

A Summary on Election and Free Will

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

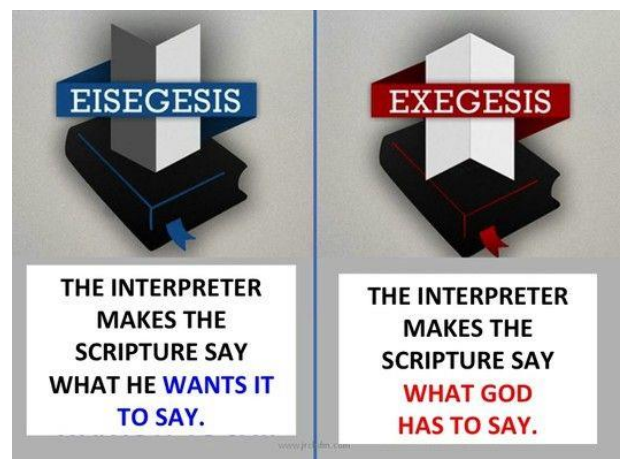


The theological argument continues today on the subject of election and free will or the responsibility of man in regards to his salvation. Does he really have freedom to choose where he will spend eternity? Some Christians put all their eggs in the basket of divine sovereignty and election (God's choice).

There are others who put all their eggs in the basket of human freedom (man's choice). The problem with this approach is that when the basket of eggs is dropped, all the eggs become broken.

In other words, emphasizing one teaching at the expense of the other causes God's plan of salvation to be upended and broken. This is because God's choice does not cancel out man's choice regarding his eternal destiny. In 2 Peter 3:9, God clearly reveals that He desires that all men repent (change their minds!). No matter which way you cut the theological pie, this is free will. God's choice and man's freedom to choose his eternal destiny (Heaven or Hell) are inseparably bound together in the elective and saving program of God. Even if we don't have all the answers, we must believe this to be true. God not only has a determined people and plan, but a way to implement this plan (freedom of choice).

The belief of Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther and present day Reformed theology follows the classic Reformation teaching. It insists that man does not have a free will in the plan of salvation. Some Christians attempt to counter the extreme and unbiblical views of Reformed Theology in the area of election (double predestination, God hating certain people, limited atonement, etc.), but in countering these



errors, they can become guilty of opposing Biblical Theology, even as Calvinism does. If we are not careful, we can do the same thing Reformed Theology does, which is reading into the Bible (eisegesis) instead of taking out of the Bible (exegesis).

One reviewer on the subject of election said this:

“Our race is an unbroken line of fallible beings whose thinking process is marred by personal and ancestral histories, undetected prejudices, and undiscovered blind spots which prevent us from the objectivity that we desire in regard to our intellectual pursuits.”

A bit wordy, but I think he is probably right! I like to say, “Brilliant men sometimes confuse things brilliantly!” If we are not careful, the way we think can come before the way God thinks and what He actually says (Isa. 55:8). Here is my point. While reacting to the extreme teachings found within Reformed Theology, various Christians have concluded that election occurs only when a person believes on Christ. Others claim that only Jesus Christ is elected (1 Pet. 2:6) and when people are saved and placed in Christ, it’s then they become one of God’s elect (Eph. 1:3). There is no prior election. Some teach that election occurs in accordance with God’s eternity. Since God views time, not as something in the past, but as something that is ever-present, election should be contemplated from the perspective of the present tense (occurring when a person believes) and not as something in the past.

Anthony Badger, in his 2013 book Entitled “Confronting Calvinism” (A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology), teaches that since God is timeless, God views election as a timeless event (only an ever-present occurring event), something that God can only work out today when someone believes. However, this view actually limits the way a timeless God can choose to work. God can work out His plan in the timeless past and bring it to pass in the timeless present and this is what the Bible clearly and unmistakably teaches (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29-30). Election does not occur after salvation.

Election does not have to be bound to the present as Badger and others claim. The past and present are included in eternity and therefore are acceptable ways to communicate God’s saving plan in relation to His eternal existence. God’s

timelessness (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13) does not demand that election occurs in the present any more than His eternal nature demands that we needed to be physically born in the past. Let's get serious. God speaks in terms that we understand and communicates to us on the level of our understanding. To argue for a present and not past election allows a person to read their own philosophical ideas into the Bible, create their own plan about the origin of salvation, and alter the obvious meaning of Bible texts. Eisegesis!

Others argue that in eternity past God chose us based upon His omniscience of knowing that we would choose Him. Of course, in this case, man's free will is sovereign and becomes the determining factor in God's election. This view makes God's choice dependent on man's choice and God becomes secondary in the role of salvation. God is not really choosing but only confirming. It is man who is the ultimate chooser.

All of the above theories are put forth to take away from God ultimately choosing the salvation of sinners. Many come to these conclusions for they believe that if election is solely based upon man's faith (how man responds to God today and in this life), then this removes the dreadful idea of God choosing some people over others for salvation in eternity past. Of course, we can embrace a "whosoever will" Gospel invitation (Rev. 22:17) without robbing God of His original choice to put His plan of election in place. We can also defend God's choice and Biblically affirm that whatever choice God has made, it would not violate the responsibility of man in the outworking of His plan (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:15-16).

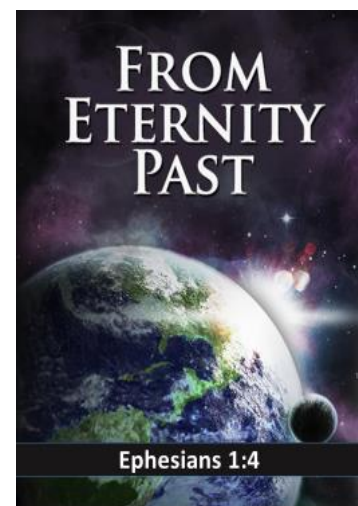
God's choice involved a specific people who individually and collectively would be known as "God's elect" (Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1), but at the same time He allowed for human responsibility to be included in the ultimate outcome of His saving program. Although a man's faith or human response to the offer of salvation is part of God's masterplan of salvation ("But as many as received him" - John 1:12), it was not the foundation, origin, or cause of God's saving purpose. It was His own grace and love for His chosen ones (2 Tim. 1:9). This was not a love that would overshadow His universal love for all mankind (John 3:16) but a special love (Rom. 8:33-39) for those who were included in God's original purpose in eternity past.

In summary, God's choice does not override man's choice, but neither was man's choice the foundation of God's elective purpose (Eph. 1:4). In whatever way God has chosen to implement His plan of election, it would not contradict His universal love for all people (John 3:16), limit Christ's death for all people (2 Cor. 5:19-20; Heb. 2:9), and it would give opportunity for all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Whatever mysteries might be involved with God's original choice and purpose in election, this purpose does not contradict other clear revelatory truth found in Scripture unless we want to give a "private" and unadvised interpretation of the Bible (2 Pet. 1:20).

We must accept both revelations as being true without questioning God's original purpose in election or the way He chooses to implement His election. Some question God's original choice in eternity past (Eph. 1:4), while others question the way God has decreed to implement His elective choice, through God's universal expression of love for all humanity (Rom. 5:8), Christ death for all mankind (1 John 2:2; 4:14), and His appeal to the human will to bring about salvation (John 16:8).

We must remember that Christ's death is *sufficient* for all to be saved but it only becomes *efficient* for those who believe and therefore confirm their election as being part of the sheepfold and Church (John 10:11, 15; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). In summary, Christ died to save all people *provisionally* (John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Pet. 2:1) and *potentially* (John 3:16), but He also died *practically* to secure the salvation of those who actually believe on Him - the elect (2 Tim. 2:10).

Let's start at the beginning. The Bible teaches that it is God's purpose, choice, and foreknown plan that was the foundation of our salvation (1 Pet. 1:2; Acts 2:23; Rom 8:20; 11:2). It's a plan that was foreordained prior to the formation of planet earth. Man's faith, choice, or works had nothing to do with God's choice which occurred in eternity past. We were not there to make any choices! The same was true regarding creation – we were not there (Job 38:4-7). God originally and independently chose the plan of salvation. He chose, ordained, and predestinated a collective group of people to be part of this plan (Eph. 1:4;

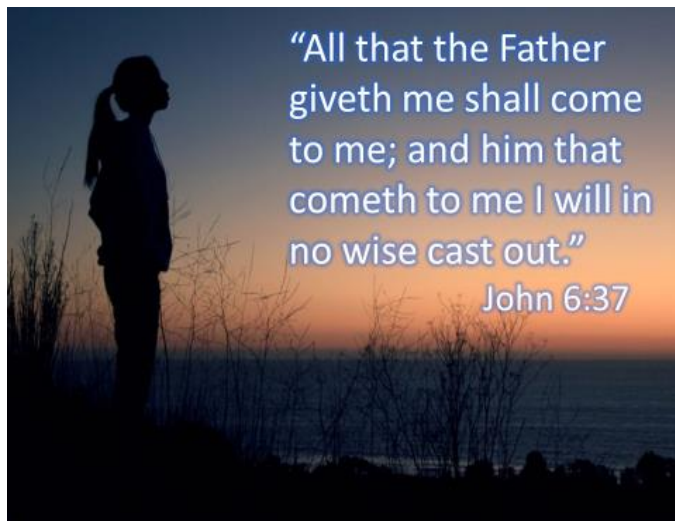


Rom. 8:29-30). He also placed the names of these same people in the Book of Life even before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Yes, it all happened before the world and universe was ever created. This is where our salvation began – in eternity past!

2 Timothy 1:9 declares:

“Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

Here are the simple facts. God chose us – we did not choose Him (*the origin of election* – John 15:16). He chose us in eternity past (Eph. 1:3-4; Rom. 8:29-30) so we could make a choice to come to Him in eternity present (*the outworking of election*). This occurs when we respond to His initiatives upon our hearts and believe the truth (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). To deny either one of these Bible axioms is to deny God’s clear revelation and plan of salvation. It’s not about Augustinianism versus Arminianism; it’s not about Pelagianism versus semi-Pelagianism - it’s about Biblicism.



Jesus taught the sovereignty of God and free will of man alongside of each other: “**All that the Father giveth me** (*GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY: the elect are seen as a gift to Christ – Acts 17:24*) **shall come to me** (*GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY: the drawing work of God upon the human heart*); **and him that cometh to me** (*FREE WILL - the individual response of personal faith in Christ*) **I will in no**

wise cast out” (John 6:37). The ability to believe on Jesus requires divine enablement (John 6:44; Acts 18:27) but it is not devoid of personal volition (John 3:16; Rom. 4:3).

With God’s work in the sinner’s heart, the lost sinner is enabled to place his faith in Christ, but this enablement by no means guarantees that the sinner will actually do

so (John 5:40). Some suggest that this contradicts the proclamation by Jesus that all those the Father gives to Him will come to Him (John 6:37). Of course, this is not the case, since Jesus was making a simple statement that all those who do come to Christ for salvation will have come as a result of the drawing power of God (John 12:32). Those who do come will also be God's elect or chosen ones. However, this statement does not negate the fact that people can reject God's drawing (John 3:19; 12:34-36; Acts 7:51; Heb. 10:29). God's drawing and man's defiance or his refusal to embrace Christ as Savior is all part of God's plan of salvation.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 also teaches the sovereignty of God and free will of man: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY in past election – Eph. 1:4) through sanctification of the Spirit (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY in the Holy Spirit's pre-conversion work) and belief of the truth**" (*FREE WILL – an individual's personal faith in Christ*).

1 Peter 1:2 points to this dual emphasis of God's sovereignty and human reasonability: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (*the PAST plan of election = the foreknown, prearranged plan of God to elect His people*), through sanctification of the Spirit (*the PRESENT means of election = the drawing of the Spirit of God, setting people apart from our sin and state of unbelief*), unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (*the PERSONAL application of election = through obedience, the obedience of faith, which means that by placing faith in Christ and having Christ's blood applied to my legal record and account in Heaven I am saved - Rom. 1:5; 16:26*): Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."

Here is the clear and unmistakable teaching of Scripture. God's choice does not invalidate man's choice regarding his eternal destiny.

Jesus said in John 5:40:

"And ye will not (not cannot) come to me, that ye might have life."

Acts 7:51 also declares:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

Such a verses as these, and many others (John 3:18, 36; 8:24, 45-46; 16:9), without reading preconceived ideas into them, speak volumes against the Reformed doctrine of irresistible grace. It is possible to be convicted by the Spirit and yet resist the Spirit. But there must be the convicting work of the Spirit of God or no one



would ever come to Christ or express faith in Him. Some call this “prevenient” or pre-regenerating grace. The word prevenient is Latin and speaks of the grace that comes before actual regeneration. The efficacy of God’s enabling grace must accompany a sinner’s response to God or else no individual would ever be saved (Rom. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:1-2; 4:18; Col. 1:21). This awakening grace enables the sinner to come to Christ in faith but does not guarantee that the lost sinner will actually do so. Calvinists mock prevenient grace, which provides the person with the ability to believe on his own volition. They despise this teaching for it replaces their concept of total depravity, which concludes that man cannot believe and that God implants faith in a person’s heart, without human involvement or decision.

We must stick with God’s definition of total depravity and not Calvinism’s terms and definitions. For the Calvinist, total depravity means total inability (man has no choice regarding his salvation). But God allows man the restored ability to choose or reject salvation (John 3:36), Nevertheless, to deny the necessity of God’s enlightening and convicting grace prior to a sinner’s conversion goes against biblical teaching (John 6:44). Pelagianism, also called the Pelagian heresy, is the theological position that the original sin did not taint our human nature and that the mortal will is still capable of choosing good or evil without special divine aid or assistance. This theological error is named after the British monk Pelagius. The Bible categorically denies this teaching (Rom. 3:10-12; 5:12; Phil. 2:13). Without God’s awakening grace coming upon our heart, we could not and would not never express faith in Christ. After we are saved, we can sing:

“Tis done-- the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

William Evans explains the work of God in the heart and the resisting of the Spirit's call to salvation (Acts 7:51; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13): "God wills to work faith (saving faith) in all of His creatures and will do so if they do not resist His Holy Spirit. We are responsible, therefore, not so much for the lack of faith, but for resisting the Spirit who will create faith in our hearts (saving faith) if we will permit Him to do so." Again, this is why we often sing:

"When I saw the cleansing fountain
Open wide for all my sin,
I obeyed the Spirit's wooing,
When He said, Wilt thou be clean?"

Only a theologian with an ax to grind would refuse to believe that man has no response to the Spirit's call. The Scriptures emphatically state that man can believe or express faith in Jesus Christ for salvation through the appropriate means of the Spirit and the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) being impressed upon his inner heart. The Scriptures speak of saving faith as "thy faith" (Luke 7:50), "his faith" (Rom. 4:5), and "their faith" (Matt. 9:2) which indicates that man's volitional response is part of God's salvation plan.

God initiates the wayward soul to place "his faith" (Rom. 4:5) in Christ and all of this comes about because of the work of God's grace taking place in the heart (Acts 18:27; Rom. 11:5-6). Yes, God enables us to have faith (John 6:44) but at the same time makes us responsible for it (John 6:37 – "him that cometh unto me"). The individual has the final say regarding His eternal destiny (John 3:18). No obscure teaching on election will overturn this blessed noonday truth.

Robert Gromacki

"He has graciously worked in and through the human will to gain the assent of that will without violating human responsibility."

Satan and the sin nature keeps a person's will and life bound to sin and unbelief (Eph. 2:1-2); however, God's Spirit working upon the human heart can impact a man's decisions in relation to *spiritual* things and his eternal destiny (John 16:8). The preparatory work of the Spirit upon the heart of man allows him to exercise his

volitional nature and remain autonomous (independent or free) in the matter of choosing his eternal destiny. Since James 3:9 confirms that man still possesses part of God's image which would involve volition, the facility or ability of choice. Think about this. Man has a free will that can respond favorably to God's intuitive revelation concerning His existence (Rom. 1:19, 21) and a general set of morals (Rom. 2:12-15; 1 Cor. 5:1; Acts 24:25). If this is true, then man can respond to God's spiritual revelation concerning the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), but only as the Spirit's ministry and assistance influences his heart and will (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2).



“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). God can reason with man, move in his heart, and man can respond favorably to God's proposals even in a fallen state. Yes, spiritually dead people can hear and believe. Jesus taught in John 5:24-25, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my

word (*pre-conversion*), and believeth on him that sent me (*pre-conversion*), hath everlasting life (*post-hearing and believing*), and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life (*after hearing and believing*). Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is (*during Jesus' day*), when the dead (*spiritually dead*) shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (*hearing and responding to the truth results in spiritual life*). In other words, people pass from one realm (spiritual death) to another (spiritual life) the moment they believe (1 John 3:14)

Yes, spiritually dead people can through God's inner work of grace occurring in their hearts, hear and respond in belief. God does not have to regenerate a person before they can hear and believe as Calvinism asserts. Regeneration and salvation follows belief (John 1:12-13; Acts 16:31). Calvinists will ask: “How do you preach to a dead man?” They will conclude that you can shout and scream at the grave all day long, but there won't be any response. The dead must be raised and given life in order to respond. God must make us alive (give us the new birth) before we

can have faith in him. They also conclude: “Just as a baby naturally cries out after it has been born, so believers cry out to God in faith after they have been born again.”

In other words, the Calvinist believes that their calling upon God to save them, their turning to God in repentance, and their faith in Christ comes only as a result of being regenerated. According to Calvinism, regeneration precedes faith because the human will must be changed before it can respond favorably to God. This kind of teaching once again falls under the category of philosophy and not Bibliology since regeneration and salvation always follow faith (1 John 5:1; Eph. 2:8-9). While our salvation does not follow a temporal order, it does follow a logical order which is clearly defined in Scripture.

Interesting enough, since many Calvinists believe that regeneration precedes faith, how can they really believe in salvation by faith alone. They really cannot have it both ways. This is because, according to Calvinism, faith is not the instrumental cause of salvation - regeneration is the cause of faith. Therefore, faith is actually the result of salvation. If this is really true, Calvinists must deny a central tenet and

truth of the Bible which is that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 3:26). Instead, they conclude that salvation comes by regeneration alone without faith alone in Christ alone! This is because faith comes after regeneration or salvation. Faith is not really related to our salvation since it follows salvation.

But the Calvinist will come back with this: “We believe in justification by faith alone.” In other words, to scoot around their philosophical dilemma that faith follows regeneration, they must admit that justification follows faith (Gal. 3:24) and this is what is most important to them (our legal declaration of righteousness before God). The order of salvation for Calvinism is regeneration, faith, justification. Of course, the Biblical order is that faith always precedes regeneration (John 1:12-13), along with the truth that faith precedes justification (Gal. 2:16). The Calvinist would have us believe that faith cannot come before regeneration, since man is



spiritually dead and cannot express faith, but faith can come before justification, since by this time man has already been regenerated and given elective faith by God. I know, this sounds like a class in philosophy and not Bible doctrine!

Let's be honest with the Bible. Jesus taught that dead men can believe in spite of what Calvinism teaches (John 5:24-25). The corpse illustration repeatedly fails the Biblical test. This is because unsaved people, who are in the realm of spiritual death, are still living and rational beings that can interact with God's pleas and proposals (Isa. 1:18) based upon His gracious touch upon their hearts and lives. Therefore, the Bible categorically and repeatedly teaches that faith precedes God's regenerating and eternal life (John 3:15-19; 3:36; 5:25; 6:47; 11:25; 1 John 5:11-13). God did not make us alive to believe but worked His grace in our hearts so we could believe and be made alive. Ephesians 1:13 declares: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth (not after you were regenerated!), the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed (not after regeneration), ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." In other words, all of our spiritual blessings come after we believe including regeneration, justification, redemption, and positional sanctification before God. Let the Biblical record stand: we are "of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Belief always comes before salvation.

All of our spiritual blessings, including regeneration, are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3) and we are positioned in Christ through faith (not regeneration) as a result of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27). This means that we cannot be regenerated until we are first positioned in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and we are not placed in Christ until we have "first trusted Christ" (Eph. 1:12). There is no Biblical or theological evidence that teaches regeneration precedes faith. And yet, much of the Calvinism of today promotes this debunked theory because they also deny that man possesses any human choice in the matter of his salvation. Because of the total depravity of man's will, he must first be regenerated, so God can give him a renewed will which can then express a God-given faith in Christ (after regeneration).

Okay, enough of this. Here is the point. God allows a person to remain autonomous (independent and free), even if he needs assistance in relationship to his choice regarding the salvation of his soul. This is God's plan and purpose for humanity

even after the Fall. The human depravity of man would keep a person bound to their depraved will and from responding favorably to Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:10-19). This is why each person must respond to God's initiative, God's special divine help, by accepting or rejecting His offer of salvation. It's God who takes the step (John 1:13; 3:8; 6:44; 12:32; 16:8; Acts 16:14) that brings a person to the place so they can respond favorably to the working of God's grace in his heart (John 1:12; 3:15-16; 6:37; Rev. 22:17) and the message of God's grace on the cross (Rom. 10:17; Rom. 1:16). By a person's own will or volition, he can possess an attitude of acceptance or rejection of the Gospel message (John 3:18,36; 5:40).

God has not made the human race as robots, who must respond to His initiatives, without personal expression and individual choice. God has given us the freedom to determine our eternal destiny. He allows us to make a valid and real choice. We can either reject His initiatives upon our soul or respond favorably to them.



Or course, God is the initiator and source of the new birth - not man. God is the One who pushes the button to initiate the salvation of an individual. The Bible clearly states that our salvation is "not by the will of man" (John 1:13). This does not override man's individual or volitional response to God's work in the heart but puts our salvation in proper perspective. Our

salvation is Godward in focus. The fact that salvation is "of God" (John 1:13) means that God is the sovereign planner, provider, and pursuer of a person's salvation. Without God's divine intervention into our lives we would continue to be "without Christ ... having no hope, and without God in the world."

"O the glory of His presence,
O the beauty of His face;
I am His and His forever,
He has won me by His grace."

The wind blows wherever it purposes and the same is true regarding the timing and working of the Spirit in the hearts of people as it pertains to the new birth (“so is everyone that is born of the Spirit - John 3:8). It’s the wind of the Spirit or God who initiates salvation in our hearts. Man has nothing to do with bringing himself to the place of the new birth. God is the source of a person’s



salvation in the sense that He is the One who convicts and opens the heart. However, man is the responder and embracer of God’s inner work of grace (“But as many as received him” – John 1:12). God does the supernatural work in the heart (John 1:13) and man responds to God’s work either in unbelief (John 1:11) or belief (John 1:12).



Again, the will of man is bound only to unbelief and sin. Therefore, God must move upon a person’s heart and will, soften it, and bring it to the place of response. God brings a person to the threshold of salvation and allows them to make a valid choice regarding their eternal destiny (John 12:35-36). God bestows sufficient grace upon men, so they can believe,

if they will. The sovereign grace of God’s inner enlightenment and work upon a person’s heart and will (Heb. 6:4), allows an individual to see his sinfulness and separation from God (Luke 18:13), and then allows him to respond favorably to the Gospel, without God overriding his human will or choice (Eph. 1:13). Calvinists claim that if a person teaches an individual can make a personal decision to trust Christ, if a person does possess free will, then this teaching should be regarded as partial depravity. But this is nothing more than philosophical reasoning that is “after the tradition of men” (Col. 2:8) for it outright denies what the Bible teaches.

Total depravity means that every aspect of humanity is corrupted by sin, including the human will. Therefore, human beings are unable to come to God on their own accord (Rom. 3:10-12). Yes, every aspect of humanity is tainted by sin, but not to the extent that human beings are unable to place faith in Christ of their own accord

(free will), as the Spirit brings inner conviction and convincing regarding the need of salvation. People are given a God-given ability to choose salvation.

God seeks to work faith and repentance in our hearts through His inner conviction and spiritual illumination (John 16:8; Acts 2:37; 2 Cor. 7:10; Heb. 6:4) but does not overtake our own will in relation to expressing faith in Christ (John 5:40 – “ye will not come”) and repentance toward God (“Except ye repent” - Luke 13:3, 5; 2 Pet. 3:9). God helps us to have faith but does not override our own will and choice regarding our destiny (Matt. 23:37 – “ye would not”).



It's the grace of God's inner work upon the human heart that allows a person to express faith in Jesus Christ. The grace of God's illumination (2 Cor. 4:6), conviction (John 16:8; Acts 2:37), His salvation promptings upon the human heart and mind of poor, lost, depraved sinners, reveals to the sinner the “Light of the world” (Jesus), the light of salvation (2 Cor. 4:6 – “shine unto them”) or “the light of life” (John 8:12). God's inner work of grace gives an individual a legitimate opportunity to respond to God's salvation offer (John 3:36; 12:46) or reject the Gospel light due to an unrepentant heart (John 3:19-20) and personal commitment to unbelief (John 12:37, 48).

Since the will of man is bound to unbelief and sin, man needs preparatory grace upon his heart in order to be saved. God seeks to assist a man and prepare a man to express faith, and He does this by generating and inspiring the seed of faith in a man's heart, through the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), the Gospel of God (Acts 15:7), the drawing of God (John 6:44; 12:32), the Spirit of God (John 16:8; 2 Thess. 2:13) and the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4). It's God who actively prompts, pursues, and persuades a person to come to salvation through the instrumentality of these divinely provided means. As a result of this pre-salvation work upon the heart, an individual can be opened to his sinfulness and need for salvation. Because of the gracious work of God upon the inner heart, a man can decide to use his own volition to express faith in Christ, confirming that God is the initiator, author, and source of

his faith, so much so, that a person's "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5).



The Meriam Webster Dictionary defines freewill as a "voluntary choice or decision." This is the basic understanding of freewill. God never unconditionally decides a man's salvation against his will (John 5:40). God seeks to soften our heart and make us willing to respond to His grace but this does not guarantee that our stubborn will not get in the way (Acts 7:51). Man still has the responsibility to express his own faith (Luke 7:50; Rom. 4:5) in Jesus Christ, as God works on the heart, to initiate and inspire faith (John 3:16; 36; 5:24). Human will and volition enter the salvation picture (John 7:37-38). As previously mentioned, God enables us to have faith (John 6:44) but at the same time makes us responsible for it (John 6:47). Man, with God's assistance, can decide to use his own volition, to express faith in Christ (John 7:38; 11:25; Acts 10:43; Rom. 10:10).

God offers Himself to an individual's faith (a person's own volition) multitudes of times throughout the pages of Scripture, as He calls upon people and prompts them to come to salvation, as He seeks sinners (Luke 19:10) and opens their hearts, so they might respond favorably to His overtures or proposals (Matt. 11:28). One thing is certain, there is no hint anywhere in the Bible that mankind cannot respond to God's initiative – "he that cometh" (John 6:35); "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37); "And the Spirit and the bride say come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" – Rev. 22:17; "He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" – 2 Tim. 2:12).

Man can respond to the working of grace upon his soul. He is responsible for exercising faith in God's plan of salvation, if he is to be saved (Romans 10:17). Faith honors God and God honors faith for it pleases God "to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Yes, we are free to believe. In one sense, we are chosen but also free to believe as God communicates His gracious, drawing touch upon our hearts (John 6:44). Although the word "draw" has the physical meaning of dragging in a net that

is full of fish, it's metaphorical meaning speaks of inward power, leading, and compelling of God upon our hearts.

The indication is that it takes God's power to break through our sinful depravity and spiritual blindness so that we can see our sinfulness, separation from God, and need for the Savior. God's drawing power does not mean that He overtakes our will, that He imposes His will over our own free choice, so that we cannot make a decision regarding our eternal destiny. What it means is that it takes God's power to break through our hard hearts and blinded minds (Eph. 2:1). It takes God's spiritual power to soften our hearts and bring us to the place of repentance and faith.

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

Jesus taught in Matthew 13:15:

“For this people's heart is waxed gross (thick and callouses), and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”



It takes God's penetrating power to awaken us from our sinful estate and show us our need for grace and salvation. It takes a "grace awakening" in our soul for us to see ourselves as lost sinners that are in desperate need of salvation through Christ alone. There is a sense of power and strength that is related to God drawing a sinner to Christ and breaking through his spiritual depravity, darkness and blindness (John 6:44; 12:32). At the same time, God's

drawing upon is a gentle persuasion and becomes a beautiful expression and experience of His grace and mercy extended to us.

Martin Luther once said:

“The drawing is not like that of the executioner, who draws the thief up the ladder to the gallows; but it is the gracious allurements, such as that of a man whom everybody loves, and to whom everybody willingly goes.”

Although I disagree with Luther’s theology in many areas, this is a good description of a loving God seeking out poor lost sinners. God’s gentle and yet convicting persuasion upon our hearts is what results in sinners wanting to express faith in Christ.

Salvage yards use giant electromagnets to lift and partially sort scrap metal. When the magnet is turned on, a tremendous magnetic force draws all the metals that are near it, but has no effect on other metals such as aluminum and brass. Like a magnet, God must penetrate the hearts of lost people if they are going to be saved. It takes God’s penetration within the soul to enable a person to see and sense their lost estate (John 6:44). Without the magnetic pull of God upon the human heart, no person could be saved (Rom. 3:11). At the same time, God allows a person’s own will to merge with His magnetic pull or drawing power upon the soul (John 6:47). If a person’s human will does not respond to God’s initiative, that individual, like the aluminum and brass, will not be attracted and become attached to God’s magnetic pull upon the human heart.



King Agrippa refused the pull of God upon his heart when he said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

“Almost persuaded” now to believe;
“Almost persuaded” Christ to receive.
Seems now some soul to say,

“Go, Spirit, go thy way.
Some more convenient day
On Thee I’ll call!”

Almost persuaded,” harvest is past;
“Almost persuaded” doom comes at last!
“Almost” cannot avail;
“Almost” is but to fail!
Sad, sad that bitter wail,
“Almost,” but lost!



The concept of God electing those who will be saved isn’t controversial. What is controversial is how and in what manner God chooses those who will be saved. So, who are the elect that God has chosen to save? Well, here is a simple answer. They can only be the “whosoever wills” that express faith in Christ (Rev. 22:17). They are ultimately

the vast community of people that God has chosen to save prior to the establishment of the earth (Eph. 1:4). They are called the “elect” because that word denotes the concept of God choosing them.

Simply put, the “elect of God” are those whom God has chosen and predestined to the glories of salvation prior to the establishment of planet earth (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:29-30). They are the people that have been saved by grace because of God’s inner work in their hearts and their personal response of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). They are the ones who have “turned to God from idols” (1 Thess. 1:9). The title “elect” (Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1; 2 John 11, 3) envisions that great, all-encompassing body of believers (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4), which were ordained to eternal life in eternity past (Acts 13:48), and who enter into God’s elective plan in eternity present when expressing faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31).

Harry Ironside had a good answer to this question:

“But what if I am not one of the elect?’ You can readily settle that yourself. Without attempting to delve into the mysteries of the divine decrees and the divine foreknowledge, it is enough to say that all who come to GOD through His Son are elect. Our Lord makes this very plain in John 6:37. He says, ‘All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’

“Now do not linger too long on the first half of the verse. Be clear about the latter half, for it is there that your responsibility is found. Have you come to JESUS? If so, you have His pledged word that He will not cast you out. The fact that you come proves that the Father gave you to CHRIST. Thus you may be certain that you belong to the glorious company of the elect.”

In summary, God brings a person to the threshold of salvation by flooding him with light (John 12:35) or the revelation regarding his sin, separation from God, and need for the Savior. He allows a person to make a valid choice regarding his eternal destiny. Jesus said, “While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be children of light” (John 12:36). God enlightens and stirs the human will but does not override the human heart and will for Jesus declared that “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). One thing is certain, it takes the light of illuminating grace to awaken a person to their need for salvation.



2 Corinthians 4:4

“In whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

God’s illumination must come upon our hearts if we are going to be rescued from satanic blindness and spiritual death (Eph. 2:1-2). Nevertheless, to conclude that the human will is only subject to the sin nature, and has no freedom to exercise itself otherwise, even with God’s aid and help, goes beyond the teaching of

Scripture. A person's faith is an act of their will made possible by the work of God on the human heart (Acts 16:14). God allows faith to be possible while man makes it actual through His volitional response to God's proposals. An enlightened will and understanding of the truth (Heb. 6:4) allows a person to receive or reject God's open offer of salvation (Acts 26:29).

Adam, being a free agent, chose to sin and therefore plunged his posterity into spiritual darkness and blindness (Rom. 5:12). Nobody denies this (Rom. 3:10-20). However, this does not mean that man's will is bound to sin forever, since through inner conviction, God enables man's will to respond favorably to His salvation offer. This is because man still retains the freedom to choose contrary to God's initiating grace upon the heart, or he can choose to comply with God's proposals for the salvation of his soul (John 3:18; 6:64; 12:37; Acts 17:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:12).



What must I do to be saved (Acts 16:31)? What shall we do (Acts 2:37-38)? The answer is very clear: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31) and "believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). The writers of Scripture did not say "Be passive, there is nothing you can do" or "Wait and see if God

will show mercy to us and give us the faith to believe." One man heavily influenced by Calvinism said to me, "I hope God decides to save me." The truth is this, God has already decided that He wants to save us (2 Pet. 3:9), if we will respond to His call and initiative upon our hearts, through expressing our personal faith in Christ.

There is something a person must do to be saved. A person must believe or express person faith in Christ (Rom. 4:5) in order to be saved (John 6:29). In fact, the only thing a person can do without doing anything is express faith, since faith is not a work, but is contrasted with works (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16). Strict Calvinism teaches that if a person can express his own volition or faith in Christ that this becomes

another form of works. Of course, this is philosophical reasoning since faith is never identified as a form of works but is opposed to it in every way (Rom. 3:28). Faith is total reliance and dependence upon Jesus Christ for the salvation of one's soul.

Our faith, which is made possible by God's interaction with our heart, still involves a personal response of the human to God's offer of salvation, which allows us to be brought into the family of God (John 1:12). No, we don't have any spark of life within us but the Spirit moving in our hearts brings us to the place of personal and volitional decision so that we can decide to receive or reject Christ.

It's true that salvational faith can be viewed as a gift from God ("obtained like precious faith" - 2 Pet. 1:1), since it is God who convicts sinners and seeks to create faith in the hearts of people, as they respond to His promptings. Calvinism teaches that God only gives faith to God's elect and no other person is given the faith to believe on Christ and be saved. However, God does not create faith in a person's heart, through inner conviction, with an arbitrary or selective purpose in mind. If God loves the entire world and says anyone ("whosoever") can believe on His Son and be saved, then surely God supplies the inward potential for all people to have faith in Jesus Christ, as He convicts and compels them to salvation. God does not mock mankind!



Of course, it's not God's faith that saves people, but "the faith of God's elect" (their own faith – Titus 1:1), which they place in Jesus Christ for salvation (Luke 7:50; Rom. 4:5; 1 Cor. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:9), as a result of God's promptings upon their hearts. God does not give selective faith to certain people, but all those who do express faith in Christ are one of God's elect, who were chosen to be part of His saving plan (Eph. 1:4). Their expression of their faith in Christ confirms their election. Lastly, this is a faith that has Jesus Christ alone as its object (Gal. 2:16; 3:22, 26).

Dr. Harry Ironside once again remarks:

"Faith is the gift of God ... All men may have faith if they will; but alas, many refuse to hear the Word of God, so they are left in their unbelief. The Holy Spirit presents the Word, but one may resist His gracious influence. On the other hand, one may

listen to the Word and believe it. That is faith. It is God's gift, it is true, because given though His Word."

Faith can be viewed as a gracious gift that comes from God in the sense that He convicts us and compels us to come to Christ. He softens our hearts so we can respond favorably to His invitation to salvation. God ENABLES us to have faith since salvation is "not by the will of man" (human determination without God - John 1:13) but at the same time He MAKES us responsible for faith ("But as many as received him" - John 1:12). Both truths are brought out in Scripture – the sovereignty of God and the free will of man.

God also grants the gift of repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25) to people by bringing conviction upon their hearts, stirring their conscience (Acts 2:37), and producing sorrow over sin (2 Cor. 7:10), so they can respond favorably to His ways and will for their lives ("repentance unto the acknowledging of the truth" – vs. 25). This means that God inspires



and initiates both repentance and faith, but men are always held accountable to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:3) and express personal faith (Luke 7:50), as they respond to God's promptings upon their soul. "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (Acts 28:24). Of course, God does not produce repentance and faith in the hearts of people, by arbitrarily changing their wills, overtaking their human wills, coercing them against their will, or overriding their freedom of choice.

Dr. Lehman Strauss said:

"While it is true that no man repents until the Holy Spirit moves upon his heart, there can be no repentance where there is unwillingness to turn to God."

This strikes the perfect balance between God's sovereign work in the human heart that allows man to willingly or unwillingly accept God's initiatives upon their heart.



Many will argue at this point, “If the will and decision of a person can enter into the salvation picture, then God is no longer sovereign or in complete control and charge.” This certainly is not the case. The Meriam Webster Dictionary defines sovereignty as “supreme power; freedom from external control; controlling influence.”

The Biblical concept of God’s sovereignty can be seen in the Bible. Psalm 115:3, “But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” Isaiah 46:10-11 also paints the picture of God’s sovereignty: “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” Then there is Ephesians 1:11: “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” Yes, God is in control of everything, including the plan and implementation of salvation. But God’s control does not mean He must violate the free expression of human choices.

Did God lose control over the situation of the cross, while He watched wicked sinners punishing His beloved Son (Acts 2:23), or when wicked people express wrath, defiance, and hatred against Him (Ps. 76:10; Prov. 16:4)? Of course, God never loses control. His plan always comes to fruition (Dan. 4:34-35), even when He allows man’s personal decisions to fulfill His goals and purposes. In a similar way, God does not lose His sovereignty, or control over the salvation of the sinner, just because a person can decide His own destiny. God’s elective purposes (Eph. 1:4) come to pass, through the agency or medium of human choices (John 6:37; 2 Thess. 2:13; Eph. 1:4, 13), but this does not destroy the doctrines of grace and election, nor does it make God less sovereign or lacking control over what is taking place. God is simply allowing His saving purpose to come to fruition according to His own sovereign plan for “he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3).

Can God choose to limit the full display of His sovereign power while maintaining His absolute sovereignty? He most certainly can.

Jesus said in Matthew 26:53-54:

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”

Jesus could have displayed the fullness of His sovereignty or power but chose not to do this in order to bring about our ultimate redemption. In a similar way, God could totally bypass man’s volitional nature in an individual’s conversion experience, but He has chosen to limit the full display of His power by not violating man’s human choice and responsibility. Although God must penetrate the human will and soften the heart of the sinner (sovereignty), He chooses to limit the complete display of His absolute power by allowing each person to make a personal decision regarding their eternal destiny (free will).

God’s determination does not necessarily override man’s determination (Acts 2:23). In fact, God’s decrees often (not always) come to pass within the boundaries of man’s choices. Just because God chooses to limit His absolute sovereignty (power) over the human wills of people does not mean He is no longer sovereign. This is what Augustine and Calvin would want us to believe but not what God’s Word actually teaches. God is always sovereign in that He ordains His own plans and brings them to fulfillment in the way He has purposed. God ordained the end (His elect people) and also the means to the end (the free will response of these same people). The same sovereign God who allowed Adam to wreck the human race (Rom. 5:12) also allows mankind to decide the ultimate destiny of his salvation.

In John 3:18, Jesus expressed human responsibility (free will) in this way:

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

In Holman Hunt’s picture which is called “The Light of the World,” we see Christ with a patient, gentle face standing at a door which is ivy-covered, and it appears that the door has been closed for a long time. He stands and knocks on the door. There is no answer, and He still stands and knocks. His eyes speak of love, His face beams with a yearning desire to enter. If you look closely, you can see that there is

no knob or latch on the outside of the door. It can be opened only from within. Here is the obvious meaning as it pertains to this study. God comes to our heart's door and knocks wanting entrance. He waits and knocks again, but you must open the door yourself. The latch is on the inside. The latch represents our freedom of choice.

“You must open the door,
You must open the door,
When Jesus comes in,
He will save you from sin,
But you must open the door.”

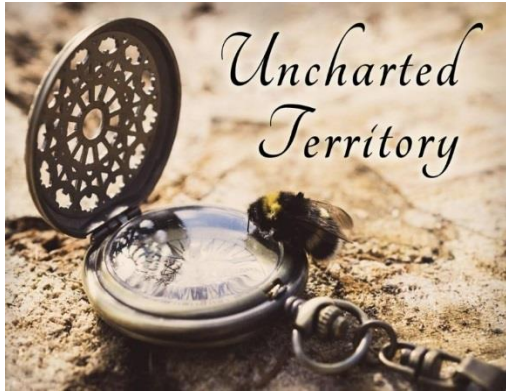


Both the creation (God's choice) and carrying out of God's plan of election (human choice) is ordained by God. Both are woven together into the fabric of God's sovereign plan of salvation for mankind. They are like two pieces of a puzzle that fit together in God's redemptive plan for lost humanity. To neglect one is to neglect the other. God's initial choice and man's choice are not two incompatible realms from God's perspective (Isa. 55:8; Deut. 29:29). Man's human choice does not diminish the Biblical understanding of God's sovereignty as some would teach. God can determine the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) without violating man's responsibility and freedom of choice. Yes, there is a sense of wonder and amazement in all of this. But our God is the great God of wonders!

“Great God of wonders! all thy ways
Are matchless, godlike and divine;
But the fair glories of thy grace
More godlike and unrivaled shine,
More godlike and unrivaled shine.”

Romans 11:33 declares this about our great God and His ways:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”



Ephesians speaks of God's sovereignty ("being predestinated according to the purpose of him" - Eph. 1:11) and man's free will ("In whom ye also trusted after ye believed" - Eph. 1:13). If we accept both these Biblical propositions, then we will remain true to the teaching of God's sovereignty and human freedom. It will keep us from moving into uncharted territory which is not supported by a Biblical road map. We will

avoid the extreme conclusions of reprobation, double predestination (supralapsarianism), preterition, limited or particular redemption, God hating a non-elect group of people, or God regenerating people before they can believe, bypassing their own volition or will.

Charles Spurgeon (a Calvinist), commenting on the subject of God's sovereignty and human freedom, stated: "Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly?"

There is a poem that gives the Biblical balance on the teaching of God's sovereignty and human choice as it relates to salvation.

The Spirit came in childhood
And pleaded, "Let me in,"
But oh! the door was bolted
By thoughtlessness and sin;
"I am too young," the child replied,
"I will not yield today;
There's time enough tomorrow."
The Spirit went away.

Again He came and pleaded
In youth's bright happy hour;
He came but heard no answer,
For lured by Satan's power

The youth lay dreaming then
And saying, "Not today,
Not till I've tried earth's pleasures."
The Spirit went away.

Again He called in mercy
In manhood's vigorous prime,
But still He found no welcome,
The merchant had no time;
And so, repulsed and saddened,
The Spirit went away.

Once more He called and waited,
The man was old and ill,
And scarcely heard the whisper,
His heart was cold and still;
"Go leave me; when I need thee,
I'll call for thee," he cried;
Then, sinking on his pillow,
Without a hope, he died!

Someone said this about election and human choice:

"The pendulum swings, ridiculous extreme, bypassing truth which lies somewhere between"

This is definitely true regarding God's election and human responsibility. We have seen that God does the choosing (Eph. 1:4) and we do the believing (John 3:16) but not without God's gracious assistance and work taking place in our hearts.

John Chadwick wrote:
"I sought the Lord,
And afterwards I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him,
Seeking me! It was not that I found,
O Savior true;
No, I was found by Thee."

What God starts He finishes by drawing His people to Himself (“no man can come to me, except the Father ... draw him” - John 6:44), but at the same time God does not draw people to salvation without human volition or choice (“he that believeth on me hath everlasting life” - John 6:47). Side by side we see the twin truths of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.

When a church member asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled divine sovereignty and human choice, he replied, “I never try to reconcile friends.” God desires that all sinners would be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) but only those who respond favorably to His conviction upon their hearts will be saved and confirm that they were part of the elect body of believers that God originally chose to save (Rom. 8:33; Titus 1:1).

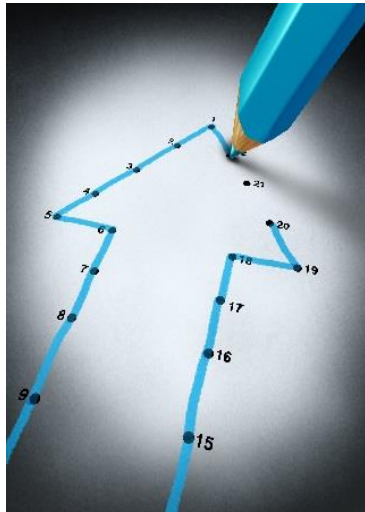


Again, God has ordained the salvation of a vast group of people within lost humanity (Acts 13:48), at the same time, others miss out on God’s foreordaining plan because of their own choice to not participate with God’s desires and initiatives regarding their salvation. As Paul taught, “seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46). From the New Testament perspective, the body of people (the Church) was chosen in Christ before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:7; Rom. 8:29-30) and their salvation is complete in Christ when they come to personal faith in Him (John 3:16).

C. H. Mackintosh said this:

“Dear friend, your difficulty is occasioned by the influence of a one-sided theology [extreme Calvinism]—a system which we can only compare to a bird with one wing, or a boat with one oar. When we turn to the sacred page of God’s Word, we find THE TRUTH, not one side of the truth, but the whole truth in all its bearings. We find, lying side by side, the truth of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Are we called to reconcile them? Nay, they are reconciled already because they are both set forth in the word. We are to believe and obey. It is a fatal mistake for men to frame systems of divinity. You can no more systematize the truth of God than

you can systematize God Himself. Let us abandon, therefore, all systems of theology and schools of divinity, and take the truth.”



We sometimes try and connect all the dots between God’s sovereignty in election and the free will of man (human responsibility). We all do this to a certain extent as we think through the Biblical teachings regarding election and free will. Sometimes we believe that we have connected all the dots and have all the answers. If we come to this conclusion it’s probably because we have not heard all the questions! Yes, we can in a general way know what the Bible teaches and does not teach about the various subjects connected with election and human responsibility. And yet, there still remains a sense of wonder and amazement regarding God’s saving plan. We sometimes sit back and reflect on how finite our minds are when it comes to God’s masterplan of salvation and realize that we cannot fully explain the unexplainable. As we reflect on God’s glorious plan of salvation, we can only worship and praise our great and wonderful God (“To the praise of the glory of his grace” – Eph. 1:6).

“To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that we may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thro' Jesus the Son,
And give him the glory, great things he has done!”