

# **The Sovereignty of God**

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**Note:** All Scripture references are from the NASB (1977) unless otherwise noted.

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**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 1: God's Nature

### God's Sovereignty Defined

God is Sovereign. But what does this mean? The word “*sovereignty*” means *SUPREME AUTHORITY*. In the earthly realm, it speaks of one who holds the *highest* place of authority such as a monarch, president, or ruler of a province or territory. However when this term is applied to God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, it takes on a much fuller meaning. God rules from heaven over the world He created out of nothing by His own power; He also sustains everything in the world by His powerful Word. Scripture describes God as **THE SOVEREIGN KING** above all earthly and heavenly powers and authorities.

***Psalm 103:19:*** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.**

God possesses **absolute dominion** and authority over all things. So He is said to sit on a “throne” in heaven! Just think how ridiculous it would be to say that God created the universe but is not in control of what takes place in it. *Scripture teaches that God not only controls nature and history, but literally sustains the entire universe by His power, and orders the events of His entire creation to accomplish His own purposes and plans.* Friends, we must understand that all world events happen at the express purpose and will of God, who rules the world and all who are in it. ***He is “Lord of Heaven and Earth”*** (Acts 17:24). Everything that happens in the world happens because God has permitted, indeed has ***decreed***, it to happen (**THE DECREES OF GOD**). Even the evil in the world, which God hates, exists because it is necessary to achieve His eternal purposes, which will certainly come to pass. God not only permits the events of human history, but has ordained them from eternity past (**FOREORDINATION**). Furthermore, He is *actively involved* in seeing that they all come to pass (**PROVIDENCE**) so as to fulfill all of His plans and purposes.

***Proverbs 16:4:*** **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose.** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

It is ***unthinkable*** that God's divine purpose could meet with frustration, for then it could not be God's divine purpose! Failure of God's purpose would be failure of His sovereignty. God cannot be God and be less than sovereign. Scripture is very clear that a less-than-sovereign God would NOT be God.

***Ephesians 1:11:*** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**

Even Satan was created by God to achieve the very purpose for which God made him.

***Isaiah 10:15:*** **Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?** That would be like a club wielding those who lift it, Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood.

***Isaiah 54:16:*** Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, And brings out a weapon for its work; **And I have created the destroyer to ruin.**

**Question #1:** What does the word “sovereignty” mean in a worldly sense? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #2:** How does the Bible use the word “sovereignty” in relation to God? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #3:** How does God's sovereignty relate to the accomplishment of His divine purpose?

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**Question #4:** How does a good understanding of God's sovereignty help us explain the existence of Satan and evil? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #5:** Why is sovereignty a necessary attribute of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Exposition of 1 Chronicles 29:11-13

Let us closely examine how this Scripture passage describes the Sovereignty of God.

**1 Chronicles 29:11-13:** <sup>11</sup>Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. <sup>12</sup>Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. <sup>13</sup>Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.

→ Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty: What words can describe the greatness of God and His power? We cannot fully understand or describe the greatness of God because He is infinite and we are finite. Listen as Scripture speaks of His greatness: His is the *power* and *glory* and *victory* AND *majesty*.

God is the source of all *power*.

**Jeremiah 32:17:** Ah Lord GOD! Behold, **Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee,**

God's is the *glory*.

**Revelation 15:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. <sup>4</sup>**Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?** For Thou alone art holy; For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

God will always prevail in *victory* against His enemies.

**Isaiah 42:13:** The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. **He will prevail against His enemies.**

God's authoritative *MAJESTY* is the most regal and beautiful, stately and splendid, awesome and magnificent grandeur of all.

*Psalms 96:4-9:* <sup>4</sup>For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. <sup>5</sup>For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. <sup>6</sup>**Splendor and majesty are before Him, Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.** <sup>7</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. <sup>8</sup>**Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name;** Bring an offering, and come into His courts. <sup>9</sup>Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth.

**Question #6:** According to the above Scripture passages, how is the greatness of God reflected in the demonstration of His power, glory, victory, and majesty?\_\_\_\_\_

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→ indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD: The **Scripture plainly declares** that ***GOD CREATED all things and is the Possessor of everything.*** Since God is the creator of all things, He also is the rightful owner and proprietor of all things. He, therefore, has the sovereign right or prerogative to do as He pleases.

*Exodus 9:29:* And Moses said to him, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, **that you may know that the earth is the LORD’S.**

*Exodus 19:5:* Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, **for all the earth is Mine;**

*Deuteronomy 10:14:* Behold, **to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.**

*Job 41:11:* Who has given to Me that I should repay him? **Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.**

*Psalms 24:1:* **The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains,** The world, and those who dwell in it.

*Psalms 89:11:* The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine; **The world and all it contains,** Thou hast founded them.

The **Scripture plainly declares** that ***GOD RULES and does as He pleases*** with everything He has made. God is **TOTALLY FREE** of external constraint.

*Daniel 4:34-35:* <sup>34</sup>But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion,** And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup>And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand** Or say to Him, “What hast Thou done?”

*Psalms 135:5-6:* <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.** <sup>6</sup>**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

**Question #7:** How do the above Scripture passages justify God’s freedom to do as He pleases?\_\_\_\_\_

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→ and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all: The Scripture plainly declares that *God is the highest authority* and that He is the One who *establishes all other authority* in heaven and earth.

*Romans 13:1:* Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For **there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**

God is highly exalted above everything. Therefore, God exalts Himself above us and commands that we worship Him. It is right and proper for Him to do so. Let's consider the appropriateness of God's action. Would it be right for some other being to occupy God's great seat of authority? Would it be proper for a creature to somehow be exalted above the One who created it? Indeed these questions must be answered, "No." If they could be answered "Yes," God would not be God. This is why idolatry is the great sin of mankind. Idolatry gives God's proper place to something other than God when God alone must be exalted as King and Sovereign over us. This is high treason against the greatest majesty that exists. Who can fully express how great a sin unbelief truly is? Who can describe the folly and shame of idolatry? Dare we slap the hand that feeds us? Dare we raise clinched fists against the One who holds our life's breathe in His hands? God rightly exalts Himself above us and commands that we worship Him, because it is right and proper. It is, in reality, the highest good of the creature to worship and praise the Creator.

*Psalms 97:9:* For Thou art **the LORD Most High over all the earth; Thou art exalted far above all gods.**

*Exodus 20:2-3:* <sup>2</sup>I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup>**You shall have no other gods before Me.**

*Isaiah 2:11-12:* <sup>11</sup>The proud look of man will be abased, And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And **the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.** <sup>12</sup>For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty, And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased.

**Question #8:** On what basis should Christians submit to human governing authorities? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #9:** What is idolatry? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #10:** Why is idolatry the most terrible of sins? \_\_\_\_\_

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→ Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone: God in His Sovereignty dispenses what He pleases to all the peoples of the earth. Here the Scripture says that God, the Ruler of all, gives riches to the rich and honor to the honorable. Here the Scripture explicitly states that God has the power and the might to raise up or exalt people and give them strength. Obviously the inverse is also true. If God decides to abase people and make them weak, that is His prerogative. This fact resounds throughout Scripture. God rules His creation, including the earth and men and angels, by His mighty Providence. God is Sovereign over the prosperity and poverty of everyone.

*Exodus 4:11:* And the LORD said to him, **“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”**

*Isaiah 45:7:* The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.**

*1 Samuel 2:7-9:* **<sup>7</sup>The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.** <sup>8</sup>He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, And He set the world on them. <sup>9</sup>He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; **For not by might shall a man prevail.**

The **Scripture plainly declares** that *God is Sovereign over the LIFE AND DEATH of every creature.* God determines the length of our days, and His limits cannot be adjusted. No one lives unless God decrees it; and no one dies unless God decrees it. He is the Author, Giver, and the Sustainer of every living thing. He holds in His hand the lives of both His beloved ones and His enemies. Even Satan, the father of lies, the destroyer, owes his next breathe to the Almighty.

*Job 14:5:* Since **his days are determined, The number of his months is with Thee, And his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass.**

*Deuteronomy 32:39:* See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; **It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal;** And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

*1 Samuel 2:6:* **The LORD kills and makes alive;** He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

*Job 12:9-10:* <sup>9</sup>Who among all these does not know That the hand of the LORD has done this, <sup>10</sup>**In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?**

*Matthew 10:29-30:* <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And **yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

The **Scripture plainly declares** that *GOD SUSTAINS and MAINTAINS all things which He has created.*

*Hebrews 1:3:* And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things by the word of His power.**

*Job 34:14-15:* <sup>14</sup>If He should determine to do so, **If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, <sup>15</sup>All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.**

**Question #11:** What is the ultimate answer to the question, *Why are things the way they are?*:

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**Question #12:** How does this brief look at God’s total control over His creation affect your sense of security in this world? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #13:** Does this brief look at God’s total control over His creation raise some questions in your mind? If so, write them out and look for answers to them as you continue this study:

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→ Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name: Now here is a proper response to the knowledge of God's Sovereignty. We should first acknowledge His greatness and power, and then humbly thank Him for WHO He is and what He has given us. More than this we should praise His glorious name!

*Psalm 106:1:* Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

*Psalm 33:1:* Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright.

**Question #14:** What are some practical ways in which you might acknowledge God's greatness and power, thank Him for who He is and what He has given you, and praise His glorious name?

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## Summary

We have seen that the Bible clearly teaches that God is sovereign over all His creation. We have also seen that the *nature* of this sovereignty is absolute and supreme authority, exercised over all things He has created. Our dear brother Charles Hodge defines sovereignty well in his work entitled, *Systematic Theology*:<sup>1</sup> "Sovereignty is not a property of the divine nature, but a prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being. If God be a Spirit, and therefore a person, infinite, eternal, and immutable in his being and perfections, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, He is of right its absolute sovereign. Infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, with the right of possession, which belongs to God in all his creatures, are the immutable foundation of his dominion." Dear reader, hear now the word of the Lord!

*Deuteronomy 4:39:* Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.

## Application

**How do we apply this doctrine to our life; that is, how must it affect us in our thinking and our living?**

- We must recognize Him as the sovereign authority in our lives by humbly submitting to His will. (**Deuteronomy 4:39-40, 27:10; Job 2:10; Lamentations 3:37-41; Jeremiah 44:23; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Luke 11:28**)
- We must love God in His sovereignty and find our joy in the fact that the goodness of God rules over our lives, decisions, and everything that we are and all that we have. (**Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 12:12**)
- We must realize that trust in God's sovereign and gracious hand allows us to rest in amazing security. (**Romans 8:28,31**)

## Why is this doctrine important?

- The truth of God's sovereignty explains the being, nature, essence, and destiny of all things. (**Revelation 14:6-7**)

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 440.



- The truth of God's sovereignty gives meaning and significance to the way we live our lives. (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 147:11, 112:1**)
- Since sovereignty is "a prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being,"<sup>2</sup> rightly understanding God's sovereignty equips us to think rightly about Him and His Kingdom. All theological heresy flows from misunderstanding the character and nature of God. (**Proverbs 9:10**)

### Why is this doctrine controversial?

The basic nature of sin is rebellion against God's sovereignty. From the time Adam and Eve first decided to disobey God's commandment in the Garden of Eden, their descendants have sought to exalt their own autonomy in resistance to God's authority. Sinful humanity is naturally repulsed by the idea of submitting to Someone of higher authority and continually seeks to usurp God's authority. This is the highest crime against God and worthy of death. (**Proverbs 29:15; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10-18; 8:7-8**)

**Question #15:** How will your study thus far immediately impact your typical thoughts, words, attitudes and actions? (Be very specific in your answer.)

Thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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Words: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Attitudes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Actions: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Sovereignty and God's Attributes

God's sovereign authority works in perfect harmony with all of His attributes to manifest God's perfection in every way. Consider just a few examples:

**Sovereignty and Wisdom:** God uses His authority in accordance with perfect wisdom. God always makes decisions and executes His authority in ways that fulfill the eternal counsel of His will. Everything He does fulfills the purpose for which He planned it.

*Jeremiah 10:12:* It is He who made the earth by His power, **Who established the world by His wisdom; And by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens.**

**Sovereignty and Love:** God's authority is always dispensed with concern for those He loves. God's motivation, in the exercise of His authority, is to benefit and bless those to whom He obligates Himself by covenant – indeed to all who fear Him and call upon Him.

*Psalm 103:11-13:* <sup>11</sup>For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So **great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.** <sup>12</sup>As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup>Just as a father has compassion on his children, So **the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.**

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<sup>2</sup> Hodge, 440.

**Sovereignty and Power:** God has the ability to bring to pass whatsoever He pleases; thus, the exercise of His authority cannot be effectively resisted. God brings to pass whatever His wisdom and love decide. If He could not do what He wills and perform all His pleasure, He would not be God!

*Isaiah 46:9-11:* <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, “My purpose will be established, And **I will accomplish all My good pleasure**”; <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. **I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

**Sovereignty and Knowledge:** God uses His authority with perfect knowledge because He is the source of perfect knowledge. Nothing escapes the attention of God nor does anything invalidate His purposes. God’s authority is always exercised with complete knowledge of what has happened, is happening, and will happen as a result. God never errs, never changes, and never overlooks anything.

*Isaiah 40:14:* With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And **who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge**, And informed Him of the way of understanding?

**Sovereignty and Holiness:** God’s use of His authority is always motivated by His hatred of sin, spotless purity, and zeal for His own honor. He expects His creatures to revere His holiness and issues serious warnings and threats to those who fail to honor Him. God must be zealous for His own honor because He is truly honorable and most worthy of praise and glory. A failure to revere and honor God’s holiness is the very definition of sin itself.

*Revelation 14:6-7:* <sup>6</sup>And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having **an eternal gospel to preach** to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; <sup>7</sup>and he said with a loud voice, **“Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him** who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”

*1 John 3:10:* By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: **anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God**, nor the one who does not love his brother.

**Sovereignty and Righteousness:** The foundation of everything God does is justice. All of His judgments are morally perfect and upright. In fact, God Himself is the very standard of what is just and righteous. God’s authority is always executed in perfect righteousness. Whatever is right, is right because it is approved by God.

*Deuteronomy 32:4:* The Rock! His work is perfect, For **all His ways are just**; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, **Righteous and upright is He.**

Since all of these things are true of God, who is the highest authority, we have grounds for tremendous security and exceeding joy. We can rest in the security of God’s righteous judgment and find in Him a refuge and strength in every adversity we face.

*Psalms 5:11:* But let **all who take refuge in Thee be glad, Let them ever sing for joy**; And mayest Thou shelter them, That those who love Thy name may exult in Thee.

*Romans 8:28:* And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are called according to His purpose.

**Question #16:** Carefully consider what you have just studied about God’s sovereignty and His attributes. How does Scripture’s teaching on this subject encourage you to trust God completely and serve Him boldly?\_\_\_\_\_

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## God's Power - Omnipotence (having absolute power and supremacy; all-powerful)

Consider how God's absolute power and supremacy is related to His Sovereignty. If God is all-powerful, then He has the ability to freely do as He pleases and is therefore by default the SUPREME AUTHORITY.

*Job 23:13:* But He is unique and who can turn Him? And **what His soul desires, that He does.**

*Isaiah 43:13:* Even from eternity I am He; And **there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?**

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

Scripture speaks of God's mighty power and describes Him as omnipotent or all-powerful. **Scripture plainly declares** that *God can do anything and nothing is too hard for Him.*

*Jeremiah 32:17:* Ah Lord GOD! Behold, **Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee,**

*Matthew 19:26:* And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, **but with God all things are possible."**

*Job 42:1-2:* <sup>1</sup>Then Job answered the LORD and said, <sup>2</sup>"I know that **Thou canst do all things,** And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.

God had the creative power to make the universe from nothing, and He sustains it by His power. He made the world for His own pleasure and by His own will.

*Revelation 4:11:* Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for **Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.**

His creation is a *small example* of His mighty power. In the creation of the universe, God's resources were not depleted in any way, for they are infinitely vast. Since God created all things, He transcends them; *His power and dominion are infinitely greater than everything He created.* God is actively sustaining everything in creation. He exercises His power continually, bringing to pass "all His good pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). He made all things by His purposeful will. He possesses the *power to execute* His divine will and bring His intentions to perfect completion. He alone created all things out of nothing. Because of this great truth He is known as "The Almighty."

*Isaiah 40:26,28:* <sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; **Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power Not one of them is missing.** . . . <sup>28</sup>Do you not know? Have you not heard? **The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth** Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

*John 1:1-3:* <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>**All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**

*Colossians 1:16-17:* <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things have been created by Him and for Him.** <sup>17</sup>And He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together.**

This truth affirms that all power in the creation comes from God. Since God made everything out of nothing, then power must, by necessity, be delegated by God. In fact the **Scripture plainly declares** that God's power is far above all earthly powers.

*Ephesians 1:18-21:* <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the

saints,<sup>19</sup> and what is **the surpassing greatness of His power** toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might<sup>20</sup> which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,<sup>21</sup> **far above all rule and authority and power and dominion**, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

If someone were more powerful than God, he or she would have authority over Him. Scripture teaches, however, that this is impossible. Therefore, because God is omnipotent, He is also **SOVEREIGN**.

**Question #17:** List several scriptural truths that affirm God's omnipotence: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #18:** How does God's omnipotence affirm that He and He alone is God? \_\_\_\_\_

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## God's Knowledge - Omniscience (all-knowing)

God knows everything. Since God is the source of all things (making everything from nothing), He is therefore the source of all knowledge and wisdom. **A. W. Tozer** helps us understand how complete God's knowledge is with this definition of *omniscience*:

*[God] knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn.*<sup>3</sup>

We might add that God also knows every possible cause and effect, feeling and desire, creature, event, and every other thing that can be named. His knowledge is complete and eternal. The **Scripture plainly declares** that God knows everything.

**1 John 3:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him <sup>20</sup>in whatever our heart condemns us; for **God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.**

**Isaiah 40:28:** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. **His understanding is inscrutable.**

**Psalms 147:5:** Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; **His understanding is infinite.**

People rarely argue that God does not know the past, but people do sometimes argue that God does not know the future. **Scripture, however, plainly declares** that God does know the future. He must know it, because the future is the outworking of God's decrees, which were made before He created the world. **He knew in eternity past the entire record of history for all time.** Predictive prophecy in the Bible proves this again and again. God speaks about future events before they come to pass, and multitudes of biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled!

**Isaiah 46:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning**

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<sup>3</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), 56.

**And from ancient times things which have not been done**, Saying, “My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure”;

**Isaiah 44:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>And who is like me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place.

**<sup>8</sup>Do not tremble and do not be afraid. Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it?** And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.

Nothing escapes God’s notice; and nothing is hidden from Him. He is aware of past, present, and future events just as if they were all laid out before Him. His knowledge is as perfect as His being. Since God is perfect in knowledge, He is all-knowing and can never be confused, misled, or surprised.

**Hebrews 4:13:** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but **all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him** with whom we have to do.

Nothing escapes the attention of God. He sees all things, even the inner thoughts of man. Jesus said that the hairs of our heads are all numbered (Luke 12:7) and that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice (Matthew 10:29). “No creature is hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare” before the Lord (Hebrews 4:13). He knows our thoughts (Ezekiel 11:5) before we even express them. Indeed, there is no place where we can hide from God. He sees everything in full view; and He understands “the thoughts and intentions of our hearts” (Hebrews 4:12) better than we do. **He is God!**

**1 Kings 8:39:** then hear in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, **whose heart Thou knowest, for Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men,**

**1 Chronicles 28:9:** As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; **for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.** If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

**Proverbs 5:21:** For the **ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD,** And He watches all his paths.

Psalms 139 speaks of God knowing our thoughts and words “*before there is a word on our tongue.*”

**Psalms 139:2-4:** <sup>2</sup>Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; **Thou dost understand my thought from afar.** <sup>3</sup>Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, And art intimately acquainted with all my ways. **<sup>4</sup>Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all.**

A. W. Pink describes God’s knowledge of our sins: “*Neither the darkness of night, the closest curtains, nor the deepest dungeon can hide any sinner from the eyes of Omniscience. The trees of the garden were not able to conceal our first parents. No human eye beheld Cain murder his brother, but his maker witnessed his crime. Sarah might laugh derisively in the seclusion of her tent, yet was it heard by Jehovah. Achan stole a wedge of gold and carefully hid it in the earth, but God brought it to light. David was at much pains to cover up his wickedness, but ere long the all-seeing God sent one of His servants to say to him, “You are the man!” And to writer and reader is also said, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23).*”<sup>4</sup>

**Proverbs 15:3:** The **eyes of the LORD are in every place,** Watching the evil and the good.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 17-18.

**Job 34:21-22:** <sup>21</sup>“For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, And He sees all his steps.  
<sup>22</sup>**There is no darkness or deep shadow Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.**

**Psalms 90:8:** Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, **Our secret sins in the light of Thy presence.**

S. Lewis Johnson<sup>5</sup> summarizes God’s knowledge like this:

- **Intuitive:** God knows everything by default, His knowledge exists within Himself
- **Simultaneous:** God knows everything in one simple act, instantaneously, not gradually
- **Independent:** God knows everything apart from any learning, He cannot learn, because He knows all things from eternity, His knowledge comes from Himself
- **Distinct:** God knows everything clearly, without ambiguity, specifically not generally, absolute
- **Infallible:** God’s knowledge is unfailing, certain, accurate in every detail
- **Immutable:** God’s knowledge never changes because He has never learned a new fact, it is not subject to anything outside of Himself
- **Complete:** God’s knowledge is infinite, the scope or extent of it is exhaustive, He knows all things actual and possible, all events, all creatures of the past, present and future.

Consider how God’s knowledge is related to His Sovereignty. Since God is all-knowing, nothing can escape His attention or surprise Him. He is intimately aware of everything at all times, knowing it all from before the creation of the world. God knows everything *freely* because He has both willed everything to be and providentially brought it about.

**Ephesians 1:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup>with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**

**Summary** - See chart on **God’s Knowledge and Power**, page 17.

**Question #19:** Study the chart, “God’s Knowledge and Power,” on page 17. Then *briefly* describe the connection between omniscience and omnipotence. \_\_\_\_\_

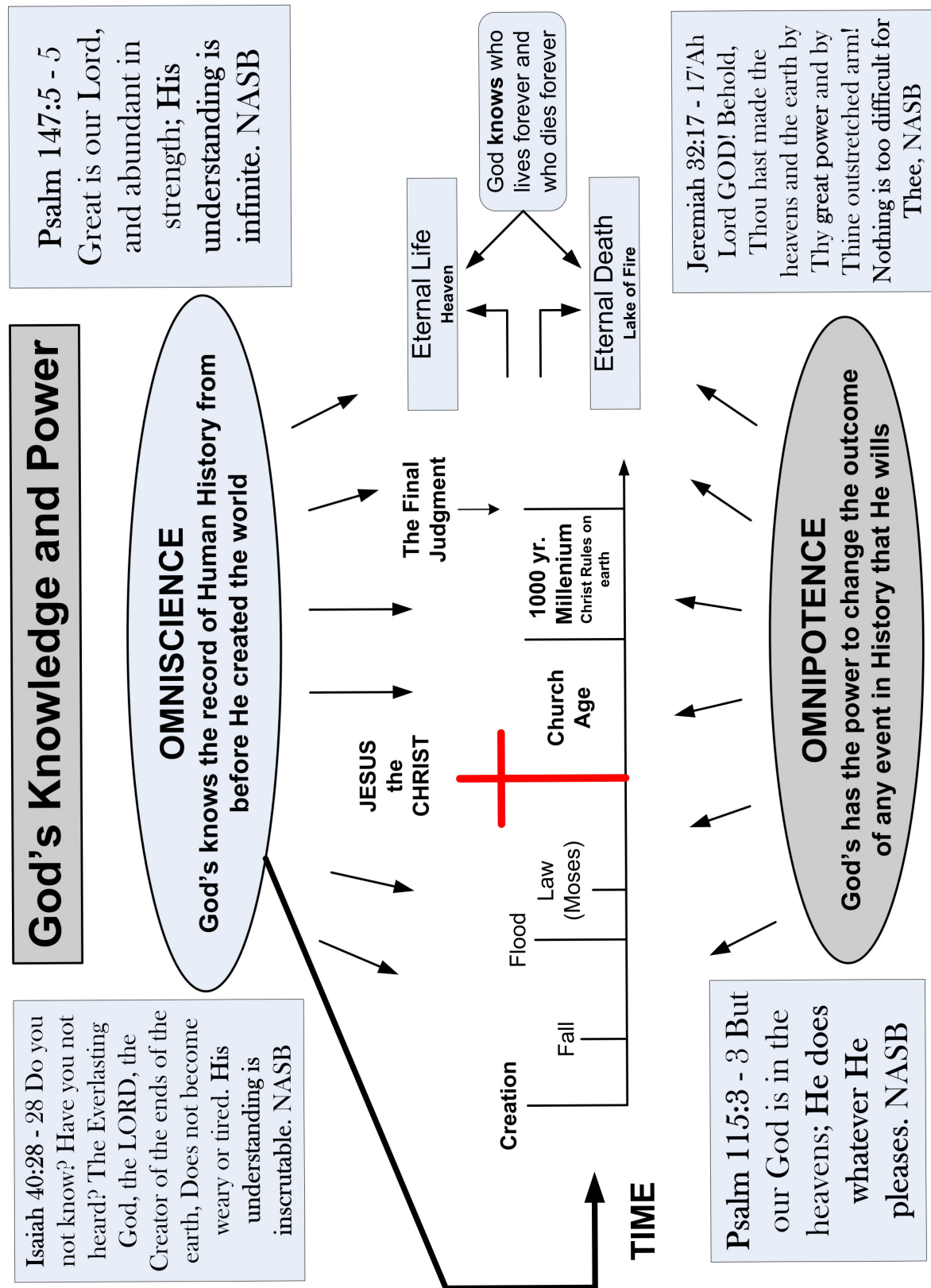
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**Question #20:** Why are omniscience and omnipotence necessary elements of sovereignty? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>5</sup> Taken from a sermon delivered at Believer’s Chapel, Dallas Theological Seminary, date uncertain.





**Notes:**



# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 2: God's Dominion - In Creation

God's sovereignty is expressed in His creative works. His power brought everything into being, His wisdom designed all the intricate details of the universe, and His beauty is reflected in all that we see. All the creative works of God exist in perfect balance. This is truly amazing!

**Psalm 19:1-6:** <sup>1</sup>The heavens are **telling** of the glory of God; And their expanse is **declaring** the work of His hands. <sup>2</sup>Day to day **pours forth speech**, And night to night **reveals knowledge**. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their line has gone out through all the earth, And **their utterances to the end of the world**. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, <sup>5</sup>Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. <sup>6</sup>Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The sovereignty of God in creation can be seen in many ways. When God made the world out of nothing, **He created by His own pleasure and will**. He made the heavens and the earth in all of their glorious array exactly the way He wanted. Consider the following quote from AW Pink: *"In the great expanse of eternity, which stretches behind Genesis 1:1, the universe was unborn and creation existed only in the mind of the great Creator. In His sovereign majesty God dwelt all alone. We refer to that far distant period before the heavens and the earth were created. There were then no angels to hymn God's praises, no creatures to occupy His notice, no rebels to be brought into subjection. The great God was all alone amid the awful silence of His own vast universe. But even at that time, if time it could be called, God was sovereign. He might create or not create according to His own good pleasure. He might create this way or that way; He might create one world or one million worlds, and who was there to resist His will? He might call into existence a million different creatures and place them on absolute equality, endowing them with the same faculties and placing them in the same environment; or, He might create a million creatures each differing from the others, and possessing nothing in common save their creaturehood, and who was there to challenge His right? . . . Behold then the exercise of Divine sovereignty long before man ever saw the light. With whom took God counsel in the creation and disposition of His creatures. See the birds as they fly through the air, the beasts as they roam the earth, the fishes as they swim in the sea, and then ask, Who was it that made them to differ? Was it not their Creator who sovereignly assigned their various locations and adaptations to them!"*<sup>6</sup>

Everything God did in creation, He did alone. There was no one to consult regarding its vast design.

**Isaiah 44:24:** Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, **"I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, And spreading out the earth all alone."**

Consider how God has made everything so distinctive, and yet He holds it all in perfect balance! His sovereignty is expressed in every aspect of His creation. Consider **"outer space,"** for example.

**1 Corinthians 15:40-41:** <sup>40</sup>There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup>There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; **for star differs from star in glory.**

Or the earth:

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 28-29.

**Proverbs 8:28-29:** <sup>28</sup>When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, <sup>29</sup>When **He set for the sea its boundary, So that the water should not transgress His command**, When He marked out the foundations of the earth;

God is the one who endows His creatures with various powers as He see fit. Consider the germ or the ant, the elephant or the whale, or even mankind and angels. With what power, wisdom and beauty God has fitted His creatures with various powers and freedoms!

**Genesis 1:20-23:** <sup>20</sup>Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." <sup>21</sup>And **God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind**; and God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

When God placed man upon the earth, He did it sovereignly – *as He saw fit*. He determined the exact places where the nations would dwell and the specific times they would occupy in the annals of history.

**Acts 17:24-26:** <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup>nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup>**and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation,**

With what *goodness* God has made His creation! He has graced the earth with birds and bees, flowers and the trees! And what about our bodies? They are perfectly paired with our creative minds, enabling us to do what we will. How delightful to contemplate the rich flavors of our favorite meal or to simply appreciate plain old vittles to fill our hungry bellies. How we enjoy the tingling rush of a hot fire on a cold winter's night or the sweet butterfly kisses of a precious young daughter! *Oh the magnificence of the goodness of God!* How many large volumes would it take to describe the riches of His kindness to us? We could spend a lifetime considering the loveliness of God's creation – but *how much more lovely is the One* from whom it all flows! How vast is the sum of His goodness? How shall we respond to the sovereign majesty and goodness of God? With simple gratitude and a heart of thanksgiving shall we acknowledge His wonderful goodness to us!

**1 Timothy 4:4-5:** <sup>4</sup>**For everything created by God is good**, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; <sup>5</sup>for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

God does everything with specific intention and intricate detail. The **Scripture plainly declares** that when God's purpose for the first creation is fulfilled, He will destroy it and create another. He clearly exercises supreme authority over what He has made. Does not the potter have a right over the clay?

**Hebrews 1:10-12:** <sup>10</sup>And, "Thou, LORD, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Thy hands; <sup>11</sup>**They will perish**, but Thou remainest; And **they all will become old as a garment,** <sup>12</sup>**And as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; As a garment they will also be changed.** But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end."

**Isaiah 51:6:** "Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; **For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment**, And its inhabitants will die in like manner, But My salvation shall be forever, And My righteousness shall not wane.

God creates and destroys and does as He sees fit in the heavens and the earth. Everything that exists was created by God's own will and for His own pleasure.

**Revelation 4:11:** "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; **for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.**"

He is the Creator, the Owner, the Governor of all, and none shall say to Him "What hast Thou done?" No one can question His actions or purposes or resists His will successfully.

**Daniel 4:34b-35:** <sup>34</sup>For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion**, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup>And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand** Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'

Another quote from **A.W. Pink**: "*Learn then this basic truth, that the Creator is absolute Sovereign, executing His own will, performing His own pleasure, and considering nought but His own glory. "The Lord hath made all things FOR HIMSELF" (Prov. 16:4). And had He not a perfect right to? Since God is God, who dare challenge His prerogative? To murmur against Him is rank rebellion. To question His ways is to impugn His wisdom. To criticize Him is sin of the deepest dye. Have we forgotten who He is? Behold, "All nations before Him as are nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God?" (Isaiah 40:17, 18).*"<sup>7</sup>

**Question #21:** How do the following Scripture passages *specifically* testify of God's sovereignty in creation:

Psalm 19:1-6: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 44:24: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 Corinthians 15:40-41: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Proverbs 8:28-29: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 1:20-23: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Acts 17:24-27: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Question #22:** How are you *personally* touched by God's goodness as you consider His creation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>7</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 31.

**Question #23:** How do Hebrews 1:10-12, Isaiah 51:6, Revelation 4:11, and Daniel 4:34-35 reflect God's sovereign right to exercise supreme authority over what He has made?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #24:** Carefully reread the two quotes by A. W. Pink in this section. In what ways do his words deepen your awe and reverence of God?\_\_\_\_\_

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In what ways do his words convict you of sinful attitudes or behavior?\_\_\_\_\_

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## The Sovereignty of God

### Part 2: God's Dominion - In Providence

#### The Providence Of God Defined

Although the doctrine of God's providence is one of the great mysteries of the Bible, it is found on almost every page of Scripture. It is, in fact, constantly assumed and implied by the biblical writers. So what does "God's providence" mean, and how is it described in the Bible? **Wayne Grudem** provides an excellent definition in his textbook entitled, *Systematic Theology*:

*"God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) **Preservation** - keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) **Concurrence** - cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) **Government** - directs them to fulfill his purposes."*<sup>8</sup>

This is a profound statement we should consider carefully. Let's begin by looking at the biblical evidence for each of its parts (which he has called *preservation*, *concurrence*, and *government*.)

**Question #25:** Look up the words *preservation*, *concurrence*, and *government* in an English dictionary and write them out:

**Preservation:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Concurrence:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Government:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Question #26:** Do the definitions of these words help you understand any parts of Grudem's definition? If so, explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Preservation:** *God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.* God's providence includes His continual involvement with all created things. God has not left the world to spin of its own power but is constantly maintaining its activity by His own hand.

**Hebrews 1:1-3:** God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup>in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He

<sup>8</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 315.

<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2003) lists the following synonymns for preservation: upkeep, maintenance, care, conservation, retention, perpetuation, continuation, safekeeping, safeguarding, protection

appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world.** <sup>3</sup>And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things by the word of His power.**

Here the Scripture says of God that He “upholds all things.” Could there be a clearer statement of His “continual involvement?” Consider Colossians 1:17.

**Colossians 1:16-17:** <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, **both in the heavens and on earth**, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things have been created by Him and for Him.** <sup>17</sup>And He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together.**

These Scriptures, understood in their immediate context, affirm that God is not merely holding the planets in orbit, but that He also created and preserves people and angels.

**Acts 17:28:** **for in Him we live and move and exist,**

**Job 34:14-15:** <sup>14</sup>If He should determine to do so, **If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,** <sup>15</sup>**All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.**

When we think about God’s providence over His world, we should think of it as *continual involvement*. God is separate and distinct from His creation, yet He is governing it by His mighty power. God does not simply intervene occasionally in the events of history when He thinks it is appropriate. He is the glue that holds it all together and the motor that keep it all moving. Without His constant work, the universe would disintegrate. God is not the creation (as is taught by Pantheism), nor has God abandoned His creation to run by itself (as is taught by Deism). Rather, as Wayne Grudem rightly teaches from Scripture, God “*keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.*”<sup>10</sup>

**Question #27:** Reread the Scripture passages quoted above. What specific words or phrases describe God’s continual involvement with His creation in ways that *preserve* it? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #28:** In what specific ways does knowledge of this aspect of God’s sovereignty encourage and comfort you? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Concurrence:** *God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he . . . (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.* Here we see that although God is separate and distinct from everything He has made, He *oversees* everything He has made in a directive way. In theological terms, this is called **concurrence**. When we use this term, we are referring to God’s ultimate control over *nature* and *history*. This idea is supported by the testimony of Scripture.

## God’s Control of Nature

When we speak of God’s control of nature, we are referring to His control of planetary movements, weather patterns, animals, people, angels, and demons – in other words, everything

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<sup>10</sup> Grudem, 315.

He has made. At God's command, the great springs of the deep burst forth in the days of Noah. His voice opened the heavens and ordered rain to pour down for forty days and nights. Tornadoes and tempests, lightning and thunder, winds and waves ... all are God's servants sent to do His bidding and perform all His good pleasure. *No* maverick storm has ever raged through God's creation outside of God's ruling hand of Providence!

**Job 37:1-13:** <sup>1</sup>At this also my heart trembles, And leaps from its place. <sup>2</sup>Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth. <sup>3</sup>Under the whole heaven **He lets it loose, And His lightning to the ends of the earth.** <sup>4</sup>After it, a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice; And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard. <sup>5</sup>God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend. **<sup>6</sup>For to the snow He says, "Fall on the earth," And to the downpour and the rain, "Be strong."** <sup>7</sup>**He seals the hand of every man, That all men may know His work.** <sup>8</sup>Then the beast goes into its lair, And remains in its den. <sup>9</sup>Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. <sup>10</sup>**From the breath of God ice is made,** And the expanse of the waters is frozen. <sup>11</sup>Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. <sup>12</sup>And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth. <sup>13</sup>**Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.**

**Psalm 135:6-7:** <sup>6</sup>Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. <sup>7</sup>**He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain; Who brings forth the wind from His treasures.**

**Mark 4:38-41:** <sup>38</sup>And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" <sup>39</sup>And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And **the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** <sup>40</sup>And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" <sup>41</sup>And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

**Job 38:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>Have you ever in your life **commanded the morning, And caused the dawn to know its place;** <sup>13</sup>That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, And the wicked be shaken out of it?

**Psalm 103:20:** Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, **who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!**

**Question #29:** From the Scriptures quoted above, list specific words (verbs) that describe God's and Jesus's involvement with nature. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question #30:** In each case, what happened as a result of God and Jesus's involvement? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question #31:** According to Psalm 103:20, how do angels relate to God? \_\_\_\_\_



**Question #32:** Summarize in your own words what are these Scriptures teach about God. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #33:** Describe your mental and emotional reaction to this teaching. \_\_\_\_\_

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## God's Control of History

Not only does God control nature, but also the events of history. The Scripture plainly declares that God is the primary cause behind every historical occurrence.

**Lamentations 3:37-38:** <sup>37</sup>Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it?** <sup>38</sup>Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

**Isaiah 45:7:** The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.**

Consider these words of **Jonathan Edwards**: *"God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God's permitting is God's forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass."*<sup>11</sup>

God's control over the events of history is plainly evident in Scripture. The Bible consistently testifies to the fact that God is providentially working His will in all things to accomplish His purposes for the display of His own Glory, exalt His Name, and affirm His Power.

**Ephesians 1:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup>with a **view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.** In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**

Many examples of God's control over the events of history can be cited from the Old Testament. Here are just a few:

- The creation account (Genesis 1-2)
- The flood (Genesis 6-8)
- The confounding of human languages at Babel: (Genesis 11)
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: (Genesis 19)
- The plagues of Egypt: (Exodus 7-12)
- The Exodus, parting of the Red Sea, giving of manna and water from the rock: (Exodus 14-17)
- Giving of the Law at Sinai: (Exodus 19-20)
- Defeat of Sihon and Og: (Numbers 21)
- Conquest of Canaan: (Joshua)
- Numerous divine interventions: (Judges)
- Defeat of Sennacherib and 185,000 Assyrians: (2 Kings 19)

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<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2. Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1998 (reprint from an 1834 edition originally published in Great Britain), 529.



**Question #34:** Read two or three of the passages referenced above. For each one that you read, describe how God's control over the events of history is clearly affirmed. \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament is literally riddled with accounts of *concurrency* i.e., examples of God's constant cooperation "with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do." **Scripture plainly declares** that God: (1) controls *the events of history* to achieve His own purpose and will; and (2) exercises His providence *over the nations themselves as well as the economic and religious systems of the world*. He is sovereign over the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak.

**Isaiah 40:22-25:** <sup>22</sup>It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. <sup>23</sup>**He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.** <sup>24</sup>Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. <sup>25</sup>"To whom then will you liken Me That I should be his equal?" says the Holy One.

**Job 12:16-22:** <sup>16</sup>With Him are strength and sound wisdom, The misled and the misleader belong to Him. <sup>17</sup>He makes counselors walk barefoot, And makes fools of judges. <sup>18</sup>**He loosens the bond of kings, And binds their loins with a girdle.** <sup>19</sup>**He makes priests walk barefoot, And overthrows the secure ones.** <sup>20</sup>He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. <sup>21</sup>He pours contempt on nobles, And loosens the belt of the strong. <sup>22</sup>He reveals mysteries from the darkness, And brings the deep darkness into light. <sup>23</sup>**He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.** <sup>24</sup>He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people, And makes them wander in a pathless waste. <sup>25</sup>They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

**Romans 11:32:** For **God has shut up all in disobedience** that He might show mercy to all.

**Psalms 22:28:** For the kingdom is the LORD's, And **He rules over the nations.**

**Psalms 82:8:** Arise, O God, judge the earth! **For it is Thou who dost possess all the nations.**

**Psalms 47:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. <sup>8</sup>**God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.**

Here we have irrefutable testimony that *God is Sovereign over the nations of the earth!* These passages affirm that when a nation becomes great and powerful, it is God's doing. They affirm that when a nation is destroyed, it is God's doing. Even the spiritual darkness of the nations is said to be God's doing. All the nations belong to Him. They exist for His purposes and His good pleasure. The **Old Testament plainly declares** that God providentially directs the rise and fall of nations and is constantly directing the affairs of human history.

**Question #35:** From the verses quoted above, describe several examples of *concurrency*. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #36:** How do these examples of concurrence encourage and comfort you as situations in the world tempt you to be worried and fearful? \_\_\_\_\_

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Many examples of God's control over the events of history can also be cited from the New Testament. Here are just a few:

1. From the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:

- **His virgin birth:** (Luke 1-3)
- **His calming of the raging sea:** (Matthew 8:23-27)
- **The lame walk:** (John 5:1-47, note in particular, vs 17, 19 & 30)
- **The blind see:** (John 9:1-41, note in particular, vs 3-5)
- **The dead live again:** (John 11:1-44, note in particular, vs. 4, 41-42)
- **His resurrection:** (Matthew 28:1-20, note in particular vs 2-7, 18-20)

2. From other places in the New Testament:

- **The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:** (Acts 2:1-21)
- **Numerous signs and wonders done by the Apostles:** (throughout Acts)
- **Peter's deliverance from prison:** (Acts 12:1-11)
- **The conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus:** (Acts 9:1-22)
- **The death of Herod:** (Acts 12:18-23)
- **The trumpet and bowl judgments:** (Revelation 7-11,16)
- **The Judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet:** (Revelation 19:19-21)

**Question #37:** Read two or three of the passages referenced above. For each one that you read, describe how God's control over the events of history is clearly affirmed. \_\_\_\_\_

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The following passages specifically demonstrate how God mysteriously works in the free choices of men to accomplish His purposes.

**Acts 2:22-24:** <sup>22</sup>Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup>**this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.** <sup>24</sup>And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

**Acts 4:27-28:** <sup>27</sup>For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the

Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> **to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

**Question #38:** In these two situations from Acts, how do you see **concurrence** at work? \_\_\_\_\_

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The **New Testament plainly declares** and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing all the affairs of human history.

**Two Related Questions:**     *Does God cause or ordain evil?*  
   *Is everything that happens God's will?*

**Wayne Grudem**, in his *Systematic Theology*, wisely answers the first question like this:

*If God does indeed cause, through his providential activity, everything that comes about in the world, then the question arises, "What is the relationship between God and evil in the world?" Does God actually cause the evil actions that people do? If he does, then is God not responsible for sin?*

*In approaching this question, it is best first to read the passages of Scripture that directly address it. We can begin by looking at several passages that affirm that God did, indeed, cause evil events to come about and evil deeds to be done. But we must remember that in all these passages it is very clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil, but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures. Moreover, Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure in evil, and Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do. However we understand God's relationship to evil, we must never come to the point where we think that we are not responsible for the evil that we do, or that God takes pleasure in evil or is to be blamed for it. Such a conclusion is clearly contrary to Scripture.*

*There are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil. I have quoted such an extensive list (in the next few paragraphs) because Christians often are unaware of the extent of this forthright teaching in Scripture. Yet it must be remembered that in all of these examples, the evil is actually done not by God but by people or demons who choose to do it.*

*A very clear example is found in the story of Joseph. Scripture clearly says that Joseph's brothers were wrongly jealous of him (Gen. 37:11), hated him (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8), wanted to kill him (Gen. 37:20), and did wrong when they cast him into a pit (Gen. 37:24) and then sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:28). Yet later Joseph could say to his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5), and "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). Here we have a combination of evil deeds brought about by sinful men who are rightly held accountable for their sin and the overriding providential control of God whereby God's own purposes were accomplished. Both are clearly affirmed.*

*The story of the exodus from Egypt repeatedly affirms that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: God says, “I will harden his heart” (Ex. 4:21), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3), “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12), “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 10:20, repeated in 10:27 and again in 11:10), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 14:4), and “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Ex. 14:8). . . .*

*What was God’s purpose in this? Paul reflects on Exodus 9:16 and says, “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth’” (Rom. 9:17). Then Paul infers a general truth from this specific example: “So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18). In fact, God also hardened the hearts of the Egyptian people so that they pursued Israel into the Red Sea: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17). This theme is repeated in Psalm 105:25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people.” . . .*

*Later in the Old Testament narrative similar examples are found of the Canaanites who were destroyed in the conquest of Palestine under Joshua. We read, “For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed” (Josh. 11:20; see also Judg. 3:12; 9:23). And Samson’s demand to marry an unbelieving Philistine woman “was from the LORD; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel” (Judg 14:4). We also read that the sons of Eli, when rebuked for their evil deeds, “would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them” (1 Sam. 2:25). Later, “an evil spirit from the LORD” tormented King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). . . .*

*Still later in David’s life, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people (2 Sam. 24:1), but afterward David recognized this as sin, saying, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10), and God sent punishment on the land because of this sin (2 Sam. 24:12–17). However, it is also clear that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (2 Sam. 24:1), so God’s inciting of David to sin was a means by which he brought about punishment on the people of Israel. Moreover, the means by which God incited David is made clear in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.” In this one incident the Bible gives us a remarkable insight into the three influences that contributed in different ways to one action: God, in order to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but Scripture regards David as being responsible for that sin. . . .*

*In the story of Job, though the LORD gave Satan permission to bring harm to Job’s possessions and children, and though this harm came through the evil actions of the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, as well as a windstorm (Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19), yet Job looks beyond those secondary causes and, with the eyes of faith, sees it all as from the hand of the Lord: “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). The Old Testament author follows Job’s statement immediately with the sentence, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). Job has just been told that evil*

*marauding bands had destroyed his flocks and herds, yet with great faith and patience in adversity, he says, “The LORD has taken away.” Though he says that the LORD had done this, yet he does not blame God for the evil or say that God had done wrong: he says, “Blessed be the name of the LORD.” To blame God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents would have been to sin. Job does not do this, Scripture never does this, and neither should we.*

*Elsewhere in the Old Testament we read that the Lord “put a lying spirit in the mouth” of Ahab’s prophets (1 Kings 22:23) and sent the wicked Assyrians as “the rod of my anger” to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5). . . .*

*In many of the passages mentioned above, God brings evil and destruction on people in judgment upon their sins: They have been disobedient or have strayed into idolatry, and then the LORD uses evil human beings or demonic forces or “natural” disasters to bring judgment on them. . . . Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation and destruction upon hardened sinners, none of us can charge God with doing wrong. Ultimately all will work in God’s good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. Yet we must realize that in punishing evil in those who are not redeemed (such as Pharaoh, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians), God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness, and power (see Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14–24).”<sup>12</sup>*

**Question #39:** Summarize your understanding of Grudem’s teaching in three or four sentences.

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**Question #40:** Did Grudem’s teaching generate any questions in your mind? If so, record them here:

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### **Distinctions in God’s Will - Is everything God’s will?**

Armed with this understanding of God’s control over and use of evil, we will now turn to the second question: ***Is everything that happens God’s will?*** As we have seen, God’s will must be seen as the final authority behind and ultimate reason for everything that happens. God’s providential ***permitting*** or ***preventing*** determines whatsoever comes to pass (Isaiah 14:24). Does this mean, however, that everything that happens is God’s will? Answering this question requires us to distinguish between God’s ***sovereign will*** and His ***moral will***. ***Scripture clearly reveals that*** God often ***permits*** His moral requirements to be violated by the free choices of men and women. This reveals that God’s ***sovereign will*** clearly ***includes*** certain violations of His moral will. God’s ***moral will*** is discerned by simply reading His ***precepts*** and ***commands***

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<sup>12</sup> Grudem, 322-326.

regarding human conduct. God's **sovereign will** is discerned only when the **secret** counsel of God is **revealed** as events actually happen. Whatever comes to pass is what He has sovereignly planned and **decreed** from all eternity. Thus, we answer questions like, "Is it God's will for me to do this or that," by simply looking to God's revelation of His moral will in Scripture. But as events actually occur, we come to know God's sovereign will, i.e., what He has ordained and then approved, permitted or prevented. When discussing these matters, therefore, we must clearly distinguish between *Two Wills of God*. The following Table will help us do that.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Two Wills of God</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The <u>secret</u> things belong to the LORD our God, but the things <u>revealed</u> belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. NASB</p>	
SOVEREIGN WILL	MORAL WILL
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Also called.....</i></b>  <b>SECRET WILL</b>  <b>WILL OF DECREE</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Also called.....</i></b>  <b>REVEALED WILL</b>  <b>COMMANDED WILL</b>  <b>WILL OF PRECEPT</b></p>
<p><i>God's <b>Sovereign will</b> includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs everything that happens. We find out God's <b>Sovereign will</b> when events actually happen.</i></p>	<p><i>God's <b>moral will</b> expresses God's general desire concerning things and usually contains God's commands about our moral conduct.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ephesians 1:11  James 4:15  Genesis 50:20  Matthew 11:25-26  1 Corinthians 4:19  Acts 2:23, 4:28, 21:14  Romans 1:10, 9:18, 15:32  1 Peter 3:17, 4:19</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exodus 20:1-17  Ephesians 5:17  Romans 2:18  1 John 5:14  Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 18:14  1 Timothy 2:4  2 Peter 3:9  Ezekiel 33:11</p>

**Question #41:** In your own words, distinguish between God's sovereign will and His moral will. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #42:** How would you explain the difference between God's sovereign will and His moral will to a young child? \_\_\_\_\_

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Examples of the two wills of God are clearly seen in Scripture and in the world around us. When we see evil take place, we know that, although it is *a violation of* His moral will (His revealed will, commanded will, or will of precept), God *permitted rather than prevented* it by His sovereign will (His will of decree or secret will) which He determined from all Eternity.

Consider the following:

**Joseph and his brothers:**

**Genesis 50:20:** And as for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good in order** to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

**The murder of Jesus:**

**Acts 2:23:** this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

**Genocide in War**

**9/11/2001: The Attack on the Twin Towers**

How can we explain such things in the light of God's absolute sovereignty? **Jonathan Edwards** well states what is taught in Scripture: "*God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God's permitting is God's forbearing to act or to prevent.*"<sup>13</sup>

Simply stated, God permits the existence of evil in His world, which He hates, to accomplish higher purposes in His world which he loves.

**Question #43:** Formulate a short response to someone who asks you, "How can a good God allow all this evil to exist in our world?" (This response should briefly answer the question from a biblical perspective while serving as a foundation for further discussion.)\_\_\_\_\_

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**Government:** *God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he . . . (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes."* Grudem further defines this third aspect of God's Providence by saying, "*God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.*"<sup>14</sup>

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything happens ultimately under the *sovereign authority* of God as He *directs them* so that *in the end His purposes are fulfilled*.

**Psalms 103:19:** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.**

Paul affirms that God works "*all things after the counsel of His will*" and to His "*ends.*"

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<sup>13</sup> Edwards, 529.

<sup>14</sup> Grudem, 331.



*Ephesians 1:11-12:* <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** <sup>12</sup>**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

*Romans 8:28:* And we know **that God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

*Romans 11:36:* For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.** To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

The **Scripture plainly declares** this same truth in the Old Testament.

*Ecclesiastes 7:13-14:* <sup>13</sup>Consider the work of God, For **who is able to straighten what He has bent?** <sup>14</sup>In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God **has made the one as well as the other** So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

*Daniel 4:34-35:* <sup>34</sup>But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion,** And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup>And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth;** And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, “What hast Thou done?”

*Psalms 135:5-6:* <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.** <sup>6</sup>**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything in the universe, seen and unseen, is under the sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

*1 Corinthians 15:27:* For **He has put all things in subjection under His feet.** But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

*Ephesians 1:19b-22:* <sup>19b</sup>These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup>which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far **above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named,** not only in this age, but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And **He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

*Philippians 2:9-11:* <sup>9</sup>Therefore also **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,** <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father.

**Question #44:** Based on your reading of the above Scriptures, describe in your own words the *effectiveness* of God’s providential governing of His creation. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #45:** Based on your reading of the above Scriptures, how do you think God’s government of His creation relates to human governments? \_\_\_\_\_

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(If necessary, see also Proverbs 21:2 and Romans 13:1-7.)

## Summary

We have seen that the Bible clearly teaches that: 1) God providentially implements His sovereign rule over all of creation; and 2) He is directing nature and history to fulfill His own purposes. His Providence displays His sovereign authority in clear and unmistakable ways. Dear reader, hear now the word of the Lord!

**Deuteronomy 4:39:** Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**

As we struggle in our human frailty to understand the profound truth of God's providence **Wayne Grudem** helpfully reminds us to bow in humility before its great mystery: *"What if we cannot understand this doctrine fully? - Every believer who meditates on God's providence will sooner or later come to a point where he or she will have to say, 'I cannot understand this doctrine fully.' In some ways that must be said about every doctrine, since our understanding is finite, and God is infinite . . . But particularly is this so with the doctrine of providence: we should believe it because Scripture teaches it even when we do not understand fully how it fits in with other teachings of Scripture."*<sup>15</sup>

**Question #46:** Are you willing to bow in humility before the great mystery of God's providence and believe it while frankly admitting that you cannot understand it fully?\_\_\_\_\_

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## Application

Applying this doctrine in our lives so that it impacts our thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions requires us to:

- Believe God is providential
- Appreciate God's wise providential purposes and rule
- Humbly submit to God's will
- Never complain against God's providence
- Be thankful for God's providence
- Trust in God's good promises to His people

## Believe God is providential

Chances are good you believe in God's providence, whether you realize it or not. Is this not your assumption each time you pray for God's intervention in your life? Indeed it is! When you bow your knee, head, or heart to Almighty God, you acknowledge His sovereign authority (His right and power) to change things even as you humbly request that He do so. Your prayer reflects your belief that God is almighty and in control of all things as you rest in trusting God.

**Isaiah 26:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>The **steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee.** <sup>4</sup>Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

**Proverbs 3:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>**Trust in the LORD with all your heart,** And do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>**In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.**

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<sup>15</sup> Grudem, 336.

**Question #47:** Consider your typical prayers. Do they reflect a belief in God's providence? Explain by giving examples. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Appreciate His wise providential purposes and rule

How wonderful it is to consider that our highly exalted God has created us for the purpose of worshipping Him and enjoying Him forever! As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." This statement clearly reflects the great and foremost commandment given to us by Jesus.

**Matthew 22:37-38:** <sup>37</sup>And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup>This is the great and foremost commandment."

How can we love God and *not* love His almighty rule over the world? How can we adore Him with everything that is within us and *not* worship and magnify the astounding wisdom displayed in His providential control over the world? We can only rejoice and give thanks for the great benefits we have in God's providence! **Thomas Watson** expressed it well: "*Without this wise providence of God there would be anxiety and confusion in the whole world, just like an army when it is routed and scattered. The providence of God infuses comfort and virtue into everything we enjoy. Our clothes would not warm us, our food would not nourish us, without the special providence of God. And does not all this deserve your admiration of providence?*"<sup>16</sup> Rightly understanding God's providence drives us to exalt the honor of His name as we worship Him with holy fear and rejoicing!

**Psalms 96:9-13:** <sup>9</sup>Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth. <sup>10</sup>Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity." <sup>11</sup>Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; <sup>12</sup>Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy <sup>13</sup>Before the LORD, for He is coming; For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, And the peoples in His faithfulness.

God rebukes those who do not adore His mighty providence.

**Jeremiah 5:22-23:** <sup>22</sup>"Do you not fear Me?" declares the LORD. "Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it. <sup>23</sup>But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; They have turned aside and departed."

And He commands us to tremble and praise Him because He is highly exalted.

**Psalms 99:1-3:** <sup>1</sup>The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! <sup>2</sup>The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. <sup>3</sup>Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He.

God's providence is worthy of our admiration and praise. Rightly understanding it benefits us while intensifying our worship of God in many ways, including the following.

- Increases our gratitude to God

**Psalms 75:1:** We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks, For Thy name is near; Men declare Thy wondrous works.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*. reprint 2003 by The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle PA. pg 124.

- Increases our trust in God.

*Psalm 65:5:* By awesome deeds Thou dost answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, **Thou art the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea.**

- Changes the way we view our world

*Psalm 102:25-27:* <sup>25</sup>Of old Thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. <sup>26</sup>Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. <sup>27</sup>**But Thou are the same, And Thy years will not come to an end.**

- Helps us understand that evil is not outside of the control of God but that He is using it for the ultimate end of all of His good purposes.

*Proverbs 16:4:* **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.**

- Causes us to *rest in God's promises* as we consider *future events*, knowing that even if we face dreadful suffering, God will work it for our good.

*Romans 8:28,31:* <sup>28</sup>And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. . . . <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?**

*Psalm 23:3-4:* <sup>3</sup>He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. <sup>4</sup>**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;** Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

- Encourages us to anticipate the accomplishment of *God's ultimate end in everything*: He will destroy evil forever, and we will lie down in peace.

*Isaiah 14:24, 27:* <sup>24</sup>The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, **"Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will be."** . . . <sup>27</sup>For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His outstretched hand, who can turn it back?"

*Isaiah 11:6-9:* <sup>6</sup>And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. <sup>7</sup>Also the cow and bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup>And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. <sup>9</sup>**They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,** For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

- Affirms that God's providence is the *foundation of our hope* for a future day of glorious rest and eternal happiness.

*Revelation 21:3-4:* <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, <sup>4</sup>and **He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain;** the first things have passed away."

Oh Christian, consider how His eye is on the sparrow and He watches over you! Yours is a special providence, being in the company of God's dearly beloved and chosen people.

*Romans 8:28:* And we know **that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**

Thomas Watson further teaches us: "*God's providence reaches to all persons, especially the persons of the godly, who in a special manner are taken notice of. God takes care of every saint in particular, as if he had none else to care for. 'He careth for you,' 1 Peter 5:7. i.e., the elect in*

a special manner. 'The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; to preserve them from death, and to keep them alive in famine.' Ps 33:18,19. God by his providential care shields off dangers from his people, and sets a life-guard of angels about them. Ps 34:7. God's providence keeps the very bones of the saints. Ps 34:20. It bottles their tears. Ps 56:8. It strengthens the saints in their weakness. Heb 11:34. It supplies all their wants out of its alms basket. Ps 23:5. Thus Providence wonderfully supplies the wants of the elect."<sup>17</sup> Let us therefore appreciate God's providence enough to worship and magnify God's great name because of it. Let us do this while always seeking to acknowledge His invisible hand of guidance and care.

**Question #48:** At this particular time in your life, what do you most appreciate about God's providential purposes and rule? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #49:** In what specific ways should you demonstrate (in your thoughts, actions, attitudes, and speech) your appreciation of God's providential purposes and rule? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Humbly submit to His will**

We rightly acknowledge God's good providence by humbly submitting to it. Are we happy that God is in control? Then let us also be happy with what He gives and *also* with what He takes away. Remember God's good promise to never give us more than we can bear and to bring us safely to His heaven.

**1 Corinthians 10:13:** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,** but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

**2 Timothy 4:18:** **The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom;** to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**1 Peter 1:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>**who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time.

**John 10:27-29:** <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and **I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.** <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Consider the example of the saints who have gone before us. Even though they faced great trials and the hand of God seemed against them at times, yet they trusted Him and humbly submitted to His will. **Watson** elaborates, "*God is to be trusted **when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises.** God promised to give David the crown, to make him king; but providence ran contrary to his promise. David was pursued by Saul, and was in danger of his life, but all this while it was David's duty to trust God. Pray observe, that the Lord by cross*

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<sup>17</sup> Watson, 120.

*providences often brings to pass his promise. God promised Paul the lives of all that were with him in the ship; but the providence of God seemed to run quite contrary to his promise, for the winds blew, the ship split and broke in pieces. Thus God fulfilled his promise; upon the broken pieces of the ship they all came safe to shore. Trust God when providences seem to run quite contrary to promises.”<sup>18</sup>*

**Abraham:** Faithful to God in severe trial while trusting in God’s promise to bless.

**Hebrews 11:17-19:** <sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, **when he was tested, offered up Isaac;** and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; <sup>18</sup>it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” <sup>19</sup>He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

**Job:** Worshipped God in the midst of terrible suffering and pain.

**Job 1:20-21:** <sup>20</sup>Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. <sup>21</sup>And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.**”

**Job 13:15a:** **Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.**

**Joseph:** Faithful to God in the midst of terrible hardships and suffering.

**Genesis 50:19-21:** <sup>19</sup>**But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place?”** <sup>20</sup>**And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.** <sup>21</sup>**So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.”** So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

**Daniel:** Faithful to God in the midst of great suffering and severe temptation in a pagan culture.

**Daniel 1:1-9:** <sup>1</sup>**In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.** <sup>2</sup>**And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah in to his hand,** along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels in the treasury of his god. <sup>3</sup>**Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, . . .** <sup>6</sup>**Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. . . .** <sup>8</sup>**But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.** <sup>9</sup>**Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials.**

**Paul:** Persevered to the end despite tremendous suffering and persecution.

**2 Corinthians 11:23-28:** <sup>23</sup>Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) **I more so;** in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. <sup>24</sup>Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. <sup>26</sup>I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; <sup>27</sup>I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup>**Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.**

**Question #50:** Which of the above examples are most helpful in encouraging you to submit to God’s will? Explain how they are encouraging to you. \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>18</sup> Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 123.

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**Question #51:** Describe one or more specific situations in which you need to submit to God's will. Then list specific actions you must take in order to submit to God's will in this (these) situations. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #52:** Make a specific step-by-step plan that you will follow to take the actions listed in Q. #51. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Never Complain against God's Providence

Would you like to rule the world? Do you have a wiser plan than God's? Would God and His world be better off if you were at the helm? Such thinking is utter folly, and we all know it. Why then do we complain disrespectfully against God's wise providence? Shall the clay say to the potter, why did you make me like this? (Romans 9:20-21) Shall the dog bite the hand that feeds it? Complaining to God about the circumstances of our lives is sheer folly, but *seeking consolation and comfort* in His sovereign power, wisdom, and care is wise. Consider the words of **Thomas Watson**: "*Let us **be content** that God should rule the world; **learn to acquiesce** in his will, and **submit to his providence**. Does any affliction befall you? Remember God sees it is that which is fit for you, or it would not come.*"<sup>19</sup>

**Philippians 2:12-16:** <sup>12</sup>So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** <sup>13</sup>**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** <sup>14</sup>**Do all things without grumbling or disputing;** <sup>15</sup>that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup>holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

May we always seek humble submission to God, realizing He knows what we need far better than we do ourselves. The circumstances God has ordered for our lives are those which produce our highest good and God's greatest glory!

**Matthew 6:31-34:** <sup>31</sup>Do not be anxious then, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "With what shall we clothe ourselves?" <sup>32</sup>For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; **for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.** <sup>33</sup>**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.** <sup>34</sup>Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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<sup>19</sup> Watson, 125.



**Question #53:** How do Philippians 2:12-16 and Matthew 6:31-34 specifically affirm the great wisdom of submitting to God's providence without complaint? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #54:** What particular aspects of your life right now are you most tempted to complain about? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #55:** How will you apply Philippians 2:12-16 and Matthew 6:31-34 to these particular aspects of your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Be Thankful for God's Providence

Dear friends, when we consider God's goodness to us, we must respond with thankfulness! God has promised that every single thing in our lives will ultimately work for our good. Since He has met our greatest need by not sparing His own Son, He will also give us everything else that we need.

**Romans 8:31-32:** <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?**

<sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**

If God will give us a Kingdom when we die, will He not also give us daily bread while we live? If Jesus suffered and died to bring us to Himself, will He not also hear our prayer when we cry to Him for help? Indeed He will! And He won't stop there. He will also crown us with eternal life and allow us to see His glory forever in Heaven. What more could we want from the good hand of Providence? Learn then, that it is fitting for the upright to praise God. Thanksgiving to God is pure praise! It honors the God who gives us life and breath.

**Psalm 50:23:** **He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;** And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God.

Those who know the goodness of God will respond with the highest praises of our King! Thanksgiving runs through the veins of every God-focused saint. Praise is the garment that fits handsomely on our backs.

**Psalm 145:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works. <sup>10</sup>**All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee, O LORD, And Thy godly ones shall bless Thee.**

The mouths of the wicked are filled with grumbling, murmuring, and complaining. The wicked cannot praise God; neither are they thankful. The poison of asps is on their lips, and with the tongue they profane the name of God. But such wicked speech does not befit a saint!

**2 Timothy 3:2-4:** <sup>2</sup>For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, **boastful, arrogant, revilers,** disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>unloving, irreconcilable, **malicious gossips, without self-control,** brutal, haters of good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, reckless, conceited, **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.**

**Psalm 33:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>**Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright.** <sup>2</sup>**Give thanks to the LORD** with the lyre; **Sing praises to Him** with a harp of ten strings. <sup>3</sup>**Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.** <sup>4</sup>For

the word of the LORD is upright; And all His work is done in faithfulness. <sup>5</sup>He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.

Let us therefore give God the thanksgiving and praise which is due Him! No matter what cup we are called to drink, no matter what bitterness of soul should afflict us, no matter what great trial may befall us—may we stand in the company of God-honoring saints, with the glorious praise of God in our mouth, secure in the knowledge that He gives only what works for our good. May we do His good will by giving thanks in all circumstances!

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:** <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>**in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you** in Christ Jesus.

**Ephesians 5:18-20:** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

**Question #56:** According to Romans 8:31-32, Psalm 50:23, and Psalm 145:9-10 33:1-5, on what basis should Christians be *characterized* by thankful spirits? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #57:** According to Romans 3:13-14, 2 Timothy 3:2-4, Psalm 33:1-5 how should the speech of believers in Christ differ from the speech of unbelievers? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #58:** Read and meditate on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Ephesians 5:18-20 . Then write a hymn or a prayer of thanksgiving to God focusing specifically on your delight in and appreciation of His providence. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Trust in God's Good Providence to His People

When we consider the promises which God has made, we should be encouraged to rest in His providence. Because God is in control, we can rest knowing that He will bring about our good and His glory! **Thomas Watson** gives us this challenge: *"Therefore, Christians, believe that God loves you, and that he will make the most cross providences to promote his glory and your good."*<sup>20</sup> Scripture affirms that God will care for us and meet our needs.

**Psalms 37:3-7:** <sup>3</sup>**Trust in the LORD, and do good;** Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. <sup>4</sup>Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup>**Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him,** and He will do it. <sup>6</sup>And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your judgment as the noonday. <sup>7</sup>**Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;** Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

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<sup>20</sup> Watson, 125.



Jesus often confronting our fears with, “Do not be afraid,” followed by assurances of His presence with us. Indeed we have nothing to fear if we love God, everything will work for our *ultimate good*.

**Luke 12:32:** **Do not be afraid**, little flock, **for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom**.

**Question #59:** List the commands in Psalm 37:3-7 and Luke 12:32. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #60:** Now list the promises and affirmations of truth in these passages. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #61:** How do the promises and affirmations of truth in these passages encourage you to so trust in God’s providence that you delight and rejoice in obeying His commands? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 3: God's Purposes

### The Display of His Glory and Excellence – The Ultimate End

God created the world for many purposes. Indeed, everything He created fulfills a specific purpose in His grand scheme for the ages. As we have already seen, all things work out in conformity with His sovereign purposes.

**Proverbs 16:4:** **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose,** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

**Question #62:** For what most basic reason does every created thing (even the wicked) exist? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now, consider these verses:

**Ephesians 1:11-12:** <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** <sup>12</sup>**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

**Question #63:** According to Ephesians 1:11-12, how did we obtain an inheritance? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #64:** According to Ephesians 1:11-12, for what purpose (end) did we obtain our inheritance? \_\_\_\_\_

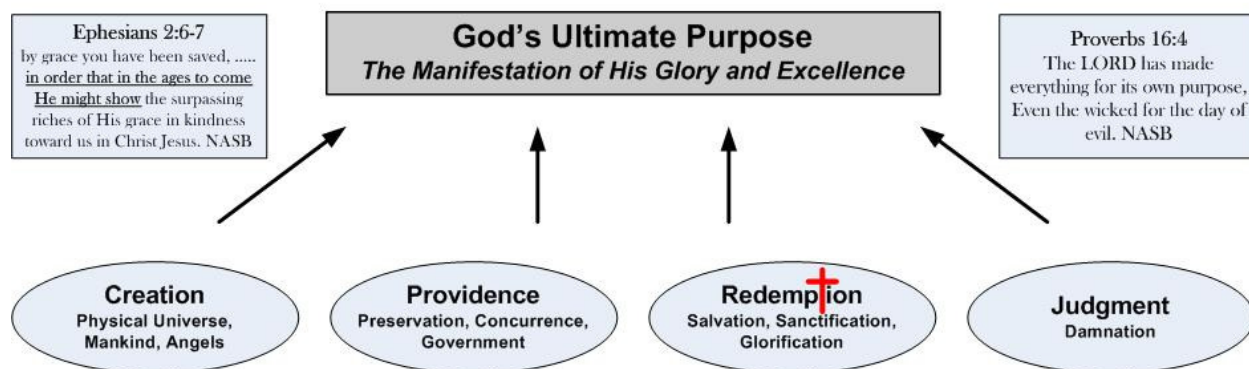
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**Ephesians 1:11-12** reveals that although the salvation of the saints was predestined according to God's purpose, the salvation of the saints *is not God's highest purpose*. God's predestination of the salvation of the saints was *"to the end that we.....should be to the praise of His glory."* Note well that the salvation of men and women supports the higher purpose of the *praise of the glory of God!* How then should we answer the question: What is God's *highest* purpose in creating all things? In other words, what ultimate purpose do all of God's other purposes serve? To paraphrase the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: What is the chief end of God in creating all things? The following chart clearly shows us the answer.

*"The chief end of God in the creation of all things is to manifest the Glory and Excellency of His own nature as God, and to express through creation, providence and redemption the manifold perfections of His divine character"*



**ALL PURPOSES OF GOD SERVE THE HIGHER PURPOSE OF THE DISPLAY OF HIS GLORY!**

The chief end of God in creating all things is to manifest the Glory and Excellency of His own nature as God, and to express through Creation, Providence, and Redemption the manifold perfections of His divine character.

**Question #65:** Is the idea presented in the chart a new one for you? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, what is your initial reaction to it? \_\_\_\_\_

Dear reader, God is a Being of such awesome wonder and exquisite beauty that the expression of His being is the highest and most glorious concept conceivable. Furthermore, *reflecting God's character and nature in an intimate personal relationship with Him* is the most fulfilling and exhilarating of all human experiences. Thus, this is the highest purpose for which we were created. As the Westminster Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." This assertion is well-supported in Scripture.

**1 Chronicles 16:28-29:** <sup>28</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, **Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.** <sup>29</sup>Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him; **Worship the LORD in holy array.**

**Isaiah 42:12:** **Let them give glory to the LORD,** And declare His praise in the coastlands.

**Isaiah 43:7:** Everyone who is called by My name, **And whom I have created for My glory,** Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

**Psalms 99:9:** **Exalt the LORD our God,** And worship at His holy hill; For holy is the LORD our God.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>**For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.**

**Matthew 5:16:** **Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

**1 Peter 2:12:** **Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

**1 Corinthians 10:31:** Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

**Question #66:** From the above verses, list several *specific ways* in which we are commanded to give God glory. \_\_\_\_\_

The Bible consistently subordinates all human purposes to our ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Dear Reader, here is the meaning of our lives! The Lord Himself taught the same thing when He answered a Pharisee's question by identifying the great commandments. He said all the Law and Prophets (in other words, the whole Old Testament) are summed up in these two commandments.

**Matthew 22:34-40:** <sup>34</sup>But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. <sup>35</sup>And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, to test Him, <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup>And He said to him, **"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** <sup>38</sup>**This is the great and foremost commandment.** <sup>39</sup>**The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Here Jesus tells us that the chief purpose for our existence is to *love God*, i.e., to worship Him with everything within us. The meaning of worship is **to ascribe worth or value to something**. Consider this definition in relation to God's highest purpose for us. God seeks to manifest or show forth the excellence of His character and commands us to love, praise, and revere Him. Sin, therefore, is an abominable failure to fulfill our chief end because it doesn't reflect love for God and, consequently, doesn't glorify Him. Therefore, it fails to fulfill the high purpose for which He created us. This is also why even one sin violates the whole law of God. When we Christians sin, we fall short of our chief end of glorifying and enjoying God. And He takes action immediately to get us back on track! He faithfully convicts us of our failure and drives us to confess and repent through the work of His Holy Spirit. When we respond in love to His conviction, we return to glorifying God by reflecting His merciful forgiveness to those around us.

**James 2:10:** For whoever keeps the whole law and **yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**

**1 John 1:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

**Question #67:** In your own words, describe how repentance and confession of sin glorifies God. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question #68:** Explain why the fact that repentance and confession of sin glorifies God and must not be used by a Christian as a license to sin. \_\_\_\_\_

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## God's highest purpose is NOT the salvation of mankind.

Many people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of men and women. They wrongly reason that since we are created in God's image and are therefore the pinnacle of His creative work, God's highest priority must be preventing us from falling into damnation. This idea is foreign to the Bible's teaching, however. Scripture affirms that God ordained the fall of mankind from eternity for His own immutable purpose and by His eternal decree. He purposed from the beginning for mankind to fall, so that He could redeem some to eternal life while others were damned. How can we be so sure these are God's purposes? Because this is in *fact what happens*, which is the definition of God's sovereign will. Everything that unfolds in the course of history must be the outworking of the sovereign decree of God. Not only is this reasonably inferred by a common sense understanding of sovereignty, but the Bible plainly states that God is responsible for the fall and that He planned redemption from before the creation of the world.

**Romans 9:14-24:** <sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? **There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!** <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."** <sup>16</sup>So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

<sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." <sup>18</sup>So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. <sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" <sup>20</sup>On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? <sup>21</sup>Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? <sup>22</sup>What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**1 Peter 1:20-21:** <sup>20</sup>For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup>who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

**Question #69:** How do people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of mankind? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question #70:** How do Romans 9:14-21 and 1 Peter 1:20-21 affirm that God purposed from the beginning that some would be redeemed and others would be damned? \_\_\_\_\_

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Many who claim that it is God's will that all men and women be saved quote the following verses:

**1 Timothy 2:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>**who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** <sup>5</sup>For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.

**2 Peter 3:9:** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

**Romans 11:32:** For **God has shut up all in disobedience** that He might show mercy to all.

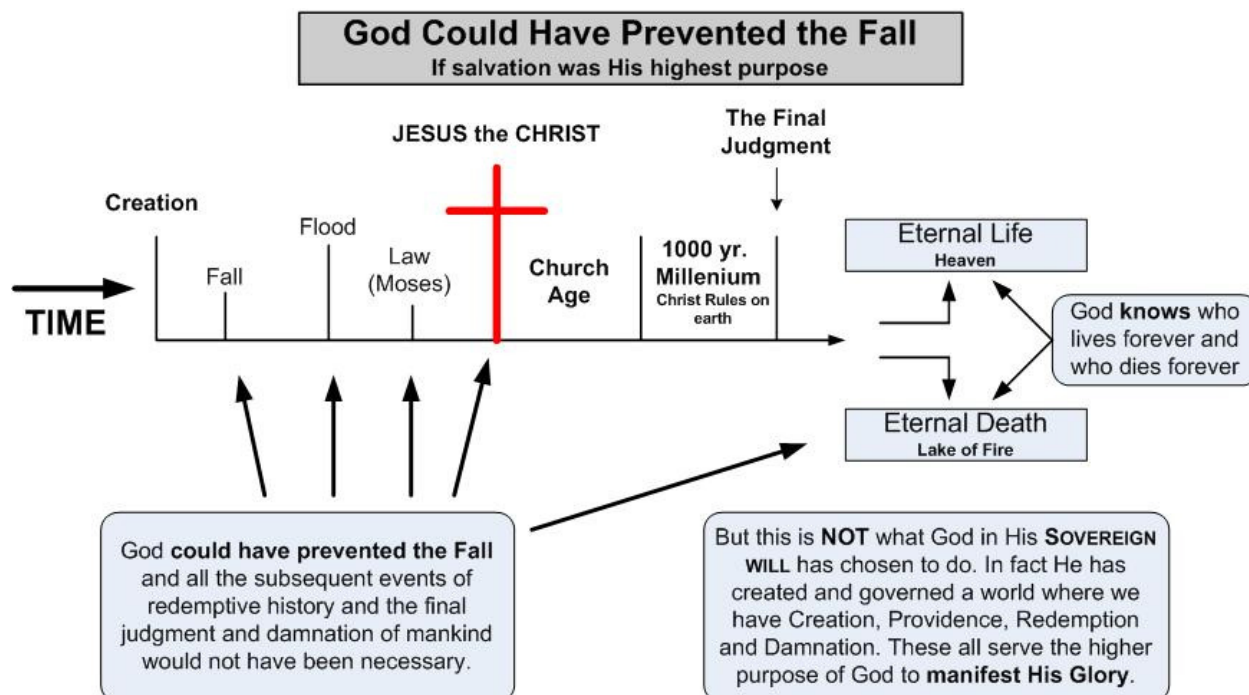
They fail to consider, however, that if God's highest purpose were to save all mankind, then that is exactly what God would do. God would not have shut up all people into disobedience if He desired to save them all; rather He would have simply prevented the fall from happening. He could have done this in many ways, not the least of which would have been to NOT create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil nor to give a law not to eat from it. These verses then, simply reflect the **moral will** of God.

God does not delight in the death of anyone, even hardened sinners (Ezekiel 18:32). However, He will judge and damn hardened sinners because doing so displays the excellence of His goodness, justice, and wrath. So even though in His **moral will** He does not delight in the death of the wicked, in His **sovereign will** He demands it. God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves. Consider the following quote from **John Piper**: *"The misery and the suffering that judgment brings upon the impenitent, in and of itself, does not delight the heart of God. He is not malicious or bloodthirsty. That's what Ezekiel 18:32 is warning us NOT to believe about God. Rather, when He brings judgment on the impenitent and unbelieving and wicked, the delight that He takes in that act is delight in the vindication of His justice and His truth and righteousness, and the value of His name which has been profaned by unbelievers. God's heart is capable of grieving over the misery and the sin, considered in and of itself, of any unbelieving lost person (Ezekiel 18:32), while at the same time, rejoicing and exulting exuberantly in the vindication of His righteousness and His name as He destroys them in hell (Deuteronomy 28:63). If that does not fit together in your own mind and heart, you are finite and God is infinite. Do not shape God into your limited image, let the Holy Scriptures stand, and may God build His true character in your heart and in your eyes."*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All He Does," Sermon: February 1, 1987. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see: John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, Appendix: "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire For All to be Saved." (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 313-340.





**Question #71:** How can God *not* delight in the death of the wicked while acting decisively to destroy them in hell? \_\_\_\_\_

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## God's Glory displayed in all things

Consider then, how God displays His glory in all things. Listed below are a few of the divine excellencies that are seen in the works of God.

- **The creation of the universe** reflects His power, wisdom, beauty, and perfection.
- **His providence** reflects His power, wisdom, grace, mercy, patience, and omnipresence.
- **The salvation of His people** reflects His love, grace, mercy, goodness, and justice.
- **The damnation of the wicked** reflects His goodness, justice, wrath, and power.

Dear reader, when we consider the almighty power and wisdom of God, we must respond with worship and awe! **The Scripture plainly teaches** *"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things."* God is indeed the beginning, middle, and end of all that He has purposed to do.

**Romans 11:33-36:** <sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? <sup>35</sup>Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? <sup>36</sup>**For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.** To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Numerous biblical texts explicitly state that God seeks His own glory. Listing them all would take several pages and examining them all would be exhausting. Here are just a few of them:

**Isaiah 48:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>**For the sake of My name** I delay My wrath, And **for My praise** I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off. <sup>10</sup>Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested

you in the furnace of affliction. <sup>11</sup>For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

*Isaiah 43:7:* Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

*Jeremiah 13:11:* “For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,” declares the LORD, “that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen.”

*Psalms 106:7-8:* <sup>7</sup>Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Thy wonders; They did not remember Thine abundant kindnesses, But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. <sup>8</sup>Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.

*Romans 9:17:* For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.”

*John 7:18:* He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

*Matthew 5:16:* Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

*John 12:27-28:* <sup>27</sup>“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify Thy name.” There came therefore a voice out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

*John 17:24:* Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.

*1 Peter 4:11:* Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let us learn then: the Bible plainly declares that chief among God’s purposes is the pursuit of His own glory and the fame of His great name!

**Question #72:** Describe your initial reactions to the Bible’s teaching that the display of God’s glory is His highest priority in everything that He does. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #73:** What specific changes in your priorities, attitudes, and pursuits are in order as you seek to live each day in the light of this biblical teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

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# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 3: God's Purposes

### The Plan of Redemption, the Gospel, and Missions

Consider then how God, in His infinite wisdom, has planned the outworking of history to achieve this great end of displaying the glory of His name. As we look at Scripture, we see that even the earliest passages speak of God's plan to "save and redeem."

**Genesis 3:15:** And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And **between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head**, And you shall bruise him on the heel.

Indeed, the entire Bible declares how God is working out His plan for the ages. **Scripture plainly teaches** that it was always God's plan for mankind to fall, for Jesus to die upon the Cross, and for God to redeem for Himself a company of people whom He has **"destined for Glory."** Scripture is replete with passages testifying that these events were **"predestined according to His purpose"** and done by the **"predetermined plan and foreknowledge"** of God.

**Ephesians 1:10c-12:** <sup>10c</sup>In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose** who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

**Acts 2:22-23:** <sup>22</sup>Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup>this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

**Acts 4:27-28:** <sup>27</sup>For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

**Ephesians 1:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will**, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**Ephesians 3:11-12:** <sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with the **eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord**, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

**Titus 1:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of **those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, <sup>2</sup>**in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, <sup>3</sup>but at the proper time manifested**, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior;

**2 Timothy 1:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup>**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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher, and an apostle and a teacher.

**Question #74:** What specific words and phrases in the above Scriptures reveal that God planned, from the beginning, to “save and redeem” a number of fallen sinners?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #75:** How do these passages speak to the *absoluteness* of God’s sovereignty in your mind?\_\_\_\_\_

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Since these things in God’s Word are necessarily true, we must now consider the means God ordained to carry out His plan for the ages. The Bible plainly declares that God uses the proclamation of the Gospel message in this late age to bring about His purpose of glorifying Himself in the redemption of sinners. He has charged His church with the great task of evangelizing the nations (missions). He has done this both for the sake of His great name, and so that the Lamb will receive the reward of His suffering. Since God has created both mankind and angels as morally responsible, He holds them accountable to His standard of morality. Scripture therefore affirms that both mankind and angels will stand in judgment before God and are accountable to God’s sovereign authority.

**2 Peter 2:4:** For if **God did not spare angels when they sinned**, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, **reserved for judgment**;

**Hebrews 2:16:** For assuredly **He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.**

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, **because this applies to every person.** <sup>14</sup>**For God will bring every act to judgment**, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

**Romans 3:19:** Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and **all the world may become accountable to God**;

**Romans 14:12:** **So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God.**

**1 Peter 4:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup>so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup>For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup>And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; <sup>5</sup>**but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.**

**Question 76:** According to the above verses, what do mankind and angels have in common?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #77:** According to the above verses, how has fallen mankind been blessed astoundingly more than have fallen angels?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #78:** Ponder this astounding blessing; then write a short prayer of gratitude to God for it. \_\_\_\_\_

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God expects His creatures, whom He has made for His own purposes, to live according to God's standard of moral character which requires perfection, purity, and holiness. Because all of mankind has fallen short of the glory of God (His perfect standard of moral character), they stand in great need of redemption – a need God provided for long ages ago in His *plan of redemption*. In our late age, God's plan of redemption is coming to pass through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As God's people proclaim the work of Jesus, who was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind and God's required redemption price, the purpose of God in redemption is being accomplished as He calls out His chosen people from every tribe and nation.

**Romans 3:23:** for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

**Romans 16:25-27:** <sup>25</sup>Now to Him who is able to establish you **according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,** <sup>26</sup>but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, **according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;** <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

**Question #79:** Why do all people everywhere need to be redeemed? \_\_\_\_\_

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Through this gospel (the message of the person and work of Christ), the judgment of God for the sins of mankind has been cancelled for all who believe. By faith in Christ they enter into a state of redemption. Their debt of sin has been paid as God's wrath and judgment were satisfied at the cross. Christ Jesus Himself, in His perfect life and atoning death, fulfilled the law of God (God's perfect standard of moral character) and paid the just penalty for the wages of sin. This we call *justification by faith*.

**Romans 3:21-28:** <sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;** for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;** <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** <sup>27</sup>Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but **by a law of faith.**

<sup>28</sup>For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

**Question #80:** According to Romans 3:21-28, what did Christ do that makes it possible for God to freely forgive fallen sinners? \_\_\_\_\_

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Because of this great work, God has exalted Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God and the man, to be the sovereign king and judge of the living and the dead. Therefore all nations and all people, in every age and generation, will bow the knee before the sovereign authority of Christ when judgment comes at the consummation of God's plan for the ages.

**Ephesians 1:18-23:** <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup>which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>**far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.** <sup>22</sup>**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

**2 Timothy 4:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and **of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead**, and by His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

**Philippians 2:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>Therefore also **God highly exalted Him**, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,** <sup>11</sup>**and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

**Question #81:** According to the above scriptures, do any nations or people exercise *sovereign* ruling authority on this earth? \_\_\_\_\_ Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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This message of the Gospel is the *means* by which God brings to pass His eternal purpose in Christ to redeem. This is why missions is a key element of God's glory in the church. Scripture commands us to carry the Gospel to the far corners of the earth.

**Mark 16:15:** And He said to them, **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."**

**Ephesians 3:8-12:** <sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, **to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,** <sup>9</sup>**and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God**, who created all things; <sup>10</sup>in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

**Matthew 24:14:** And **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.**



**Romans 10:14-15:** <sup>14</sup>How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how shall they hear without a preacher?** <sup>15</sup>**And how shall they preach unless they are sent?** Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!”

So then God fully intends to save all those whom He has purposed to save. This He will accomplish by His great missionary people, the Gentile Church. The accomplishment of His purpose is *certain*! Scripture affirms that our sovereign God will save *all* of the people He has intended to save. Every last one *will* be saved.

**John 6:37-39:** <sup>37</sup>**All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup>And **this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing**, but raise it up on the last day.

**Revelation 5:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and **didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** <sup>10</sup>And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

**Question #82:** Describe the significance of the missionary activity of Christ’s Church. \_\_\_\_\_

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Christ did all that was needed to *secure* the salvation of His church.

**John 19:30:** When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, **“It is finished !”** And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.

In all of this great plan to redeem, God’s people magnify the *glory* of His grace in salvation. All of God’s redemptive acts throughout history work to the *end (the ultimate purpose)* of the praise of the glory of God’s excellency and nature as our Savior.

**2 Corinthians 4:15:** For all things are for your sakes, that **the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.**

**Ephesians 1:3-14:** **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, <sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>**to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He *freely* bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, <sup>8</sup>which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup>**with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ**, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose** who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup>**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ **should be to the praise of His glory.** <sup>13</sup>In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup>who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, **to the praise of His glory.**

Even the very *state of being* to which God’s people are destined is said to be “glory”!



***Ephesians 1:18:*** I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are **the riches of the glory of His inheritance** in the saints,

***Romans 9:23-24:*** <sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might **make known the riches of His glory** upon vessels of mercy, which **He prepared beforehand for glory**, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**Question #83:** For what ultimate purpose did God purpose and act to save fallen sinners?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #84:** Look back through this section and select one or more passages to memorize that will help you remember God's ultimate purpose for saving you.

**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 3: God's Purposes

### God's Decrees and Foreordination

#### The Certainty of God's Purposes Being Fulfilled

Since God is clearly all-powerful and all-knowing, governs His creation by a mighty providence, and inevitably brings His plans and purposes to pass, we see that God's purposes are *immutable (unchanging and certain)*. The Bible plainly declares that God's purposes will be established in history because His counsel (plans and purposes) are certain.

*Psalm 33:11:* The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

*Proverbs 19:21:* Many are the plans in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand.

*Hebrews 6:17-18:* <sup>17</sup>In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup>in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.

**Question #85:** List words and phrases from the above passages that affirm the immutability of God's plans and purposes. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #86:** If even one of God's plans and purposes failed to come about, what would we have to conclude about the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

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This discussion of God's decrees is clearly related to His sovereign authority. Since God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, He necessarily decreed everything that happens. He has *declared* or *proclaimed*, according to His counsel and will, everything that comes to pass. This *decree of God* cannot be thwarted or hindered, because His *invisible hand* providentially carries it out in history. The Bible plainly declares that *God will bring to pass what He wills in His sovereign decree*.

*Isaiah 46:9-11:* <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, **"My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure"**; <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

Consider the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* on the Decrees of God:

**Question 7:** What are the Decrees of God? **Answer:** The Decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

**Ephesians 1:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup>with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**.

Whatever comes to pass has been *eternally decreed by God*. This means that God has *approved* (in the sense of permitting or preventing them) all of the events of history. This we call *foreordination*. God has *fore* (from before time began), *ordained* all that ever has happened or will happen in history. Jonathan Edwards described *foreordination* like this: “*Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He doth approve of them or doth not approve of them; that is, He is either willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. But to will that they should be is to decree them.*”

**Numbers 23:19:** God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; **Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?**

Jonathan Edwards also addressed God’s decrees in relation to the problem of evil: “*God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God’s permitting is God’s forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.*” (Job 12:13-22; Proverbs 8:14-16; Isaiah 40; Acts 2:23, 4:28) Learn then that history is the product of God’s eternally wise planning, creative purpose, providential preservation, and common grace. God fills space and time with His presence, sustains it, and gives it purpose and value. The omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent One is Lord of time and history, not vice versa. His purposes are providentially accomplished in time and space.

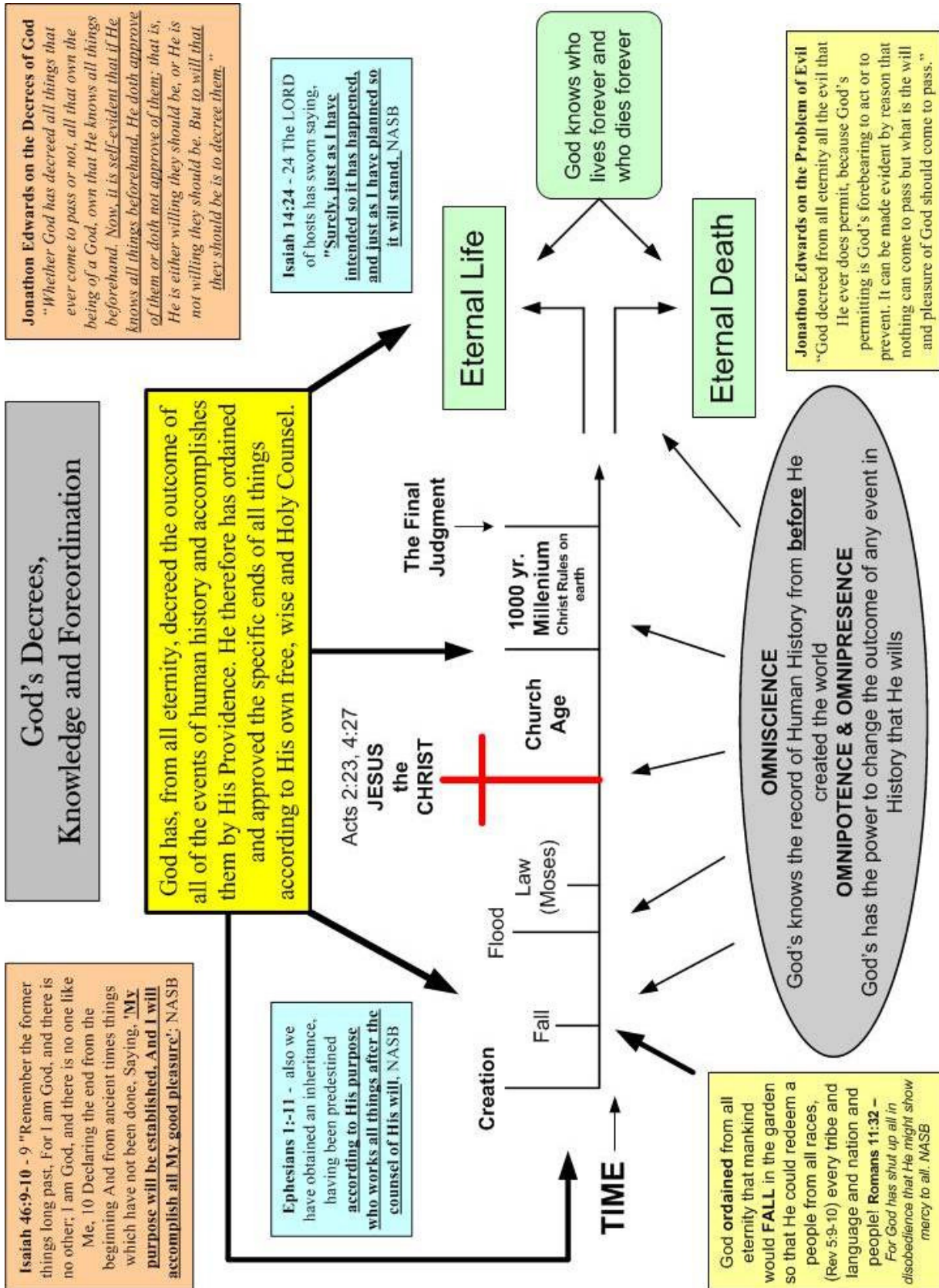
**Isaiah 14:24-27:** <sup>24</sup>The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, **“Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,** <sup>25</sup>to break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. <sup>26</sup>**This is the plan devised against the whole earth;** and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. <sup>27</sup>**For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?”**

**Question #87:** On what basis (bases) did God foreordain whatever comes to pass?\_\_\_\_\_

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## The Nature of God's Decrees and Foreordination

As we consider the decrees of God (His eternal purposes and plans), let us understand that they reflect His very nature. Reflecting on God's attributes helps us define and understand His purposes. In relation to His decrees then we must recall that God's nature is:

- **Holy:** God is absolutely perfect and pure.
- **Omnipotent:** God is all-powerful and free to do all His holy will.
- **Omniscient:** God is all-knowing, having perfect knowledge of past, present and future events.
- **Omnipresent:** God exists in all space and in all of past, present, and future eternity.
- **Eternal:** God has always been, is now, and always will be.
- **Self-Existent:** God had no beginning, will have no end, and is the source of all beings, things, knowledge, and power.
- **Sovereign:** God is the supreme authority; His decrees are irresistible.
- **Wise:** God's plans all work together in harmony to accomplish His purposes.
- **Just and Righteous:** God cannot do anything evil, unjust, or wrong.

Therefore in light of God's nature, let us now consider the nature of His decrees.

### God's Decrees are:

- **Glorious:** The chief end or final cause contemplated in all God's decrees is His own glory. Because God is infinite and perfect, the revelation of His glory and excellency is the highest of all existing purposes. All other purposes of creation, therefore, are properly and necessarily subordinate to that end.

*Romans 11:36:* **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.** Amen.

**Question #88:** What is the chief end of all God's decrees? \_\_\_\_\_ Why is it right and proper that this be the chief end of all God's decrees? \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Many and one:** God's decrees are all reducible to one eternal purpose. All of the manifold events of history form one great purpose or plan. Because God's knowledge perfectly encompasses past, present, and future, He approved of His plan, from beginning to end, at the time He made it. **Charles Hodge** explains, "*It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that He ever purposes what He did not originally intend: or that one part of His plan is independent with other parts. It is one scheme and therefore one purpose.*"<sup>22</sup>

*Isaiah 41:4:* Who has performed and accomplished it, **Calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD,** am the first, and with the last, I am He.

*Isaiah 46:9-10:* <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, For I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying,

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<sup>22</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 537.



**“My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.”**

**Isaiah 48:3: I declared the former things long ago** And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. **Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.**

**Question #89:** Explain in your own words how God’s decrees reduce to form one great purpose or plan. \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Free:** God’s decrees are free and sovereign, determined by the counsel of His own will. Charles Hodge again explains, “*God adopted the plan of the universe on the ground of His own good pleasure, for His own glory, and every subordinate part of it in reference to the whole. His decrees are free, therefore, in a far higher sense than that in which the ordinary purposes of men are free.*”<sup>23</sup>

**Psalms 135:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. <sup>6</sup>Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

**Isaiah 46:10:** <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, “**My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.**”

**Isaiah 40:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? <sup>14</sup>**With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?**

**Question #90:** On what basis are God’s decrees *free*? \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Reflected in all things:** God’s decrees comprehend all events. Whatever God does and permits is according to His plan. Divine foreknowledge necessitates this. Since God knows the end from the beginning, nothing can happen that He did not know from eternity past. Therefore nothing happens that God did not intend. Since God is providentially controlling nature and history, His purposes and plans are perfectly and exclusively fulfilled.

**Psalms 139:16:** Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And **in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.**

**Matthew 10:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet **not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

**Isaiah 22:10-11:** <sup>10</sup>Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem, And you tore down houses to fortify the wall. <sup>11</sup>And you made a reservoir between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, **Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago.**

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<sup>23</sup>Hodge, 540.



**Question #91:** Explain in your own words how divine foreknowledge necessitates that God's decrees comprehend all the events of human history. \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Immutable:** God's decrees are perfect and therefore cannot change. This is to say that whatever God has determined will come to pass, because He has also determined the means by which they come to pass.

*Jeremiah 4:28:* For this the earth shall mourn, And the heavens above be dark, Because I have spoken, **I have purposed, And I will not change My mind, nor will I turn from it.**

*Psalms 33:11:* The **counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart** from generation to generation.

**Question #92:** What specific comfort do you derive from the fact that God's decrees are perfect and therefore cannot change? \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Inclusive of the ends and the means:** God's decrees ordain all of the means by which His purposes are established. Since God's purpose is being carried out in an infinitely complex world of causes and effects, His purposes include all of the causes and effects necessary to accomplish them. Clearly, His eternal plan includes all of the means by which His ends are attained. *The Westminster Confession of Faith (On Providence: articles 1, 2, 3)* explains:

1. God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

3. God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

Consider how even the free choices of people ultimately accomplish the eternal purposes of God. Scripture clearly affirms that the decisions we make every day are part of God's means of fulfilling His decree.

*Acts 4:27-28:* <sup>27</sup>For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

*Ephesians 3:8-12:* <sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light

what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; <sup>10</sup>in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord**, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

**Question #93:** After considering the infinite number of complex causes and effects involved in the carrying out God's purposes in this world, write a short prayer of praise extolling God's amazing providence. \_\_\_\_\_

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- **Efficacious:** God's decrees will surely come to pass. Consider how predictive prophecy has affirmed this time and again.

*Daniel 11:36:* Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, **for that which is decreed will be done.**

*Lamentations 3:37-38:* <sup>37</sup>Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it?** <sup>38</sup>**Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?**

*Isaiah 25:1:* O LORD, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; **For Thou hast worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.**

Consider how the decrees of God not only declare the certainty of all of His promises but also His threatenings. When God threatens the wicked with destruction, He is not playing games. He will make good on His threats if His warnings are not heeded.

*Psalms 145:20:* The LORD keeps all who love Him; But **all the wicked, He will destroy.**

*Genesis 6:13:* Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and **behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.**"

*Matthew 10:28:* And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather **fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Likewise, when God promises to bless His own people, He will surely do it. The promises of God are as sure as the sun is bright! God's faithfulness in blessing His people, and their delight in glorifying Him are in accord with God's eternal purposes which He has purposed in Christ Jesus.

*Romans 8:28:* And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are called according to His purpose.

*2 Corinthians 1:20:* For **as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes**; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

*1 Peter 1:3-7:* <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>**to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,** <sup>5</sup>**who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed

in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, **<sup>7</sup>that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

**Question #94:** Describe the confidence and security you have in your faith because God's decrees are efficacious. \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Sovereignty of God

### Part 3: God's Purposes

#### Divine Sovereignty and Prayer

Many object to the idea of foreordination, arguing that if all things are decreed or ordained from the beginning there is ***no reason to pray***, since God's decree cannot be changed. This objection cannot stand, however, because it misunderstands the fundamental purpose of prayer. When God commands us to pray, He is not giving us veto power over His decree. Rather, prayer is a divinely-ordained means of communicating with Him and bringing His sovereign will to pass. In this section, we will study God's purpose for prayer as it relates to His sovereignty by considering the following points:

- Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty.
- Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence.
- Prayer changes the way we see things in time and space.

**Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty:** Prayer's primary purpose is to honor and glorify God. Prayer fundamentally recognizes God's sovereignty, acknowledges His power, and submits to His will. Prayer, as it is defined and illustrated in the Bible: (1) seeks to align human thought and will to God's divine purposes; and (2) appeals to His power and ability to meet legitimate needs and desires. Consider, for example, the pattern of prayer given by Jesus to His disciples:

**Matthew 6:8-13:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. <sup>9</sup>Pray, then, in this way: (1) **"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.** <sup>10</sup>Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done,** On earth as it is in heaven. (2) <sup>11</sup>**Give us this day our daily bread.** <sup>12</sup>**And forgive us our debts,** as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup>And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. **For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.** Amen."

**Question #95:** List words and phrases in Jesus' pattern of prayer that reflect desire to align human thought and will to God's divine purposes:\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #96:** List words and phrases in Jesus' pattern of prayer that reflect appeals to God's power and ability to meet legitimate needs and desires:\_\_\_\_\_

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When we pray according to Jesus' instructions, we do not tell God how to run His world. Rather, we humbly acknowledge His Sovereignty, and appeal to His Fatherly willingness to care for us. ***When we pray for our needs to be met***, it is not for the purpose of informing God of our needs, because Scripture says He already knows them (Matthew 6:8). All we need to do is acknowledge God's ability to meet those needs. God does instruct us to bring our needs and requests to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6) ***for our benefit***. When we identify our needs and

seek His specific provision for them, we entrust ourselves to His perfect care and are blessed with peace beyond all comprehension (v. 7) Furthermore, *when we pray for someone to be saved*, we acknowledge God's sovereign authority to save by granting repentance and regeneration (spiritual life) to a sinner who is dead in transgressions and sins. If we do not believe this but rather believe that God has already done everything needed for people to be saved and is simply waiting for them to respond, praying for God to save people is pointless.

**Question #97:** How does praying for God to meet our needs affirm His sovereignty?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence on God:** In prayer we humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our complete dependence upon Him. We do not dictate to God what His Divine will ought to be. Rather, we seek to align our thinking with His all-wise and powerful, loving and good will. Shall we instruct God about what is lacking in His wise plan? Shall a worm crawling through the earth tell the Almighty God how to govern His world? Silliness!

**Romans 11:34-36:** <sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, **or who has become His counselor?** <sup>35</sup>**Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?** <sup>36</sup>For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen

Prayer is rather a confession of our weakness, even our inability to help ourselves. In prayer we appeal to the Almighty for His gracious enablement. We acknowledge that there is nothing in us to merit God's favor, but only sin and rebellion that offends His holiness and merits our utter destruction. *Humble prayer expresses submission to His Holy will and utter dependence on His gracious provision* of our needs. The Scripture plainly declares that He supplies our need.

**Acts 17:24-25:** <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup>neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, **since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;**  
**Philippians 4:19: And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus**

Consider the prayers of tax gatherer and the Pharisee in Luke 18. Which was heard?

**Luke 18:9-14:** <sup>9</sup>And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup>**But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’** <sup>14</sup>**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;** for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

**James 4:10: Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord,** and He will exalt you.

**Scripture plainly declares** that God hears and answers the prayers of those who bow before the sovereign authority of God seeking His loving and gracious provision.

**Question #98:** In your own words, explain how each of the following passages present prayer as a humble expression of our dependence upon God.

Romans 11:34-36: \_\_\_\_\_

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Acts 17:24-25: \_\_\_\_\_

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Philippians 4:19: \_\_\_\_\_

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Luke 8:9-14: \_\_\_\_\_

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James 4:10: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer changes the way we see things in time and space:** The Scripture plainly declares that God responds to prayer and acts either to grant or deny our requests.

**James 4:2b:** You do not have **because you do not ask.**

**John 14:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>**And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do,** that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>**If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**

**Psalms 91:15:** **He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;** I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him, and honor him.

**Jeremiah 29:12:** **Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.**

**Jeremiah 33:3:** **Call to Me, and I will answer you,** and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

**2 Corinthians 12:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>Concerning this **I entreated the Lord three times** that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup>**And He has said to me,** “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

**1 John 5:14-15:** <sup>14</sup>And **this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** <sup>15</sup>And **if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**

**Question #99:** According to the above Scripture passages, in what ways does God respond to our prayers? \_\_\_\_\_

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Scripture also reveals that God makes conditional promises based on the prayerful obedience of His people to His commands and or warnings.

**2 Chronicles 7:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>**If** I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or **if** I command the locust to devour the land, or **if** I send pestilence among My people, <sup>14</sup>and My people who are called by My name **humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then** I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

This kind of interaction between God and mankind occurs often in Scripture and has generated many questions about how all things can be foreordained. Since both are expressly taught in Scripture, there must be a way to reconcile them. The best solution is to understand that prayer and free moral choices are a means by which God brings to pass His sovereign will. God has ordained that our prayers and choices in time and space actually bring to pass elements of His plan for the ages. Divine sovereignty and free moral agency work harmoniously on the pages of Scripture. One clear example is the story of Jonah. Consider how God providentially directed the sea and the weather in the context of Jonah's disobedience. The other men in the ship realized this, prayed to God for deliverance, and are saved by throwing Jonah into the sea. Jonah was, by God's design, swallowed by a fish and prayed to God for deliverance. God responded to Jonah's prayer by causing the fish to spit him up onto dry land.

**Jonah 1:4, 14-2:1, 10:** <sup>4</sup>And **the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea** and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. . . . <sup>14</sup>Then they called on the LORD and said, "**We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish** on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; **for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased.**" <sup>15</sup>So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, **and the sea stopped its raging.** <sup>16</sup>Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. <sup>17</sup>And **the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah**, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. <sup>2:1</sup>Then **Jonah prayed to the LORD** his God from the stomach of the fish, . . . <sup>10</sup>Then **the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up** onto the dry land.

Scripture reveals to us what Jonah himself knew – that God was accomplishing His eternal plan through the willing choices of people who were morally accountable for their actions. In ways unexplained to us, most likely because they are incomprehensible to us, God *caused* them to make *willing choices* that accomplished God's purposes. The following passages also illustrate this truth.

**Genesis 25:21-34:** <sup>21</sup>And Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. <sup>22</sup>But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup>And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; **And the older shall serve the younger.**" <sup>24</sup>When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup>Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. <sup>26</sup>**And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel**, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. <sup>27</sup>When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. <sup>28</sup>Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game; but Rebecca loved Jacob. <sup>29</sup>And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; <sup>30</sup>and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. <sup>31</sup>**But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."** <sup>32</sup>And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" <sup>33</sup>And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; **so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.** <sup>34</sup>Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.



**2 Chronicles 33:10-13:** The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. **Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them,** and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains and took him to Babylon. When he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. **When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom.** Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

**Acts 2:22-23:** <sup>22</sup>Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup>this Man, **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.**

**Acts 4:27-28:** <sup>27</sup>For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, **whom Thou didst anoint,** both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

**Question #100:** How do these examples from Jonah, Genesis, and Acts help you understand how God can make conditional promises even though He has foreordained everything that comes to pass? \_\_\_\_\_

**Scripture plainly declares** that God's sovereign purposes are accomplished as He interacts with the prayers and legitimate choices of moral agents. Divine sovereignty and human moral agency exist side by side on the pages of Scripture. Oh the wonderful mystery of God's providential outworking of His eternal purposes through the choices of millions of people everyday! How evident it is that we should live our lives in humble acknowledgement of God's sovereign lordship by continually seeking understanding of His will as we lay our requests before Him. How our prayers should reflect our humble dependence on His gracious love and our deep gratitude for His desire to be our God and meet our needs. May our whole lives glorify Him in thankfulness for His goodness and mercy!

**Deuteronomy 4:39:** Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**

**Question #101:** Write a prayer thanking our sovereign God for the great privilege of prayer. \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### God's Sovereignty In Salvation

As we consider God's sovereignty in regard to salvation, we will discuss both the nature of God and the nature of man. Mankind has fallen into sin and stands in need of salvation. God's eternal purpose in Christ is to redeem His people from their sins. In this section, we will study what the Bible says about the various issues involved in the accomplishment of human redemption. First and foremost, we will see that God is not only sovereign in creation and in providence, but also in the application of redemption.

**Matthew 1:21:** And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is **He who will save His people from their sins.**

**2 Timothy 1:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God <sup>9</sup>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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

To help us understand what the Bible has to say about the doctrine of salvation, we will look first at some of the controversy and false teaching surrounding it in church history.

### The Doctrine of Salvation in Church History

The many and varied doctrinal controversies throughout the history of the Christian church reflect the blatant war against God's truth being waged by the great enemy of the church, Satan himself. Great battles are fought when false teachers, knowingly or ignorantly, distort and pervert scriptural truth.

**2 Peter 2:1-3:** <sup>1</sup>But false prophets also arose among the people, just **as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; <sup>3</sup>and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

False teachers take advantage of immature Christians who have little knowledge of the Bible. The Bible describes those who are led astray by false teachers as "children" who "barely escape from the ones who live in error." Thus, Scripture clearly instructs that Christians must take responsibility for *not* being led astray from the truth by false teachers and false doctrines. We do this by working hard at discerning scriptural truth, so as to grow up in our salvation and in the knowledge of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**2 Peter 2:18-19:** <sup>18</sup>For speaking out arrogant words of vanity **they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,** <sup>19</sup>**promising them freedom** while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

**Ephesians 4:11-16:** <sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and **some as pastors and teachers,** <sup>12</sup>**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>As a result, **we are no longer to**

be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

We dare not simply ignore the controversies stirred up by false teachers as we study Scripture. As we examine the biblical teaching regarding salvation, we must identify the major issues involved and raised in false teachings and clearly understand and refute them with biblical truth.

**Question #102:** According to 2 Peter 2:1-3, 18-19, what tactics do false teachers typically use to lead professing Christians astray? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #103:** Knowing how false teachers operate and taking to heart the admonition in Ephesians 4:14-16, what steps must we take to defend ourselves against the wiles of false teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Pelagius and Augustine

One of the first major controversies regarding the doctrine of salvation was introduced by a man named **Pelagius**. Pelagius was an ascetic monk born in England in 354 A.D. He later became a popular teacher in the church at Rome. Pelagius was the author of the following **false teachings** concerning the doctrine of salvation:

- Mankind is not hampered by original sin, i.e., human minds, wills, and emotions were not corrupted by the Fall.
- Mankind has **natural ability** to obey God's commands, i.e.:
  - humanity is not in bondage to sin;
  - we can attain Heaven by good works (salvation was by Law or Gospel)
- Divine grace is not necessary for salvation.
- Sinless perfection can be attained.
- God's choice of which sinners would be saved was based on His foreknowledge of their response to the Gospel (the prescient view of predestination).
- Christians can lose their salvation.

The chief **antagonist** of these Pelagian doctrines was **Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo**. Augustine taught that Adam's fall into sin corrupted the nature of all his progeny. Thus, all people are born sinners and continue to live in bondage to sin (being dead in transgressions and sin), unless and until they are regenerated by God's divine grace, which is necessary for salvation. Augustine taught that salvation was totally God's work and that He was thus due the glory for it. The chart below pictures the contrast between the two teachings.

Doctrine	Pelagianism	Augustinianism
Original Sin	Denied	Affirmed
Natural Will	Ability to obey perfectly	Inability
Grace	Not Necessary	Absolutely necessary
Sinless Perfection	Can be attained	Cannot be attained
Salvation Secure?	No	Yes
Glory	Goes to man	Goes to God

Many in the early church held to the doctrinal system of Pelagianism. But close scrutiny by many official church councils led to its official condemnation by the ***Councils of Carthage*** in 416 and 418. These Councils were assembled to assess the validity of the teachings of Caelestius, a disciple of Pelagius. After due deliberation, they denounced the Pelagian doctrines of human nature, original sin, grace, and perfectibility; and fully approved the contrary views of Augustine. Likewise, ***the second Council of Orange*** (529 A.D.), in upholding Augustine's view of the inability of the natural will, repudiated the semi-Pelagian doctrine that the human race, though fallen and possessed of a sinful nature, is still "good enough" to lay hold of the grace of God through an act of unredeemed human will. Pelagianism, as a structured heretical movement, ceased to exist after the 6th century. Unfortunately, its essential ideas have generated disputes and controversies throughout the history of the Church and even today.

**Question #104:** In your own words, briefly describe the basic distinction between the teaching of Pelagius and the teaching of Augustine. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Luther and Erasmus

The German Reformer Martin Luther had a profound affect on the Church. His efforts, along with those of Calvin, Zwingli, and others, spawned the Protestant Reformation. The main issue at stake in Luther's mind was salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. However, he dealt with many other doctrinal issues during his ministry, bringing much needed reform to almost every area of theology. Luther disagreed sharply with a Roman Catholic teacher by the name of Erasmus about the doctrines of human nature and freewill. On September 1, 1524, Erasmus published his treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*. Luther responded in December of 1525, with *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther defended the position defined by **Augustinian** theology which had been the official position of the church for some 1000 years. This position had been recognized and affirmed at the second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) as the clear teaching of the Bible. Erasmus took a **semi-Pelagian** position, maintaining that man is morally able to respond to the gospel without the necessity of divine grace.

Erasmus	Luther
Semi-Pelagian	Augustinian
<b>Synergistic</b> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.	<b>Monergistic</b> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.

Discussions of human freewill focus on the basic issue of man's nature and the nature of saving grace. Scripture clearly teaches that in our fallen state we desire autonomy, i.e., to be subject or accountable to no one but ourselves. Scripture also clearly teaches that God is ***the supreme authority*** to whom we ***are*** subject and accountable. Therefore, the following questions typically arise:

- Is man's will totally free, or is it somehow limited in his ability to make free choices?
- Was man created morally able to do good and evil, and how was this affected by the Fall?
- Can man respond to the Gospel on his own without the need for divine grace or enablement?
- What role does freewill play in predestination?
- Once people are saved or regenerated, are they able to do good and evil?

The chart below shows various aspects of this discussion about man's nature and its freedom in different states.

State of man in history	Morally Able to do		Inclined by Nature to	
	GOOD	EVIL	GOOD	EVIL
Created	yes	yes	no	no
Fallen	no	yes	no	yes
Redeemed	yes	yes	yes	no
Glorified	yes	no	yes	no

The controversy over this doctrine still rages on in the Church. Since the issues involved are inherent in the arguments between Calvinism and Arminianism, we will deal with them in the biblical analysis which follows.

**Question #105:** In your own words, distinguish between Semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism.

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**Question #106:** What significant questions are addressed by these two schools of thought? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #107:** Why, in your judgment, are these questions important?\_\_\_\_\_

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### Calvin and Arminius:

As did Luther, the French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) had a massive impact on the Church. His ministry was based in Geneva, Switzerland, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* remains one of the foremost theological works in church history. In 1559 he founded the Geneva Academy, a Bible school which emphasized the principle of *sola scriptura* (sole reliance on the authority of Scripture.) Calvin focused on God as the center of all reality and centered all teaching in the nature of God. He is recognized as the father of the Reformed Faith and has had a major influence in the development of Protestant Christianity.

The founder of the theological system known as Arminianism was Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). He studied under the strict Calvinist theologian, Theodore Beza, at Geneva and became a professor of theology at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands in 1603. Arminius gradually came to reject certain Calvinist teachings and attracted some followers. Controversy resulted and spread throughout Holland, where Calvinists in the Reformed Church held the overwhelming majority. Forty-six Arminian ministers signed a dissenting creed, formulated in Five Articles labeled “Remonstrance,” and laid them before the state authorities of Holland in 1610. The Calvinists responded with a Counter-Remonstrance; however, the official Calvinistic response came from the Synod of Dort after considering the Five Articles from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619. The eighty-four members and eighteen secular commissioners released their decision in what has come to be known as *The Canons of Dort*. This document is still part of the official confession of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. The Canons of Dort affirm the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants. Thus, the so-called Five Points were not independently formulated by Calvinists as a summary of Calvinism. Rather, they emerged in response to the Five Articles presented by the Arminians in opposition to the teaching of Calvin. The chart below shows the Five Points displayed in the helpful acronym **TULIP**, which identifies the main doctrines of salvation that relate to God’s sovereign grace.

The Five Points of Calvinism <i>The Five Responses to the Remonstrance at Dort</i>				
<b>T</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>P</b>
Total Depravity	Unconditional Election	Limited Atonement	Irresistible Grace	Perseverance of the Saints

**Question #108:** What started the controversy between the Arminians and the Calvinists?

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**Question #109:** What happened at the Synod of Dort and what was the resulting creed that was published?\_\_\_\_\_



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## Calvin, Arminius, or the Bible?

Who was Calvin? Who was Arminius? They were simply fallible men who served the church as teachers. God has blessed the church with faithful teachers who help us clarify and understand doctrinal issues, but no teacher's word alone can be trusted as the final authority. It is vitally important that we uphold God's self-revelation in the Bible as our sole final authority in understanding scriptural truth. We must also affirm our reliance upon the Holy Spirit for true spiritual discernment. God's Word is truth and His Spirit illuminates our minds and hearts to know it rightly.

**1 Corinthians 1:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." <sup>13</sup>**Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he?** Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

**1 Corinthians 2:10-13:** <sup>10</sup>**For to us God revealed them through the Spirit;** for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? **Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** <sup>12</sup>**Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** <sup>13</sup>which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Confusion often arises when people use the terms "Calvinist" and "Arminian" as labels without clear understanding of the terms and the doctrinal issues at stake. Such confusion hinders fruitful discussion of biblical doctrine and does not foster understanding of God's Holy Word. The issues being discussed when these terms are used tend to be controversial and emotionally charged. As students of Scripture, we need to resist our natural inclination to get defensive and argumentative while *helping one another* grow in grace and knowledge of God's truth. Much of the animosity in discussions like these springs from simple *ignorance of Holy Scripture*. We enter into heated debates armed with our own opinions and prejudices but without having looked closely at *all of the relevant Bible references, in their context*, to gain a clear understanding of the issues at hand. When this happens, we are foolishly attempting to grasp supernatural realities with natural faculties. The resulting discussion (or heated argument!) becomes nothing more than a human appraisal of wisdom and truth, which is a far cry from divine revelation of heavenly light. The **Scripture plainly declares** that such matters can only be grasped only by spiritual discernment, not by mere human powers of reason and logic.

**1 Corinthians 2:11-14:** <sup>11</sup>For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so **the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** <sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** <sup>13</sup>which things we also speak, not in words **taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.** <sup>14</sup>But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**

Let us, therefore, rely wholly on God's Word and His Spirit for insight into these high and holy things. Anyone who has looked deeply into the doctrine of salvation knows the humbling difficulty of working to grasp what Scripture teaches about the deep mysteries of God's sovereign grace.

**Question #110:** Describe the way God has blessed the church with faithful teachers. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #111:** According to the passages quoted above from 1 Corinthians, upon whom must we ultimately rely for accurate understanding of God's Word? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #112:** Read Acts 17:11. How does this verse help you balance appreciation of faithful teachers with not relying on them too much? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #113:** How can we best avoid unhelpful heated debates about difficult biblical issues and instead work together to better understand and apply God's truth? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **The importance of the issue: What is at stake?**

The Calvinist/Arminian controversy has arisen several times over the course of church history. Each time intense debate has increasingly clarified the relevant issues in the light of Holy Scripture. Church councils of Bible scholars have been convened for the purpose of affirming confessions of orthodoxy and pronouncing judgments against heretics. These issues are serious because the truth of Scripture is at stake. We must guard God's revelation in His Word against the schemes of Satan and the false teachers who, knowingly or unknowingly, pervert the teaching of Scripture with *destructive heresies* (Genesis 3:1-4; 2 Peter 2:1). Scripture exhorts us to "*contend earnestly for the faith*" against those who seek to distort the truth.

**Jude 3-4:** <sup>3</sup>Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that **you contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup>For **certain persons have crept in unnoticed**, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord**, Jesus Christ.

**2 Timothy 1:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>**Retain the standard of sound words** which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>**Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to us.**

Preserving right understanding of the doctrines of salvation is of grave importance. The heresies that continue to plague the Church target the very heart of the Gospel itself. They are not *theological or Christological* (about God or Christ's nature) errors, but *soteriological* (about salvation) distortions. As such, they misrepresent the work of Christ and how it impacts humanity. Tragically, a large segment of the modern Church responds with indifference to those

who urge clarification and preservation of biblical truth regarding salvation. Many Christians simply shrug off the need to discuss the doctrines of grace with reasons like these:

- **Too controversial:** It is not worth arguing about; better to keep the peace.
- **Requires too much study:** It takes too much time and hard thinking to understand.
- **Beyond our grasp:** This is one of God's deep mysteries that we *cannot* understand.
- **Offensiveness of sovereign prerogative:** Affirming God's sovereign rights over His created beings threatens human autonomy.

**Question #114:** In the light of Jude 3-4 and 2 Timothy 1:13-14, respond to the reasons given above that shrug off the need to discuss the doctrines of grace. \_\_\_\_\_

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Such *indifference* reflects a severe lack of honor and respect toward God and His Holy Word. Consider, if God deems these matters of such importance that He speaks volumes about them in Holy Writ, surely it is incumbent upon us to *hear, understand, and heed* them. Failure to do so reflects a lack of love for the Word of God, which is God's revelation of Himself to us. Dear reader, what has plagued our hearts so severely that we do not earnestly desire to lay hold of God's awesome and wonderful Word which He has so freely given us? Should His truth not be the great delight of our hearts? Consider the words of the Psalmist as he describes his relationship to God through Scripture.

**Psalm 119:97-104:** <sup>97</sup>**O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.** <sup>98</sup>Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. <sup>99</sup>I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation. <sup>100</sup>**I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Thy precepts.** <sup>101</sup>I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Thy word. <sup>102</sup>I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, **For Thou Thyself hast taught me.** <sup>103</sup>**How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!** <sup>104</sup>**From Thy precepts I get understanding;** Therefore I hate every false way.

If God's Holy Word is not worth contending for, then what is? If we must diligently study and examine the Word to grasp some of its truths, surely that is nothing less than a divine privilege! Let us therefore give ourselves wholly to the task, as studying the Bible can be hard work. Shouldn't we expect God's Word to challenge us as we study it? Is Scripture not divine revelation requiring the Spirit's illumination to grasp? Have we forgotten that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours and that human powers of reason and logic alone cannot comprehend them? When we examine Holy Scripture and there encounter a sovereign God who has made everything (including ourselves) for His own purpose and likens us to clay in the hands of a potter, should we not willingly surrender to His shaping of us into vessels suited to His purpose? Or shall we protest against the King of Heaven that He has no right over us because we want to be free to do our own will? Shall the clay argue with the potter about its purpose for existing? Learn to submit to sovereign authority and to acquiesce to God's will. Paul answers these questions in Romans 9.

**Romans 9:19-21:** <sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" <sup>20</sup>On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? **The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will**

it? <sup>21</sup> **Or does not the potter have a right over the clay**, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?

The Enemy loves to convince us that the great doctrines in the Bible are unclear and confusing so that we will not work hard at discerning God's truth. With regard to the doctrines of salvation, he is wrong, however. The issues themselves are *so clear* that we must either accept or reject them. We cannot take a stand somewhere in the middle. Consider:

- **Total Depravity:** People are *either* able to understand and believe the gospel apart from God's enabling grace *or* they are not.
- **Unconditional Election:** God *either* elects people to salvation conditionally *or* unconditionally.
- **Eternal Security:** Christians can *either* lose their salvation *or* they cannot.

The issues themselves are clear. The difficulty in studying these issues is *not* understanding them; it is accepting them. We want so much to be in charge of our lives and in control of our destinies that we recoil from such blatant affirmations of God's absolute sovereignty.

**Question #115:** Take a few moments to ponder Psalm 119:97-104, Romans 9:19-21, Jude 3-4, and 2 Timothy 1:13-14. Then write a brief prayer confessing any reluctance you have to contend earnestly for the truth of God's Word and asking Him to help you overcome that reluctance.\_\_\_\_\_

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## Calvinism and Arminianism Defined

When we examine the tenets of Calvinism and Arminianism side by side, the issues at stake in the debate are revealed as vitally important. The ongoing debate that began with Calvin and Arminius addresses much more than how people get saved. It also concerns the nature of man, the concept of grace, the character of the church, the necessity of sanctification, the hope of glorification, and the absoluteness of God's sovereignty – to name just a few. God has revealed volumes of truth about these matters in Scripture; obviously they are important to Him! For that reason alone, we should pay careful attention to what He has said. The chart below will help us clarify the issues being debated by the Remonstrants (Arminians) and the Calvinists at the Synod of Dort in 1619 before we begin our examination of what the Bible teaches about these issues.



Arminianism		Calvinism	
Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
<p><b><u>Synergistic</u></b> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.</p>		<p><b><u>Monergistic</u></b> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.</p>	
<p><b><i>Free Will or Human Ability</i></b> Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not 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.</p>	<p><b>T</b> Total Depravity</p>	<p><b><i>Total Inability or Total Depravity</i></b> Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not--indeed he cannot--choose good over evil in the spiritual realm.</p>	
<p><b><i>Conditional Election</i></b> God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will.</p>	<p><b>U</b> Unconditional Election</p>	<p><b><i>Unconditional Election</i></b> God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man.</p>	
<p><b><i>Universal Redemption or General Atonement</i></b> Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins.</p>	<p><b>L</b> Limited Atonement</p>	<p><b><i>Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption</i></b> Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners.</p>	
<p><b><i>The Holy Spirit Can be Effectually Resisted</i></b> The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work.</p>	<p><b>I</b> Irresistible Grace</p>	<p><b><i>Irresistible Grace or Effectual Calling</i></b> In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ.</p>	
<p><b><i>Falling from Grace</i></b> Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ--that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.</p>	<p><b>P</b> Perseverance of the Saints</p>	<p><b><i>Perseverance of the Saints</i></b> All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.</p>	

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Human Inability

As we examine these matters in the Bible, we will use relevant biblical terms as much as possible. The Bible is very clear about defining its terms. When we use **biblical terms** and their biblical definitions, we have God's true Word on the subjects we're studying. It helps us avoid man made labels that confuse the issues and it defines terms with biblical words that come out of the biblical context which hold their truest meaning.

***TULIP is not the best:*** In seeking to use biblical terms to describe the issue at hand, we quickly discover that the acronym, ***TULIP***, is inadequate. The following terms describe much more accurately what the Bible teaches about the Five Points under discussion.

- Natural Ability or Natural Inability
- Prescient<sup>24</sup> Election or Sovereign Election
- Universal Redemption or Particular Redemption/Definite Atonement
- Human Resistance or Effectual Calling
- Falling from Grace or Eternal Security

The chart below clarifies these contrasting terms.

Five Important Biblical Doctrines Related to Predestination in Salvation			
Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
<u>Synergistic</u> Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.		<u>Monergistic</u> Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.	
Man is naturally able to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.	Natural Ability	Natural Inability	Man is naturally unable to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.
The condition for salvation is faith which man exercises of his own ability. God chooses those who choose Him.	Prescient Election	Sovereign Election	The condition for salvation is the Sovereign electing will of God alone.
Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone.	Universal Redemption	Particular Redemption	Christ did in fact secure the salvation of His Church individually and definitely.
Man's will is free and he can successfully resist the Spirit's call.	Human Resistance	Effectual Calling	The calling of God to the elect does effect salvation infallibly.
Because faith is the necessary condition for Salvation, it can be lost when man discontinues his faith.	Falling from Grace	Eternal Security	The nature of saving faith is eternal and cannot be reversed.

<sup>24</sup> having foreknowledge or foresight

**Question #116:** Carefully consider the two immediately preceding charts. Then explain in your own words why the terms used in the chart immediately above are preferable.

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Let us now look to the Bible for divine insight on these issues.

### **What Does the Bible Say About Human Inability?**

The Bible clearly affirms *“there is no one who does good, not even one”* (Psalm 14:3). Jesus said, *“No one is good except God alone”* (Mark 10:18). We know from observation that people persistently sin against God from earliest childhood through old age. And the Word of God confirms this observation again and again. Psalm 51:5 says people are steeped in sin from birth. Romans 3:23 and 5:12 affirm that human beings in their natural state are sinners who fall far short of God’s required standard. Humanity fell into sin and darkness when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and transgressed God’s clear commandment (Original Sin). Their rebellion corrupted their entire being, body and soul (mind, will, emotions); and this corruption was passed to all their descendants (Romans 5:12). In fulfillment of God’s Word, Adam and Eve died, both spiritually and physically (the aging process began). Unfettered communion was broken between man and God; we no longer *naturally* understand the things of God nor do we desire to do so. Humanity is accurately described in Scripture as *“dead in . . . trespasses and sins”* and in need of new life (Ephesians 2:1-5, Colossians 2:13). *The biblical truth is, mankind neither pleases God nor seeks after God. In our natural state, we do not possess the ability to savingly understand the things of God (that is the spiritual matters of the kingdom of God relating to man’s need to be saved and God’s provision to save Him).*

### **Natural Human Inability**

#### **What Does the Bible Say?**

**Dead in trespasses and sins** – Eph 2:3, Col 2:13  
**Hostile to God** – Rom 8:7  
**Cannot submit to God’s Law** – Rom 8:7  
**Cannot Please God** – Rom 8:8  
**Cannot understand the things of God** - 1 Cor 2:14, Rom 3:11  
**Cannot accept the Holy Spirit** – John 14:17  
**Cannot see the Kingdom of God** – John 3:3  
**Cannot hear the Words of Christ** – John 8:43  
**Cannot see the Light of the Gospel (Blinded minds)** – 2 Cor 4:4  
**Thinks the Gospel foolishness** – 1 Cor 1:18  
**Does not seek for God** – Rom 3:11  
**Does not fear God** – Rom 3:18  
**Heart is deceitful and desperately wicked** – Jer 17:9  
**Without God given faith our deeds are sinful** – Rom 14:23



**Question #117:** Examine the chart above very closely. Read the referenced Scriptures and pay close attention to the biblical words used to describe the condition of unredeemed people. Then write a *concise* description of natural human inability to respond to God in saving faith. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Unable to see, hear, or understand

The Bible speaks of humanity's fallen nature by using words like *cannot*. It is not that we *will not* but that we *cannot* understand the Gospel without the work of divine grace. The Bible plainly declares that *fallen humanity has a natural inability to see, hear, or understand, the things of God*. Jesus makes it clear that mankind has an INABILITY TO SEE the Kingdom apart from regeneration.

**John 3:3:** Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

The Apostle Paul affirms the same truth.

**2 Corinthians 4:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>And even if **our gospel is veiled**, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup>in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of the unbelieving**, that they might not **see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God.

By saying "our gospel is veiled . . . to those who are perishing," the Bible affirms that the unsaved are *unable to see* the gospel. Veils distort or obstruct our vision and keep us from seeing clearly. This evil work of veiling the gospel is attributed to Satan (the god of this world): ". . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." The gospel is veiled to unbelievers because Satan has *blinded their minds*. Blinding the mind is a biblical idiom describing an inability to understand. The "*light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*" is incomprehensible to unbelievers because they cannot grasp who He is and why they need Him. Apart from God's enabling grace, the beautiful treasure of Christ, and all that He is and the essential truths about Him, are not seen and understood in their heart and mind.

Likewise, in the passage below, Jesus makes it clear that fallen humanity has an INABILITY TO HEAR God's Word.

**John 8:43:** Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because **you cannot hear My word.**

Jesus said, "*you cannot hear My word*," to ungodly Pharisees who claimed that Jesus' witness of Himself was not true (John 8:13). He affirmed that they could not understand the truth of His words because they were not of God but of their father, the devil (v. 44). The word "*cannot*" speaks of their inability. They "*do not understand*" because they "*cannot hear*." And they "*cannot hear*" because they are not of God, but of the devil. This is a consistent theme in the teaching of Jesus. In the following passage, He tells His disciples that the reason they understand "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" and others do not is that they have been given understanding by God whereas others have not.

**Matthew 13:10-13:** <sup>10</sup>And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup>And He answered and said to them, "**To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been**

**granted.** <sup>12</sup>For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup>Therefore I speak to them in parables; **because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**”

In the passage below, Paul also affirms that unredeemed people cannot understand the things of God because they have an **INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND**.

**1 Corinthians 2:14:** But a **natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**; for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised.

Paul, writing inspired Scripture, explains that “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him.” The “natural man” Paul refers to is a person who is unredeemed and does not have the Holy Spirit living within him (this is in contrast to the spiritual man who has the Spirit, after regeneration, v-12, v-16). Such a person does not understand spiritual truth. All thoughts of God, sin, being saved, and reconciliation with God seem foolish to him so he will not accept nor understand that they are true. His thinking is so corrupted, “he **cannot** understand” God’s truth. The word “**cannot**” speaks of man’s ability, not his willingness, although because he is **unable** to understand he is therefore also unwilling, as it states, he “**does not accept**.” Spiritual truth must be “**spiritually appraised**.” The natural man “**does not accept**” spiritual truth because he has no natural ability to “**understand**” spiritual things. This is because he does not have the Spirit (given at regeneration) by which he can “**appraise**” spiritual things. Only those indwelt by God’s Spirit can “**appraise**” spiritual things.

**Question #118:** Explain in your own words the **significance** of the Bible’s teaching that fallen people **cannot** accept the Gospel by an act of their own will. In other words, what does this clear biblical teaching reveal about the desperate state of unredeemed people?\_\_\_\_\_

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## Mankind is in rebellion against God and enslaved to sin

The **Bible plainly declares** that mankind is naturally in a state of rebellion against God.

**Romans 3:9-12, 18:** <sup>9</sup>What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; <sup>10</sup>as it is written, “**There is none righteous, not even one**; <sup>11</sup>**There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God**; <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside, together they have become useless; **There is none who does good, There is not even one**. . . . <sup>18</sup>**There is no fear of God before their eyes.**”

Here Paul describes mankind in relation to God. There are **none** righteous, **none** who understand, and **none** who seek for God. **All** have turned aside. There are **none** who do good, and **none** who fear God. We know these are not general statements about most people, because Paul twice uses the phrase “**not even one**.” In doing so, he emphasizes the **universality** of mankind’s rebellion against God’s sovereign authority, his doing of good before God, and his seeking and understanding of God.

Later in Romans, Paul affirms the thoroughness of mankind’s bent toward evil. He affirms that unregenerate people have neither desire nor ability to submit to God. Their minds are set on the flesh and they are by nature hostile toward God.

**Romans 8:5-8:** <sup>5</sup>For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Paul says the natural state of all men is “according to the flesh” and that they naturally “set their minds on the things of the flesh.” Given man’s sinful nature, it makes sense that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” People who live *in the flesh* are ruled by their sinful nature. Their fallen minds are “*hostile toward God.*” They do not “*subject themselves to the Law of God*” because they are “*not even able to do so.*” Note well that Paul is describing *inability* here, not unwillingness. He is not saying they simply *don’t desire* to obey God; he is saying they *cannot* obey God—and that *the reason* they cannot obey God is that they are *in the flesh*.

The Bible consistently declares that mankind is *enslaved to sin*. God declares through the prophet Jeremiah that the fallen human “heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (17:9). In other words, unredeemed people are *bound to sin* and naturally prone to evil *because* they are in the flesh. *The following passages reveal that unredeemed people are not free to obey God.* Rather they are in “*bondage to sin*” and thus *unable* to obey God with right motives. **Man’s will is not free** to obey God, but rather in bondage to sin.

**John 8:34:** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”

**Romans 6:5-7:** <sup>5</sup>For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is freed from sin.

**Romans 7:14:** For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

**Titus 3:3-7:** <sup>3</sup>For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This idea is further clarified in passages that state *no one who is unregenerate (and therefore a slave of sin) does good (by God’s standard)*. Only those who have been cleansed by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit are *able* to please God in any sense.

**Romans 3:12:** All have turned aside, together they have become useless; **There is none who does good, There is not even one.**

**Isaiah 64:6:** For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

**Romans 14:23:** ... and whatever is not from faith is sin.

The Bible clearly affirms that the natural person, apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (being born again), abides in a state of sin and rebellion in relation to God and is therefore *by nature, an object of God’s wrath*.

**Ephesians 2:3:** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, even as the rest.

Consider the following chart in light of the biblical truths we have just studied.

Semi-Pelagian		Augustinian	
Man is naturally able to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.	Natural Ability	Natural Inability	Man is naturally unable to understand and believe the Gospel apart from Divine enablement.

**Question #119:** Does Scripture support the idea that man is “naturally able” to understand and believe the Gospel apart from divine enablement?\_\_\_\_\_List specific statements from Scripture to support your answer.\_\_\_\_\_

The fact is that divine enablement given by God’s grace is **necessary** to understand and believe the Gospel. This divine enablement is called **regeneration**. We will discuss regeneration at length below.

The following statements reflect the biblical basis of the Augustinian view of Salvation.

### Westminster Confession of Faith - Of Free Will

3. 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.

### Synod of Dort - ARTICLE 3

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation

### Not sick, but dead

The Bible plainly declares that unredeemed sinners are thoroughly corrupt in their whole being. It describes unredeemed humanity as not good, unable to do good, hating God’s truth, drinking in sin like water, defiled in both conscience and mind, and unable to please God or submit to the law of God.

**Romans 7:18:** For I know **that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

**Isaiah 64:6:** For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

**Job 15:14-16:** <sup>14</sup>What is man, that he should be pure, Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? <sup>15</sup>Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, And the heavens are not pure in His sight; <sup>16</sup>**How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!**

**John 3:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.** <sup>20</sup>**For everyone who does evil hates the light,** and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

**Titus 1:15:** To the pure, all things are pure; but to **those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.**

**Romans 8:6-8:** <sup>6</sup>For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because **the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so;** <sup>8</sup>**and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

**Question #120:** Based on the verses referenced above, write a brief character sketch of a fallen sinner. \_\_\_\_\_

Sin has thoroughly corrupted the nature of mankind. It has not simply inflicted serious wounds; it has killed our ability to respond to God. **The Bible plainly declares** that, apart from a divine working of new life, we are **dead in transgressions and sins** and wholly insensitive to spiritual things.

**Colossians 2:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>And when **you were dead in your transgressions** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, <sup>14</sup>having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

**Ephesians 2:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins,** <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

All Christian believers **were dead in trespasses and sins** before God gave them new life. The Lord Jesus Himself frequently refers to unbelievers as “dead” and in desperate need of regeneration. Without regeneration **no one can see the kingdom of God** and come to faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-6, 6:65). The just consequence of Adam’s original sin was the spiritual death of all his descendants (Romans 5:12-19). All human beings are physically born **spiritually dead** and thus live **in bondage to trespass and sin**. In that condition, they are unable to hear, understand, and respond to the things of God and His kingdom (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:5-8). The Bible speaks clearly and definitively on human depravity, i.e., natural inability to respond rightly to God.

**Romans 5:12-19:** <sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through **one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men,** because all sinned—. . . <sup>17</sup>For if **by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one,** much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>So then as **through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men,** even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. <sup>19</sup>For as **through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners,** even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

**John 5:21-24:** <sup>21</sup>For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so **the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.** <sup>22</sup>For not even the Father judges anyone, but He



has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed out of death into life.**

**Matthew 8:22:** But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and **allow the dead to bury their own dead.**"

**Luke 15:22-24, 32:** <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; <sup>23</sup>and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup>for **this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;** he was lost and has been found." And they began to be merry. . . . <sup>32</sup>"But we had to be merry and rejoice, for **this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live,** and was lost and has been found."

**1 John 3:14:** We know that we have **passed out of death into life,** because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

Consider how well this image of physical death corresponds to our sinful state apart from regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Dead people cannot see, hear, move, talk, think, understand, or respond to any kind of stimulus in any way. They are wholly unresponsive and unable to change.

**John 11:43-44:** <sup>43</sup>And when He had said these things, **He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."** <sup>44</sup>**He who had died came forth,** bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

**Romans 5:6:** For **while we were still helpless,** at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

**Jeremiah 13:23:** **Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots?** Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.

Consider the statement by **Albert Barnes** concerning man's dead condition: "*A corpse is insensible. It sees not, and hears not, and feels not. The sound of music, and the voice of friendship and of alarm, do not arouse it. The rose and the lily breath forth their fragrance around it, but the corpse perceives it not. The world is busy and active around it, but it is unconscious of it all. It sees no beauty in the landscape; hears not the voice of a friend; looks not upon the glorious sun and stars; and is unaffected by the running stream and the rolling ocean. So with the sinner in regard to the spiritual and eternal world, he sees no beauty in religion; he hears not the call of God; he is unaffected by the dying love of the Saviour; and he has no interest in eternal realities. In all these he feels no more concern, and sees no more beauty, than a dead man does in the world around him. Such is, in fact, the condition of a sinful world. There is, indeed, life and energy and motion. There are vast plans and projects, and the world is intensely active. But, in regard to religion, all is dead. The sinner sees no beauty there; and no human power can arouse him to act for God, any more than human power can rouse the sleeping dead, or open the sightless eye-balls on the light of day. The same power is needed in the conversion of a sinner which is needed in raising the dead; and one and the other alike demonstrate the omnipotence of him who can do it.*"<sup>25</sup>

**Question #121:** In your own words, describe the meaning and consequences of being dead in trespasses and sins. \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>25</sup> (from Barnes' Notes on Eph 2:1, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by Biblsoft, Inc.)

Plainly stated, mankind is dead and in need of new life. Correcting our sinful state requires resurrection from the dead, something only God can do. The Bible plainly declares that salvation is the *monergistic* work of God,<sup>26</sup> by which He infuses spiritual life into the spiritually dead. The theological term for this is regeneration.

**Ephesians 2:4-6:** <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even **when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

**John 5:21:** For **just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.**

Note how the Bible attributes salvation *wholly to the work of God* by affirming the inability of fallen sinners to come to Christ apart from divine grace. Note well from these verses that no one can be saved apart from God's saving work of *regeneration*.

**John 6:44, 65:** <sup>44</sup>**No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day. . . . <sup>65</sup>And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, **that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**"

**Matthew 19:23-26:** <sup>23</sup>And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup>And again I say to you, **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.**" <sup>25</sup>And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" <sup>26</sup>And looking upon them Jesus said to them, **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."**

**Titus 3:4-7:** <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Note also how the Bible attributes salvation *wholly to the work of God* by affirming God's divine enablement to be a *monergistic* work.

**Deuteronomy 30:6:** Moreover **the LORD your God will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27:** <sup>26</sup>Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.** <sup>27</sup>And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,** and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

**1 Peter 1:3:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,** who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

**Matthew 11:27:** **All things have been handed over to Me by My Father;** and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

**John 3:27:** John answered and said, **"A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven."**

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<sup>26</sup> *Monergism* holds that the "grace of God is the only efficient cause in beginning and effecting conversion." It is the opposite of *synergism*, which affirms "the doctrine of divine and human cooperation in conversion." (*The Evangelical Dictionary of Salvation*, Walter A. Elwell, editor. 729, 1063)



**Question #122:** In your own words, describe what the Bible teaches about: (1) man's inability;  
(2) God's monergistic work of conversion. \_\_\_\_\_

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# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Regeneration

#### What does the Bible say?

The word **regeneration**, as used in Scripture, refers to new creation. The root of the word is **generate** or **genesis**, which means “beginning” or “to create”; the prefix **re** means “again.” Paul speaks of regeneration when he writes to the Christians in Corinth:

**2 Corinthians 5:17:** Therefore if any man is in Christ, **he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, **new things have come**.

Those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit are **new creations** of God. They have been **recreated** by the supernatural creative power of God. Paul affirms that the effective change agent of saving faith is not human work, but the creative power of God.

**Galatians 6:15:** For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creation**. Salvation is undeniably **supernatural**. It is God’s work; it transcends all human abilities; and it blesses mankind with innumerable benefits. Let us now consider the following **definition** of **regeneration**:

A sovereign act of God, performed by the Holy Spirit, in which the sinner is given the capacities needed to understand, believe, and enter the Kingdom of God by God given faith and is granted eternal life. His/her mind and will are **divinely enabled** to comprehend sin and righteousness and judgment. His/her spirit is resurrected from its natural dead state, restoring communion with God who is Spirit. It is a fundamental change in the nature of mankind having the very nature and eternal life of God implanted into the human soul. At this time the Holy Spirit enters into the being of mankind performing this transformation eternally.

**Question #123:** From the definition above, list a few phrases that stick out to you. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #124:** If you are a Christian, what clear evidence of regeneration do you see in your own life? \_\_\_\_\_

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The nature of regeneration is clearly revealed in the Bible. As we survey the following biblical texts, consider how they all point to the supernatural and sovereign work of God in salvation.

**Regeneration** is the **act of God**:

**1 Peter 1:3:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the **God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

**1 Peter 1:22-23:** <sup>22</sup>Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, <sup>23</sup>for you **have been born again** not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, **through the living and abiding word of God.**

**James 1:18:** **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth,** so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

**Ezekiel 11:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>And **I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them.** And **I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,** <sup>20</sup>that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

**Question #125:** In your own words and based on the above passages, describe the way God acts to regenerate sinners. \_\_\_\_\_

**Regeneration changes the *mind and will*:**

**Ezekiel 36:26-27:** <sup>26</sup>Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;** and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe** My ordinances.

**1 John 3:9:** No **one who is born of God practices sin,** because His seed abides in him; and **he cannot sin, because he is born of God.** <sup>27</sup>

**1 John 5:18-20:** <sup>18</sup>We know that **no one who is born of God sins;** but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. <sup>19</sup>We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. <sup>20</sup>And we know that the Son of God has come, and **has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true,** and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

**1 John 5:4:** For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world;** and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-16:** <sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** <sup>13</sup>which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit,** combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. <sup>14</sup>But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for **they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them,** because they are spiritually appraised. <sup>15</sup>But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. <sup>16</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? **But we have the mind of Christ.**

**Question #126:** From the above passages, list several examples of clear evidence (substantial enough to hold up in court!) that a sinner has been regenerated. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>27</sup> Note that John is discussing the *practice of sin* in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18, i.e., sin as characteristic of one's life style. He is not saying that Christians do not sin at all.

**Regeneration** quickens dead spirits with *eternal life* and creates a new self in the *likeness of God*:

**Colossians 2:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>And when **you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him**, having forgiven us all our transgressions, <sup>14</sup>having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

**Ephesians 2:4-10:** <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>**even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)**, <sup>6</sup>and **raised us up with Him**, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; **and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God**; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, that no one should boast. <sup>10</sup>**For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

**Ephesians 4:20-24:** <sup>20</sup>But you did not learn Christ in this way, <sup>21</sup>if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup>that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, <sup>23</sup>and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, <sup>24</sup>and **put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**.

**John 5:24:** Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

**John 6:39-40:** <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me **I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day**. <sup>40</sup>For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, **may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day**.

**Question #127:** From the above passages, explain *how* regeneration creates a new self in the likeness of God. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #128:** From the above passages, describe specific ways in which the new self differs from the old self. \_\_\_\_\_

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Regeneration is the very essence of salvation itself. It is the *saving act* of salvation, performed by God, whereby salvation is applied to the elect in time and space. It is the point in time when the called of God are supernaturally transformed by God. The Bible actually describes salvation as *“the washing of regeneration.”*

**Titus 3:4-7:** <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>**He saved us**, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy**

**Spirit**,<sup>6</sup> whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. For this very reason Jesus stressed the fact that *sinner must be born again to enter the kingdom of God*. The Bible plainly declares that no can *see or enter* the kingdom of God apart from the supernatural creative power of God in regeneration.

**John 3:3-7:** <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**” <sup>4</sup>Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**” <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, **‘You must be born again.’**”

Here Jesus Christ, God Himself in the flesh, reveals to Nicodemus the exclusiveness of the kingdom of God. He says *unless* one is born again, he *cannot* see the kingdom of God. The word “*cannot*” speaks of human inability, not mere unwillingness. Fallen sinners are *unable* to see the kingdom of God until and unless they experience the supernatural creative power of God in the new birth. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins have no ability to see, hear or understand the Gospel (1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; John 8:42-47; Matthew 13:10-13; Romans 3:9-12,18, 6:16, 7:14). Only those who have been regenerated are *able* to see, hear and understand who God is, their great need for salvation because of sin and long to repent of it, and that Christ is the divine provision to cancel sin and its terrible consequence of death. These are the *only ones* who are able to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus emphasized the *necessity of the new birth* in salvation by affirming three times, “You *must* be born again” (John 3:3, 5, 7).

**Question #129:** Read each of the Scripture passages listed in parentheses in the above paragraph. Based on these passages, explain in your own words explain *why* regeneration is *necessary* for salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

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## The analogy of birth and new life

Consider the analogy of birth which Jesus uses. People have no more choice in their natural birth than they do in their spiritual birth. We did not choose to become physically alive through the process of physical birth; we were born as the result of the decisions and actions of others. The same is true of our spiritual birth. We were born again by *God’s* sovereign decision and action. This took place before we had any capacity to see, hear, or understand the Gospel; it took place when we were *dead in sin*. Our ability to believe the Gospel and receive Christ as Savior was granted to us by the sovereign choice and quickening power of God.

**John 1:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them **He gave** the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup>**who were born** not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

**John 6:44:** **No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day.

**Romans 9:16:** So then it **does not depend on the man who wills** or the man who runs, **but on God who has mercy.**

**Matthew 11:27:** All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

Just as Lazarus had no ability to raise himself from the dead, neither was he able to resist the powerful call of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to be resurrected (John 11:43-44). Similarly, the nation of Israel will be corporately raised from its spiritual death and brought into the glorious kingdom of God in the day of their restoration.

**John 11:43-44:** <sup>43</sup>And when He had said these things, **He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."** <sup>44</sup>**He who had died came forth,** bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

**Ezekiel 37:11-14:** <sup>11</sup>Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. **We are completely cut off.**'" <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, **I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people;** and I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. <sup>14</sup>**And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life,** and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,'" declares the LORD."

Do babies resist being born? Do the dead resist the free gift of life? Do they even have the ability to do so? Of course not! No one resists the regenerating work of God because the work itself overcomes any possible resistance. When fallen human nature is regenerated, people are given both: 1) clear understanding of their great need for salvation; and 2) deep desire to be saved by God's power and free grace.

**Luke 18:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, **"God be merciful to me, the sinner!"** <sup>14</sup>**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified** rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

**Acts 2:37-39:** <sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, **they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"** <sup>38</sup>And Peter said to them, **"Repent,** and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, **as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.**

**Acts 10:43-45:** <sup>43</sup>"Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name **everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**" <sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.** <sup>45</sup>And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.

**Acts 13:48:** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

**2 Corinthians 7:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that **you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance;** for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup>For **the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation;** but the sorrow of the world produces death.

**Question #130:** According to the above passages, what is the necessary result of regeneration?

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**Question #131:** How does understanding the regenerating power of God encourage you to actively evangelize those who are lost? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Regeneration is an invisible work that becomes increasingly evident over time**

Regeneration occurs at the exact moment in time when the secret power of God implants new life in a person who is spiritually dead. At that moment the person is born again (regenerated). Regeneration is an instantaneous event that produces evident growth in Christlikeness (sanctification). However, it is not always possible to pinpoint the precise moment regeneration occurred. This should not trouble us as long as clear evidence of regeneration is present.

**John 3:8:** The wind blows where it wishes and **you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going;** so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

**Wayne Grudem** explains in chapter 34 of his *Systematic Theology*:

*Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us. We know that somehow we who were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) have been made alive to God and in a very real sense we have been “born again” (John 3:3, 7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). But we don’t understand how this happens or what exactly God does to us to give us this new spiritual life. . . .*

*Because regeneration is a work of God within us in which he gives us new life it is right to conclude that it is an instantaneous event. It happens only once. At one moment we are spiritually dead, and then at the next moment we have new spiritual life from God. Nevertheless, we do not always know exactly when this instantaneous change occurs. Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from “hardened sinner” to “holy saint,” but there will be an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God through the Holy Spirit, in an unseen, invisible way, awakens spiritual life within. The change will become evident over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God.*

*In other cases (in fact, probably most cases when adults become Christians) regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time at which the person realizes that previously he or she was separated from God and spiritually dead, but immediately afterward there was clearly new spiritual life within. The results can usually be seen at once—a heartfelt trusting in Christ for salvation, an assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible and pray (and a sense that these are meaningful spiritual activities), a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, a sincere desire to be obedient to God’s Word in Scripture, and a desire to tell others about Christ. People may say something like this: “I don’t know exactly what happened, but before that moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation. I was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But after that moment I realized that I did trust in Christ and he was my Savior. Something happened in my heart.” Yet even in these cases we are not quite sure exactly what*



*has happened in our hearts. It is just as Jesus said with respect to the wind—we hear its sound and we see the result, but we cannot actually see the wind itself. So it is with the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.<sup>28</sup>*

**Question #132:** How can we know whether someone has been regenerated by God? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Regeneration precedes faith

The Bible clearly teaches that regeneration *precedes* faith in Christ, even though many people mistakenly believe just the opposite. **Grudem** goes on to explain:

*The idea that regeneration comes before saving faith is not always understood by evangelicals today. Sometimes people will even say something like, “If you believe in Christ as your Savior, then (after you believe) you will be born again.” But Scripture itself never says anything like that. This new birth is viewed by Scripture as something that God does within us in order to enable us to believe.*

*The reason that evangelicals often think that regeneration comes after saving faith is that they see the results (love for God and his Word, and turning from sin) after people come to faith, and they think that regeneration must therefore have come after saving faith. Yet here we must decide on the basis of what Scripture tells us, because regeneration itself is not something we see or know about directly.<sup>29</sup>*

It seemed as if we heard the Gospel and then believed because we were unaware that only those who have been born again will believe. Belief in Jesus Christ requires God’s gift of faith and the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration. The new birth is not something we do, but something God does. We discover this great truth after we examine Holy Scripture and understand the process of salvation. Jesus made this very clear:

**John 6:63-65:** <sup>63</sup> “**It is the Spirit who gives life**; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He was saying, “**For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**”

Here Jesus explains that “*some of you do not believe*” because “*no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.*” The Bible also plainly declares that those who believe do so because of God’s enablement.

**Matthew 13:11:** And He answered and said to them, “**To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.**”

**Philippians 1:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>For **to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake, <sup>30</sup>experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 701-2.

<sup>29</sup> Grudem, 703

**Acts 16:14:** And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.**

**Question #133:** In your own words, explain what the Bible teaches about the relationship between the new birth and believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. \_\_\_\_\_

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# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Sovereign Election

#### What does the Bible say?

The Bible plainly declares that God chooses who will be saved. The word *election* refers to God's determination, before He created the world, of who will be saved. This truth is taught throughout the Bible.

**Deuteronomy 7:6-8:** <sup>6</sup>For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; **the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession** out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup>The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup>but because **the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers**, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

**Psalms 33:11-12:** <sup>11</sup>The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation. <sup>12</sup>Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, **The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.**

**Isaiah 65:9:** And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, And an heir of My mountains from Judah; **Even My chosen ones shall inherit it, And my servants shall dwell there.**

**John 15:16:** **You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit**, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

**Ephesians 1:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup>just **as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**Titus 1:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, **for the faith of those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, <sup>2</sup>**in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, <sup>3</sup>but at the proper time manifested**, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior; <sup>4</sup>to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

**2 Timothy 2:10:** For this reason I endure all things **for the sake of those who are chosen**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

**2 Thessalonians 2:13:** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

**1 Peter 1:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen <sup>2</sup>according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

**Matthew 11:27:** All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

**Election** is closely related to **predestination**, another concept clearly presented in the Bible. **Predestination** refers to the fact that God has determined the destiny of His chosen people from before the beginning of time.

**Acts 13:48:** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

**Romans 8:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who **are called according to His purpose.** <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

**Romans 9:22-24:** <sup>22</sup>What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, **which He prepared beforehand for glory,** <sup>24</sup>**even us, whom He also called,** not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**1 Corinthians 2:6-9:** <sup>6</sup>Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; <sup>7</sup>but **we speak God's wisdom in a mystery,** the hidden wisdom, **which God predestined before the ages to our glory;** <sup>8</sup>the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; <sup>9</sup>but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not, And which have not entered the heart of man, **All that God has prepared for those who love Him.**"

**Ephesians 1:12:** <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

**Question #134:** Carefully read the preceding Scripture passages. Then in your own words, distinguish between the terms "election" and "predestination." \_\_\_\_\_

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**Election** and **predestination** are clearly biblical doctrines. This fact is rarely disputed; however, much controversy arises over questions such as:

- Who does God choose?
- Why does He choose them?
- Does He base these choices on some foreseen act or faith of people or on His own free and sovereign purpose?

These questions and more are addressed below.

## **Election is unconditional**

When we say election is **unconditional**, we mean that God's election of sinners to salvation is not determined by anything in the sinner that *merits* salvation, or any condition that needs to be met in the sinner that moves God to choose them. Scripture never speaks of election as something we deserve or earn. Rather it affirms that God's choice of us was motivated by His

*free sovereign grace.* Salvation by *grace alone* cannot be merited by any human work or condition.

The word grace is typically defined as *unmerited favor*, describing the nature of salvation as God's freely bestowed gift. An even better definition might be *favor against merit*, emphasizing the fact that although sinners have in fact merited or earned damnation, God has given them salvation instead.

**Titus 3:4-7:** <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>**He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that **being justified by His grace** we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

**2 Timothy 1:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup>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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

**Ephesians 2:4-5:** <sup>4</sup>But **God, being rich in mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even **when we were dead in our transgressions**, made us alive together with Christ **(by grace you have been saved)**,

If grace could be merited, it would *no longer be grace* because God would owe us salvation.

**Romans 11:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant **according to God's gracious choice.** <sup>6</sup>**But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.**

Even the faith we exercised to believe is *"the gift of God."* Scripture specifically says it is *"not of ourselves."*

**Ephesians 2:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;** <sup>9</sup>**not as a result of works**, that no one should boast.

Scripture speaks in this way as to exalt God's free and sovereign choice in the matter so that we glorify Him for His *"freely bestowed"* grace and so that we do not *"boast"* or somehow take credit for the fact that we have been saved. Notice in the passage in Ephesians below the Scripture plainly says that *"He predestines us...according to"....*

- to the kind intention of *His will*
- to the praise of the glory of *His grace*
- it is *freely* bestowed

**Ephesians 1:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will**, <sup>6</sup>to the **praise of the glory of His grace**, which **He freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved.

**Question #135:** In your own words, define unconditional election. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #136:** Why is *favor against merit* a fuller description of grace than *unmerited favor*? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #137:** List words and phrases from Ephesians 1:3-6 that emphasize God's free and sovereign choice of sinners for salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #138:** According to Ephesians 1:6, for what purpose does God save sinners? \_\_\_\_\_

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Those God has redeemed cannot take any credit for their salvation or boast in anything they have done to earn it. The Bible plainly declares that sinners contribute nothing to merit their salvation. It is wholly and completely God's free gift given by His own free and sovereign grace.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31:** <sup>26</sup>For **consider your calling**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup>but **God has chosen** the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen** the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup>and the base things of the world and the despised, **God has chosen**, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup>**that no man should boast before God.** <sup>30</sup>**But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, <sup>31</sup>that, just as it is written, "**Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.**"

**Romans 5:15-16** - <sup>15</sup> But **the free gift is not like the transgression**. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, **much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.** <sup>16</sup> And **the gift** is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand **the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.** NASB

**Romans 6:23** - <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but **the free gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

The Bible plainly declares that sinners are chosen for salvation *not on the basis of their will*, but by the free mercy of God.

**Romans 9:10-16:** <sup>10</sup>And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>**for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls,** <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." <sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."** <sup>16</sup>**So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.**



**John 1:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup>who were born not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

In fact, the Gentile nations of the world did not seek God at all until God chose to reveal Himself to them.

**Romans 3:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that **both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;** <sup>10</sup>as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup>**There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God."**

**Isaiah 65:1:** **I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me.** I said, "Here am I, here am I," To a nation which did not call on My name.

**Question #139:** List several specific statements from the above quoted Scripture passages which affirm that sinners contribute *nothing* to their own salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #140:** Meditate on your answer to *Question #139*. Then describe your personal response (mentally, emotionally, practically) to what God has done for you. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Election and Foreknowledge

Peter and Paul both use the word *foreknowledge* in connection with election:

**1 Peter 1:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen <sup>2</sup>according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,** by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

**Romans 8:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called;** and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Some students of Scripture explain the connection between foreknowledge and election like this: God *knew beforehand* who would be saved and based election on that foreknowledge. He simply looked into the future to see who would believe the Gospel; then He chose (elected) those He saw choosing Him. This view cannot stand however, because it misunderstands and misrepresents the biblical meaning of *foreknowledge*. **John MacArthur** explains: "*When the Bible speaks of God's foreknowledge, it refers to God's establishment of a love relationship with that person. The word "know," in both the Old and New Testament, refers to much more than mere cognitive knowledge of a person. Such passages as Hosea 13:4-5; Amos 3:2 (KJV); and Romans 11:2 clearly indicate this. For example, 1 Peter 1:20 says Christ was 'foreknown before the foundation of the world.'* Surely this means more than that God the Father looked into the future to behold Christ! It means He had an eternal, loving relationship with Him. The same is



true of the elect, whom we are told God 'foreknew' (Romans 8:29). That means He knew them—he loved them—before the foundation of the world.”<sup>30</sup>

**Hosea 13:4-5:** <sup>4</sup>Yet I have been the LORD your God Since the land of Egypt; And **you were not to know any god except Me**, For there is no savior besides Me. <sup>5</sup>**I cared for [Hebrew “yada” – to know] you** in the wilderness, In the land of drought.

**Amos 3:2:** You only have I **chosen [Hebrew “yada” – to know]** among all the families of the earth; Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.

**Romans 11:2:** God has not rejected His people **whom He foreknew**. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

In the first chapter of 1 Peter, believers are said to be **“chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. . . ”** (vs. 1-2). Several verses later, Peter writes that Christ **“was foreknown before the foundation of the world”** (v. 20). In Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28, Peter speaks in a sermon and prays with a group of Christians. We know his words are inspired by God’s Holy Spirit because they are included in Scripture. In these passages, he affirms that Christ’s election as Savior and God’s foreknowledge of His crucifixion occurred **“by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.”** Obviously, foreknowledge has a much fuller meaning here than simply prior knowledge of the events! Peter affirmed that God’s foreknowledge of these events **resulted from His predetermined plan**, not from looking into the future to see what would happen. He **foreknew** these events because He chose, elected, and planned them. God’s foreknowledge is a necessary result of His **decree and foreordination** of whatsoever comes to pass.

**Acts 2:22-23:** <sup>22</sup>Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup>this Man, **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

**Acts 4:27-28:** <sup>27</sup>For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup>**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

Consider the following discussion of the Greek word for “foreknowledge” in Spiros Zodhiates’ New Testament Word Study.

**4267. prognôskœ;** fut. prognôsomai, 2 d aor. proégnœn, from pró (4253), before, and ginôskœ (1097), to know. To perceive or recognize beforehand, know previously, take into account or specially consider beforehand, to grant prior acknowledgement or recognition to someone, to foreknow.

(I) Used of mere prescience, to know before (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17).

(II) **Used of God’s eternal counsel it includes all that He has considered and purposed to do prior to human history.** In the language of Scripture, something foreknown is not simply that which God was aware of prior to a certain point. Rather, it is presented as that which God gave prior consent to, that which received His favorable or special recognition. Hence, **this term is reserved for those matters which God favorably, deliberately and freely chose and ordained.**

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<sup>30</sup> John MacArthur Grace to You Questions QA86 – “What does the bible teach about election”

**(A) Used of persons, to foreknow with approbation, to fore-approve or make a previous choice of, as special people (Rom 8:29; 11:2).**

**(B)** Used of events, to previously decide or plan, to foreknow for God is to foreordain 1 Peter 1:19,20 presents Christ as the “Lamb of God foreknown from the foundation of the world” (a.t.). He is said to be foreknown because God had planned and determined in His eternal counsel to provide His Son as a sacrifice for His people. Certainly more is meant than that God knew ahead of time that Christ would so come and die. God’s foreknowledge is given here as the cause for His Son’s sacrifice — because He planned and decreed it.

**(C) In Rom 8:29**, in relation to believers, *proginôskœ* occurs with the verb *proôrise*, aor. act. indic. of *proorízœ* (4309), **to predestinate. Foreknowledge and foreordination are logically coordinate.** The former emphasizes the exercise of God’s wisdom and intelligence in regard to His eternal purpose and the latter emphasizes the exercise of God’s will in regard to it. **What He has decreed is what He has decided.** This foreknowledge and foreordination in the Scripture are always unto salvation and not unto perdition. Therefore, it should be said that the Lord never foreordains someone to be lost. **Rather, He foreordains unto salvation those whom He specially considered and chose in eternity past (see Matt 7:23; John 10:14; Rom 11:2; 1 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:9; 2 Tim 2:19; Sept.: Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2).** Any thought of the lost being appointed or ordained unto condemnation should be understood as an act of passing over in which the lost are permitted to suffer the consequences of their choice of sin (1 Peter 2:8). **The salvation of every believer is known and determined in the mind of God before its realization in time. Thus, *proginôskœ* corresponds with the idea of having been chosen (*eklégomai* [1586], to choose) before the foundation of the world mentioned in Eph 1:4 and logically precedes the action indicated by *proorízœ*. *Proginôskœ* essentially entails a gracious self- determining on God’s part from eternity to extend fellowship with Himself to undeserving sinners (Rom 8:29).<sup>31</sup>**

**Question #141:** Explain in your own words how the Bible affirms that God’s *foreknowledge* is based on His predetermined plan, not on looking into the future to see what will happen. \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Election is a major theme in God’s plan**

*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines *election* as: “The gracious and free act of God by which He calls those who become part of His kingdom and special beneficiaries of His love and blessings. The Bible describes the concept of election in three distinct ways. Election sometimes refers to the election of Israel and the church as a people for special service and privileges. Election may also refer to the election of a specific individual to some office or to perform some special service. Still other passages of the Bible refer to the election of individuals

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<sup>31</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1991), 1215-1216.

to be children of God and heirs of eternal life.”<sup>32</sup> We see from this definition that the doctrine of election is not confined to the New Testament; it characterizes God’s interaction with mankind throughout all of human history. Election describes God’s method of God for selecting specific individuals for specific purposes. Those purposes include the performance of *particular services* and the receipt of *particular privileges*.

**Question #142:** Based on the information in the preceding paragraph, write a simple definition of election that a young child would understand. \_\_\_\_\_

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Consider the following **biblical examples of election**:

**Noah** was specifically chosen by God to build an ark in which he and his family would be saved from God’s coming destruction of the entire population of the earth. Noah’s faith in God’s Word was credited to him and his family for eternal salvation.

**Hebrews 11:7:** By faith **Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen**, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

**Abraham** was specifically chosen by God from among the Gentiles in Chaldea to move to Canaan and become the ancestor of Christ. He became the father of the nation of Israel through which the Messiah would come.

**Genesis 12:1-3:** Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, **To the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup>And I will make you a great nation**, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup>And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”

**Nehemiah 9:7:** Thou art the LORD God, **Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham.**

**Joshua 24:2:** And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, **Terah, the father of Abraham** and the father of Nahor, and **they served other gods.**”

**Moses** was specifically chosen by God to deliver Israel from cruel bondage in Egypt.

**Exodus 3:10:** Therefore, **come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh**, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.

**Question #143:** In what specific ways were Noah, Abraham, and Moses *elected* by God? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Israel** was specifically chosen by God to witness His incomparable power displayed in mighty miracles that resulted in their release from Egyptian bondage. **Israel** was specifically chosen by God to be bound to Him in a covenant relationship rich in great privileges. **Israel** was specifically chosen by God to receive the Word of God, record it in the Old Testament Scriptures, and bring forth the prophesied Messiah.

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<sup>32</sup>Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, gen. ed. Ronald F Youngblood (Nashville: Nelson, 1995), 389.

**Deuteronomy 7:6-8:** <sup>6</sup>For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; **the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.** <sup>7</sup>The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup>but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

**Isaiah 41:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>But you, Israel, My servant, **Jacob whom I have chosen,** Descendant of Abraham My friend, <sup>9</sup>**You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts, And said to you, “You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.”**

**Isaiah 44:1-4:** But now listen, O Jacob, My servant; And **Israel, whom I have chosen:** <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you, “Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; And **you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.** <sup>3</sup>For I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; **I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, And My blessing on your descendants;** <sup>4</sup>And they will spring up among the grass Like poplars by streams of water.”

Consider how greatly Israel was blessed to be specifically chosen by God! They were appointed to:

- be the nation through whom the **Messiah** would come
- be the people through whom God would speak in the **Law and the Prophets**
- have a **personal relationship** with God as He led them by prophet, fire, and cloud
- be heirs of **salvation by grace through faith** in God’s promise to them
- have access to Him through the **Levitical Priesthood** and the prescribed service of worship
- have God’s **Shekinah glory** dwell in their midst
- eventually inherit **the promised land and God’s Kingdom** on earth

**Romans 9:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites, **to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,** <sup>5</sup>whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen

**Question #144:** In what specific ways was Israel blessed by God’s election?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #145:** Does Israel’s election for specific purposes and blessings necessarily mean that every Israelite was saved?\_\_\_\_\_ Explain your answer.\_\_\_\_\_

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In addition to those listed above, Gideon, Samson, David, Solomon, and many others became the recipients of God’s special favor (His grace), **through no merit of their own.** They too were specifically chosen by God for His service and richly blessed by innumerable related benefits. This clearly discernable Old Testament pattern runs through the New Testament as well, firmly

supporting the cardinal doctrine of salvation by faith alone through grace alone. The New Testament clearly affirms that people come to Christ and are saved because they have been *elected* by God beforehand for this blessed privilege.

**John 6:37, 44, 65:** <sup>37</sup>All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. . . . <sup>44</sup>No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. . . . <sup>65</sup>And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from Me Father.**"

**John 15:16:** **You did not choose Me, but I chose you,** and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

**Ephesians 1:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.** In love <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**Romans 8:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>**and whom He predestined, these He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

**Romans 11:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant **according to God's gracious choice.** <sup>6</sup>But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

**2 Thessalonians 2:13:** But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

**Cornelius and his family** were specifically chosen by God for salvation (Acts 10:1-44). In this passage, note how God worked in specific, unusual ways to save this God-fearing Roman centurion and his Gentile family:

- God used an angelic vision to instruct Cornelius to send for Peter, who was staying with the tanner named Simon (vs 1-8, 22).
- God prepared Peter for the arrival of Cornelius' messengers by giving him a heavenly vision (vs 9-16).
- God instructed Peter to go to Cornelius (vs 17-33).
- Peter preached the Gospel to Cornelius, his relatives, and friends (vs 34-43).
- God sovereignly imparted the Holy Spirit to the whole crowd, to the amazement of the Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter (vs 44-48).

**Saul of Tarsus** was specifically chosen by God, not only for salvation, but also to be His Gospel messenger to the Gentile world. Saul's salvation was particularly amazing because of his vicious hatred of the Church.

**Acts 9:13-17:** <sup>13</sup>But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, **how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem;** <sup>14</sup>and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to him, **"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;** <sup>16</sup>for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

**Galatians 1:13-17, 22-24:** <sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how **I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it;** <sup>14</sup>and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries, being more



extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. <sup>15</sup>But **when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles**, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. . . . <sup>22</sup>And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; <sup>23</sup>but only, they kept hearing, **"He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."** <sup>24</sup>**And they were glorifying God because of me.**

*Lydia* was specifically chosen by God to be saved.

*Acts 16:14-15:* <sup>14</sup>And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.** <sup>15</sup>And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

*Christ's disciples* were specifically chosen by God to be saved. Consider how the Bible describes their salvation.

*John 15:16, 19:* <sup>16</sup>**You did not choose Me, but I chose you**, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. . . . <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, **but I chose you out of the world**, therefore the world hates you.

*John 6:70:* Jesus answered them, **"Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve**, and yet one of you is a devil?"

The New Testament refers repeatedly to the *election* of the church to salvation. The Greek word for *church* (*ekklesia*) means "to call out of."

*1 Peter 2:9:* But **you are a chosen race**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies **of Him who has called you out** of darkness into His marvelous light;

*Mark 13:20:* And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the **sake of the elect whom He chose**, He shortened the days.

*Colossians 3:12:* And so, as those who **have been chosen of God**, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

**Scripture plainly declares** that God reserves the right to choose whomever He will for His own purposes.

*Luke 1:30-31:* <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, **"Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.** <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus."

*John 5:5-9:* <sup>5</sup>And **a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness.** <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, **"Do you wish to get well?"** <sup>7</sup>The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." <sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk." <sup>9</sup>And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk.

*Acts 10:40-41:* <sup>40</sup>God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, <sup>41</sup>**not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God,** that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

**Question #146:** From the New Testament scriptures listed above, explain the role that God's election plays in the salvation of sinners. \_\_\_\_\_



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## The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

### An Exposition of Romans 9: God's Free and Sovereign Grace

#### Romans 9: Outline

- 9:1-3:** Paul's sorrow over Israel's present rejection of Christ  
**9:4-5:** Paul enumerates Israel's privileges and blessings  
**9:6-17:** God's sovereignty in salvation and judgment explained in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Pharaoh  
**9:18-21:** God's mercy and judgment according to His own sovereign purpose; humanity's lack of right or power to find fault with His decisions  
**9:22-24:** God's grand design in dispensing judgment and mercy  
**9:25-29:** Prophetic predictions of Gentile salvation and Jewish defection  
**9:30-33:** The point: Gentiles attained righteous by faith; whereas Israel stumbled in pursuit of righteousness by works.

**Question #147:** Read Romans 9:1-33 slowly and thoughtfully. Then list the primary distinctions you see Paul making between Israel and the Gentiles. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, <sup>5</sup>whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

**<sup>1</sup>I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.**

Paul expresses His deep sorrow over Israel's rejection of Christ. Note the context of the passage which carries over from Romans 8:28-32. In these verses Paul described the salvation of called and elect **individuals**. Thus, we can affirm that Romans 9 is speaking of the salvation of individual Jews rather than of **corporate** calling or privilege. (See also 9:30-32.) Commentator **Albert Barnes** writes, "*The chapter, therefore, has not reference to national election, or to choice to external privileges, but has direct reference to the doctrine of the election to salvation which had been stated in chap. 8. To suppose that it refers merely to external privileges, and national distinctions, makes the whole discussion unconnected, unmeaning, and unnecessary.*" <sup>33</sup>

**<sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,**

Paul's sorrow is so severe that he is willing to trade his faith for Israel's acceptance of Christ. Here is the deep and godly compassion of a man who believes in God's sovereignty through and

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<sup>33</sup> (from Barnes' Notes on Romans 9, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by Biblsoft, Inc.)

through, and yet struggles in his own finite mind to understand God's purpose in Israel's rejection of Christ.

<sup>4</sup>**who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,**  
<sup>5</sup>**whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.**

Here Paul emphasizes that in spite of Israel's great privileges, they are lost—unsaved. This is the reason for his deep sorrow. In the rest of this chapter, he will show that salvation is rooted in divine privilege extended to individuals solely by God's sovereign free grace and received solely by God-given faith. Salvation is not according to works (vv 11, 16, 31-32) nor according to man's will (v. 16), but is wholly God's doing (vv 8, 11, 15-18, 21-24, 28-29).

**Question #148:** Is Paul speaking of individual Jews in Romans 9, or is he addressing the nation of Israel as a whole? Support your answer with scriptural evidence. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #149:** What specific aspects of Israel's peculiar relationship with God intensifies both Paul's grief over their unbelief and their own culpability in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:6-9:** <sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; <sup>7</sup>neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." <sup>8</sup>That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. <sup>9</sup>For this is a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

<sup>6</sup>**But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel**

God's promises to Israel have not failed but are being realized even now by those God has called.

<sup>7</sup>**neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." <sup>8</sup>That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. <sup>9</sup>For this is a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."**

Salvation is not based on direct physical descent from Abraham, but on God's choice. Although both Isaac and Ishmael were Abraham's physical sons, only Isaac was the child promised by God, born wholly by God's will, power, and purpose. Ishmael was the child of short-sighted human effort, born out of frustration, fear, and unbelief. Together, they picture the biblical truth that salvation results from the choice, power, and action of God, not from the plans, decisions, and efforts of people.

**Romans 9:10-13:** <sup>10</sup>And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>for though the twins were not yet born,

and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

<sup>10</sup>**And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;**

Paul goes on to affirm God's sovereignty in salvation by demonstrating that believing parents do not necessarily produce believing children. Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, but only one was chosen by God for His redeeming privileges.

<sup>11</sup>**for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."**

Before the twins were born, before they had done anything good or bad, God purposed to choose the younger for salvation and pass over the older. His choice was obviously not based on any works done by the twins, but resulted from His sovereign decision to accomplish His predetermined purpose. (See also Romans 11:5, Ephesians 1:4-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9.)

**Question #150:** Explain in your own words how the conception of Abraham's two sons and God's words to Rebekah concerning her twins picture the nature of salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #151:** What implications for the nation of Israel do you see in Romans 9:6-13? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #152:** In your own words, summarize the teaching of each of the following passages:  
Romans 11:5: \_\_\_\_\_

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Ephesians 1:4-6: \_\_\_\_\_

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1 Thessalonians 1:4: \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Timothy 1:9: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #153:** How do the passages cited in **Question #152** support Paul's teaching in Romans 9:6-13? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:14-15:** <sup>14</sup>What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

<sup>14</sup>**What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!**

At this point, Paul anticipates his reader's likely reaction to the unsettling truth that salvation is by God's choice, not human effort or will (vs 11, 16, 31-32). Unserved sinners naturally seek to usurp God's absolute sovereignty and typically believe that *they* control their own destiny. If Paul had presented salvation (as it is often presented today) as if it were based on man's will rather than God's sovereign choice, he would have not have needed to bring this up. But because he presented salvation truthfully, he had to address their expected response—accusing God of being unjust. Rather than argue the point with them, however, he simply affirmed the righteousness of God in exercising His sovereign prerogative.

<sup>15</sup>**For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**

God bestows His mercy and compassion freely (i.e., under no obligation or compulsion). He calls specific sinners to salvation "in order that [His] purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of [their] works" (v. 11). If His choice of sinners to be saved was based on *anything* they had done to earn it, it would no longer be gracious, but merited. (Recall the definition of grace: "unmerited favor" or "favor against merit.") Paul further expounds this theme in Romans 11:

**Romans 11:6-8:** <sup>6</sup>But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, **otherwise grace is no longer grace.** <sup>7</sup>What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but **those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;** <sup>8</sup>just as it is written, "**God gave** them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day."

God, by His own will, showed mercy to Isaac and not to Ishmael; by His own choice, He blessed Jacob rather than Esau. Neither Isaac nor Jacob were more deserving than their brothers of God's favor. God's choice was motivated *solely* by His own will; it was not based on either man's heritage, works, or desires (this theme is continued in Romans 9:16-18).

**Question #154:** How does the utter sovereignty of God's grace (seen in His utterly sovereign choice of individuals of salvation) impact you at this point in your study? Honestly record your reactions. Then spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you rightly understand and submit to His truth recorded in Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:16-18:** <sup>16</sup>So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be

proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” <sup>18</sup>So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

<sup>16</sup>**So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.**

Consider the word “*it*” in verse 16. To what does “*it*” refer? We must answer this question by considering the **context** of the verse. The paragraph in which verse 16 is located begins at verse 14 and runs through verse 18. Please pause and read those verses carefully. Paul, in this paragraph, makes the point that God is not unjust because His choice of those who will be saved is based on His mercy and compassion rather than human merit. Paul affirms this same truth in verses 8 and 11. In verse 8, Paul said that God’s choice doesn’t result from human lineage, and in verse 11, that God’s choice isn’t motivated by human works. Thus, we see from **the context of verse 16** that “*it*” refers to God’s dispensing of mercy and compassion to “the children of the promise” rather than to “the children of the flesh.” He does this in accordance with **His purpose** rather than who people are or what they have done. We can also sense **the importance of this point** from the fact that Paul chose to **make this point** three times in two paragraphs.

<sup>17</sup>**For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.”**

Paul reasons that God’s doing as He willed with Pharaoh was not unjust but His privilege and right. His purpose was to make His name famous by exercising His righteous power to judge Pharaoh as well His ability to harden Pharaoh’s heart in order to accomplish His purpose (Numbers 14:15; Ezekiel 20:9,14,22; Psalm 46:10).

**Proverbs 21:1:** The **king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD;** He turns it wherever He wishes.

<sup>18</sup>**So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

Paul re-asserts (see v. 15) that God dispenses His mercy to whomever He “desires” or wills. Most of us gratefully acknowledge that statement. But we may balk the next statement: “He hardens whom He desires.” When we find ourselves resisting this truth, we do well to ask ourselves: Who are we to charge God with injustice? Who is powerful enough to overrule His sovereign authority? In what court could we arraign God for wrongdoing and bring Him to trial?

**Question #155:** Summarize in your own words what Scripture clearly teaches about God’s sovereignty in Romans 9:16-18. \_\_\_\_\_

Given that God Himself is the Author of Scripture, do readers of Scripture have the option of rejecting any of its teaching as untrue? \_\_\_\_\_ Thus, if this passage is troubling for you, please spend a few moments in prayer asking God’s Holy Spirit to help you understand, appreciate, and affirm the truth of His Word.

**Romans 9:19-21:** <sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” <sup>20</sup>On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? <sup>21</sup>Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?



<sup>19</sup>**You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”**

Paul again anticipates an argument from those who would hear his words and charge God with injustice. He expects some to ask: If God dispenses His mercy and executes His judgment on vessels He sovereignly created for those very purposes, how can He righteously reward or blame them for their actions? Paul’s *anticipation* of such questions affirms that he is indeed teaching God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation. Paul would have had no need to address this anticipated argument if he were reasoning that the dispensing of God’s mercy in salvation came as a result of man’s will or that it was withheld because of man’s stubborn rejection.

<sup>20</sup>**On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?**

Paul shuts the mouths of any who would dare challenge the design and purposes of God. He reasons that God, as the Creator, has the sovereign prerogative to do as He pleases with what He has made.

<sup>21</sup>**Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?**

Paul affirms that just as a potter has a “*right over the clay*” to make vessels destined for honorable or common use, God has the ultimate right to determine the destinies of the people He creates. The potter’s clay is analogous to people. Those created for “*honorable use*” will receive the privileges of eternal salvation; whereas those created for “*common use*” are “*prepared for destruction*” (vs 22-24). God, in His goodness and mercy, creates both kinds of people with no humanly discernable differences. We cannot tell by looking at or speaking to someone whether that person was created for honorable or common use. Thus we freely proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace to faith to *everyone*, without any attempt to distinguish between the two types of vessels. Dear reader, if you have not received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, we earnestly plead with you to hear and heed these words: *Now* is the day of salvation; the free offer of the Gospel is extended to you! Why will you be destroyed? Repent and trust Christ by faith and you *shall* be saved!

**Question #156:** What objection does Paul anticipate in Romans 9:19-21? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does He answer this objection? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #157:** Explain in your own words how the Christian’s great privilege of evangelizing the lost is wholly consistent with the truth of this passage. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:22-24:** <sup>22</sup>What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

<sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**<sup>22</sup>What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?**

Here is the second point of Paul's answer to the objection anticipated in verse 19. You will recall that his first point was *the potter has a right over the clay*. And here Paul explains that God has at least four reasons for exercising His right to permit sin in His creation:

- To demonstrate His wrath
- To make His power known
- To exercise much patience with the vessels of wrath
- To make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy

This passage teaches that God is sovereign over evil as well as good and uses evil to accomplish His good and righteous purposes. God will do as He pleases with the wicked, and He will do it to glorify Himself by revealing His goodness to His chosen vessels of mercy. This answer to the objection in verse 19, "Why does He still find fault?" is a clear statement of God's free sovereign right (or prerogative) to do as He pleases with His creation.

**<sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy**

God demonstrates His wrath, power, and patience with the wicked to make known or to *display* "the riches of His glory" to His chosen "vessels of mercy." When God's vessels of mercy (those who are redeemed) consider the destruction of the wicked, they will stand in awe of God's wrath, power, and patience. The Bible plainly declares that God's purpose in the destruction of the wicked is to display His glory.

**which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.**

The vessels of mercy God "prepared beforehand for glory" comprise His church: the saved, the elect, the called (the foreknown remnant of Jews and those foreknown among the Gentiles.) The Bible plainly declares that God *predestines* these vessels of mercy for salvation by working according "to His own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9) to prepare them for *glory*. Second Peter 1:3-4 affirms that those who have been called "by His own glory and excellence . . . become partakers of the divine nature." What a cause for rejoicing!

**Question #158:** For what purposes does God endure "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction"? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #159:** In your own words, explain why these are good and right purposes. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:25-29:** <sup>25</sup>As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'" <sup>26</sup>"And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." <sup>27</sup>And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly." <sup>29</sup>And just as Isaiah

foretold, “Except the LORD of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah.”

<sup>25</sup>As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’” <sup>26</sup>“And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.”

Paul here affirms that Hosea’s prophecy is fulfilled in God’s choosing certain Gentiles to be saved and called “My people . . . sons of the living God.” They receive this new identity because of their faith in Christ, not by becoming Jews.

<sup>27</sup>And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; <sup>28</sup>for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” <sup>29</sup>And just as Isaiah foretold, “Except the LORD of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah.”

Conversely, Israel (known as the sons of Israel) did not receive the promised blessing of salvation as a nation. Only a remnant of Jews believed in Jesus Christ along with many Gentiles. Here the point of Romans 9:6-7 is re-affirmed:

**Romans 9:6-7:** <sup>6</sup>But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For **they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; <sup>7</sup>neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants**, but: “Through Isaac your descendants will be named.”

Jacob was chosen over Esau “in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand” (Romans 9:11). Were these choices of God, made apart from human works, unjust? “May it never be!” Paul affirms (v. 14). Then he reminds his readers of **God’s explanation** of how His sovereignty works in salvation: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (v. 15). Paul understood that God chose some for salvation and passed over others (vs. 16-18), “in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He **prepared beforehand for glory**” (v. 23). And here he re-affirms what he has already taught: that only a remnant of Jews will be saved, and that only by the mercy of God. If God had not graciously “left to us a posterity,” the Jews would have been destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Question #160:** Do you see how Paul strengthened His argument in verse 27-29 by seeing God’s choice of a remnant out of the midst of Israel’s utter rebellion against God? In your own words describe this. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Romans 9:30-33:** <sup>30</sup>What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup>just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

<sup>30</sup>What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.

What an amazing contrast we see here! The Gentiles did not seek righteous standing with God by their own merit but received it *by faith*. Israel, however, sought righteous standing with God by boasting in their *heritage* as Abraham's seed and their own futile efforts to keep the Law—and were corporately cut off from the blessing of salvation. They failed to glorify their merciful God by humbly acknowledging their dependence on Him by faith and trusting in Christ's righteousness alone for justification in God's sight.

**They stumbled over the stumbling stone,<sup>33</sup> just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”**

They stumbled by rejecting Christ the Messiah, who alone merited the righteousness of God for sinners. Here is the reason for Paul's great sorrow and unceasing grief for his kinsmen (vv. 2-3).

**Question #161:** Describe the “stumbling stone” and “rock of offense” that tripped up so many Jews \_\_\_\_\_

Is that same stone still causing people to stumble? \_\_\_\_\_ What is the only way to avoid falling over it? \_\_\_\_\_

## God is Sovereign in the dispensing of His grace

Simply put, God determines who receives grace and who does not. If this were not true, humanity would be sovereign in this matter and could rightfully boast. Grace would play no part in salvation because the faith to believe would not be *freely* bestowed on whomever God wills to have mercy: **“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy”** (Romans 9:15).

**Luke 4:25-29:** <sup>25</sup>“But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; <sup>26</sup>**and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.** <sup>27</sup>And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and **none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.**” <sup>28</sup>And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; <sup>29</sup>and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.

God's sovereignty is seen in many places in the Bible and concerns broader matters than salvation.

**1 Chronicles 29:11-13:** <sup>11</sup>Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. <sup>12</sup>**Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone.** <sup>13</sup>Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.

**Exodus 4:11:** And the LORD said to him, **“Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”**

**Isaiah 45:7:** The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.**

**Question #162:** Explain in your own words why it is *good* that *God determines* who receives grace and who does not. \_\_\_\_\_

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## God Sovereignly bestows the revelation of salvation on whomever He wishes

Salvation is a *revelatory process* which comes by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

### New life for some

Sinners are saved when God regenerates them (gives them new life) and they are born again. Consider how Jesus rejoices in the fact that some receive this revelation from God and some do not.

**Matthew 11:25-28:** <sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.** <sup>26</sup>**Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.** <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**"

Consider also Scripture's plain declaration that God is responsible for the blindness of some.

**Romans 11:7-10:** <sup>7</sup>What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, **but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;** <sup>8</sup>just as it is written, **"God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day."** <sup>9</sup>And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. <sup>10</sup>**Let their eyes be darkened to see not,** And bend their backs forever."

**Isaiah 6:8-10:** <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" <sup>9</sup>And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' <sup>10</sup>**Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Lest they see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.**"

Human beings *cannot* do anything to save themselves because they are dead in trespasses and sins. They are *naturally unable* to even understand and accept the Gospel. The only way they can be saved is for God to fulfill His electing process through His work of *regeneration*. He does this by freely and sovereignly giving His elect understanding of sin, righteousness and judgment, which ultimately brings them to repentance, faith, and conversion. **Charles Hodge** explains:

*God is no less sovereign in the distribution of his favours. He does what He wills with his own. He gives to some riches, to others, honour; to others, health; while others are poor, unknown, or the victims of disease. To some, the light of the gospel is sent; others are left in darkness. Some are brought through faith unto salvation; others perish in unbelief. To the question, Why is this? the only answer is that given by our Lord. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."*<sup>34</sup>

Is it not apparent and amazing that God has had a special love relationship with the elect from all eternity? His foreknowledge and election of them for salvation surely reflects His deep love for them! Although we finite human beings cannot fully understand why God chose some for salvation and left others in their sinful state, we do know that His attributes always operate in

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<sup>34</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), vol. 1: 441.

perfect harmony with each other. Thus, God's sovereignty is always exercised in perfect harmony with His goodness, love, wisdom, and justice.

**Question #163:** Carefully consider Matthew 11:25-28, Romans 11:7-10, Isaiah 6:8-10, and the above quote from Charles Hodge. Then in your own words, explain the *necessity* of regeneration and revelation in salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

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### Reprobation for others

Since God elects some people to be saved out of the whole of humanity, He obviously passes over those He does not choose. This is called *reprobation*. Wayne Grudem defines *reprobation* as follows:

When we understand election as God's sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, then there is necessarily another aspect of that choice, namely, God's sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them. This decision of God in eternity past is called reprobation. *Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby to manifest his justice.*<sup>35</sup>

The Scripture speaks of this reality in many places. Here are just a few:

**Psalm 92:5-9:** <sup>5</sup>How great are Thy works, O LORD! Thy thoughts are very deep. <sup>6</sup>A senseless man has no knowledge; Nor does a stupid man understand this: <sup>7</sup>That when the wicked sprouted up like grass, And all who did iniquity flourished, **It was only that they might be destroyed forevermore.** <sup>8</sup>But Thou, O LORD, art on high forever. <sup>9</sup>For, behold, Thine enemies, O LORD, For behold, Thine enemies will perish; All who do iniquity will be scattered.

**Romans 9:17-21:** <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, **"For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth."** <sup>18</sup>So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. <sup>19</sup>You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" <sup>20</sup>On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? <sup>21</sup>**Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?**

**Romans 11:6-8:** <sup>6</sup>But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. <sup>7</sup>What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but **those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;** <sup>8</sup>just as it is written, **"God gave** them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day."

**1 Peter 2:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone," <sup>8</sup>and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, **and to this doom they were also appointed.**

This fact is terrible, but nonetheless true. Although the reality of hell and damnation is difficult to consider, it is an essential part of God's eternal plan. Reprobation and damnation serve His ultimate purpose of manifesting of His glory. Scripture clearly teaches these difficult truths.

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<sup>35</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan), 684.



**Exodus 9:13-17:** <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. <sup>14</sup>For this time **I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.** <sup>15</sup>For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would have been cut off from the earth. <sup>16</sup>But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, **in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.** <sup>17</sup>Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.””

**Proverbs 16:4:** The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, **Even the wicked for the day of evil.**

Nevertheless, God experiences very real sorrow when anyone perishes.

**Ezekiel 18:32:** “For **I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,**” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”

**Wayne Grudem** comments: “*But it might be objected at this point, if God genuinely feels sorrow at the punishment of the wicked, then why does he allow it or even decree that it will come about? The answer must be that God knows that this will ultimately result in greater glory for himself. It will show his power and wrath and justice and mercy in a way that could not otherwise be demonstrated. Certainly in our own human experience it is possible to do something that causes us great sorrow but which we know will result in long-term greater good. And so, after this faint human analogy, we may somewhat understand that God can decree something that causes him sorrow yet ultimately will further his glory.*”<sup>36</sup>

**Question #164:** Describe your initial reaction to the doctrine of reprobation. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #165:** How do the Bible passages quoted above and the words from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* enhance your appreciation of the the doctrine of reprobation (i.e., how do they help you view this doctrine from the right perspective)? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Election comforts and fills us with thanksgiving as it glorifies God**

The doctrine of election comforts those whom God has chosen by assuring us of the certainty of our salvation. If God has chosen to save us, can anyone thwart His intended purpose? **NO!** Our salvation has been securely ordained by God’s eternal decree from before the world began.

**2 Timothy 1:8-10:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, **<sup>9</sup>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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,** <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

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<sup>36</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan), 686.

**Ephesians 1:3-6:** <sup>3</sup>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 <sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved.

**Romans 8:29-35:** <sup>29</sup>For **whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined**, these **He** also called; and whom **He** called, these **He** also justified; and whom **He** justified, these **He** also glorified. <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** <sup>32</sup>**He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** <sup>33</sup>**Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

When we consider that our salvation is rooted in the free and sovereign purpose of God, we naturally rejoice with thanksgiving. How amazing that God would stoop to save such unworthy sinners caught up in sin and rebellion and deserving of hell! We exult in His amazing grace, which frees us from the eternal death we have merited. With grateful hearts, may we glorify God for our salvation by freely proclaiming His goodness to us.

**2 Thessalonians 2:13:** But **we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

**Psalms 65:4:** **How blessed is the one whom Thou dost choose, and bring near to Thee**, To dwell in Thy courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, Thy holy temple.

**Psalms 106:4-5:** <sup>4</sup>Remember me, O LORD, in Thy favor toward Thy people; Visit me with Thy salvation, <sup>5</sup>**That I may see the prosperity of Thy chosen ones, That I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, That I may glory with Thine inheritance.**

**Question #166:** Carefully read 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Ephesians 1:3-6, and Romans 8:29-35. According to these passages, how secure is your salvation?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If God is for you (and He is if you are saved), who can be against you?\_\_\_\_\_

Who can successfully bring a damning accusation against you?\_\_\_\_\_

Who has the power to condemn a person God has justified?\_\_\_\_\_

Who is able to separate you from the love of God?\_\_\_\_\_

What else in all of creation can separate you from the love of God?\_\_\_\_\_

What makes your salvation so secure?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Question #167:** Do 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Psalm 65:4, and Psalm 106:4-5, accurately describe your attitude toward your salvation?\_\_\_\_\_ If not, it would be wise for you to spend more time studying and meditation on what Scripture teaches about the security of your salvation.

## Election should encourage evangelism

We should zealously preach the gospel and evangelize people because *God has promised* to save people from every tribe and nation, indeed from every language and ethnic group in the world.

**Matthew 28:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

**Luke 24:45-47:** <sup>45</sup>Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; <sup>47</sup>and that **repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**”

**Revelation 5:9-10:** And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; **for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** <sup>10</sup>And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.

We see Paul, in his missionary journeys in the book of Acts, being encouraged by God to evangelize in certain areas because God’s elect people were there.

**Acts 16:6-10:** <sup>6</sup>And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;** <sup>7</sup>and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and **the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;** <sup>8</sup>and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>**And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”** <sup>10</sup>And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

**Acts 18:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. <sup>9</sup>And **the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;** <sup>10</sup>**for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city”** <sup>11</sup>**And he settled there a year and six months,** teaching the word of God among them.

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16:** <sup>14</sup>But thanks be to God, **who always leads us in His triumph in Christ,** and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. <sup>15</sup>For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among **those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;** <sup>16</sup>**to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma of life to life.** And who is adequate for these things?

Paul affirmed that he did all for sake of God’s elect, the church he zealously sought to reach with his relentless preaching of the Gospel.

**2 Timothy 2:10-11:** For this reason I **endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation** which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

Paul affirms in Romans 9 that God elects according to His own free and sovereign purpose. Then in Romans 10, he explains that people are saved when they call upon the name of the Lord. God saves those He has elected through the means of Gospel preaching! *“How shall they hear without a preacher?”*

**Romans 10:12-15:** <sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; <sup>13</sup>for “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup>How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how shall they hear without a preacher?** <sup>15</sup>**And how shall they preach unless they are sent?** Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!”

**Question 168:** From the above Scripture passages, describe at least four specific ways in which the doctrine of election *encourages* evangelism:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_

Consider a few statements from the **Canons of the Synod of Dort**:

**ARTICLE 7.** Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from the primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation. This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy, and for the praise of the riches of His glorious grace; as it is written “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:4-6). And elsewhere: “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

**ARTICLE 8.** There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved, both under the Old and New Testament; since the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose, and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which He has chosen us from eternity, both to grace and to glory, to salvation and to the way of salvation, which He has ordained that we should walk therein (Ephesians 1:4,5; 2:10).

**ARTICLE 9.** This election was not founded upon foreseen faith and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition of which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to the testimony of the apostle: “For He chose us (not because we were, but) in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Ephesians 1:4).

**ARTICLE 10.** The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which does not consist herein that out of all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation, but that He was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to Himself, as it is written: “Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls — she (Rebekah) was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Romans 9:11-13). “When the Gentiles heard

this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

**ARTICLE 11.** And as God Himself is most wise, unchangeable, omniscient, and omnipotent, so the election made by Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number diminished.

## The Sovereignty of God

### Part 4: In Salvation

#### Effectual Calling

#### What Does the Bible Say?

We have seen that salvation is a supernatural work of God accomplished by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is the only way salvation can occur because mankind is naturally unable to see, hear, and understand the Gospel. Salvation rests upon the free electing grace of God. He chooses (elects) those who will be saved from before the beginning of time. Election is unconditional; that is, it is not **conditioned** (determined or based) upon any response in man. People are saved in time and space because God has chosen them in eternity past and regenerates them (causes them to be born again) at a specific point in the course of their lives.

**John 3:3:** Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”

**1 Peter 1:1-3** - <sup>1</sup>Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen <sup>2</sup>according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Salvation is a supernatural work of God, initiated by election and accomplished by the new birth. Although predestined to occur in eternity past, it actually happens when the chosen sinner’s heart is regenerated by God’s Holy Spirit. He does this through a process of **drawing** or **calling**. The **Bible plainly declares** that those whom God has elected and predestined are **drawn** to salvation by God Himself.

**John 6:37:** **All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**

**John 6:44:** **No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day.

**John 6:65:** And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**”

**Jeremiah 31:2-3:** <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD, “The people who survived the sword Found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when it went to find its rest.” <sup>3</sup>The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; **Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.**”

**Exodus 19:4:** You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and **how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.**

**Question 169:** From the passages listed above, describe in your own words the supernatural work of God that saves sinners. \_\_\_\_\_

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The Bible plainly declares that the Church, i.e., those who are the elected recipients of salvation, have been called by God at a particular point in their lives. This clearly affirms that **God is the initiator** of their salvation.

**Romans 8:28:** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, **to those who are called according to His purpose.**

**Romans 1:1-7:** <sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, **called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which He promised before-hand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,** <sup>3</sup>concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, <sup>6</sup>among whom **you also are the called of Jesus Christ;** <sup>7</sup>to all who are beloved of God in Rome, **called as saints:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Romans 9:23-24:** <sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, **which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called,** not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

**1 Corinthians 1:9:** God is faithful, through whom **you were called into fellowship with His Son,** Jesus Christ our Lord.

**1 Corinthians 1:22-24:** <sup>22</sup>For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, <sup>24</sup>**but to those who are the called,** both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

**2 Thessalonians 2:14:** And it was for this **He called you through our gospel,** that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**1 Timothy 6:12:** Fight the good fight of faith; **take hold of the eternal life to which you were called,** and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

**2 Timothy 1:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup>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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

**Hebrews 9:15:** And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, **those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**

**1 Peter 5:10:** And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, **who called you to His eternal glory in Christ,** will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Scripture also speaks of our salvation as a **calling** by God, i.e., a divine favor or privilege which has been given to all the saints.

**Romans 11:28-29:** <sup>28</sup>From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; <sup>29</sup>**for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

**1 Corinthians 1:1-3:** <sup>1</sup>Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother, <sup>2</sup>to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling,** with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29:** <sup>26</sup>For **consider your calling, brethren**, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup>but **God has chosen** the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen** the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup>and the base things of the world and the despised, **God has chosen**, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup>that no man should boast before God.

**Ephesians 1:18-19a:** <sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the **hope of His calling**, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

**Hebrews 3:1:** Therefore, **holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling**, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

**Question #170:** According to the above passages, who is the initiator of our salvation?\_\_\_\_\_ Is this clear teaching of Scripture difficult for you to accept?\_\_\_\_\_ If so, read these passages again, prayerfully asking God to open your heart to receive this truth with joy and contentment.

### **All the Elect will be Saved**

The **Bible plainly declares** that everyone God the Father chooses for salvation will be saved and glorified. God is sovereign, and His purpose to save His people (those He elects, predestines and calls) cannot be frustrated. God works everything after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11), including His plan of redemption. Consider the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

**John 6:37-39:** <sup>37</sup>**All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing**, but raise it up on the last day.

Notice how Jesus affirms the *certainty* of salvation of *all* whom the Father has given Him. Oh, what comfort for the saints! The very purpose of almighty God, which cannot be thwarted, upholds their final salvation. This great truth will be examined further under the doctrine of Eternal Security. For now, consider the following verses:

**Acts 13:48:** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**.

How many believed? *As many as had been appointed to eternal life*, as a consequence of the divine appointment (predestination). God acted upon them in a calling of regeneration to grant them the gift of faith so they could believe, and “as many” did.

**Romans 8:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified**.

How many of those whom God foreknew and predestined to salvation were also called, justified, and glorified? *All!*

**Question 171:** Describe your initial reaction to this scriptural truth.\_\_\_\_\_

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### **The Golden Chain**

**Romans 8:28-30** has been rightly described as *the golden chain of salvation* because of its profound assurance that God's purpose in salvation cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything. It describes the effectual calling of salvation on Christian believers.

**Romans 8:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, **to those who are called according to His purpose.** <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

Notice first that, in the *effectual calling* of His saints, God is the divine initiator of salvation and strong protector of those whom He has chosen to save.

**Romans 8:28:** And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, **to those who are called according to His purpose.**

Surely the highest good of those God has "called according to His purpose" is their salvation. He *causes* all things to work together to accomplish this specific purpose as well as all His other purposes for them. He will draw them, regenerate them, gift them with repentance and saving faith in Christ, and bring them to conversion. Then He will continue working in them through the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit to conform them to the image of Jesus Christ before finally glorifying them in Heaven.

**1 Peter 1:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>**to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away**, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>**who are protected by the power of God though faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

**Philippians 2:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**

Second, we see that God predestined those He *foreknew* (fore-loved) to "be conformed to the image of" Christ. Being conformed to the image of Christ is a process that begins, *by God's work in us*, at salvation and is completed, *by His work in us*, at glorification. The "predestination" has a final destination of the completed work of sanctification (which we call Glorification when the saints are finally changed by God with glorified bodies).

**Romans 8:29:** **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren;

Thus, the *destiny* of those God foreknew has been *pre-destined* (pre-determined) by God.

**Ephesians 1:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>**He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**Ephesians 1:11-12:** In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Third, consider this concise summary of the salvation process.

**Romans 8:30:** and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

Clearly, those who have been predestined are called; and those who are called are regenerated by the Spirit and saved through faith in the justifying work of the Son. The calling of God is thus *effectual* because His Holy Spirit *effects* salvation in those who are called by moving them to be willing accept the Gospel.

**John 6:65:** And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**”

We have already seen this *effectual calling* at work in many who were saved in the narrative passages of Acts. Paul, Lydia and Cornelius are a few examples.

**Question 172:** According to the passages quoted above, what prevents the links in “the golden chain” from being broken? \_\_\_\_\_

What does this tell you about the security of your salvation? \_\_\_\_\_

### Is saving Grace Irresistible?

Yes, it cannot be resisted because salvation is a supernatural work of God in regeneration. Could Lazarus have resisted his resurrection from the dead? God has, in eternity past, elected and predestined *all* who will come to saving faith through the irresistible or effectual calling (working) of His Holy Spirit. **The calling effects salvation in the elect.**

**Deuteronomy 30:6:** Moreover **the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,** in order that you may live.

**John 6:37:** **All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**

**John 6:44:** **No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day.

**John 6:65:** And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, **that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**”

Regeneration, which precedes and enables believing faith, is an irresistible working of God’s Holy Spirit that changes sinners’ hearts and minds, raises them from spiritual death to spiritual life, and implants within them the nature of God. This work of the Spirit is accomplished according to the Father’s good will and cannot be thwarted by the creature.

**Titus 3:4-7:** <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>**He saved us,** not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>**that being justified by His grace** we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27:** <sup>26</sup>Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;** and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

<sup>27</sup>And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,** and **you will be careful to observe** My ordinances.

**Romans 8:9:** However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.** But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

**1 John 4:13:** By this **we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**

**Romans 8:16-17:** <sup>16</sup>**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** and if children, heirs also, **heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,** if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

**Question 173:** According to the verses above, what is Holy Spirit's role in regeneration?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 174:** Write a brief prayer of thanksgiving for the Holy Spirit's work in your life.\_\_\_\_\_

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**David N. Steele** comments:

*"The gospel invitation extends a call to salvation to everyone who hears its message. It invites all men without distinction to drink freely of the water of life and live. It promises salvation to all who repent and believe. But this outward general call, extended to the elect and non-elect alike, will not bring sinners to Christ. Why? Because men are by nature dead in sin and are under its power. They are of themselves unable and unwilling to forsake their evil ways and to turn to Christ for mercy. Consequently, the unregenerate will not respond to the gospel call to repentance and faith. No amount of external threatenings or promises will cause blind, deaf, dead, rebellious sinners to bow before Christ as Lord and to look to Him alone for salvation. Such an act of faith and submission is contrary to the lost man's nature.*

*Therefore, the Holy Spirit, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a special inward call in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ . . .*

*Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit's call and of God's grace in saving sinners as being 'efficacious,' 'invincible,' or 'irresistible.' For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!"*<sup>37</sup>

Let's review: How are people saved? By exercising their human wisdom and choosing to follow Christ? Or by **God choosing** to save them before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, and then powerfully calling them in regeneration at some point in their life?

**Romans 9:10-12:** <sup>10</sup>And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>for though the twins **were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand**, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."

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<sup>37</sup> David N. Steele *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* P&R Publishing 1963 page 48



**Romans 9:15-16,18:** <sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, **“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”** <sup>16</sup>So then **it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs**, but on God who has mercy. . .  
**<sup>18</sup>So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

**Question 175:** What does this say about people’s ability to resist the Spirit’s work in salvation?

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Could Paul have chosen **not** to be God’s appointed instrument to take the Gospel to the Gentiles?

Could Jeremiah have decided not to be God’s prophet to the nations? \_\_\_\_\_

Could you have refused the Holy Spirit’s call to repent and believe the Gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

**Daniel 4:35:** And all the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, **But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitatns of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, “What hast Thou done?”**

**Acts 9:13-16:** <sup>13</sup>But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, **how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem;** <sup>14</sup>and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.” <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to him, **“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;** <sup>16</sup>for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

**Galatians 1:15-17:** <sup>15</sup>But **when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace,** was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

**Jeremiah 1:4-5:** <sup>4</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>5</sup>**“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”**

With this in mind, let us consider again whether or not we would take a Semi-Pelagian or an Augustinian view of this doctrine.

Man’s will is free and he can successfully resist the Spirit’s call.	Human Resistance	Effectual Calling	The calling of God to the elect does effect salvation infallibly.
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We have seen that the Bible clearly teaches that God’s call to the elect actually effects their salvation infallibly (without fail).

**Question #176:** How will you respond to God’s word on this subject? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Particular Redemption

#### What Does the Bible Say?

God's work of redemption cannot be both *universal* and *particular*. The language of Scripture reveals which it is. The following are just a few of the Scriptures affirming that: (1) the benefits of Christ's atonement are the *definite* possession of the Church in *particular* (believers); and, (2) the sufficient work of Christ guarantees to the elect all of God's promises of reconciliation and eternal blessing. The words *us*, *we*, *our*, and *they* in these passages indicate that the merit of Christ's atonement belongs to His Church *in particular*.

**Matthew 1:21:** And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is **He who will save His people from their sins.**

**John 10:11:** I am the good shepherd; **the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.**

**Acts 20:28:** Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God **which He purchased with His own blood.**

**Romans 5:8-11:** <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates His own love toward **us**, in that while **we** were yet sinners, **Christ died for us.** <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, **we** shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while **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. <sup>11</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

**Romans 8:31-34:** <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for **us**, who is against **us**? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but **delivered Him up for us all**, how will He not also with **Him freely give us all things?** <sup>33</sup>Who will bring a charge against **God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? **Christ Jesus is He** who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, **who also intercedes for us.**

**2 Corinthians 5:21:** He made **Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we** might become the righteousness of God in Him.

**Galatians 1:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>**who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us** out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup>to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

**Galatians 3:13:** **Christ redeemed us** from the curse of the Law, **having become a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—

**Ephesians 1:7:** **In Him we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, . . .

**Ephesians 5:25-27:** <sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and **gave Himself up for her**; <sup>26</sup>that He might **sanctify her**, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup>that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but **that she should be holy and blameless.**

**Colossians 1:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>For **He delivered us** from the domain of darkness, and **transferred us** to the kingdom of His beloved Son, <sup>14</sup>**in whom we have redemption**, the forgiveness of sins.

**Titus 3:5-7:** <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

**Hebrews 10:14:** For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

**1 Peter 2:21-24:** <sup>21</sup>For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow, <sup>22</sup>who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; <sup>23</sup>and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup>and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

**1 John 1:6-7:** <sup>6</sup>If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth, <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

These passages (and many more) clearly affirm that Christ's work *definitely* secures for the Church *in particular* all the benefits of reconciliation to God. This fact is rarely disputed. What is often disputed is that the Church *alone* receives these benefits.

**Question 177:** Reread the above passage, circling specific words or phrases affirming that Christ's atonement applied specifically to those God has chosen for salvation. Based on this evidence, are you willing to accept this doctrine?\_\_\_\_\_ Explain your answer.\_\_\_\_\_

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## Does the Bible teach universal atonement?

Since the Bible teaches that only those who believe are justified, it necessarily implies that the benefits of Christ's atonement are *not* afforded to unbelievers.

**Romans 3:21-25a:** <sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Clearly, salvation is given to those whom God chose to give it before time began. Clearly, salvation is brought to pass in time through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit and results in regeneration.

**Romans 8:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

God's effectual calling brings the sinner to repentance and faith through the enabling work of God's Holy Spirit. This results in conversion, justification and imputation, as well as ultimate sanctification and glorification. At the point of repentance and faith, sinners are *justified* because God's wrath against their sins has been satisfied (*propitiated*). Their guilt has been removed from them (*expiated*), and they are declared righteous in Christ (imputation).

**Romans 3:25-28:** . . . <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation in His blood through faith**. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. <sup>27</sup>Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law**.

Believers in Christ are thus **saved** from God's wrath through Christ's work of **justification**.

**Romans 5:9:** Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him**.

**Question #178:** On what basis are believers saved? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #179:** How does this guarantee that all the glory for the salvation of sinners goes to God alone? \_\_\_\_\_

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Some passages of Scripture seem to imply that Christ's atonement was universal. Do the benefits of the atonement extend to unbelievers? Did Christ die for the sins of people who will never be saved?

**John 1:29:** The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world!**"

**1 John 2:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup>and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but **also for those of the whole world**.

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19:** <sup>18</sup>Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>namely, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

**1 John 4:14:** And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be **the Savior of the world**.

If God, through the work of Jesus Christ, has **taken away the sin of the world** through the **propitiation of sins**, how can He righteously punish unbelievers in Hell according to the perfect and good justice of God? Since Scripture cannot contradict itself, these individual passages must be understood in the whole context of Scripture. Thus, these passages cannot mean that the **specific sins of all the people** in the world have been **propitiated**. Scripture defines **propitiation** is the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin; it also teaches that apart from repentance and faith, sinners are doomed by the wrath of God. If the above passages could be understood to mean the benefits of the atonement extend to all people everywhere, then preaching the Gospel would be unnecessary. If the sins of the whole world have already been **taken away and propitiated**, repentance and faith are unnecessary for salvation. There is no need for the Gospel. We might even say there is no need for a Bible! Of course, since God's Word is **wholly true**, these passages cannot be understood in a way that invalidates the rest of Scripture. How should we understand these passages in the light of the whole counsel of God? We *must* understand that

although Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross was *sufficient* to save all, it was not *efficacious* for all. The atonement is sufficient to propitiate the sins of all, but only proficient for believers.

**Question #180:** What primary truth about Scripture *must be* applied as we seek understanding of John 1:29, 1 John 2:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, and 1 John 4:14? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why is it absolutely necessary that we do this? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Hebrews 2:9:** But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God **He might taste death for everyone.**

If Christ has already *"tasted death for everyone,"* then why is there any need at all for anyone to die? Is it not rather plain that this "tasting death" is not meant to imply that it will cover or **atone** for the sins of non-elect people, for they will actually *"taste death"* themselves. The **Reformation Study Bible** regarding Hebrews 2:9 is very helpful. *"Here, 'everyone' must be understood in the light of the context and of the results of Jesus' death described elsewhere in Hebrews. It refers to the 'many sons' whom God brings to glory (v.10), whom Jesus calls 'brothers' (v. 11). Those for whom Jesus tasted death were made holy and perfect once for all by His sacrifice (10:10,14), their consciences cleansed from acts that lead to death (9:14), so they are freed from the fear of death (2:14,15). By contrast, there are those (even within Christian congregations) who do not trust the Son but subject Him to ridicule (6:6). For them, 'there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment' (10:26,27). Thus 'everyone' here includes all those (but only those) who persevere in trusting Jesus (3:6,14)." See here how important understanding texts in their context really is!*

### Sufficient but not Efficacious

When the Bible speaks of *"the sins of the whole world"* or *"the sins of the world,"* it is addressing the *sufficiency* of Christ's atonement rather than its efficacy. Christ would not have had to suffer any more or any less if God had chosen to save more or fewer people. The *efficacy* of Christ's atonement addresses the *application* of Christ's suffering to particular sinners who come to Christ in faith believing. Only those God has specifically chosen to save are *benefited* by Christ's atoning death because only they possess God given gift of saving faith. Hell is a reality which portrays that the atonement is **not benefiting the non-elect (and unbelieving) in the same way** it is benefiting the elect and believing.

**Ephesians 1:7-8a:** <sup>7</sup>In Him **we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of **our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace, <sup>8</sup>which He **lavished upon us**.

Although the free offer of the Gospel goes out to *the whole world*, the *benefit* of the atonement is received only by those who believe the Gospel. The efficacy of Christ's death is applied (made specifically effective for particular people) when **they place their faith** (believe and rely) on Christ for salvation. Christ's atonement remains *non-effectual* for those who do not place their faith in it. **Propitiation** of sins and **justification** before God only **result** from **grace alone** by **faith alone** in **Christ alone**.

**Romans 3:21-25a...28** - <sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace **through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publically **as a propitiation in His blood through faith....** <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

Scripture passages that describe Christ's death as universal in scope are clearly consistent with the full counsel of God. Christ's death, as the perfect unblemished sacrifice, is *infinite* in its ability and power to atone for *the sins of the whole world*, but limited in its application to those who, as a result of God's work of regeneration, repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ. **The Bible plainly declares** that *redemption* is applied in *particular and only* to people who believe the Gospel with saving faith. This is done *as a result of* God's foreknowledge and predestination. *All* of God's elect come to this saving faith by the effectual calling and regeneration of *His Holy Spirit*, which faith is a gift given in regeneration.

**Question #181:** In your own words, explain the relationship between the *sufficiency* of Christ's atonement and its *efficacy*. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Particular Redemption can be reasoned from the Decree

The Church is ultimately saved by God's *eternal decree*. God purposed, *from the beginning*, to redeem a specific group of people for His own possession. Each member of the Trinity participated in the redemption of this group, the Church, the bride of Christ. God the Father *planned* redemption (by election and foreknowledge), God the Son *purchased* redemption (by atonement), and God the Spirit *applied* redemption (by regeneration).

**2 Timothy 1:8-10:** <sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup>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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,** <sup>10</sup>but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

**Romans 8:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>**and whom He predestined, these He also called**; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

**Romans 3:21-25a:** <sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

**Titus 3:4-7:** <sup>4</sup>But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup>whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.



**Question #182:** In your own words, describe the role of each Person of the Trinity in redeeming sinners. \_\_\_\_\_

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Thus, we affirm Scripture's clear teaching that God did, in fact, **decree** from eternity past to save specific individuals who would comprise the Church of Jesus Christ. The unfolding of history progressively validates this great truth. God's people are being effectually called by His Spirit, redeemed from sin, and reconciled to God through the work of His Son for the purpose of enjoying God and glorifying Him forever. Scripture teaches that whatever comes to pass has been **eternally decreed by God**. This means that God has predetermined all of the events of history. The theological term for this divine activity is **foreordination**. God has **fore** (before time began), **ordained** (determined) all that comes to pass. Jonathan Edwards helpfully explained: "Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. **Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He doth approve of them or doth not approve of them;** that is, He is either willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. **But to will that they should be is to decree them.**"

In the final analysis, the question, "To whom does the atonement apply?" has only one scriptural answer: the believer in Christ. We have seen that the benefits of the atonement are efficacious for believers **only**. Thus, redemption in Christ Jesus is a **particular redemption**.

**Ephesians 1:7-8a:** <sup>7</sup>In Him **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,** according to the riches of His grace, <sup>8</sup>which He lavished upon us.

**Revelation 5:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; **for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** <sup>10</sup>**And Thou has made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God;** and they will reign upon the earth."

**Question #183:** How do the highlighted phrases in the above passages indicate that our redemption in Jesus Christ is a particular redemption? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Christ's Priesthood is Exclusive

Scripture clearly teaches that Christ is not interceding for unbelievers. If He were, they would have an advocate with God and enjoy the benefit of salvation through Christ's perfect mediation. However, this is **not** the case. The **Bible plainly declares** that Christ's sacrifice of atonement benefits only believers in Christ.

**Ephesians 3:8-12:** <sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light what is the administration of **the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;** <sup>10</sup>in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup>**This was in**

accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,  
<sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

*Hebrews 10:10-15:* <sup>10</sup>By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. <sup>11</sup>And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; <sup>12</sup>but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup>waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. <sup>14</sup>For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

When Jesus prays for the church in His high priestly prayer, He does not pray for the world, nor for unbelievers, but specifically for those the Father has given Him. His prayer of intercession for His own will be answered by the Father absolutely and completely in the course of time.

*John 17:9, 20-21:* <sup>9</sup>I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; . . . <sup>20</sup>I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send me.

Other passages also affirm that His intercession is for believers only.

*Romans 8:33-34:* <sup>33</sup>Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

*Hebrews 4:14-15:* <sup>14</sup>Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

*Hebrews 7:25:* Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

**Question #184:** If you are a Christian, write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for choosing you for salvation. If you are not a Christian but would like to be, write a brief prayer asking God to guide you into genuine repentance and faith. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Eternal Security

Someone may ask, “Is my salvation secure, or can I lose it.” As you read on we will see how the Bible will answer this question in detail. For the moment, be assured that if the security of our salvation depended on our ability to remain faithful to God, we would all be hopelessly lost. The security of our salvation does not depend on our ability to keep faith, but on the greatness of the One in whom we have faith. He will never leave or forsake those who are His. He is the good shepherd, who gives eternal life to His sheep; no one or no thing is able to snatch them out of His hand (John 10:26-30). Jesus Himself will see to it that we make it to heaven. We can rest *assured* that we have eternal life if we have been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible plainly declares that those who truly believe *will* persevere to the end by Christ’s power.

*Colossians 3:3-4:* <sup>3</sup>For you have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then **you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

*1 Peter 1:3-5:* <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>**to obtain an inheritance** which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>**who are protected by the power of God through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God has “caused us to be born again to a living hope . . . to obtain an inheritance.” Being born again by God’s power generates vibrant hope in our heavenly inheritance because we “are protected by the power of God through faith.” Living hope results from assurance that no one can thwart the mighty purpose of God to protect us through faith, insuring that we will indeed receive the promised inheritance. The foundation of our hope could not be any more secure! Not even the darkest day of doubt and trouble can remove us from His mighty hand.

### They Shall Never Perish

The teaching of Jesus also affirms that we shall not fall away.

*John 10:27-29:* <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and **I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish;** and **no one shall snatch them out of My hand.** <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.**

Here Jesus described the unassailable security of those the Father has given to Him. They “shall never perish” because they **have** “eternal life.” *Eternal* life is life that *cannot* end; it extends *forever*. Thus, we who are in His hand are absolutely secure; no one or no thing can break His grip on us. As if this were not enough to affirm our security, He further asserts, “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Christ’s unbreakable grip on His sheep is further strengthened by the hand of the Father. Through the combined power of God the Father and God the Son, all the saved will be kept forever, having eternal life. The Bible plainly declares that the final perseverance of the saints does not lie in the strength of their will but in the power of God. Our salvation is ultimately a transaction between Father and Son. The Father gives; the Son receives; the power of both secures the transaction. Those given to the Son by the Father will never be lost.

**John 6:39-40:** <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** <sup>40</sup>For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and **I Myself will raise him up on the last day.**

Jesus says that He will lose none of those the Father has given Him but will raise them up “on the last day.” Those who believe in Him are *secure*. They are safe in *His* hands. He will raise them up on the last day, and they will live forever. The life He gives is *eternal*. Those who twist the clear meaning of this text to say that believers in Christ are not secure in their faith discourage the saints by misrepresenting the truth of their security. Dear Christian, do not be misled! Hold fast to this glorious promise! Our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will see us through to the end. We who belong to Him shall never perish.

**Question #185:** According to John 10:26-30, what distinguishes “My sheep” (those who belong to Jesus Christ) from other sheep?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #186:** According to John 10:29 and 1 Peter 1:3-5, how does one become one of Jesus’ sheep?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #187:** What great assurance is given to Jesus’ sheep in Colossians 3:3-4 and 1 Peter 1:3-5?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #188:** According to John 6:39-40 and 10:27-29, on what basis is our salvation secure?\_\_\_\_\_

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## **The Saints will Persevere**

The New Testament writers consistently affirm this crucial doctrine. We have already heard from Peter and John; now let’s consider the writings of Paul and Jude (the brother of Jesus). In Romans 8, Paul solidly grounds the security of the believer in the nature and purpose of God.

**Romans 8:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>There is therefore now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has **set you free from the law of sin and of death.**

Here Paul addresses the nature of Christ’s atoning work in accomplishing the Christian’s justification. We are *not condemned* by God’s Law because Christ has paid its penalty for *all* of our sins—past, present, and future. We stand before God *totally free* of our debt of sin. Thus, the law of sin and death *no longer applies to us*. We now live under *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*. This is what it means to be a Christian! Our salvation is *secure* because *all* of God’s wrath against *all* of our sin has been fully absorbed by Jesus Christ, as the hymn writer declares, “in my place condemned He stood!”.

Consider now the profound truths about our security and final perseverance taught in Romans 8:28-30, which has been aptly called “The Golden Chain.”

**Romans 8:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, **to those who are called according to His purpose.** <sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

The saints, those whom God foreknew (chose to set His love on beforehand) are *called according to His purpose*. In fulfilling His purpose for those chosen sinners, He causes all things to work together for their good. Would failing to save those He has specifically chosen for that purpose work together for their good? Hardly!

The *destiny* of every Christian is to be conformed to the *image of Christ*. We shall be like Him and share in His glory! This is also affirmed in Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

**Philippians 3:20-21:** <sup>20</sup>For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>21</sup>**who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory**, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

According to Romans 8:29, those God has called, foreknown, and predestined shall be *glorified*. He has elected them from all eternity. Is there any possibility that they could be lost in the end? No! Jude, the brother of our Lord, affirms our security in Christ when He speaks of the keeping power of Christ in relation to our final salvation.

**Jude 24-25:** <sup>24</sup>Now **to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand** in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

The **Bible plainly declares** that *God keeps us from stumbling*. This means that God equips, empowers, and motivates us to persevere so that we do not finally fall away. This is affirmed in Jude’s statement that God (“Him”) *is able . . . to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless*. Here again we see the divine nature of our salvation: We are *blameless* (guiltless) in His presence because of His ability to make us guiltless. The guilt of all our sins has been washed away by the blood of Jesus so that we stand in God’s presence blameless! Dear saint, the Lord will *“keep you from stumbling and make you stand”* because of Christ!

**Romans 8:31-34:** <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup>**Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies;** <sup>34</sup>**who is the one who condemns?**

Rest assured, the saints *will* persevere to the end and be glorified in the presence of God because of *His* Almighty power, *His* immutable purpose to save His elect, and *His Son’s* all-sufficient sacrifice of atonement at Calvary.

**Question #189:** In your own words, distinguish between the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and the law of sin and death. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #190:** From Romans 8:28-30, describe how God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #191:** According to Philippians 3:20-21 and Jude 24-25, what is every Christian's destiny? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #192:** If you are a Christian, describe your personal expectations of this destiny. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #193:** In your own mind, answer each of the five questions Paul asks in Romans 8:31-34. Then write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for what He has done for you through Jesus Christ. \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Does the security of salvation depend on man or God?**

The Bible portrays us as sheep and Christ as the Good Shepherd who will lose none that the Father has given Him. Christ keeps us secure by giving us *eternal* life. Thus, our assurance is rooted in His sovereign love and mighty power, not in our human ability.

**John 6:39:** And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

**John 10:27-29:** <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and **no one shall snatch them out of My hand.** <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**

**1 Peter 1:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy **has caused us to be born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>**who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time.

**Jude 24-25:** <sup>24</sup>Now to **Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless** with great joy, <sup>25</sup>to the only wise God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

**Hebrews 10:14:** <sup>14</sup>**For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

**Ephesians 2:8-9:** <sup>8</sup>For **by grace you have been saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God;** <sup>9</sup>**not as a result of works,** that no one should boast.

Scripture presents salvation as a gift, not as something we earn. The works required to save us are attributed to Jesus Christ, not to us. We are saved because *He has caused* us to be born again (1 Peter 1:3), not on the basis of our deeds but the work of Christ (Titus 3:4-7). We are *protected*

*by His power* (1 Peter 1:5), saved by *grace* (Ephesians 2:8-9), **sustained** blameless until the end (Jude 24), and made perfect forever by His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:11-14).

The security of our salvation does not rest on human strength and ability, but on God's sustaining power. Perseverance in the faith is empowered by God's Holy Spirit *equipping, enabling, and motivating* believers to faithfully pursue God's kingdom and righteousness all the days of their lives. Thus, we are saved (from beginning to end) by God's sovereign electing love and sustaining power, not by any human ability to keep ourselves from falling. If salvation depended on any human ability, we would be hopelessly lost. Scripture affirms that *true believers persevere by God's power*.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24:** <sup>23</sup>Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>Faithful is He who calls you, and **He also will bring it to pass**.

Here Paul extols God's faithfulness to those He has called to salvation and instructed to persevere in the faith. He *sanctifies us entirely* and *preserves us completely*, so that we are *without blame at the coming of our Lord*. The security of our salvation rests firmly on God's *faithfulness* to us; we *will* persevere because of His Spirit's work in us.

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9:** <sup>4</sup>I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, <sup>6</sup>even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of **our Lord Jesus Christ**, <sup>8</sup>**who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless** in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>**God is faithful**, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Philippians 1:6:** For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**.

**Philippians 2:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Here the **Bible plainly declares** that our final perseverance is *a matter of God's persistent faithfulness* to those He has chosen. Dear saint, what additional evidence do you need to trust that your salvation is secure? Believe God's promise! If it is God's purpose to save us finally, who or what shall thwart this purpose of Almighty God?

**Question #194:** How secure must *eternal* life be? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question #195:** Based on Philippians 2:12-13 and Ephesians 5:15-21, 6:10-13, explain in your own words the relationship between perseverance in the faith and the security of salvation. \_\_\_\_\_

## Sealed by the Holy Spirit

We have seen that the New Testament clearly teaches that regeneration is an irreversible work of God ( pgs. 49-52 **update** ). Those who have been born again cannot be unborn. Someone will ask, what about those who believe for a while, but later commit apostasy and turn from the faith?

We will answer that question after laying some scriptural groundwork. *The Bible clearly affirms that: (1) those who have savingly believed the gospel are sealed with the Holy Spirit; and (2) this sealing guarantees that they will inherit the kingdom.* Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as the earnest or deposit that guarantees eternal redemption. Christians cannot lose their salvation because **God** sees to it that they remain in Christ. Salvation is not something they are able to lose; it is an *eternal* relationship with God that they enter into *because of* His mighty power and calling. If you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit has transformed your being by new birth. This new birth implants the life of God in you and seals you for the day of redemption.

**2 Corinthians 1:21-22:** <sup>21</sup>Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, <sup>22</sup>who also **sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.**

Here Paul described the *sealing* of the Spirit as a *pledge*. In other words, it is *an earnest, a down payment* on the full payment of redemption. The Greek word used here for *pledge* is “*arrabon*,” which means: *a pledge, part of the purchase-money or property given in advance as security for the rest: earnest.* Paul clearly affirmed that our redemption is guaranteed by God’s down payment. He makes similar statements in Ephesians.

**Ephesians 1:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, **you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup>who is given as a pledge of our inheritance,** with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

When Christians receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at salvation, they are guaranteed redemption because the Holy Spirit Himself is the guaranteeing downpayment on their inheritance. The sealing of the Spirit is *unto* redemption.

**Ephesians 4:30:** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, **by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

Here Paul affirms that we are sealed for the purpose of redemption. The Bible plainly declares that Christians are *sealed* by God for the divine purpose of being redeemed. The final perseverance and salvation of true believers in Christ is guaranteed by the very character and nature of God: He *will accomplish* all His purposes.

**John 5:24:** Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and **believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.**

**Isaiah 46:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, **For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure”;** <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

**Question #196:** Reread 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:14:14, Ephesians 4:30. Then discuss the sealing of the Holy Spirit being described in Scripture as a *pledge* of God to believers. \_\_\_\_\_

## Eternal Security Results From Election

The *primary* reason we are saved is because God chose us for salvation from the beginning (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Those who are in Christ are the *elect* or *chosen* of God. They *will* persevere in faith and repentance. *God will work in those He has chosen to enable them, by the*

***power of the Holy Spirit to persevere in faith to the end.*** Scripture clearly states that those God has predestined He will also glorify. Predestination guarantees receipt in heaven of an inheritance already obtained by faith for the purpose of sharing in the glory of God.

***Romans 8:29-30:*** <sup>29</sup>For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

***Romans 9:23-24:*** <sup>23</sup>And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup>even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

***Ephesians 1:11-12:*** In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Those God chose for salvation from before the foundation of the world, He effectually called by His Spirit and gave new birth (Regeneration). Sinners are converted when the divine gifts of grace and faith empower them to repent of sin and believe the Gospel. God's Holy Spirit comes to live in them, producing persevering sanctification that ultimately results in glorification, i.e., the redemption of their bodies which become immortal and incorruptible. Consider the wise words of **R. L. Dabney**: "The perseverance of believers follows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, which was the ground of their being chosen unto salvation. The Scriptures make it plain that the reason why God ever determined to save any man was not His seeing in him anything good, attractive or extenuating, but something without, known to His wisdom, which was to God a good and wise reason to bestow His eternal love on that particular sinner (Rom. 9:11, 16). This sovereign and unmerited love is the cause of the believer's effectual calling (Jer. 31:3; Rom. 8:30). Now, as the cause is unchangeable, the effect will be unchangeable. That effect is, the constant communication of grace to the believer in whom God has begun a good work. God was not induced to bestow His renewing grace in the first instance, by anything which He saw, meritorious or attractive, in the repenting sinner; and therefore the subsequent absence of everything in him would be no new motive to God for withdrawing His grace. When He first bestowed that grace, He knew that the sinner on whom He bestowed it was totally depraved, and wholly and only hateful in himself to the divine holiness; and therefore no new instance of ingratitude or unfaithfulness, of which the sinner may become guilty after his conversion, can be any provocation to God, to change His mind, and wholly withdraw His sustaining grace. God knew all this ingratitude before.... If He had not intended from the first to bear with it, and to forgive it in Christ, He would not have called the sinner by His grace at first. In a word, the causes for which God determined to bestow His electing love on the sinner are wholly in God, and not at all in the believer; and hence, nothing in the believer's heart or conduct can finally change that purpose of love."<sup>38</sup>

In Romans 8, Paul reasons from the election of God and the priesthood of Christ to conclude that we shall never be separated from His divine love.

***Romans 8:33-35, 37-39:*** <sup>33</sup>**Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, **who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.** <sup>35</sup>**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . <sup>37</sup>But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who

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<sup>38</sup> RL Dabney *Systematic Theology Banner of Truth* 2002 page 690

loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>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.**

Is it not abundantly clear from these verses that the believer is secure? Is it not also clear that our security rests wholly on God's almighty power working through the ministry of Christ's intercession? Scripture teaches that believers will *never* be separated from the love of God in Christ. The love bestowed by God upon His chosen people is an *eternal* love; it is everlasting.

**Jeremiah 31:3:** The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "**I have loved you with an everlasting love**; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness."

It might be helpful at this point to review the section on Election and Foreknowledge where we learned that the word *foreknowledge* when used in regard to predestination refers to God "loving beforehand" those He chooses for salvation. The nature of God's electing love makes it eternal and unchangeable.

**Question 197:** Reread Romans 8:29-30, 33-35, 37-39, Ephesians 1:11-12, and Jeremiah 31:3, marking specific words, phrases, and sentences that assure you (personally) that your salvation is secure. Then, using God's own words of assurance to you, write a prayer thanking Him for your salvation.

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## The Covenant of Redemption Guarantees the Security of the Believer

*The Covenant of Redemption* is an *agreement* between the members of the Godhead from eternity past to save sinners chosen by God through the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father *planned* redemption (2 Timothy 1:9) by *electing* from all eternity the ones (Ephesians 1:4) He will give to the Son as a gift (Titus 1:2). The Son *agreed* to take on human nature (Colossians 2:9) as a means of purchasing redemption at Calvary (Hebrews 10:7-9) by mediating between God and those He has chosen (Romans 8:34). The Holy Spirit *agreed* to: (1) apply redemption to the elect through effectual calling and regeneration; (2) equip them to persevere in sanctification; and (3) ultimately glorify them. This Covenant of Redemption is the *first cause* of salvation and holds within it the fulfillment of salvation for every believer foreknown and elected by God. The **Bible plainly declares** that saints persevere until the end *because* God purposed from the beginning to save *forever*.

**Hebrews 7:25:** Hence, also, **He is able to save forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them.**

**John 6:39-40:** <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** <sup>40</sup>For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and **I Myself will raise him up on the last day.**

The very nature of God's knowledge (omniscient or all-knowing) requires that He know *the end from the beginning*. He knows the whole of human history before any of it happens because what He planned to happen He made to happen by His providential will. In time and space, the Son of God and the Spirit of God accomplished the Father's plan of redemption, so that *the specific individuals* chosen by the Father to give to the Son are surely saved and secured.

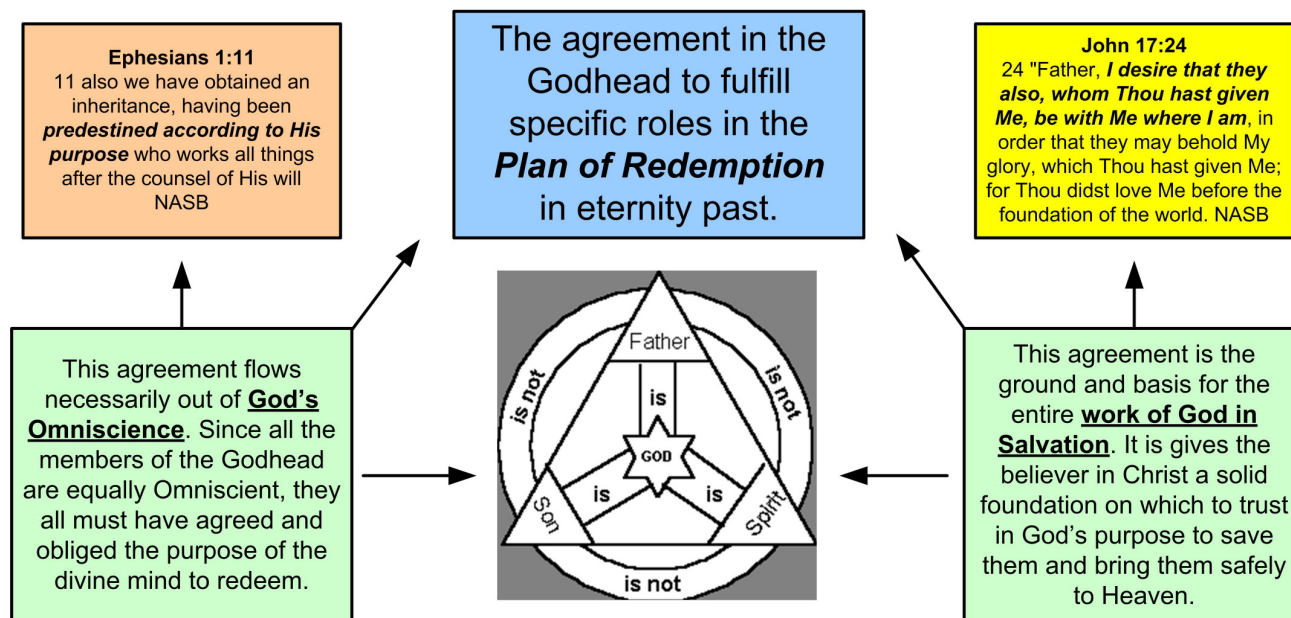
**John 6:37-39:** <sup>37</sup>**All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.** <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup>**And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.**



**John 10:27-30:** <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and **no one is able to snatch them out of My hand.** <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** <sup>30</sup>**I and the Father are one.**

**John 17:24:** Father, **I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory,** which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.

# The Covenant of Redemption



## 1 Peter 1:18-20

18 knowing that you were not *redeemed* with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with *precious blood*, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For **He was FOREKNOWN before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you NASB

**Question 198:** What three Persons entered into the Covenant of Redemption?\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 199:** What did each of these Persons promise to do?\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 200:** Can any of these persons fail to keep His promise?\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 201:** On what basis then, is our salvation secure?\_\_\_\_\_



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## What Eternal Security is Not

The Bible plainly declares that all who truly believe *will in fact* be saved and brought safely to Heaven *by God's power*. This in no way contradicts clear biblical teaching that the distinguishing marks of true believers are: (1) *obedience* which comes from faith, and (2) *perseverance* to the end. The Bible plainly declares that those who do not continue in faith and obedience to the end prove that they are not born again.

*Colossians 1:21-23*: <sup>21</sup>And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— <sup>23</sup>**if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard**, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

*1 John 2:3-6*: <sup>3</sup>And **by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments**. <sup>4</sup>The one who says, "I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; <sup>5</sup>**but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected**. By this we know that we are in Him: <sup>6</sup>the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

The Bible is filled with warnings of falling away and exhortations to *hold fast* the faith we profess. We should not think that, since our salvation is secure in Christ, we can indulge our sinful flesh and still inherit the kingdom of God. Did Christ's death give us a license to sin? Absolutely not! Rather, it transformed our hearts and gave us the power to live for His glory. Would any regenerate person delight in trampling the grace of God and despising the blood of Christ? God forbid! *Because we are kept by God's power, the gospel commands us to prove our repentance by our deeds, and warns that those who do not persevere in faith shall be lost*. We are called to glorify God by reflecting His power at work in us by *enduring in faith to the end*. Such endurance proves positively that we are saved, not by our power, but by God's. We will not persevere in sinless perfection, but will continually repent when we sin and humbly seek God's forgiveness through Christ. Faith that *holds fast* to Christ proves it is real. Only those who willingly obligate themselves to obey Him in the power of His Spirit will see Heaven.

*1 Corinthians 15:1-2*: <sup>1</sup>Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>**by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you**, unless you believed in vain.

*Hebrews 3:14-15*: <sup>14</sup>For we have become partakers of Christ, **if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end**; <sup>15</sup>while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

*Mark 13:13*: And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but **the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved**.

*Ezekiel 36:26-27*: <sup>26</sup>Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and and put a new spirit within you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances**.

*Eternal security* is not fire insurance. It does not guarantee that everyone who *professes* faith in Christ and is accepted into the earthly fellowship of the saints is eternally secure and will go to Heaven. Our Lord frequently warned His disciples of the serious consequences of departing from the faith and lapsing into a fruitless lifestyle. He taught them that the very nature of true

saving faith produces perseverance in His Word and obedience to His teaching. Jesus often *distinguished true disciples from mere professors*, usually with exhortations to persevere to the end in obedience and faith.

**John 8:31-32:** <sup>31</sup>Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “**If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;** <sup>32</sup>and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

**John 15:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>**Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;** and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.

Jesus effectively contrasted the life of true saving faith that bears the fruit of righteousness with the life of complacency that accompanies mere profession. His teaching is thoroughly seasoned both with exhortations to bear fruit and warnings against fruitlessness. It calls us to spiritually productive lifestyles motivated by true love and devotion to Him. It affirms that *fruitful faith* is a distinguishing mark of *saving faith*.

**John 15:5-8:** <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches; **he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit;** for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>**If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up;** and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this is My Father glorified, **that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.**

Jesus’ Parable of the Sower clearly illustrates that saving faith is the only “soil” that produces the “firm root” of perseverance required to bring forth fruit.

**Matthew 13:18-23:** <sup>18</sup>Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. <sup>20</sup>And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and **immediately receives it with joy;** <sup>21</sup>**yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.** <sup>22</sup>And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and **the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.** <sup>23</sup>And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; **who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.**

This fruit-bearing perseverance is the distinguishing mark of true saving faith. Scripture clearly teaches that falling away from the fellowship of professing, obedient, righteous believers to pursue a life of sin and unbelief is *apostasy*.

**Question #202:** What prevents the eternal security of the believer from becoming a “license to sin”? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #203:** How do we distinguish between true saving faith and empty profession of faith? \_\_\_\_\_

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## What is Apostasy?

Apostasy is generally defined as the determined, willful rejection of Christ and His teachings by a professing Christian. **John Murray** wisely explains: “*It is in fact possible to give all the outward signs of faith in Christ and obedience to Him, to witness for a time a good confession and show great zeal for Christ and His kingdom and then lose all interest and become indifferent, if not hostile, to the claims of Christ and of His kingdom.*”<sup>39</sup> Scripture clearly portrays Israel, at certain points in her history, as having forsaken and rejected God. Jesus used the illustration of rocky places to portray apostasy.

**Matthew 13:20-21:** <sup>20</sup>And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and **immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.**

**John Murray** comments on this passage: “*Some [people] appear to be converted, they boil over with enthusiasm for a little while, and then suddenly cool off. They disappear from the fellowship of the saints. Others do not show the same enthusiasm; their attachment to the faith of Christ has never been one of very pronounced character. But in the course of time it becomes precariously tenuous and finally the tie is completely broken—they walk no more in the path of the righteous.*”<sup>40</sup>

Let us not underestimate the deceptiveness of such temporary faith. None of the other disciples suspected Judas of false faith and stealing from the money box (John 12:6), although Jesus knew his true character (John 6:70-71). His lack of perseverance in the end revealed him to be apostate—a mere professor, not a true believer. The apostle Peter and the writer to the Hebrews warn professing believers not to return to their sin and defilements of the world.

**2 Peter 2:20-22:** <sup>20</sup>For **if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.** <sup>21</sup>For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup>It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”

**Hebrews 6:4-6:** <sup>4</sup>For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>and **then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,** since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

John Murray wisely warns professing believers: “The Scripture itself, therefore, leads us to the conclusion that it is possible to have a very uplifting, ennobling, reforming and exhilarating experience of the power and truth of the Gospel, to come into such close contact with the supernatural forces which are operative in God’s kingdom of grace that these forces produce effects in us which to human observation are hardly distinguishable from those produced by God’s regenerating and sanctifying grace and yet be not partakers of Christ and heirs of eternal life.”<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, those who **fall away** in a pattern of continual sin and break fellowship with the Church were never truly **born again**. Scripture warns us that many will confess Christ with their tongues

<sup>39</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* Eerdmans Publishing Company pg 152

<sup>40</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* Eerdmans Publishing Company pg 152

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

but deny Him in their lives. We may have known someone who appeared to believe and follow Christ, but then became disillusioned and turned away from Him, falling into a life of unrepentant self-will and sin. This may cause us to question our salvation. How can we *know* we are truly saved? By seeing *evidence* in our lives that God's Spirit has regenerated us and lives within us. Such evidence is revealed as bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Good trees bear good fruit, and bad trees bear bad fruit. If we have truly believed, God's sanctifying power will be at work in our lives, equipping us, by God's good grace, to persevere to the end and be saved. We will not shrink back and be destroyed.

**Hebrews 10:39:** But **we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.**

**Question #204:** Define apostacy. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Question #205:** Since only professing believers can commit this sin, how can you test yourself to be sure you are in the faith? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## 1 John and Saving Faith

Christians have been *born of God*. God has given them life, and that life is eternal by nature. We who have been *born again* are new creations kept by Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that we cannot turn away from genuine faith by rejecting Christ. Those who apostatize may have made an orthodox *profession* of faith but were never born again. The book of First John greatly illumines our understanding of true salvation.

**1 John 2:18-19:** <sup>18</sup>Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup>**They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.**

Those who are *born of God* do not continually sin as a distinguishing way of life.

**1 John 3:6-10:** <sup>6</sup>**No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.** <sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup>**the one who practices sin is of the devil;** for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup>**No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.** <sup>10</sup>By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: **anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God,** nor the one who does not love his brother.

Continuing in sin (sinning as a characteristic way of life) reveals the apostate's true identity. In the same way, continuing in righteousness and truth (as a characteristic way of life) reflects the reality of genuine saving faith.

**1 John 2:29:** If you know that He is righteous, you know **that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.**

When those who have professed faith in Christ break fellowship with Christians and begin to live in continual patterns of sin, they show themselves to be children of the devil.

**1 John 3:10:** By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

First John makes it crystal clear that the distinguishing mark of true faith is righteous fruit. Those whose lives reflect a continual pattern of sin reveal that they are mere professors who cannot bear fruit characteristic of those who are *born of God*.

**1 John 4:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Those who have been born of the divine will persevere by the power of God at work in them.

**1 John 5:18-19:** <sup>18</sup>We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. <sup>19</sup>We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

**Question #206:** What primary characteristic distinguishes genuine believers from mere professors? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **These truths require us to continue in faith and obedience.**

We must guard against the temptation to allow our understanding of the security of our salvation to lull us into complacency. The scripture warns us repeatedly to *pursue* our faith in Christ. It exhorts and admonishes us to keep our lives free from sin, to be holy, and to live after the pattern we were given by Christ. Those who are born of God *will* persevere till the end and *will* bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. This occurs through our diligent effort in willing obedience which generates assurance that we belong to Christ.

**2 Peter 1:10-11:** <sup>10</sup>Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup>for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

**2 Timothy 2:19:** Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

**Hebrews 6:11-12:** <sup>11</sup>And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

## **The Westminster Confession on Perseverance**

### **CHAPTER XVII.**

#### ***Of The Perseverance of the Saints.***

**I.** They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

**II.** 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.

**III.** Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalancy of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and prevalancy others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

**Question #207:** What is the primary danger in rightly understanding the doctrine of perseverance?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #208:** How can believers effectively guard against this danger?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 4: In Salvation

### Dealing with Hebrews 6:4-6

Some Scripture passages relevant to the doctrine of predestination in salvation may seem contradictory, but in fact, they cannot be. This is because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and God does not contradict Himself. We have seen Scripture clearly teach that God is sovereign in the salvation of His elect people. We have seen that their security is assured because of *His* faithfulness. Scripture clearly teaches that the benefits of salvation are wholly the work of God. His *election* of sinners for salvation is **unconditional**; He does not choose based on some condition within them or some kind of foreseen faith. Election is grounded in God's sovereign, gracious choice. The *perseverance* of those He chooses and saves is assured by His faithfulness to His own purposes. With these truths firmly in mind, let's examine a passage of Scripture that may seem to contradict to them.

#### Hebrews 6:4-6

This passage addresses **professing** believers who have strayed from the faith and the basic teachings of salvation. The writer deals with their lack of maturity by giving reproof (5:11-6:3) and warning (6:4-12) concerning the reality of their conversion. The *context* of Hebrews 6:4-12 reveals that the *primary* issue at hand is not the security of the believer, but rather admonition and warning to persevere and remain steadfast in the faith. Although secondary *implications* regarding the security of the believer may be drawn from the passage, they are not the main focus of the passage.

**Hebrews 6:4-6:** <sup>4</sup>For in the case of those who **have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,** <sup>5</sup>**and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,** <sup>6</sup>**and then have fallen away,** it is **impossible** to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

A. At first glance, Hebrews 6:4-6 may seem to describe truly converted people who **fall away** without the possibility of being restored. Since other Scripture passages teach that truly converted people are secure in their faith, this passage appears to contradict them. There is another way to interpret this passage, however. Hebrews 6:4-6 is best understood as referring to **those who are mere professors and not truly born again by the Spirit of God.**

1. The immediate context of the passage supports the understanding that these are not true believers, a fact manifested by their **falling away**.

**Hebrews 6:9:** **But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation,** though we are speaking in this way.

By using the word **but**, the writer is drawing an obvious *contrast*. The *contrast* is between two kinds of people: (1) those who are truly born again and are characterized by **things that accompany salvation**, and (2) mere professors who are revealed to be **not** truly born again by the fact that they fall away. Scripture consistently affirms that endurance is one of the things that accompany salvation. Thus, true believers, by biblical definition, do not fall away. Faith that endures **characterizes** the true believer. This is so evident that the author of Hebrews doesn't explain it.

2. Interestingly, the broader context of the *book of Hebrews* includes *warnings, addressed to those who will in fact persevere and be saved*. It also provides obvious proofs of apostasy to warn unbelievers, and makes clear contrasts between mere profession and saving faith. These warning urge them to persevere in the faith to avoid coming under the judgment of God.

**Hebrews 2:1-4:** <sup>1</sup>For this reason **we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.** <sup>2</sup>For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, <sup>3</sup>**how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?** After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, **it was confirmed to us by those who heard,** <sup>4</sup>**God also bearing witness with them,** both by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

**Hebrews 10:26-29:** <sup>26</sup>For **if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,** <sup>27</sup>**but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment,** and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup>**How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?**

**Hebrews 10:39:** But we are **not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.**

**Hebrews 12:15-17:** <sup>15</sup>**See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;** that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; <sup>16</sup>that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup>For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he **was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.**

This passage in Hebrews 6:4-6 is another in this list of warning passages to these mere professors, and also clearly provides a contrast to saving and persevering faith.

**Question #209:** Summarize what you see as the distinguishing characteristic between warning passages in Hebrews addressed to mere professors of faith and those addressed to genuine believers.

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**B. The terms** used in Hebrews 6:4-6 to describe mere professors **do not** describe the reality of new birth and true conversion. Rather, they *describe various experiences of life within the Church*. Those who live in close fellowship with genuine believers may experience a great deal of spiritual blessing without being regenerate. The terms used here (“once been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, partakers of the heavenly gift, tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”) certainly describe aspects of spiritual blessing within the life and fellowship of the Church. However, they are used **nowhere in the Bible to describe the reality of regeneration**. **John MacArthur’s** comments are helpful:

*“The phrase “once enlightened” is often taken to refer to Christians, and the accompanying warning taken to indicate the danger of losing their salvation if “they fall away” and “crucify again for themselves the Son of God.” But there is*

*no mention of their being saved and they are not described with any terms that apply only to believers (such as holy, born again, righteous, or saints). This problem arises from inaccurately identifying the spiritual condition of the ones being addressed. In this case, they were unbelievers who had been exposed to God's redemptive truth and perhaps had made a profession of faith, but they had not exercised genuine saving faith. In 10:26, the reference once again is to nominal Christians who apostatize, not to genuine believers who are often incorrectly thought to lose their salvation because of their sins."*<sup>42</sup>

C. Hebrews 4:6 affirms that "it is impossible to renew . . . again to repentance" those "who have fallen away." Notice that the writer is **not** saying that these folks are beyond God's power to save through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Rather, he is saying that all human efforts of renewing them to repentance have been exhausted with no saving effect.

1) Unbelievers who have lived within the fellowship of the Church, experienced the power and conviction of God's kingdom first hand, and even manifested outward signs of repentance and true conversion, and then "fall away" into persistent sin and obvious unbelief, reveal that they were never truly saved. They may have been attracted for a time by the apparent benefits of salvation, but their hard hearts were never regenerated by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

2) This passage **cannot** be saying that **true believers** who "fall away" will not be forgiven and restored by God. In the first place, true believers **cannot** "fall away" in the sense of rejecting Christ and denying their salvation (see relevant pages on security of the believer.) And, in the second place, true believers who "fall away" into persistent sin will be convicted by the Holy Spirit and brought to repentance. Almost all Christians, at some point, fall into persistent sin and deep doubt, but God is faithful to them. He will act to restore them by His gracious love through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is no degree of sin that is beyond God's forgiveness. In fact, all of the sins of every Christian who will ever be saved were forgiven and marked "paid in full" at the moment Christ died on the Cross. His atoning work was wholly sufficient and fully effective in covering every sin of every person who has ever or will ever be saved. We do not have to worry about to what degree we can "fall away" before we are beyond the reach of God's forgiveness. Such a scenario amounts to a denial of the free mercy of God!

3) Scripture clearly teaches that true believers prove the reality of their regeneration by their **final perseverance**.

**Romans 8:29-30:** <sup>29</sup>For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and **whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9:** <sup>4</sup>I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of **our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup>who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless** in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **<sup>9</sup>God is faithful**, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In contrast to this truth, those who **fall away** prove they were never saved. Lack of perseverance reflects lack of true saving faith.

<sup>42</sup> The MacArthur Bible Commentary John F. MacArthur Thomas Nelson Inc 2005 page 1834

**1 John 2:19:** They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

**Luke 8:13:** And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

**1 John 3:9:** No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

**Question #210:** What is the ultimate proof of genuine regeneration?\_\_\_\_\_

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# The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

## Our Response: Part 5 – Lesson 1

### The Sovereign King

God, who created the Universe out of nothing and is even now sustaining all things by the power of His word, reigns as sovereign King above all earthly and heavenly powers and authorities.

**Psalm 103:19:** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.**

God possesses *absolute dominion* over all things. He is said to sit on a *throne in heavens!* God did not simply create the Universe and leave it to run on its own. He exercises full control over all He has created. *God not only controls nature and history, He sustains the entire universe by his power, and orders all things to accomplish His purpose and plans.* Everything that happens in the world happens by God's design and under His control.

**Psalms 47:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.

<sup>8</sup>**God reigns over the nations,** God sits on His holy throne.

**Job 42:1-2:** Then Job answered the LORD, and said, **"I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."**

**Acts 17:24-25:** <sup>24</sup>The **God who made the world and all things in it,** since He is **Lord of heaven and earth,** does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup>neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;

He is *the Lord of heaven and earth* and has decreed whatsoever comes to pass (**The Decrees of God**). Even the evil in the world, which God hates, He decrees to achieve His eternal purposes.

**Psalms 135:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.** <sup>6</sup>**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

God not only permits the events of human history, but has ordained them from eternity past (**Foreordination**), and is furthermore *actively involved* in seeing that they all come to pass (**Providence**), fulfilling all of His plans and purposes.

**Proverbs 16:4:** **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose,** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

**Romans 9:21-22:** <sup>21</sup>Or **does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?** <sup>22</sup>What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

The very idea that God's divine purpose could be frustrated is *unthinkable*. If it could, it would not be *the divine purpose!* Failure of God's purpose negates His sovereignty. God cannot be God and be less than fully sovereign. Scripture is very clear about this!

**Ephesians 1:11-12:** In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

**Psalm 115:3:** But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases.**

**Psalm 135:5-6:** For I know that the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. **Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and all the deeps.

God's sovereignty and providence permeates the entire plan of redemption, bringing great blessing to His church, the faithful in Christ Jesus. God's chosen people are freed from slavery



and bondage to sin. Satan, the evil world ruler who has persistently tormented God's saints will be dashed under their feet. God's saints rejoice because He has chosen them out of the world to be brought into an eternal world without sin or sorrow! There in God's kingdom, they will be united to their husband and king, lie down in peace, and rest forever!

**Romans 6:17-18:** <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup>and **having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**

**Romans 16:20:** And **the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.** The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

**1 Peter 1:3-5:** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again **to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>**to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,** <sup>5</sup>who are protected by the power of God through faith **for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

God's sovereign control over the events of life is plainly evident in Scripture. In fact **this theme runs through the whole Bible!** Everywhere we look in Scripture, we see God providentially working in all things to accomplish His purposes for the display of His glory, name, and power! God is bringing His world to **the specific end** that He purposed from all eternity. At the appointed time, all rebellion against His sovereign authority will cease. His purposes for sin and evil will be fully accomplished. Everything will be at rest forever in the Kingdom of God.

**Isaiah 46:9-11:** <sup>9</sup>"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, **'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';** <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."**

**Isaiah 14:27:** For **the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it?** And **as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?**

**Question #211:** Drawing from the Scripture passages cited in this section, explain in your own words why the very idea that God's divine purpose could be frustrated is unthinkable. \_\_\_\_\_

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## A Worthy Response

How shall we respond to these things? If God is indeed who He claims to be, *the sovereign living Lord of heaven and earth*, then our response to His great plans and purposes must be worthy of Him. Included in such a response would be *godly fear, worship, and adoration:*

## Godly Fear

Since God is the creator and sustainer of all, it is appropriate to fear His great power and majesty!

**Revelation 15:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. <sup>4</sup>**Who will not**

**fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?** For Thou alone art holy; For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed.”

When the saints of old happened upon a vision of God. they were greatly humbled. Job, for example, upon seeing a vision of God, exclaimed in reverence and awe:

**Job 42:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; <sup>6</sup>**Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.**”

**Isaiah**, upon seeing a vision of the thrice Holy God, humbly acknowledged his sins and the sins of his people:

**Isaiah 6:5:** Then I said, **“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips;** For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

The prophet **Daniel** was overcome by a vision from God and described his experience:

**Daniel 8:27:** **Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days.** Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it.

Later, he saw a heavenly messenger and records the encounter:

**Daniel 10:7-12:** <sup>7</sup>Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; **nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves.** <sup>8</sup>So I was left alone and saw this great vision; **yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength.** <sup>9</sup>But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, **I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.** <sup>10</sup>**Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.** <sup>11</sup>And he said to me, “O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, **I stood up trembling.** <sup>12</sup>Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.”

Daniel was afraid in God’s presence, and rightly so. A mere glimpse of Him can kill a man (Exodus 33:20)! When the Apostle John had a vision of the glorified Christ he responded in terror.

**Revelation 1:17-18:** <sup>17</sup>**And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.** And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, **“Do not be afraid;** I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup>and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

All these who encountered God responded in fear. We can therefore conclude that anyone who sees himself in the light of God’s holiness will react the same way. This fear does not spur a desire to run away, however. It inspires deep respect and reverence, a worshipful trembling before the power, purity and holiness of God. This happens as we contemplate our sinfulness and the many ways we have sinned against His purity and power. Were it not for His great mercy toward sinners, we would be consumed by the fire of His wrath! Knowing this, in deep reverence we express our thankfulness for His great mercy and our respect for His purity, holiness, and power. Scripture comforts us with its assurance that God *delights* in these manifestations of genuine humility!

**Isaiah 66:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? <sup>2</sup>For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. **“But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”**

**Psalm 34:15-19:** <sup>15</sup>The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, And **His ears are open to their cry.** <sup>16</sup>The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. <sup>17</sup>**The righteous cry and the LORD hears,** And delivers them out of all their troubles. <sup>18</sup>**The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, And saves those who are crushed in spirit.** <sup>19</sup>Many are the afflictions of the righteous; But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

**Psalm 51:15-17:** <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Thy praise. <sup>16</sup>For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.**

**Question #212:** Drawing on the Scripture passages related to “godly fear” cited above, describe this fear in your own words. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #213:** Why is *godly fear* something we should not be afraid of, but actually seek after? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Worship and Adoration

Worship entails ascribing value to something. When we worship something, we treasure it, adore it, and value it; our feelings and attitudes toward it inspire our behavior toward it. Worship generates action. When we worship God, we view Him as supremely valuable and worthy of our adoration and service. In reality, however, to declare God *most valuable* to us is an understatement. That’s because He is the ultimate standard defining value. When we rightly value God, we do not compare Him to any higher standard. Rather, *we esteem Him to be most worthy* of our adoration, praise, and worship.

**Exodus 15:11:** Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? **Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?**

**Psalm 71:19:** For Thy righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, **Thou hast done great things; O God, who is like Thee?**

**Psalm 86:8:** **There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Thine.**

We rightly esteem God above everything else because *everything else derives value in relation to Him*. All the things God has created derive their value from fulfilling His divine purpose for them.

**Revelation 4:11:** **Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God,** to receive glory and honor and power; **for Thou didst create all things,** and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.

**Psalm 104:5-9:** <sup>5</sup>**He established the earth upon its foundations,** So that it will not totter forever and ever. <sup>6</sup>Thou didst cover it with the deep as with a garment; The waters were standing above the mountains. <sup>7</sup>**At Thy rebuke they fled;** At the sound of Thy thunder they hurried away. <sup>8</sup>The mountains rose; the valleys sank down **To the place which Thou didst establish for them.** <sup>9</sup>**Thou didst set a boundary that they may not pass over;** That they may not return to cover the earth.

**Job 37:9-13:** <sup>9</sup>Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. <sup>10</sup>From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen. <sup>11</sup>Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. <sup>12</sup>And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, **That it may do whatever He commands it** On the face of the inhabited earth. <sup>13</sup>**Whether for correction or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.**

Why is God worthy to receive glory and honor? Because He created and controls all things. Nothing exists outside the will of God. Everything exists by His design and sustaining providence. How can we do anything less than pay Him homage as the high and lofty One? Indeed, *anything less is wretchedly sinful*, and is, in fact, idolatry—a violation of the first commandment.

**Exodus 20:3: You shall have no other gods before Me.**

Such sin fails to glorify and esteem God properly. In fact, *the very nature of sin is pride (self-exaltation)*. It declares that our willful desires are more important than God's righteous intent for us. When we sin, we do not esteem Him as Lord and Master (who He truly is). Rather, we usurp God's authority by refusing to esteem Him for who He truly is, Lord and Master of all. This is, indeed, the very definition of sin: to transgress the law, character, and will of God.

**Romans 1:18-21:** <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven **against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For even **though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks**; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

It is clearly of great importance to value God for who He is by honoring Him and giving thanks for the gracious gift of life He has given us. This theme must be stressed, given the way it emphasized in the Scripture.

**1 Chronicles 29:11-13:** <sup>11</sup>Thine, O LORD, is **the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty**, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. <sup>12</sup>Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. <sup>13</sup>**Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.**

Rightly *valuing God* moves us to worship. That is, to *ascribe* value to Him and proclaim His worth. We proclaim the glory of His great power with the words of our mouths and the thoughts and meditations of our hearts. His majestic authority is the most regal and beautiful, stately and splendid, magnificent and amazing grandeur of all. Therefore, we delight in our praises of Him!

**Psalms 96:4-9:** For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. <sup>5</sup>For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. <sup>6</sup>**Splendor and majesty are before Him, Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.**

<sup>7</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup>**Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name**; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. <sup>9</sup>Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth.

We are to praise Him and **give Him thanks!** We are to treasure Him and adore for His goodness and power! This is what is appropriate for the creature, to give glory and honor and thanksgiving to the Great Creator!

**Psalms 106:1: Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;** For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

**Hebrews 13:15 -** <sup>15</sup>Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, **the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** - <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>**in everything give thanks**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Question #214:** Describe “worship and adoration.” \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #215:** Which of the above passages seem most helpful to you personally as you seek to worship and adore God most appropriately? \_\_\_\_\_

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# The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

## Our Response: Part 5 – Lesson 2

### The Sovereign King

God made the world by His own power out of nothing and is, even now, sustaining everything by His powerful Word. God is *the sovereign king* above all powers and authorities.

***Psalm 103:19:* The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.****

God possesses *absolute dominion* and authority over all things. He sits on a “*throne in the heavens!*” How ridiculous it would be to say that God created the universe, but does not control what takes place in it. *The truth is that God not only controls nature and history, but He sustains the entire universe by His power, and orders the events of His entire creation to accomplish His purpose and plan.* Everything that happens in the world happens at the express will of this God who rules the world and all who are in it.

***Psalms 47:7-8:*** <sup>7</sup>For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.

<sup>8</sup>***God reigns over the nations,*** God sits on His holy throne.

He is the “*Lord of Heaven and Earth*” (Acts 17:24). He *decreed* everything that happens in the world (see “The Decrees of God”). Even the evil in the world, which God hates, exists to achieve His eternal purposes that will, without a doubt, comes to pass.

***Psalms 135:5-6:*** <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.**

<sup>6</sup>***Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,*** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

God does not merely permit the events of human history to occur; He ordained them from eternity past (foreordination). He is also *actively involved* in bringing them to pass (providence), fulfilling all of His plans and purposes.

***Proverbs 16:4:*** **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose,** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

That God’s divine purpose could meet with frustration is *unthinkable*. Failure of God’s purpose would be failure of His sovereignty. If God’s sovereignty could fail He would *not* be God. Scripture is very clear about this.

***Ephesians 1:11-12:*** In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

The fact that God controls all events is *a main theme of the Bible*. Scripture consistently testifies that God is continually working out His purposes for the display of His glory, name and power. God is bringing His world to an *expected end*, which He purposed from all eternity. At the appointed time, all earthly powers and authorities will be brought under His sovereign authority, His purposes will be accomplished, and all will be at rest forever in the Kingdom of God!

***Isaiah 46:9-11:*** <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, “**My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure**”; <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**



**Question #216:** From Psalm 103:19, 47:7-8, 135:5-6; Proverbs 16:4; Ephesians 1:11-12; and Isaiah 46:9-11, record specific words and phrases that emphasize God's sovereign kingship over all things. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Question #217:** Prayerfully consider and record how this aspect of God's being and nature impacts your relationship with Him. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## A Devoted Love

Because God is infinitely valuable and worthy of worship, our only appropriate response to Him is intense commitment rooted in love and devotion. Thus, Jesus *summed up* God's commandments like this:

**Matthew 22:36-40:** <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup>And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” <sup>38</sup>This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup>The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

<sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

**Mark 12:28-31:** <sup>28</sup>And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; <sup>30</sup>and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and will all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup>The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Jesus identifies the “*foremost commandment*”—our ultimate responsibility as Christians—as *loving God with all our might*. Running a close second is loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. In other words, says Jesus, this is the meaning and application of the whole Bible for us, to love God! This, says the Lord, is the “*great and foremost commandment*.” In other words, this is what is **MOST** important in life, the main thing, the first thing, the great thing, the foremost thing, the thing which is front and above all others. Jesus says “*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets*.” The entire Old Testament, all 39 books, all 929 chapters, 23,214 verses, all 590,439 words says Jesus “*depend on these two commandments*.”

**Mark 12:32-33:** <sup>32</sup>And the scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher, You have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him; <sup>33</sup>and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, **is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**”

Our first priority—more important than all our religious endeavors, more important than anything else in all the world—is to *love God*. To love God, says Jesus, is why we exist. Jesus affirmed this great truth in Luke 14.

**Luke 14:25-27:** <sup>25</sup>Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>“**If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot**

**be My disciple.** <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

God will have no rivals for His esteem and devotion in His kingdom. Jesus *expects* to be more important than everything we hold dear, including our families and even our very lives. Those unwilling to make such a commitment *cannot* be His disciples. His commandment requires us to love the Lord our God “*with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*” This standard is set extremely high. It demands that we love God with all that we are and all that we have.

- ***with all your heart:*** This speaks of emotion; we are to be wholly devoted to God with strong affection.
- ***with all your soul:*** - This refers to life itself; we are to center our lives around His service, devoting ourselves to living for Him with willingness to die at his command.
- ***with all your mind:*** This means loving God with our intellect, bringing memory, thought, imagination, reason, judgment, and all our mental powers under submission to Him in adoration and love. This requires enjoying His Word and His gospel more than the vain thoughts of our own minds, the entertainment, comedy and communications of the world. It naturally results in devoting our time to meditation and worship of God.
- ***with all your strength:*** This suggests bringing all the faculties of soul and body to labor and toil for His glory, as the highest priority in our lives.

As we value God because He is supremely valuable, we must love Him with wholehearted devotion. Good Christian, does your life give evidence of your love for God? Or does it reveal other things competing with Him for your love and devotion? Only those who love God with their whole being will be truly satisfied in this life. Full contentment and fulfillment flow from fulfilling the purpose for which we were made.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13:** <sup>12</sup>And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but **to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,** <sup>13</sup>**and to keep the LORD’s commandments** and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

**Question #218:** Based on what Jesus identifies as “the foremost commandment,” what is our highest responsibility as Christians? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #219:** List one or more *specific* ways you can love God:

With all your heart: \_\_\_\_\_

With all your soul: \_\_\_\_\_

With all your mind: \_\_\_\_\_

With all your strength: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of these areas are the easiest for you to do? \_\_\_\_\_

Which are the hardest? \_\_\_\_\_  
List one or more ways you can use the areas that are easy for you to strength the areas that are hard for you. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## A Commitment to Obedience

Since God is the Sovereign, the supreme authority, the Lord of heaven and earth, who has given us high and holy commandments, we are obligated to respond to Him in unwavering obedience. If a powerful earthly authority gave us a righteous directive, we would obey. How much more should we honor God with obedience to Him. Shall we rail against our Maker? Shall we rebel against the King of Kings? God forbid!

**Deuteronomy 4:39:** Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**

God is the One to whom we will all give an account of our deeds. Even in times of testing when it seems all the world is against us, we must obey God, regardless of the cost. The first century Apostles set a righteous example for us.

**Acts 5:27-30:** <sup>27</sup>And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup>saying, “**We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name**, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” <sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles answered and said, **“We must obey God rather than men.”**

Those who love God will in fact obey Him. Our obedience reflects our belief that He is the Sovereign Lord who alone is worthy of our adoration and trust.

**John 14:15:** **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**

**1 John 5:3:** For **this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments;** and His commandments are not burdensome.

**Question #220:** Describe the basis of our obligation to obey God unwaveringly. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

## Faith and Trust

Since our Sovereign God is in full control of all things *and* has our best interests in mind, we are absolutely safe in His care.

**Romans 8:28:** And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, **to those who are called according to His purpose.**

Many Christians have a hard time believing that God will do this for them. They know they are not worthy of such goodness from God, and so they doubt that this promise applies to *them*. Such doubts fail to grasp the *graciousness* of God's promise! This is not a blessing Christians must earn; it is one we receive by grace and faith and trust His word. Has not God proven Himself worthy of our trust? To whom else shall we go? He is the Sovereign Lord! The Bible calls us to place our trust in Him.

**Psalms 43:5:** **Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God,** for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance, and my God.

**Proverbs 3:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>**Trust in the LORD with all your heart**, And do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>**In all your ways acknowledge Him**, And He will make your paths straight.

How then should we respond to the fact that God is Sovereign in all things and over all things? We should entrust our lives to Him wait upon Him. He will not leave us nor forsake us! He is our God who delights in our deliverance and peace

**Psalm 37:3-7:** <sup>3</sup>**Trust in the LORD, and do good**; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. <sup>4</sup>Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup>**Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.** <sup>6</sup>And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your judgment as the noonday. <sup>7</sup>**Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret** because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

**Psalm 33:18-22:** <sup>18</sup>Behold, **the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him**, On those who hope for His lovingkindness, <sup>19</sup>To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine. <sup>20</sup>Our soul waits for the LORD; **He is our help and our shield.** <sup>21</sup>For our heart rejoices in Him, Because we trust in His holy name. <sup>22</sup>Let Thy lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us, **According as we have hoped in Thee.**

**Question #221:** What part does faith and trust play in *willing* obedience?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**

## The Sovereignty of God In Salvation: Our Response: Part 5 – Lesson 3

### The Sovereign King

God made the world by His own power out of nothing and is even now sustaining everything by His powerful Word. God is *the Sovereign King* above all earthly and heavenly powers and authorities.

**Psalm 103:19:** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.**

God possesses *absolute authoritative dominion* over all things. That's why He is said to sit on a *"throne in the heavens."* Scripture affirms the logical connection between God's creation of the universe and His control over it. It tells us that *God not only controls nature and history, but also sustains the entire universe by His power. He orders the events of His entire creation to accomplish His purpose and plans.* Friends, we must understand that God rules the world in such an absolute way that *every event* occurs at His express purpose and will and by His power.

**Psalms 47:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.

<sup>8</sup>**God reigns over the nations,** God sits on His holy throne.

**Acts 17:22-28:** <sup>22</sup>And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. <sup>23</sup>For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>**The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup>neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup>and He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup>that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup>for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'**"

He is *"the Lord of Heaven and Earth"* (Acts 17:24) who permits, indeed decrees whatsoever comes to pass in the world (**THE DECREES OF GOD**). Although there is much evil in the world, which God hates, He allows and uses it to achieve His eternal purposes which will come to pass.

**Psalm 135:5-6:** <sup>5</sup>For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. <sup>6</sup>Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

God not only permits, but has ordained, the events of human history from eternity past (**Foreordination**). Furthermore, He is *actively involved* in bringing them to pass (**Providence**), fulfilling all of His plans and purposes.

**Proverbs 16:4:** **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose,** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

It is *unthinkable* that God's divine purpose could meet with frustration. Sovereignty is an essential characteristic of Deity. Failure of God's purpose would be failure of His sovereignty. Failure of His sovereignty would negate His deity. Scripture is very clear about this.

**Psalm 103:19:** The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; **and His sovereignty rules over all.**



*Psalm 47:7-8:* <sup>7</sup>**For God is the King of all the earth;** Sing praises with a skillful psalm.

<sup>8</sup>**God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.**

*Daniel 4:17:* This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers, And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order the the living may know That **the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes**, And sets it over the lowliest of men.

*Ephesians 1:11-12:* In Him <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, <sup>12</sup>to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

God's absolute control over all events and circumstances underlies everything in the Bible. The Bible reveals that God is providentially working out His will to accomplish His purposes for the display of His glory, name and power! God is bringing His world to an *expected end*—the end He ordained in eternity past. At His appointed time, all earthly powers and authorities will be brought into subjection to His sovereign authority, His purposes will be accomplished, and all will rest forever in the Kingdom of God!

*Isaiah 46:9-11:* <sup>9</sup>Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning** And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, **“My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure”**; <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

**Question #222:** Thoughtfully reread the Scripture passages listed above under “The Sovereign King.” Then describe in your own words God’s relationship to everything in creation.\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #223:** How does His relationship to everything in creation impact you personally?\_\_\_\_

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## Blessed Assurance

Just as God saved us according to His kind intention by drawing us to Himself and causing us to be born again, He will surely see us through to the end and bring us safely to heaven! Jesus has secured salvation for all who respond to the gospel by repenting of their sins and placing their faith in Christ! He has opened the door to God’s presence by meeting the demands of His holy justice. No wrath remains for those who are in Christ; all of God’s wrath against all the sin of everyone who will ever be saved has been poured out on Christ! His work on our behalf has secured our salvation.

*Isaiah 53:4-5:* <sup>4</sup>Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But **He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him**, And by His scourging we are healed.

**Romans 8:1-2:** <sup>1</sup>There is therefore **now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

We have assurance because Christ's work is perfect. For this, we praise God! Our mediator (priest) stands between us and God. He is the lamb sacrificed to cover our sins. Dear friends, since God sacrificed His own Son for us, He will bring us safely to Heaven. He has made us joint heirs with Christ of His eternal inheritance. All that is Christ's is now ours as well. ***This is because the work of Christ in securing our salvation is perfect.*** He is a perfect priest and the complete sacrifice, who paid the full price for our sins. Christ was sent by the Father to do His perfect will in saving the elect. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ perfectly accomplished the will of God in redemption.

**Ephesians 1:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace, <sup>8</sup>which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight

**Hebrews 10:14:** For **by one offering He has perfected for all time** those who are sanctified.

**Hebrews 10:19-25:** <sup>19</sup>Since therefore, brethren, **we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus**, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>**let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful**; <sup>24</sup>and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup>not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

**Colossians 1:21-22:** <sup>21</sup>And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>yet **He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach**

Simply believing these scriptural truths equips us to ***rest assured*** that Heaven is ours, ***wholly*** because of what Christ has done!

**Question #224:** From the Scripture passages above relating to "Blessed Assurance," write out specific words and phrases that reveal the basis of our assurance that our salvation is eternally secure and cannot be taken away from us or forfeited by our own actions. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #225:** Describe your personal response to this assurance. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Peace and Rest

Knowing that God is Sovereign affords us great peace!

**Romans 8:31:** What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?**

God controls nature and history. He is the Lord of time and eternity. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful King of Heaven. What could take Him by surprise or prevent Him from blessing His people? His eye is on the sparrow; how much more the sons and daughters He loves.

**Romans 8:38-39:** <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>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.

Since God has done all this for us in Christ Jesus our Lord, ***we can and should rest in Him,*** knowing that He delights to give us eternal life and work all things for our good. His promises give us rest and great peace!

**Psalms 119:165:** **Those who love Thy law have great peace,** And nothing causes them to stumble.

**Isaiah 26:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>**The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee.** <sup>4</sup>Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

Jesus often commands fearful saints, ***“Do not be afraid,”*** and then assures them of His presence with them. Indeed we who love God have nothing to fear, because everything will work for our *ultimate good.*

**Luke 12:32:** **Do not be afraid** , little flock, **for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.**

Remember that God in His providence is ruling over every detail of your life. He allows only what He has designed for your good and His glory. Therefore dear Christian, He invites you to rest in His Son Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 11:28-30:** <sup>28</sup>Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and **I will give you rest.** <sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and **you shall find rest for your souls.** <sup>30</sup>For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.

**Question #226:** On what basis do Christians experience peace and rest in this life?\_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #227:** Are you currently experiencing this peace and rest?\_\_\_\_\_

If not, what is hindering you from experiencing it?\_\_\_\_\_

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## Thanksgiving and Praise

Dear friends, consider how we ought to be thankful for God’s goodness to us. God has promised to ultimately work all things in our lives for our good. He went so far as to give His own Son for us! Will He not also give us everything we need?

**Romans 8:31-32:** <sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**

If God will give His people a Kingdom when they die, will He not give them daily bread while they live? If Jesus suffered and died to bring me to Himself, will He not also hear my cry for help? Of course He will! Even more than that, He has given us eternal life and promised that we will bask in His glory forever in Heaven. What more could we ask from the good hand of God! It is certainly fitting for God's saints to praise and thank Him who gives them life and breath!

**Psalm 50:23:** He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God.

Those who know the goodness of God respond in high praise to our King. Thanksgiving is the lifeblood of every true saint. Praise is the garment that fits handsomely on our backs.

**Psalm 145:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

<sup>10</sup>**All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee, O LORD, And Thy godly ones shall bless Thee.**

Scripture affirms that the mouths of the wicked are filled with grumbling, murmuring, and complaining. The wicked cannot praise God, neither are they thankful. The poison of asps is under their tongues, and their mouths profane the name of God. The saints of God stand in stark contrast!

**Romans 3:13-14:** <sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; <sup>14</sup>Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

**Psalm 33:1-5:** <sup>1</sup>Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. <sup>2</sup>Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. <sup>3</sup>Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

<sup>4</sup>For the word of the LORD is upright; And all His work is done in faithfulness. <sup>5</sup>He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.

Let us therefore give God the thanksgiving and praise which is due to Him. No matter what cup He gives us to drink, no matter what bitterness of soul should afflict us, no matter what great trial befalls us—may we stand in the company of joyous saints, giving God glorious praise, knowing that He gives only what is for our good! So shall we do His good will of giving Him thanks in every circumstance.

**Ephesians 5:18-21:** <sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; <sup>21</sup>and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:** <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Question #228:** Write a brief prayer of thanksgiving and praise for the truths you have learned in this study. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question #229:** With whom might you share what you learned so they can rejoice with you? \_\_\_\_\_

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