

Election and Free Will – Mystery or Misunderstood?

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Same Old, Same Old!

Not long ago, I was part of an ordination council. A man, who was being examined for future ministry, was giving his understanding and view concerning the doctrine of election and the free will of man. He stated that the teachings of election and the free will of man were both true, while at the same time, they are a mystery, which cannot be resolved with our human, finite minds. He claimed the two teachings are a hopeless paradox. He then stated that only God could resolve this mystery, in His own mind, since He is God. It was the same old, same old! In other words, it was the same answer that is given by most men that are going into the ministry, who are not hyper or extreme Calvinists, but moderate in their approach to the teaching of Calvinism. I don't know how often I have heard this answer over the years.

After sitting on many ordination councils throughout the passing years, I have come to realize that explaining election and free will as a mystery is the common response for those who want to believe in both truths, without becoming extremely Calvinistic, deterministic, and fatalistic in their approach to election. However, it's time that this alleged "tried and true" answer is reevaluated, on the basis of what God actually says, concerning His complete salvation program. If God is crystal clear on many things, related to the doctrine of salvation, then we don't have to claim total ignorance regarding the doctrine of election and free will. We don't have to explain it away as some kind of unresolvable mystery and theological tension that only God knows about. I'm suggesting in this study that election is often *misunderstood* and the alleged mystery between election and free will should be exchanged for a non-mysterious teaching on the doctrine of salvation and election.

The Alleged Mystery

Is the bridge between election and free will really an irresolvable *mystery*, or is the doctrine of election *misunderstood*, due to the strong overtones and hidden agenda of Calvinistic teaching in our circles of

belief? We continue to hear that the doctrine of election is a total mystery, enshrouded in darkness, which we cannot understand or reconcile with the free will of man. Election and freedom of human choice is said to be a hopeless paradox to mankind and one of the mysteries hidden in the counsels of the Godhead. The old Deuteronomy 29:29 answer is often given – “the secret things belong to the LORD.” We are told to simply accept both truths (election and free will) and leave it there, since the connecting and reconciling link between the two has never been revealed. We are told to embrace the two truths of God’s sovereignty and the free will of man as some kind of “antinomy” or apparent contradiction, which cannot be resolved on this side of Heaven. Many well-meaning saints argue that free will and divine sovereignty are twin truths taught by Scripture that coexist in the tension of an unresolvable dialect or language. All rational attempts to resolve these two apparent contradictions will fail. The two truths involve a contradiction or at least a severe paradox.

This kind of reasoning is often never challenged, but in this study, we want to draw attention to the non-mysterious things related to God’s salvation plan. There are several things to note at this point of our study. First, the Bible suggests that God’s people are called upon to understand the deep things of the Bible by the Spirit’s illuminating work (1 Cor. 2:10). Second, the Bible always emphasizes the privilege of knowing New Testament mysteries (Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 3:3-9; Matt. 13:11). Granted, election is not one of the New Testament mysteries; however, to hide truth from His people and enshroud it in mystery, does not seem to be one of God’s New Testament purposes (John 14:26 – “the Holy Spirit ... he shall teach you all things”). Don’t misunderstand me, I’m not about to say that we can fathom the greatness and depth of God’s eternal plans and attributes (Rom. 11:33), but at the same time, we should not plead humble ignorance (1 Cor. 14:38) about the twin truths of election and man’s free will, since they are clearly taught side-by-side in the Bible.

Man’s Free Will

Any person who concludes there is a mysterious tie between election and free will at least recognizes that man possesses freedom of choice regarding his salvation and eternal destiny. This is a Biblical concept. Reading the Bible, without Calvin’s spectacles or Augustine’s

eyeglasses, and the preconceived theology of elective faith, depravity, and determinism would lead even a child to believe that man can express his own belief in Christ. Basic Calvinism teaches that God only chooses to give the gift of faith to the elect. In other words, nobody has a choice in the matter of their salvation. God actually makes the choice for the elect by giving them the faith to believe and leaves the rest of mankind without any possibility for faith.

Calvinism essentially teaches that man is passive and does not have any choice in the matter of his salvation. God creates faith in a person's heart without any response or interaction with a man's volition or will. However, the Bible repeatedly says that it is man's own personal faith, or belief directed toward the Savior, that brings salvation into his life ("whosoever believeth" – John 3:15-16; "he that believeth" – John 3:18; "And many more believed" – John 4:41; "Now we believe" - John 4:42; "he that believeth on me" – John 6:35; "He that heareth my word and believeth on him" - John 5:24; "He that believeth on me" – John 6:47; "believe in the light – John 12:36; "many believed on him" – John 12:42; "whosoever believeth on me" – John 12:46; "them also which shall believe on me" – John 17:20; "you that believe" - John 20:31; "that believing ye might have life"- 1 John 5:13; "every one that believeth" – Rom. 1:16; "them which should hereafter believe on him" – 1 Tim. 1:16; "after that ye believed" - Eph. 1:13; "they which have believed" – Titus 3:8; "I believe" – Mark 9:24). "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" - (Acts 28:24).

These verses teach that man is responsible for his own belief. Belief is something a man is called upon to do (John 6:28-29). In short, belief is all God requires! God does require faith if a man is going to be saved. Faith or belief is something man must do (Acts 16:30-31), *not in a meritorious sense*, but in order to receive God's gift of saving righteousness (Rom. 5:17). The Bible clearly reveals that faith or believing in Christ cannot be a form of works since belief results in receiving a free gift (Rom. 6:23). The reception of a gift (salvation) could hardly be viewed as something that a person has worked for or earned. *Faith is viewed as receiving something; it is never viewed as a work that a person must perform for their salvation.* The nature of receiving a free gift also indicates freedom of choice. By its very nature, a gift must be received, by an act of the human will.

The point is this. A person is saved “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Faith is the *means* through which the grace of God comes to the needy heart. Faith adds nothing to the complete salvation we have through the work of Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:9). Faith is simply the method of applying Calvary’s benefits to one’s life (John 4:13-14; 6:54, 56). One thing is certain. The Scripture always contrasts faith with works (Rom. 3:27; 4:3-5; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2; Eph. 2:8-9).

As someone has said:

“The only thing a person can do without doing anything is believe.”

When these verses are taken for what they really teach, without adding any theological jargon, or Calvinistic presuppositions and proof-texting to them, they are explaining that man has a legitimate response to God’s offer of salvation, which is presented to him through the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16) and work of the Spirit upon his heart (2 Thess. 2:13). The Scriptural conclusion is this. Individual faith is a response of the human will (“whosoever will” – Rev. 22:17) that is made possible by the work of God upon the human heart (Acts 16:14 – “whose heart the Lord opened”).

Faith does involve personal choice. The work of God upon the human heart does not irresistibly draw people to salvation as Calvinism teaches. God’s work upon the depraved human heart and will allows a person’s heart to be opened to the truth of their sinfulness and need for Christ, so they have *opportunity* and restored *ability* to use their own volitional nature, to respond favorably to the invitation of salvation, or exercise faith toward Jesus Christ. This is why the Scripture repeatedly calls upon man to believe. It’s because he can believe! He has a free will (freedom of choice) to exercise faith toward Jesus Christ (“he shall offer it of his own voluntary will”- Lev. 1:3). God brings a person to the place where they can move toward God and make a valid decision to trust in the free merits of Jesus Christ for salvation.

We cannot study the Bible without being brought face to face with personal responsibility. The Bible teaches that man’s free volition is a vital part of what brings a man to Christ, or what causes a man to reject Christ. The Word of God and the Spirit of God has a role in prompting faith in a person’s heart (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:2) but man also has the responsibility to express his own faith, since faith is something a man

is called upon to do (“What must I do to be saved?” – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” - Acts 16:31-32). However, faith is not something a person does to *merit* salvation; it’s simply the *means* or instrument that God uses to bring salvation into a person’s life (“If thou shalt believe ... in thine heart” and “for with the heart man believeth” – Romans 10:9-10).

The Bible assumes everywhere that anyone who wills to be saved can exercise saving faith – “his faith” (Rom. 4:5), “your faith” (1 Cor. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:9), and “thy faith has saved thee” (Luke 7:50). This is why Scriptures call upon man to believe. It’s because he can express faith in Christ for salvation. God would not call a person to do something that was impossible for him to do! God requires a person to express his faith in Christ or else die in his sins (John 8:24 – “ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he”). God wants people to make a volitional choice or decision. He wants them to move their own will and express faith in His saving plan (Acts 16:31). The secret of receiving the benefits of what Christ has done on the cross is to make a choice to personally believe, in the death and resurrection of Christ, to provide salvation for your life. Jesus used the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood to demonstrate a person’s role and responsibility in appropriating the salvation of Jesus Christ to their lives through simple belief in Christ (John 6:54).

Elective Faith?

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

The Bible is teaching that a person is saved by placing simple faith (their own faith) in Jesus Christ. Calvinists insist that this verse is teaching that Christ believes for a person by granting the gift of elective faith to him. Calvinism teaches by this verse that faith is a special gift given only to the elect. The expression “it is the gift of God” is said to refer to faith, proving that God gives faith to people who can’t believe, since man does not have freedom to express faith toward Christ. In essence, God provides only His elect with faith and this is why they believe. He softens the human will of rebellion by giving the elect the faith to believe in Christ. God actually believes for a person, since man

has no capacity or ability to express faith on his own, apart from God's movement and life. Of course, this verse simply is not teaching what the Calvinist asserts. Neither the grammar, nor the Greek text, supports such an interpretation. When setting up the sentence grammatically, using syntax, we can be sure that the word "faith" refers back to salvation ("saved"). Furthermore, the Greek scholars agree that the word "that" is in the neuter gender and "faith" is in the feminine gender. If the word "that" refers to "faith" it would also have to be feminine.

A. T. Robertson remarks:

"Through faith (δία πιστεως [*dia pisteōs*]). This phrase he adds in repeating what he said in verse 5 to make it plainer. "Grace" is God's part, "faith" ours. And that (και τουτο [*kai touto*]). Neuter, not feminine ταυτη [*tautē*], and so refers not to πιστις [*pistis*] (feminine) or to χαρις [*charis*] (feminine also), but to the act of being saved by grace conditioned on faith on our part. Paul shows that salvation does not have its source (ἐξ ὑμων [*ex humōn*], out of you) in men, but from God. Besides, it is God's gift (δωρον [*dōron*]) and not the result of our work."

The whole Calvinistic concept that says faith is a selective gift, which is given only to a chosen group of people, called the elect, is unscriptural. Christ is seen to be the object and subject of a person's faith, but the Bible never teaches that Christ actually believes for other people, or arbitrarily gives some people a special gift of faith, since they are the elect. When speaking about the "faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16) Paul is using Christ as the subject or content of a person's faith – not the giver of faith. It would be senseless to conclude that Christ is the source of a person's faith in these verses, since Paul immediately concludes "unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22) and "even we have believed in Jesus Christ," attributing the faith to individual people and not Christ. Paul is clearly pointing to Christ as the *subject, content, or quality* of a person's faith and not the source of a person's faith. When commenting on Galatians 2:20 ("The faith of the Son of God") Robertson is once again clear on this matter: "Which is in the Son of God (τη του υιου του θεου [*tēi tou huiou tou theou*]). The objective genitive, not the faith of the Son of God."

In other words, this verse is not teaching that Christ believes for a person, when granting elective faith to him, but the person is able to believe in the Son of God, with his own volition and free will. Christ becomes the special object and content of a person's faith - not the source of the person's faith. The Bible says that we become "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). When a person decides (chooses) to take a *step of faith* or commit themselves only to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:12 – "that which I have committed unto him"), it's then that they will receive salvation from hell, forgiveness of sins, and the gift of everlasting life. Belief or faith in Christ is a simple thing. Belief in Jesus Christ involves a definite decision or choice of a person's will, to commit their faith to Jesus Christ alone for salvation ("If thou believest with all thine heart" – Acts 8:37).

Both the Greek and basic grammar in Ephesians 2:8-9 do not support the teaching that faith is a gift given by God. Salvation is the gift being referred to in this text ("it is the gift of God"). However, is not faith also the gift of God? Yes, both faith and repentance are gifts given by God, as they relate to the grace by which they are produced (Acts 16:14; 18:27; Romans 2:4); but the *grace* or power and ability to believe, and the *act* of believing, are two different things. Without the grace or power to believe no man ever did or can believe (John 6:44), but with this God-given power or enablement, the act of faith is a man's own volition (John 1:12; 5:40; Rev. 22:17). God never believes for any man (Rom. 4:5), no more than he repents for him (2 Peter 3:9); the penitent sinner, through God's grace enabling him, believes for himself ("whosoever believeth" – John 3:15-16; "he that believeth" – John 3:18; "And many more believed" – John 4:41; "he that believeth on me" – John 6:35; "He that believeth on me" – John 6:47). Both God's grace and man's free will work synergistically together to bring about His sovereign purpose related to the eternal destiny of people.

God certainly works on the heart of people through His convicting, convincing, and compelling ministry (John 16:8; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2) so faith can be spawned or produced within the heart (Acts 16:14). However, God does not selectively, electively, or arbitrarily put faith in the heart of people. God brings people to the threshold of salvation

seeking to inspire faith in their hearts. However, it's a person's own responsibility, and act of their human will, interacting with God's movement upon their heart, which brings them to the place of faith. God inspires faith but does not *force* it upon man or *coerce* man against his own will. Nor does God *change* a person's will without man's volitional choice and response to God's revelation.

A person's choice determines whether or not he will express faith in Christ (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:40; Acts 7:51). A person's choice determines his eternal destiny – not the arbitrary selection of God. Allow me to repeat something previously mentioned. A person's faith is an act of the human will made possible by the work of God on the human heart. This is the Biblical truth taught in Scripture. God allows faith to be possible while man makes it actual.

A man can come to Christ with his own free will and eat without being *force-fed* or by having his will *overtaken* by God (“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” – John 6:53). He can also drink on his own free will, if He so desires (Rev. 22:17 – “let him take the water of life freely”). Is this not free will? John 7:37, “In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

“‘Freely come drink,’ words the soul to thrill!
O with what joy they my heart do fill!
For when He said, ‘Whosoever will,’
Jesus included me, too.”

What must I do to be saved (Acts 16:31)? What shall we do (Acts 2:37-38)? The writers of Scripture did not say “Be passive, there is nothing you can do,” when it comes to your salvation, as hyper-Calvinists teach. One man heavily influenced by Calvinism said, “I hope God decides to save me.” The truth is this. God wants to save this man, if he will place his faith in Christ. A man is responsible for expressing his own faith in Christ (Rom. 4:5). There is something a person must do to be saved. A person must believe or express faith in Christ in order to be saved (John 6:29). Of course, the ardent Calvinist says that man has nothing to do with his salvation. Therefore, expressing faith in Christ is said to be a form of works. However, this is man's reasoning and not God's reasoning. It is philosophy – not Biblicism. Faith is

always diametrically opposed to works (Rom. 3:27; 4:3-4; Gal. 2:16; James 2:14, 17) and is a non-meritorious, Biblical response to God's offer of salvation. To conclude that freedom of choice, which involves believing or expressing faith in Christ, is a human work, categorically denies what the Scriptures teach. Faith and works are always contrasted in the Scriptures.

Calvinists want to reassure us that God selectively grants faith and repentance to only the elect, or those He has predetermined to save, over other people. If God arbitrarily grants faith to those He has chosen to save then man has nothing to do with his salvation. According to Calvinism, faith is given to the elect, while the rest of the world is left to die in their sins, and given no opportunity to express faith in Christ for salvation. This is fallacy of the worst sort. Of course, the Calvinists have their alleged proof texts.

Philippians 1:29

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

This verse is teaching how God's people were given the privilege and opportunity to express faith in Christ and also to suffer for Christ in their Christian lives. What is said is that both belief and suffering were a privilege to experience. It is something that God grants to others since Christ has paid sin's penalty. Believing on Christ and suffering for Him are both associated with the working of God's grace. In these verses belief and suffering are viewed as privileges that people can enter into through God's grace.

Sir Robert Anderson said:

"It is given to us to believe on Christ, just in the same sense in which it is given to some also to suffer for his sake."

The above text is speaking about the privilege that God gives to people to believe and suffer for Christ. It is not talking about some kind of selective gifts that God gives only to the elect or those people He has chosen to save over others. When something is given to us it means that it is a gift. The word "given" is derived from a word which means grace and favor. Out of His own benevolence and kindness, God grants to His children the gracious gifts of both faith and suffering.

Many times we don't view suffering for Christ as a gift but since Christ suffered, we too, as His followers should expect to suffer for Him. And it is a privilege and gift to suffer as Christ did (1 Pet. 3:14).

The order of the gifts is significant. First, there is saving faith. Faith here refers to the privilege to possess faith through God's gracious sovereign work upon our hearts. We would not be saved today if God had not come seeking for us, to convict us and bring us to the fold. Acts 16:14 says, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened." Faith is 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. Nevertheless, let us NEVER forget of the gracious gift of God's working upon our hearts which brought us to faith in Christ. Without His work and intervention, we would be lost and going to hell.

Second, suffering for Christ is also seen as a gift given to us by God ("but also to suffer for his sake" – Phil. 1:29). This refers to the privilege to partner in suffering for Christ through our testimony and Gospel witness. Acts 5:41 says, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Suffering for Christ is also evidenced as a gift that God gives to us, so we can be more like His Son, Who during His earthly life, suffered greatly.

Philippians 3:9 is another interesting verse about faith:

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

It would be a strange and a strained interpretation of this verse to make "the faith of Christ" refer to a special gift of faith from Christ, which Paul then exercised, as his own ("by faith"), in order to receive the righteousness of God. Once again the *object* of Paul's faith is being

taught. Christ was the object and subject of Paul's faith which resulted in imputed righteousness. The text is not referring to the *manner* in which Paul obtained his personal faith but the *content* of Paul's faith, which was Christ.

Romans 12:3

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

One must recognize that this section of Romans deals with the exercise of faith in respect to service (Rom. 12:6) and has nothing to do with saving faith. In other words, God gives to His people the faith they need, in order to use their spiritual gifts for Him. This daily faith is supplied by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This is not a selective faith, but a working faith, which is given to God's saints, who are already saved.

2 Peter 1:1

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Here Peter states that believers have "obtained" their faith through God's intervention, but he does not say this shared, or common faith, was given to only a selective group. To use a verse like this to prove that saving faith is a special selective gift, which God grants to some, but not others, shows how desperate the advocates of the "elective faith" theory are to find some Scriptural proof or support for their teaching. The word "obtained" means to receive something by divine allotment and determination. It's true that salvational faith can be viewed as a gift from God, since it is God who convicts sinners and seeks to create faith in the hearts of people, as they respond to His promptings. However, God does not create faith in a person's heart with an arbitrary or selective purpose in mind.

God is willing and ready to promote faith in the heart of any person, as they respond to the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), and His promptings upon their human will. Furthermore, the text actually reveals that this

precious faith is given “through” or on the basis of “the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (not God’s election or selective gift of faith). In other words, faith can be expressed in the human heart because the gift of God’s righteousness was extended to all mankind (Rom. 5:18), or since Christ died to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).

Titus 1:1

“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.”

Calvinism concludes this is elective faith, which God only gives to the ones, He has chosen to save (the elect), and no other person can have this faith, since God has chosen to bypass them, as the non-elect. In other words, God gives faith only to those that He wants to save and the rest He leaves without faith or any opportunity to be saved. This kind of conclusion is merely an assumption based on other assumptions. The fact that God wants to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) and draw all mankind to Himself (John 12:32), would indicate that God wants to prompt and promote faith in the hearts of every person, within the realm of lost humanity, as the Gospel is taken to them.

The expression “the faith of God’s elect” is simply an acknowledgment that the open, growing, elect, corporate body, which God has chosen to save, will come to place *their* faith in Jesus Christ (“the faith of God’s elect”). Many Calvinists miss something that is clearly stated. It’s not the elective faith that God has given to them individually, which saves them, but their own faith expressed in Christ. Let’s state it in a simple fashion. It is not the faith of God that saves people (the faith that He gives to them), but the faith of the elect (their own faith), 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’s purpose of saving a community of believers called “the elect” comes to pass, as they place their faith in Christ for salvation, and become part of the Church, the corporate body, which He has chosen to save from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3). Paul was stating a glorious truth. God’s elect body was growing, since people were

placing faith in Christ, and then proving their salvation to be true, by godly living and sanctification.

We must understand that the choice God made in eternity past to save an elect a community of people (Eph. 1:4) is brought to fruition in the present grace period (Eph. 1:13), as people respond in faith to God's drawing initiatives upon their hearts (John 6:44; 12:32). This is what is called "the faith of God's elect." The faith of God's elect, which is exercised in Christ, brings this group of people into the blessings of election (Rom. 8:29), and allows them to become part of God's growing, elective body.

It's true that salvational faith is promoted and produced by the Spirit's ministry upon the human will (1 Thess. 2:13); however, it's equally true that man must respond to the Spirit's initiation upon his will (John 6:37). Hence, faith can only be viewed as a gift, in the sense that God convicts and persuades the human will to move toward the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (John 16:8). Faith is never outlined in Scripture as a selective gift, which is given only to the elect, but as something which God must promote in the human heart, in order to direct men to Christ. God inspires and initiates faith, but men are always held accountable for possessing faith, 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).

The Gift of Repentance

Acts 5:31

"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Actually this verse is not speaking of a selective gift of repentance to the individual elect, but a corporate privilege and opportunity given to national Israel to repent, since they were responsible for crucifying Jesus. The Lord was willing to give Israel the opportunity to repent, as a rebellious people, and grant them the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), instead of judgment. God was offering Israel the privilege and opportunity to repent; He was not arbitrarily producing repentance in their hearts. Israel could be given the opportunity to repent of their sins instead of passing under the rod of God's judgment. This verse is not

suggesting that God was selectively going to work out repentance in their hearts. It is evident that this is a reference to God's *general offer of repentance*, which most of the Jews rejected. God is not offering a gift to them, but a privilege to repent, instead of experiencing His judgment. The same explanation applies to Acts 11:18 where the Gentiles are in view.

Acts 11:18 says:

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

This verse is not suggesting that God grants repentance to only a select group of people within the races of Gentile humanity. Actually, the corporate nature of God's outreach is seen in this verse. Peter was using the keys of the kingdom to unlock the Gospel to all of the races of Gentile humanity (Matt. 16:19). This verse has a real dispensational significance attached to it. It teaches that God was turning from His saving program, which was once exclusively designed for the Jews (Matt. 10:6), to His program of the Church (Matt. 16:18), where both Jews and Gentiles would be brought together into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). *God was offering the Gentiles the dispensational privilege and opportunity to repent as the Gospel went forth among the nations.* God is not offering an elective gift to the Gentiles but a privilege to repent of their sins and become part of the new work of God – the Church.

The Hebrew Christians recognized that God had turned to the Gentiles in a gracious way, allowing them to repent and become part of God's new saving program. He was now willing to reach out to the Gentiles corporately with a new program of salvation that would incorporate them into the blessings with the Jews, which began on Pentecost (Acts 11:15). God had now turned to the Gentiles dispensationally, allowing them to repent and become part of the program of the Church. *The repentance that God granted them was a dispensational gift, not a selective gift, given to only a select number of Gentiles.* God had graciously turned to the Gentiles giving them the opportunity to repent and become part of the new program – the Church.

2 Timothy 2:25 is another verse used by the Calvinist, as proof for selective or elective repentance. It says, “In meekness instructing

those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.”

This particular verse is actually referring to the child of God, or a believer who has fallen into the devil’s trap, through some false teaching (vs. 26). When brethren fall into false teaching they must be treated with gentleness, humility, and Christian love (24-25a), in hope that they will come to their senses, and escape from the trap of the devil. The goal is to allow God to get a hold of their wills and produce repentance within their hearts (25b). Unless God grabs hold of their hearts there is no hope for their spiritual recovery from false teaching. God can move in the hearts of His people, causing their hearts to be stirring and convicted, and bring them to the place of repentance.

Generally speaking, God must always act first, bringing the spiritual awakening and inner conviction to the heart of every sinner, whether it’s a believer or nonbeliever. God prepares the human heart for repentance but He does not do the repenting for individual people. This verse suggests that God must do a work in the heart so that a person will repent. However, it does not teach that God repents for any person and overrides their human will. The Bible calls upon men to repent themselves (Acts 17:30 – “but now commandeth all men every where to repent” and “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” – Luke 13:3, 5).

God grants repentance 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). However, God does not produce repentance 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. God does not choose to selectively and electively produce repentance in the hearts of people.

Some have suggested that God may be unwilling to give repentance to a person (2 Tim. 2:25) since that individual may not be one of the elect. However, this is not the case at all. God is willing and ready to grant repentance to the hearts of all people. The truth is this; many individuals are so entrenched in error that it is hard for them to listen to

truth, which God is trying to bring to their attention. For this simple reason, the Bible says “peradventure” (2 Tim. 2:25), or perhaps, God will grant them repentance. When a person’s heart is hardened to truth, only God can soften it and make changes in their will; however, God will not override the stubborn will. This is why God may not accomplish the marvelous work of producing repentance in their heart. A person’s stubbornness, to God’s inner convictions and inclinations, may keep the Lord from working out the wonderful gift of repentance in their heart. God chooses to limit spiritual blessings upon those who refuse them.

Acts 7:51

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

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.”

The point is this; God produces repentance in the hearts of people through His convicting ministry upon the human will. God must move and compel people to change their ways. *However, God does not overtake the human will and create repentance in a person’s heart in any selective or elective way.* The verses used by Calvinists to teach that faith and repentance are arbitrary, or selective gifts, given only to the elect, do not support this alleged teaching. It can be said that God grants faith and repentance, as a gift to mankind, only in the sense that He provides the sinner with inner conviction upon his heart and conscience, but He does not arbitrarily overtake their wills, without human consent (John 5:40).

Romans 2:4 declares:

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

The “goodness of God” speaks of God’s willingness to act, producing repentance into the hearts of people, which results in their salvation. If it were not for the goodness of God’s grace, we would all be

hopelessly lost forever. Grace does move the sinners to repentance. None of us would ever want to repent, or turn to God for salvation (conversion), if God in His own goodness, would not take the initiative to stir our hearts and call us unto Himself. We praise the Lord for His presalvation work upon our hearts!

The word “forbearance” speaks of God holding back His immediate judgment. Rather than destroying every person the moment he or she sins, God graciously holds back His judgment (Acts 17:30). God saves sinners from what they immediately deserve, so they might come to Him, and receive salvation. This is God’s forbearance. Where would we be if God did not willingly express His grace and love to us, by holding back His immediate judgment, upon our lives? If it were not for God’s loving grace, we would all be in hell right now suffering the vengeance of a righteous God. The word “longsuffering” is really God’s patience toward those people, who have not yet repented, and who are still lost in their sins. Peter talks about this same longsuffering that God demonstrates before a spiritually lost and dying world (2 Peter 3:9 – “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”).

In summary, faith and repentance can be viewed as a gift, only in the sense that God convicts and compels the will of the sinner to turn to God, away from his sins. In other words, God works out faith and repentance in the hearts of people through His pre-saving work upon human hearts and wills. However, God does not selectively determine who will receive repentance and *override* or *overtake* the human will, as He seeks to produce faith and repentance in the hearts of the lost. The Holy Spirit convicts the entire world of mankind (John 16:8) seeking to create faith in the hearts of all lost humanity; however, man can despise the goodness of God’s work (Rom. 2:4) and resist the Spirit’s beckoning or call (Acts 7:51).

Dr. William Evans said:

“God wills to work faith in all 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 if we will permit Him to do so” (The Great Doctrines of the Bible, p. 149).

Dr. Harry Ironside remarked:

“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” (Full Assurance, pp. 98-99).

God works faith in the hearts of lost humanity through His Word (Rom. 10:17) as people respond to God’s initiatives upon their hearts and wills. God is presenting and promoting faith to the hearts of the lost, so they might respond favorably to His promptings. A person’s faith is actually a faith that has been nurtured along by God. In short, man is responsible to act upon the faith that God is seeking to spawn in his heart, and in so doing, man can express a faith that is said to be his own faith (John 3:16), since he has responded to God’s promptings upon his soul. When a man aligns His will with God’s will, faith is born in his heart, a faith that is spawned by God and embraced by man, a faith that is made possible by the work of God upon the human heart.

Because man’s own choice and volition enters into the picture, it can be said to be a person’s own faith (Luke 7:50; Rom. 4:5; 1 Cor. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:9), but God must get the credit for the whole transaction, since He is the initiator and lover of our souls, and since “salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

“Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.”

The Calvinist teaches that God only chose certain people to be saved and that He only gives repentance to those that He has already decided to save. This teaching is at odds with what the Scriptures teach. The three words joined together in Romans 2:4 (goodness, forbearance, longsuffering) speak of God’s common grace (Rom. 2:11) or the way God demonstrates His grace to all mankind. Since God wants all men to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), He is certainly willing to grant the gift of repentance to all men, through His inward conviction and drawing power (John 16:8).

God patiently waits for an unbelieving world to repent and respond to His offer of salvation. Why would God wait all day long, with outstretched arms for Israel to repent (Romans 10:21), if He was not willing to grant them repentance? Why would Jesus cry over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and beg His people to repent (Matt. 23:37), if He was not willing to grant them the gift of repentance? Why would God say He wants all people to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), if He was not willing to grant them this repentance? God is seeking to bring people to the place of repentance, but He will not do so against their human will and choice (“ye would not” – Matt. 23:37).

When Christ was on earth He called people to repentance (Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5) and eventually instructed His followers to tell people to repent throughout all “the nations” of the world (Luke 24:47). Why? It’s because God is ready and willing to produce repentance in the hearts of lost people, throughout the entire world, as they respond to His convicting and compelling work upon their hearts (John 16:8). In short, the gift of repentance does not involve God overtaking the human will of people and *selectively* and *determinatively* giving a certain class of people repentance, while refusing to produce the necessary means of repentance in others. The gift of repentance is actually a universal pre-saving work of God that is designed to usher great throngs of people into the salvation plan of God. It’s an ongoing work of grace, which must extend to all people (Acts 11:18), since all people are summoned to repent (Acts 17:30; Luke 24:47). One thing is certain. God does not call upon people to do something that He does not enable them to do through His inner convicting work.

Some Calvinists hold two or three texts, so close to their nose and face, that they hide themselves from what the entire Bible really teaches. Instead of interpreting the unclear texts of Scripture, in light of the clear texts, Calvinists reverse the order, and create theological systems, which are biased to the entire revelation of Scripture. Man can respond favorably to God’s revelation. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name.” The new birth is God’s work (John 1:13 – “but of God”) but the receiving of Christ is man’s responsibility (“as many as received him”).

Blessed noonday truth!

“His grace has planned it all,
‘Tis mine but to believe,
And recognize His work of love
And Christ receive.
For me He died,
For me He lives,
And everlasting life and light
He freely gives.”

Faith, Grace, Free Will, and Calvinism

Some Calvinists teach that grace, as it pertains to drawing a person to salvation (John 6:44), bypasses a person’s own responsibility to believe or express faith in Christ. In essence, there are Calvinists who teach that God implants elective faith in the heart of the elect (“the faith of God’s elect” - Titus 1:1) and bypasses any true volitional choice on the part of the individual. It’s asserted that if an individual can make a personal choice regarding his eternal destiny (heaven or hell) that this would be a form of works and therefore salvation would no longer be of grace (the doctrines of grace), since a person would be contributing to his salvation by believing. This Calvinistic/Reformed conclusion is not Scriptural reasoning; it’s philosophical reasoning. What saith the Scripture?

Grace *enables* a man to believe (“believed through grace” - Acts 18:27) but at the same time it does not take away his *responsibility* to believe (“his faith” - Rom. 4:5). Grace *awakens* a sinner to his need of Christ (“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened”) but does not *override* his will (“ye will not come to me, that you might have life” - John 5:40) in the conversion response (“ye do always resist the Holy Ghost” - Acts 7:51). The grace of God working in connection with a person’s heart (“I will draw all men unto me” - John 12:32) brings an individual into a savable state by giving that person a valid opportunity to believe in Christ with the added promise that “him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Man has chosen to sin and is bound to sin and unbelief (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 salvation. 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, effects man's decisions in relation to *spiritual things* and his eternal destiny (John 16:8).

Robert Gromacki said:

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

The point is this; God does not overtake the human will, but aids the will and decision of man, so he can express faith in Jesus Christ. God's work upon the human heart does not rule out the personal choice and responsibility of mankind regarding his acts of sin (John 3:19) and eternal destiny (John 5:40). That the human will is *bound* to sin and separation from God cannot be denied from Scripture (Eph. 2:1-3). For this reason a person chooses to sin and live in unbelief, since the dictates of the sin nature continually influence and affect his volitional choices, in an evil or adverse way. However, it's equally true that the human will still remains *autonomous*, which means that it's given the freedom to choose its own destiny, as God works upon the human will, promising deliverance and eternal life to the sinner. In other words, God chooses to keep man autonomous (independent and free) in the matter of his choices, even if he needs assistance in relationship to his choice, regarding the salvation of his soul.

A prisoner behind bars, if given the chance or opportunity to leave the prison cell, can choose to respond favorably to the opportunity. In a similar way, those who are imprisoned by sin and Satan, can respond favorably to God's enlightening (2 Cor. 4:4), illuminating (Heb. 6:4-5), and convicting call (John 16:8), and make a valid choice regarding Christ and their eternal destiny ("And many believed on him there" – John 4:42). 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 assistance*, goes beyond the teaching of Scripture.

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 (Rom. 3:11), but it does not mean that man is excluded from making a valid choice regarding his eternal destiny ("he that believeth on me" - John 6:47). Individual faith is a response of the human will ("whosoever will" – Rev. 22:17) that is made possible by the work of God upon the human

heart (Acts 16:14 – “whose heart the Lord opened”). God brings a person to the place of repentance and faith (Acts 2:37) but does not do the actual repenting for them (“except ye repent” - Luke 13:3, 5; “all should come to repentance” - 2 Peter 3:9) or believing for them (“every one that believeth” - 1 John 5:13; “after that ye believed” - Eph. 1:13).

Jesus Christ is the content of a person’s faith (“faith of Jesus Christ” - Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16) but He does not believe for the individual (“them that believe to the saving of the soul” – Heb. 10:39; “thy faith has saved thee” – Luke 7:50). God helps us to have faith since salvation is “not by the will of man” (human determination - John 1:13) but at the same time He makes us responsible for faith (“But as many as received him” - John 1:12).

Faith is never viewed in Scripture as “works” (Eph. 2:8-9) but is opposed to works; therefore, an individual’s personal faith does not constitute them “doing something” to earn or merit their salvation. How can taking a free gift (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 22:17) be viewed as legalism and destroy the meaning of grace? This is an absurdity. The fact that an individual can decide “for” Christ (“He that believeth” – John 3:36) or “against” Christ (“believeth not” - John 3:36) does not create a works salvation; it simply allows man to be a responsible human agent in relationship to salvation (Isaiah 1:18 – “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord”). Therefore, we can conclude that it’s only by God’s grace that a sinner is saved, which means, the sinner’s works are excluded from the salvation process altogether (Titus 2:11; 3:5).

Since personal faith is not a form of works (Gal. 2:16), then salvation can still be by grace (Eph. 2:8), even when man is given a legitimate opportunity to decide his eternal destiny (John 3:15-16). *Faith does not cancel out grace; it actually magnifies grace.* When a person’s faith is directed to Christ, as a result of the working of God’s grace in his heart (John 16:8), grace is magnified (“the glory of his grace” - Eph. 1:6), since it is grace that brings a person to the place of salvation and grace that actually saves a person. It is still true that “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

How Dead is Dead?

The Bible says man is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). But Calvinists make too much out of man’s spiritual death, in order to prove that man has no freedom of choice, or ability to respond favorably to the Gospel invitation, without first being regenerated by God, or having his will overtaken by God. Their argument is that man cannot have any volitional response before God, or express personal repentance or faith in Christ, since he is spiritually dead. Like Lazarus, a dead man, or corpse, can say nothing, or do nothing. This seems to be logical, but it is not Scriptural.

First, the Bible teaches that physically dead people will one day hear the voice of Jesus and be raised from the dead, proving that when God interacts with a corpse, it can respond (John 5:28). Second, the Bible teaches that spiritually dead people can also hear God’s voice and express faith in Christ for salvation.

John 5:24-25

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is (the Gospel period), when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

Spiritually dead men can hear and respond to God (Ezek. 37:1-4). Spiritually dead people can, with God’s aid, interact with His conviction and inclinations on the soul. *Man is spiritually dead toward God, but is still a living responsible creature, that God addresses (Isa. 1:18 – “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord”)*. One must remember that being spiritually dead is not the same as being physically dead. Calvinists make more out of God’s illustrations than He does. The favorite corpse illustration of the Calvinist has taken the place of Scripture and the truth. God simply uses the illustration of dead people to teach that every man, who rejects God’s plan of salvation, lacks spiritual life, and desperately needs His regeneration, in order to be saved.

God is not creating this corpse illustration to teach that a spiritually dead man cannot move his will, and respond to God, through personal repentance and faith. The context is talking about people lacking spiritual life, not personal volition and responsibility, toward God.

Harry Ironside explains:

“To say that because a sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, is dead toward God, therefore he cannot repent, is to misunderstand the nature of that death. It is a judicial, not an actual, death. The unsaved man is identified with sinning Adam by nature and practice, and so is viewed by God as dead in trespasses and sins. He is spiritually dead, because sin has separated him from God. But actually he is a living, responsible creature to whom God addresses Himself as to a reasoning personality, “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).”

The more extreme Calvinist assumes that spiritual death means the sinner has absolutely no response to God. All one can do is pray, or call out to God for mercy, and hope He will be given the faith he needs to be saved. All that a person can hope for is that he is one of God’s elect. All one can do is pray for God’s mercy, conviction, regeneration, and faith to be given to him.

Roy L. Aldrich said:

“A doctrine of total depravity that excludes the possibility of faith must also exclude the possibilities of ‘hearing the word,’ ‘giving serious application to divine truth,’ and ‘praying for the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration.’ The extreme Calvinist deals with a rather lively spiritual corpse after all. If the corpse has enough vitality to read the Word, and heed the message, and pray for conviction, perhaps it can also believe.”

It’s true, the Calvinist corpse, is not so dead after all!

Later Aldrich adds:

“The tragedy of this position is that it perverts the gospel. The good news becomes only a hopeful possibility. The sinner is wrongly instructed to beg for that which God is already beseeching him to receive (2 Cor. 5:20).”

Drawing, Dragging, or Deciding?

John 6:44-45

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

We will comment on these verses later. However, the drawing and teaching of God refers to His inner work that disposes (inclines) people to accept the truth about Jesus and respond to Him. Through His inward initiatives God *helps* us to have faith but does not *make* us have faith. God *promotes* faith in our hearts but does not *push* us to express faith in Christ. Man still has the responsibility to express his own faith in Jesus Christ, as God works on the human heart, to initiate and inspire faith. Man, with God’s assistance, can decide to *use his own volition*, in order to express faith in Christ. These verses are simply teaching how a sinner responds to God through divine assistance. God must break through the hardness of the human heart and prompt the heart to express faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

These verses do not imply that the sinner has no freedom of choice, or opportunity to express faith in Christ, as God draws and teaches the sinner of his lost estate and need for Christ. Many fail to read the second part of John 6:37: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” This refers to the “all” (all people) that God is calling to salvation, which are related to His open and corporate elective body. It is not referring to the “all” (all people) that are linked to determinism or Calvinistic election (God choosing some over others for salvation). This verse tells the other side of salvation’s story, how man is accountable to God, and must respond to God in faith (“him that cometh”). A person must be willing to come to Christ or express faith in Him, if he is ever going to be saved. This is the simple truth of the matter. No Scripture twisting by any Calvinist will ever overwrite the clear truth of the Bible on this matter.

Free Will and the Image of God

The image of God in man (Gen. 1:26-27) was *defaced* by the Fall but it was not totally *erased* (James 3:9). Therefore, man is still a personal

being that possesses the faculty or ability to make choices. Some of these choices he can make without God's aid, while others, He needs God's aid or assistance. Man is still a volition creature even after the Fall. He still possesses his constitutional capacity to make choices. This is why mankind can respond favorably to God when the Holy Spirit moves in his heart and life (1 Thess. 1:4-6). Jesus said in John 16:8, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." It must be understood that man does have a choice in his salvation, after the Spirit unveils to man his sinfulness, and need to believe in Christ. This means man can respond favorably to the Gospel message and the Spirit's work upon his heart, due to the volitional nature, or capacity for choice, given to him from creation.

God has delegated a sphere of limited autonomy (independence or freedom) to mankind even after the Fall. For this reason, man is held responsible for God's *natural* revelation (Rom. 1:8-23; Psalm 14:1), and even the *special* revelation of a moral inward conscience (Rom 2:11-15; Gen. 3:22), which is actually the law intuitively placed into the heart of mankind. Since God holds all of humanity accountable for responding to general and special revelation, it would necessitate that people have some ability or capacity to respond to what is right, otherwise God couldn't hold them accountable. There is also the *spiritual* revelation concerning the Gospel (Acts 15:7; Eph. 1:13) to which man can respond. However, this ability to respond to the Gospel is not given to man, without the Spirit's work or assistance upon his human heart. A man's response of faith, which is directed toward the Gospel message, can only occur when the Holy Spirit teaches and convinces him of the truth, regarding Christ and the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:5 – "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance").

The work of the Spirit upon the human heart of man (John 16:8) brings a man to the place where he can respond favorably to God and express his own personal faith in Christ. This *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 his choices. Since man still possesses part of God's image (volitional choice) he has a free will that can respond favorably to God's intuitive revelation, which has already been instilled on the inside of him, concerning God's

existence (Rom. 1:19, 21), general morals (Rom. 2:12-15; 1 Cor. 5:1; Acts 24:25), and even to God's spiritual revelation concerning the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), as the Spirit's ministry and assistance comes upon his heart and will. This is God's plan and purpose for humanity even after the Fall.

God bestows sufficient grace upon men, so they can believe, if they will. God allows man to retain the opportunity to express freedom in his choices as He makes His revelation known to mankind. Autonomy (freedom of choice) allows man to respond favorably to God's revelation and use his own volitional choice that God has placed within man from creation. God chooses to keep man autonomous (independent and free) in the matter of his choices, even if he needs assistance in relationship to his choice, regarding the salvation of his soul. The human will does not function independently without the influence of the sin nature or God's assistance. The sin nature effects man's decisions in relationship to *sinful things* (Rom. 7:17-24; James 1:14-15); however, God's Spirit working upon the human heart, effects man's decisions in relationship to *spiritual things* and his eternal destiny (John 16:8).

Robert Gromacki once again gives us this important note:
"He (God) has graciously worked in and through the human will to gain the assent of that will without violating human responsibility."

The point is this. God does not overtake the human will, but aids the will and decision of man, so he can express faith in Jesus Christ. God's work upon the human heart does not rule out the personal choice and responsibility of mankind regarding his acts of sin (John 3:19) and eternal destiny (John 5:40). That the human will is *bound* to sin and separation from God cannot be denied from Scripture (Eph. 2:1-3). For this reason a person chooses to sin and live in unbelief, since the dictates of the sin nature continually influence and affect his volitional choices, in an evil or adverse way. However, it's equally true that the human will still remains *autonomous*, which means that it's given the freedom to choose its own destiny, as God works upon the human will, promising deliverance and eternal life to the sinner.

A prisoner behind bars, if given the chance or opportunity to leave the prison cell, can choose to respond favorably to the opportunity. In a

similar way, those who are imprisoned by sin and Satan, can respond favorably to God's enlightening (2 Cor. 4:4), illuminating (Heb. 6:4-5), and convicting call (John 16:8), and make a valid choice regarding Christ and their eternal destiny ("And many believed on him there" – John 4:42). 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. Physical deadness is not the same as spiritual deadness.

Acts 2:37 states:

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 26:28

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Without the God-given power of choice, no one could be held morally accountable for anything, and the very terms of "right" or "wrong" would be meaningless. Free will simply means a man can choose to accept God's overtures (proposals) upon his heart and express faith in Christ (Acts 17:33 – "certain men ...believed") or choose *contrary* to faith (Acts 17:32 – "some mocked"). This is the true understanding and definition of freedom of the human will. Man, being free, has chosen to sin. 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 salvation.

Man still retains the freedom to choose contrary to God's initiating grace upon the heart, or choose to comply with God's proposals for his salvation. Multitudes of Scriptures verify this, when they are taken at face value, for what they really teach - "he that believeth not" – John 3:18, 36; "if ye believe not" – John 8:24; "ye believe me not" – John 8:45; "why do ye not believe me" – John 8:46; "yet they believed not on him" - John 12:37; "ye believed not" – John 10:26; "ye believe not me" – John 10:38; "if any man hear my words, and believe not" – John 12:47; "them which believe not" – 2 Cor. 4:4; "They received not" – 2 Thess. 2:10; "their eyes have they closed" – Matthew 13:15. The clear statements of men refusing to exercise faith ("ye will not come" – John

5:40 or “and ye would not” – Luke 13:34) give overwhelming evidence, that man does possess a free will, that can choose to accept God’s offer of salvation, or reject it. God, with His gracious assisting work upon the human heart, allows a man to use his own volitional autonomy (independence or freedom), and respond favorably toward the Gospel, or confirm his own rejection of the Gospel. A person’s faith is an act of their will made possible by the work of God on the human heart. However, man can refuse this gracious pleading and decide against God’s passionate plea for his salvation.

Even C. H. Spurgeon said:

“To me it is especially appalling that a man should perish through willfully rejecting the Divine salvation. A drowning man throwing away the lifebelt, a poisoned man pouring the antidote upon the floor, a wounded man tearing open his wounds—any of these is a sad sight. But what shall we say of a soul refusing its Savior and choosing its own destruction?”

Free Will and Human Depravity

Spiritual death (Eph. 2:1-2) and separation from God (Eph. 4:18) does not mean the total *destruction* of the spiritual part of man’s existence, such as his volitional nature and design, or the loss of his ability to make choices that line up with God’s revelation. It simply means that man is born separated from God (Psalm 51:5), and is not inclined to seek after God, without God’s revelation and aid (“there is none that seeketh after God” - Rom. 3:11). Left to himself, without any witness of God, man would never desire God or seek after Him for salvation. Furthermore, man’s entire nature and living is in total corruption when compared to God’s holiness and perfection (“there is none that doeth good, no, not one” - Rom. 3:12).

The verses found in Romans 3:11-12 indicate that the whole of man’s inner being is controlled by sin: his *mind* (“none that understandeth”), his *heart* (“none that seeketh after God”), and his *will* (“none that doeth good”).

The late Dr. Harry A. Ironside told this story. A little boy was asked, “Have you found Jesus?” The little fellow answered, “Sir, I didn’t know He was lost. But I was lost and He found me.”

“Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God.
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.”

This is true. Without God’s assistance, man cannot understand spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14), seek God’s fellowship (Luke 19:10), or genuinely desire to do God’s will and please Him (Eph. 2:3). Sin has affected human intellect, emotions, and volition. Measured by God’s perfect righteousness, no human being is righteous before God (Rom. 3:10), without sin, and no person can be accepted before God’s flawless holy presence (Hab. 1:13). In addition, no sinner seeks after God for salvation without His gracious assistance and initiatives. Therefore, God must seek the sinner (Gen. 3:8–10). Man has gone astray and has become totally unprofitable to God. The Lord’s parables in Luke 15 illustrate this perfectly.

Human depravity (moral corruption) does not mean that man is always as bad as he can be, in his outward actions; it means that everything man does, is in some way tainted by sin, and reflects sin, in man’s attitude, aspirations, and assignments in life. Total depravity means that man’s nature is separated from God. This separation results in the personal sinful acts of rebellion, which are directly pitted against God (Rom. 3:13-18), but it also results in sinful inclinations, which are present in everything that the sinner does and practices. Paul described the words (vv. 13–14), acts (vv. 15–17), and attitudes (v. 18) of man, as being tainted by sin. Therefore, even when unsaved people do good deeds, these deeds are still tainted by sin in some way, and are seen to be as “filthy rags” (Isa 64:4). Unsaved people have sinful inclinations and motives for doing even good deeds, whether is to merit God’s favor, or promote their own pride and personal agenda in life.

Simply stated, human depravity means that man is so corrupt by sin, in his inner nature or being (heart), that everything he does in his outward practice is tainted by sin. Depravity means that man fails the test of pleasing God in everything he does. This failure is total in that (a) it affects all aspects of man’s being (intellectual, emotional, volitional), and (b) it affects all people (Jews and Gentiles). In Romans 3:13–18, Paul gives an X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot, and he is found totally wicked in his actions, when compared to God’s

absolute holiness and perfection. He is depraved or morally corrupted (polluted) in his nature (Eph. 2:3), and because of this, none of man's outward actions line up with God's standard of perfection and holiness. All man's actions are corrupted by sin in some way and this is why man can do nothing good in God's eyes or please him in any way ("there is none that doeth good, no not one" - Rom. 3:12). When the final book is written on human depravity, it will read on the front cover – "There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10).

All of these conclusions are true to the Scripture. However, the *total depravity of man does not mean the total inability* of man to respond to God's call and work upon his heart and life. Calvinism restricts man's will to nothing more than a pawn in the hands of God. The extreme and high Augustinian/Calvinistic answer to the matter of "free will" asserts that man does not cooperate with God in any way for his salvation, not even expressing faith in Christ. Man is so totally depraved in his nature that his depravity means he is unable to respond to God in any way. He can only respond to his sinful and evil inclinations. However, the Bible paints a different picture.

God offers Himself to a man's faith multitudes of times throughout the pages of Scripture, as He calls upon man and prompts him to come to salvation, trying to get his will to respond favorably to His overtures (Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17). 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).

Man is also called upon to repent for the Bible says that God "commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). God does not mock men! If He calls upon men to repent, they can repent. God's commands are not lies. Men can make the choice to change their mind and attitude about sin, salvation, and their need for the Savior. Luke

13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." No matter what dark and perplexing questions the Calvinist might create, the Bible is very clear on one thing; man can repent and believe. God offers Himself to a man's volitional nature or will and expects man to make a choice in regard to his eternal destiny. "Why will ye die?" (Ezek. 33:11).

Alfred Smith wrote:

"I set the boundaries of the ocean vast
Carved out the mountains from the distant past
Molded a man from the miry clay
Breathed in him life but he went astray.
I hold the waters in My mighty hand
Spread out the heavens with a single span
Make all creation tremble at my voice
But My own sons come to Me by choice.
I own the cattle on a thousand hills
I write the music for the whippoorwills
Control the planets with their rocks and rills
But give you freedom to use your own will.
And if you want me to I'll make you whole
I'll only do it tho if you say so
I'll never force you for I love you so
I give you freedom is it yes or no."

Free Will and God's Assistance

There is a simple, sane, and Scriptural conclusion that we can come to when it comes to human choice and freedom. Here it is. Man can make some choices without God's help and others he can only make with God's help or assistance. When it comes to salvation He needs *the grace of God's assistance upon his heart* to respond to the glorious plan of salvation (Acts 16:14). This aid comes through the "Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29) or the Spirit's saving and sanctifying ministry upon the hearts and lives of the lost (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2 – "sanctification of the Spirit").

In eternity past God foreknew and chose His corporate body for salvation. In eternity present the Holy Spirit operates to make the election of the corporate body come to pass, by convicting people, and setting them apart to be God's children in Christ. *The Holy Spirit sets us apart in Christ through His drawing, convicting, and saving work upon our hearts and lives.* The Spirit's sanctifying work upon the hearts of lost humanity (1 Cor. 2:4 – "in demonstration of the Spirit and power" and 1 Cor. 6:11- "by the Spirit of our God") involves conviction and the carrying out of God's saving plan, or bringing His corporate elective purpose to pass. The Holy Spirit calls people to salvation through His inner convicting work of grace upon the heart, and as a result, God's corporate elective program is brought to pass (Eph. 4:4, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling"). As a result of the Spirit's work upon the hearts of people, they can express faith in Christ, and this expression of faith is said be "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1). It is the faith of these people that would result in God's corporate program of election coming to fruition.

The opportunity for lost people to believe in Christ is a gracious act of God upon the human heart (John 6:44; 12:32) and this is why the Bible speaks of those "which had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). Grace not only saves a man (Eph. 2:8-9), it prepares a man for salvation (Rom. 2:4). Grace aids the will of a person but it does not overtake a person's will. Grace works in a man's heart to convict him and compel him to come to Jesus Christ for salvation.

"In tenderness He sought me,
Weary, and sick with sin,
And on His shoulders brought me
Back to His fold again;
While angels in His presence sang
Until the courts of heaven rang.

Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold.
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold."

The *preparatory* or *pre-salvation* grace of God upon the human heart allows spiritually dead men (John 5:25) and blind men (2 Cor. 4:4) to see their utter depravity (Luke 18:13 – "God be merciful to me a

sinner”) and the good news of salvation for lost sinners through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:2), so that they can believe in Jesus Christ, or commit their faith only to Him for salvation (“that which I have committed unto him” – 2 Tim. 1:12).

The drawing grace of God, which works on a man’s heart, and enables him to respond to God’s offer of salvation, is a gracious work of God, which can be summed up in the words of Jeremiah 31:3: “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” God’s sovereignty over the human will cannot be missed. God initiates the need for salvation in the mind and heart of the sinner. God moves in us before we can move toward Him. It’s God who prompts, pursues, and persuades a person to come to salvation. The means or instruments that God used to bring people to salvation are the Gospel of God (Rom. 1:16), the Spirit of God (John 16:8), the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4), and the drawing of God (John 6:44).

“He drew me and I followed on
Charmed to confess the voice divine.”

It’s the grace of God’s inner work upon the human heart that allows a man to respond favorably to the Gospel. The grace of God’s illumination (Eph. 1:18; Heb. 6:4; 2 Cor. 4:6), conviction (John 16:8; Acts 2:37), and His salvation promptings upon the human heart and mind (Eph. 1:18 – “eyes of your understanding being enlightened”) of poor, lost, depraved sinners opens them up to 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). Man is in the dark and needs the light of God’s revelation (Isa. 9:2; Luke 1:79; John 1:4; 12:36) to see his lost estate and need for salvation (Matt. 4:16 – “The people which sat in darkness saw great light”).

The will of man is bound to unbelief and sin. Therefore, 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 conviction of God (John 16:8-9), and the Spirit of God (2 Thess. 2:13). As a result of this pre-salvation work, a man's heart can be opened to his sin and need for salvation. Because of the gracious work of God upon the human heart, a man can decide to *use his own volition* to express faith in Christ, realizing that God is the initiator, author, and source of his faith (1 Cor. 2:5 – "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God").

God seeks to work faith and repentance in our hearts through His inner conviction and illumination (John 16:8; Acts 2:37; 2 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 1:18) but does not override our own will in relation to expressing faith in Christ (John 5:40 – "ye will not come") and repentance toward God (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"). God never unconditionally decides a man's salvation against his will (John 5:40). God seeks to soften our heart and make a person 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). 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"). Man, with God's assistance, can decide to *use his own volition*, to express faith in Christ (Rev. 22:17).

In short, God brings a person to the threshold of salvation by supplying him with light (John 12:35) and allows every person to make a valid choice regarding his eternal destiny ("While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be children of light" – John 12:36). God does not override the human will and man's power of decision or choice, as He moves upon the human will, to inspire salvational faith. God seeks to soften the will and stir the will to move toward His initiative, but at the same time, He does not override the human will.

Calvinism has historically rejected that man's will, even though God's grace, can respond to God's initiative. For some reason Calvinism concludes that if man has any decision in his eternal destiny that God

is no longer sovereign (in total control), that man chooses God and God does not choose man, that man's will is not totally depraved, and that a man's personal decision of faith becomes his contribution to salvation (a work of man) instead of a work of God's grace. However, these conclusions are totally absurd and warranted. First, God chose to save a corporate group of people in eternity past and put the plan of election into place (Rom. 8:30). Without God's choice man would never be saved (Rom. 3:11). Salvation is God's choice – not man's. Furthermore, God chose to implement His own sovereign plan that did not override man's will, giving man the ability to choose his spiritual destiny, as the Lord convicts and compels a person to be saved (John 16:8-11).

Second, the fact that man can respond to God's initiative does not destroy the Biblical truth of his total depravity before God; it only reminds us that God must first move upon the heart (John 6:44), so that man can possess the desire to turn to God (1 Thess. 1:9). Third, a man's faith is never viewed from Scripture as his contribution to salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). Fourth, man's freedom to choose his eternal destiny does not limit God's sovereignty (His control over man's salvation), but magnifies it, since God has developed His own amazing plan and purpose of redemptive salvation (Rom. 11:33), which includes a genuine response from those people that He created (Isa. 1:18). God's purpose, whatever it might be, always reflects His sovereignty and control over the earth.

Many feel that God must choose to save some people at the expense of others if election is going to make any sense. They reason that there would be no real choice left with God if corporate election were true. But God's ways and thoughts are not the same as man's ideas and philosophies (Isa. 55:8). God has not chosen the arbitrary selection of some individuals over others, bypassing a non-elect group, making sure that they end up in hell. Instead, He has chosen to implement a plan whereby all people can become part of a corporate or elective body that He has chosen to save in eternity past. We must let God implement His decrees or purposes (Isa. 14:24) in the way He chooses – not in the way Augustine or Calvin has decided they should be implemented. God's ways are higher than Augustine's ways. God does not implement the decree of election at the expense of His other

sovereign ways and purposes regarding salvation among mankind (Rev. 22:17).

One thing is certain; when reading the Scriptures, without Calvin's bifocals, a person will come to the conclusion that man has a personal response to God's initiatives upon the heart. A casual reading of the Bible confirms that man has a free and legitimate choice to respond either positively ("He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me" – John 5:24) or negatively ("ye will not come" – John 5:40) to the Gospel proclamation. A man's will (freedom of choice) does enter into the salvation picture, as God works in grace upon the human heart, to generate faith, and compel a man to the place of salvation. Again, God *helps* us to have faith but does not *make* us have faith.

The Holy Spirit directs the sinner's attention to the Word of God and to the Son of God. He enables the unbeliever to see the glories of the Savior. He removes the obstacles, deals with the sinner's objections, and seeks to bring him to Christ through initiating personal belief in a man's heart.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 gives the balanced picture:

"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 through sanctification of the Spirit (God's part) and belief of the truth (man's part)."

The Spirit's gracious move upon our hearts is a glorious work of God. And yet, God allows each person to make their own decision for salvation, or use their *own volition* to respond to God's initiatives, so much so, that it's said to be a person's own faith (Luke 7:50; 18:42; Rom. 4:5) that brings them into the blessings of salvation (John 7:38). God helps us to have faith but at the same time makes us responsible for it. The old hymn said it best:

"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?"

Sovereign Grace

Calvinism rejects the notion that man has any part in deciding the destiny of his own salvation, since according to Calvinism, this destroys the sovereignty of God (God's absolute control over all things), and the operation of what is termed, sovereign grace (a controlling and non-meritorious work of God on the sinner's behalf). Once again, this conclusion is false and misleading. First, a man's faith is never viewed by God, as a human work (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-9).

Second, God can still be sovereign (in control), working everything according to His own plan and purpose (2 Tim. 1:9), without bypassing a person's decision, regarding his eternal destiny. God's sovereign plan in both salvation and strategic world events can allow for human agency and involvement (John 3:16; 7:37; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 14:16). This does not make God less sovereign, but actually displays His sovereign ability to create a plan, which involves human agency, while still bringing His own purpose to fruition (Ps. 135:6).

Once again, the fact that salvation is all "of God" (John 1:13) means that God is the planner, provider, and pursuer of a person's salvation, but it does not mean that man is excluded from making a valid choice regarding his eternal destiny. The Calvinist believes that salvation can no longer be "of God" (John 1:13) if a person can choose to believe on the Son of God or go against God's saving purpose for his life. But this is not the case at all. God is always sovereign or in control of the destiny, calling, and events associated with a person's salvation since He has created the entire plan of salvation, which includes man having opportunity to choose his eternal destiny.

- God chose a collective group of people to be saved in eternity past (Eph. 1:4; Romans 8:29-30). Is this not sovereign?
- God sought this collective group of people out (Luke 19:10), so they could be saved in eternity present (Acts 16:31). Is this not sovereign?
- God devised a plan to grant people enabling grace (Acts 18:27), so they can make a valid choice regarding their eternal destiny (Rev. 22:17). Is this not sovereign?
- God has chosen us (John 15:16), so we could choose Him (Isa. 1:18). Is this not sovereign?

- God does whatever He wants to do (Ps. 115:3) – not what Augustine or Calvin says He does. Is this not sovereign?

The fact that God sometimes chooses to limit the direct intervention and display of His sovereign power does not make Him less sovereign (Matt. 26:53-54).

“He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free.
He could have called ten thousand angels,
But He died alone, for you and me.”

He could have called the armies of angels to rescue Him, but thank God He didn't call them. Why? It's because our salvation depended upon His death upon the cross. God does not always choose to display His sovereign power in a direct and overriding way by avoiding man's choices. *God can limit the expression of His power in relationship to human decisions or choices.* To say that He does not is not Scriptural. God uses human choices to fulfill His saving, serving, and other sovereign purposes in the world.

God's determination does not 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. God is always sovereign in that He has ordained His own plans and brings them to fulfillment in the way He has purposed – not the way Augustine or Calvin has purposed. God ordained the end (an elect body) and also the means to the end (the free will response of people).

God decrees all things (sovereignty) but He is not directly responsible for all things (evil and man's choices). For instance, God is not the direct author of sin and moral evil (Rom. 5:12), and those things that evil men do. God is not directly responsible for terrorist acts, pedophiles, and other evil actions taking place in the world. God has His providential hand over all these events (Rev. 16:16), and maintains His sovereignty or control over everything that takes place in the world, but this does not make Him the *instigator* of evil actions (James 1:13).

The terrible acts of sins are known as the permissive decrees of God which take place in a fallen world of sin.

In short, God allows man to interact with His purposes, plans, proposals, and pleas (Matt. 23:37), while moving everything according to His will (Eph. 1:9), and maintaining His sovereignty (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 4:34-35). God carries the fishbowl in His hand, while the fish is swimming freely, inside the bowl. God is always in control, even when men are making their own personal decisions. God is in control, even when Calvinists, don't think He is in control.

“God's in His Heaven -
All's right with the world.”

Think of an architect who designs a building. The architect draws up the plans but there is latitude. When the carpenter constructs the building, he generally follows the plan of the architect. The architect does not plan how the carpenter should drive each nail, or lay each board. He leaves that to the choice of the carpenter. In a similar way, God has ordained the general blueprint for people's lives, regarding salvation and their earthly calling and placements in life, but this does not mean God does not give people freedom to choose the specific details of their lives, which includes their eternal destiny and choices that will affect their own personal lives.

Third, the work of God's grace is not canceled out, in the salvation of the sinner, just because a man can decide his own destiny. Think it through from a Biblical standpoint. God, by His own sovereign grace, has wrought our salvation (Eph. 1:4), bought our salvation (1 Cor. 6:20), and sought us (Luke 19:10) in the salvation process. God draws the poor lost sinner to Himself (John 6:44). He initiates the wayward soul to place “his faith” (Rom. 4:5) in Christ and all of this is the work of God's grace (Acts 18:27; Rom. 11:5-6).

Once again, 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 5:40). No obscure teaching on election will overturn this blessed noonday truth. 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 redemptive sovereign plan for mankind. To neglect one is to neglect the other. A seminary professor once said, "Try to explain election and you may lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you may lose your soul!"

We can conclude that it's only by God's grace and mercy that a sinner is saved, which means, the sinner's works are excluded from the salvation process altogether (Titus 2:11; 3:5). Since personal faith is not a form of works (Gal. 2:16), then salvation can still be by grace, even when man is given a legitimate opportunity to decide his eternal destiny (Rev. 22:17). Grace is highlighted through the entire salvation scenario. God purposed salvation (Eph. 1:9), provided salvation (John 3:16), and pursued us in salvation (Luke 19:10). "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). However, the fact that man can decide his own eternal destiny (John 1:12), does not cancel out God's grace (God still saves by grace), nor does it rob God of His sovereign plan (God is still in control).

God has chosen to sometimes limit His direct power in order to fulfill His purposes, while still maintaining His sovereignty and purpose in the world (John 17:5; Luke 23:33-34). 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 doctrine 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 ("he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" - Ps. 115:3). God chooses to limit His absolute power, in some degree, to fulfill His sovereign purpose, which is related to the salvation of the sinner. God *enables* the sinner to see his moral depravity and need for salvation (John 16:8), but He does

not *make* the sinner believe, by overriding His personal and autonomous will (John 12:35-36; Acts 7:51; Isa. 1:18 – “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD”).

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 (Eph. 1:18; Heb. 6:4; 2 Cor. 4:6), 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 (John 5:40). Calvinism contends that a person must first be regenerated (born again), before the will can be changed, and before a person can express true faith in Christ. However, this is a philosophy to make Calvinism work, it’s not Scriptural (Acts 16:31), and is theologically backwards (John 1:12-13).

Here is the point. When man exercises his freedom of choice, regarding his eternal destiny, he is actually fulfilling the sovereignty of God, not canceling it out (John 7:37-38; Acts 8:37; 16:31; Rom. 10:13; Eph. 1:13; Titus 3:5). God simply chooses to limit His strength, but not His sovereignty, and limit His power, but not His grace, while bringing a person to the place of salvation. In essence, God does not have the final say on a person’s eternal destiny (“ye would not” – Matt. 23:37).

The *outworking* of God’s plan for election does not exclude human involvement (1 Pet. 1:2), but neither is human involvement the *basis* for election (Eph. 1:9; John 15:16). God’s entire plan, from start to finish, is sovereign, but this does not mean God must override a person’s will in bringing it to pass. This entire plan of salvation was preplanned by an infinitely wise and gracious God (Eph. 3:8) – not by Augustine, Calvin, or the Synod of Dort. Will the real sovereign God, please stand up!

The Reformed, or Calvinistic system of salvation, has created doctrines of grace (tulip) that the Bible has not created, and comes to philosophical conclusions that the Bible does not teach, regarding election, moral depravity, grace, faith, the human will, and salvation.

Corporate Election Explained

Paul and other writers of Scripture seem to stress the corporate nature of election. This helps one to see the rest of God's saving plan, such as human choice or freedom, and a "whosever will" (Rev. 22:17) Gospel outreach (Mark 16:15), as harmonizing with the doctrine of election. Let me get somewhat bold in making the next statements. It makes no reasonable or Scriptural sense to tell someone that Jesus died for the entire world, and that "whosoever will" can be saved, when in fact they cannot be saved, if they are not one of the elect God chose to save! This is a conflicting claim and becomes the height of trickery and sleight! It's also theological doubletalk. To conclude that Christ died for all people and that all can be saved, and then in the next theological breath say they cannot be saved, unless they are one of the elect, is ludicrous!

I am aware how men have wrestled with the topic of election and human freedom, and how most moderate Calvinists will simply throw up their hands and conclude that unlimited atonement, election, and freedom of choice cannot be understood or resolved. Election for many is a cause of bewilderment and frustration. To others it is something that embarrasses them, since they are reluctant to say, that God individually chose them to salvation and bypassed others. Because the teaching of election is bewildering, embarrassing, and controversial many avoid it. But the theme of election in the Bible is too important to dismiss. We must be responsible for correctly interpreting the teaching about election.

The Bible emphasizes the corporate nature of election and places a community emphasis on this subject. *Christians are not elected individually but only as a corporate entity.* The writers of both Old and New Testaments seem to stress by far the corporate nature of God's election. A paradigm (model) for understanding election in a corporate concept does emerge from the Old and New Testaments. The Biblical perspective of election is corporate. It can be explained in this way. God has chosen to save a corporate group of people. He has chosen a group of people "in Christ" from which His elective purposes can take place or come to fruition.

In other words, God's elective program is designed to be opened to everyone; it is not closed to anyone. God allows people to enter His

elective program today and become part of a collective community or general class of people that He has chosen to bless and save. In other words, God chooses to save a company of people in eternity past, and those who want to be part of this company of redeemed people, can enter into the blessings of God's corporate elective program and purpose for salvation. *Election is primarily a corporate concept.* Any passages that do suggest *individual* election naturally find their fulfillment in the greater context of the election of a community of believers. God chose a community of people to salvation, without unconditionally determining the specific individuals, who would belong to the elect body.

In this view of election God calls a people in the midst of history, initially Israel, and then the church composed of Jews and Gentiles, to the place of salvation, which is not exclusively theirs, but to a salvation which is open to everybody in the world (John 3:16). Those who cooperate with God's community calling can become part of the corporate, growing, and open body of people that God has chosen to make His children. The election of a community of people is aimed at humanity as a whole, and not just a few souls, which presents a Biblical, joyful, non-fearful, non-fatalistic, and non-revolting prospect of election. The Bible does not teach that God's aim is to bring only a handful of souls to Heaven and to consign the rest to the rubbish heap. This teaching is a travesty or mockery of both Scripture and God's purpose and very character. The Augustinian/Calvinistic teaching on election has placed a dark shadow over the goodness of God and His saving purpose for all mankind (John 3:15-16).

The narrow and exclusive Augustinian teaching on election leads to doubting God's clear statements and revelations in the Bible to rescue or save all mankind. It also leads to doubt regarding God's character, goodness, and fairness to all people. A false view of election and predestination results in dread, fear, and confusion about God. Perhaps this is why Calvin in his institutes calls God's alleged act of double predestination "a dreadful decree" (Institutes 3:23.7), which according to Calvin, is God's decree or plan to damn multitudes of people to hell. Actually, there is nothing dreadful and horrible about election and predestination, when these doctrines are understood in relationship to the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27), regarding His purpose and plan of salvation.

In this study, we will discover that the Bible explains election in corporate terms and in plural language (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:4). Election in the Bible has to do with God's strategy for the salvation of the nations. Election does not *narrow* down things but *opens* things up. The community concept of election promises the inclusion of all humanity within God's elective purpose. Everything flows out of God's corporate elective program, which encompasses a general plan to save all people, and makes them part of His elective purpose. *Christians are not elected individually but they are elected as a corporate entity.* The Scriptures paint a picture of God electing a *people* for salvation - not a *person*. At the point of a person's faith each individual becomes a part of the "elect" corporate body of Christ that God wants to save and has chosen to save in eternity past. They enter into God's elective purpose, which is to save a company of people and make them His own children. They then receive the title of "elect" (a title of honor and dignity).

To state it simply, God chose to save a corporate group of people and make them His own children. A person enters God's corporate program and company of people when they place their faith in Christ for salvation. God has graciously and lovingly chosen to save a corporate remnant in the lost race of humanity. Because God has chosen to do this He put the wheels of His redemptive plan into motion to save a corporate remnant of people who turn to Him through repentance and faith.

It's interesting that both the Arminian and Calvinist view election from an individual basis and therefore miss what seems to be the important key to understanding election. Election is on a corporate basis (all can enter God's elective program by faith) and only this view of election provides a correct understanding and alignment with God's love for all people, unlimited atonement (Christ's death extends to everybody), and human freedom of choice. God's purpose was to elect a corporate group of people known as the Church (Acts 20:28), an eternally elected community, "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). This chosen body (Col. 1:18) and bride (Rev. 21:9) would experience her election through the universal proclamation of the Gospel to all men (Luke 24:47), so that all people could have opportunity to respond and be brought into the blessings of His corporate elective purpose. In short, election is open - not closed (1 Pet. 2:9). It is open to all people. God's choice is to save

a collective, growing, and open class or group of people, instead of a closed group of individual people, who were favored by God, over other people.

God chooses to save a corporate group of people, and all people can enter this chosen group, in response to the universal Gospel invitation (Matt. 11:28; Mark 16:15) and Spirit's ministry (John 16:8), which goes out to all men. There is no mystery to election and free will. The mystery is resolved when election is viewed in a corporate sense. God's mercy is freely available to all (Rom. 11:32) and any person who hears and responds to God's call becomes part of the elect body. When we preach or share the Gospel, we give people outside the elect community, an opportunity to become members of the elect people of God. *Election comprehends all men and women potentially and no one unconditionally.* It is open to all. Every person who is in Christ and part of the corporate body of the church can know they have been chosen and predestined to be holy and blameless (2 Tim. 1:9). They can know they have entered God's saving embrace and elective purpose to rescue mankind from hell.

God loves all mankind, desires to save all mankind, and has sent His Son to die for all mankind. Therefore, His corporate purpose and goal in election does not contradict these self-evident Biblical truths or axioms of Scripture. God elects on a *corporate* basis instead of an individual basis. This means God provides an opportunity for all mankind to enter into His corporate elective plan, which involves saving a company of people, who respond to His overtures of grace, and making them part of His elect company of people. Those who respond to His call become part of the corporate group that God has chosen to save before the foundation of the world. Election is actually God's "yes" to the human race. It's not a scheme that divides humanity into two camps – the elect and non-elect, but the purpose of God to save all men, in order to form the elect body. Election is the plan and purpose of God to bring a community of people (not a restrictive group) into His saving purpose and choosing a corporate bride for His Son (Eph. 5:25-27).

The concept of corporate election fulfills God's saving purposes (Eph. 1:3). Paul is saying that those of "us" who have already come to faith in Christ, and who are now saved and part of the corporate body, are

the community of people that God chose to save before the foundation of the world, and who are now bringing His election program to fruition. This same corporate group of people can be sure that God will see them through to the end. One thing is certain. Election does not involve God choosing some people, over others, and God leaving the rest (either willingly or passively) to die in their sins and go to hell. Why would God create billions of people to die in their sins after loving them (John 3:16), dying for them (Heb. 2:9), seeking them (Luke 10:10), calling them (Matt. 11:28), and drawing them to salvation (John 16:8; John 12:32)?

Dave Hunt asks the appropriate question, "What love is this?" Election does not involve God *individually* choosing some people to salvation over others but *corporately* choosing a body (Eph. 2:16. 4:14; Col. 3:15) of people, or redeemed company of people from mankind, who freely and willingly respond to God's proposals upon their hearts. Only this view of election leaves the door open for a valid "whosoever Gospel" message (Rev. 22:17). Through the centuries people have become part of this growing community or body of believers through faith (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 10:17), and this is a body that is being progressively formed over many years, by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Many today believe that God has two buckets. In the one bucket there are those He chooses to save (the elect). In the other bucket there are those who He chooses to not save (the non-elect). The problem with this view of election is that it cannot be supported by the clear and positive statements of the Bible, which declare that God wants all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), and that all can be saved (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 10:13). God only has one bucket! Therefore, it's only Biblical and right to conclude that election is on a corporate basis within the mind and plan of God. This view of election leaves the door open for a "whosoever Gospel" and closes the door to the endless and mindless arguments that lead to nowhere.

Arguments surface from the writings of moderate four-point Calvinists. "How can God elect some, and pass over others, when He wants all to be saved?" or "Why would God provide salvation for everybody through the death of Christ and then refuse the non-elect to take part in Christ's saving benefits?" Most four-pointers simply throw up their hands and say, "It's all a mystery." But is it really so mysterious?

An understanding of election in a corporate sense, electing a group or community of people to salvation, instead of choosing individual people over others, settles many questions regarding election, such as, “Did God choose some to be saved over others” and “Does God only love and intend to save the elect.” *One must no longer ask these questions, since these types of questions, did not trouble the minds of the Biblical writers.* The writers did not entertain the issue of individual election like so many do today. They simply knew and taught that God has chosen to save people and make them part of the corporate body – the church. Since plural language dominates the majority of election texts, we can therefore set forth some valid Biblical arguments for corporate election.

In those few cases, where individual election is mentioned (“Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine” - Rom. 16:13), it’s based upon the corporate emphasis of God’s choice, which is repeatedly emphasized throughout the Scripture. *Individual election presupposes God’s plan for corporate election.* In fact, even the above reference points to individual people being chosen with others, as do other references (“elected together with you” – 1 Pet. 5:13). In other words, the people who are said to be individually chosen by God are part of His greater and ongoing purpose of corporate election. Of course, individual people make up the corporate body, but those who are said to be elected individually, have actually become part of God’s corporate program of election, which is taking place among the nations.

To state it more succinctly, the expression of an individual being chosen in the Lord is simply a personal reference to what God has done for that person’s life (1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:12); it’s not a reference to the way God has chosen to implement His elective program and salvation purpose, which extends to all mankind. People individually become part of the elect body and can view their salvation as something that is personal and precious to them. As far as our personal salvation is concerned, and from our frame of reference, we can personally say that God has elected or chosen us to be His child forever, when we enter the elect body that He has chosen to save. This is something that is wonderful and dear to our hearts. However, the individual statements regarding election do not overthrow the plain and simple facts that God has chosen a community of people to be saved and that all can enter into God’s glorious and merciful program of election.

There are a number of compelling and valid arguments that support the corporate nature of election.

Argument #1

The dominant use of election terminology is applied to the people of Israel as a corporate body or nation. The Old Testament commonly treats the entire people of Israel as a unit (Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 12:10). The nation was the “bride” of Yahweh (Isa. 54:1-8; Hos. 1-3; 61:10; 62:4-5; Jer. 3:8). The term “congregation” stresses the collective unity (Ex. 12:13; Lev. 4:13; Num. 1:1; Josh, 8:35; Jud, 20:1). The term and analogy of a “flock” also stresses the corporate concept (Ps. 78:52; 100:3). Likewise, the term “house” also points to Israel’s collective unity as a body of people that God has called (Ex. 16:31; Lev. 10:6; Isa. 2:5; Jer. 2:4; 5:15). The term “people” is also a collective term and Israel’s election by God, as His special corporate people, is clearly taught in the Old and New Testament (Ex. 19:5-6; Duet. 7:6; 14:2; Isaiah 45:4; Matthew 24:31; Rom. 9:4; 11:28). In Isaiah 45:4 we read of “Israel mine elect” (a corporate emphasis).

The New Testament also links Israel’s election to a group of people whom God foreknew and not individual people (Rom. 11:2, 5). However, one must understand that in the Jewish community not every Israelite was saved. Israel was elected as a nation but this did not guarantee the individual salvation of every Jew. Only those Jews who placed faith in the sacrificial program or the coming Messiah became regenerate or saved and were regarded as God’s true children (Rom. 9:6-8; 2:28-29).

God has chosen the nation of Israel to be His special people and all of Jacob’s descendants are under the umbrella or cluster of God’s chosen national people (Isa. 65:8). However, not every Jew is saved simply because they are part of the national election. There is actually an elect group or spiritual remnant within the national election of Israel (Isa. 65:9, 15). However, this is not the same way God is working His election program today. In the present economy or Church dispensation all of God’s corporate elect people are saved (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:22; 1 Thess. 1:4; Titus 1:1-2). There is no elect person within the corporate church who is not saved.

In any event, three things can be observed from Israel's corporate election as a body of people chosen by God. First, God elects or chooses to have a corporate body of people that are His own special people. This is His desire and purpose for mankind. Second, God extends His grace to those who want to become His children within the outworking of His elect program. Those who embrace God's grace are said to be His true elect children.

God's choice is to save a corporate body of people and those who accept His grace become part of the saved and elect body. This was true of Israel in the past and it will be true of Israel in the future when Jesus returns to earth (Rom. 11:26-27; Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Isa. 53:4-6; 65:8-16). There will always be an elect spiritual remnant or group of people that God saves and blesses. Third, since God chose a corporate body of people in Israel, it's therefore natural to expect the new distinct people of God, and new program of God (the Church), to also be a corporate solidarity of people that would take the place of Israel (not replace Israel) in the present dispensation and plan of God. Under the New Covenant a person enters the chosen body, the Church, through the new birth. This truth will be taught by Paul in the New Testament.

R. P. Shedd writes:

"Election does not have an individual emphasis in Paul, any more than it did for Israel in the Old Testament. Rather, it implies a covenant relationship for Israel through which God chooses for himself a people. This collectivism is of supreme importance for understanding the implications of election in Christ."

Argument #2

Ephesians is pre-eminently Paul's epistle of the church, the *body* of Christ (Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32) that is elect (Eph. 1:4), instead of an individual concept of election. The elective program of the church which is His body is the "mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:19; 3:3,10). The key issue surrounding the church is the oneness of the Jew and Gentile in the corporate body of Christ (Eph. 3:6; 1 Cor. 12:13). There is an emphasis on a corporate body of people or a *corporate solidarity* in this epistle and other epistles when speaking of election. With this concept in mind Paul seems to link election to a corporate body of people known as the Church (Col. 1:18).

When Paul mentions the pronouns “us” (Eph. 1:4-6, 8-9) and “we” (Eph. 1:7, 11-12) and “ye” (vs. 13) and “our” (vs. 14) in the longest Greek sentence of the Bible, which pertains to His elective purposes, he was obviously referring to the church, which is His corporate body of people. Paul means that God chose the church (“us”), or His corporate body of people, and he personalizes this organism of people with the pronouns us, we, ye, and our. God has chosen the Church, as a body of people that all can enter, rather than specific individual people.

Rather than saying God chose “me” we should stress that God chose “us” – the corporate body. The expression “elected together with you” (1 Pet. 5:13) gives us the community emphasis of election. A corporate understanding of election fits the New Testament teaching. There is no such thing as “Lone Ranger” Christians. God chooses to save a group of people who respond to His saving invitation (Matt. 22:4-14). The perspective of New Testament writers is corporate election and therefore they do not ask the questions about individual specific selection to salvation. They simply express the truth that God chooses to save people and make them part of His elect body and Paul says that all of “us” can have part in what God has planned.

Andrew Telford writes:

“The divine blue print which is set forth in the book of Ephesians has in it the destiny of the Church which is His Body. He was not dealing with the individual believer in this book, but with a corporate group, known as the Church. In Ephesians 1:5 He has predestinated the Church unto Adoption of children by Jesus Christ. God is not here deciding the Destination of individuals, but is telling us that before the foundation of the world He had decided the Destination of the Church, the corporate group.”

Later he writes: “God has predestinated one corporate group, known as Israel, to the outstanding place among the nations of the world. Then, God has predestinated another corporate group known as the Church which is His Body.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13 teaches the concept of a corporate body of brethren when it states: “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 through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Second Timothy 2:10 speaks of “the elect’s sake” referencing a body or community of people. The church (“the body” – Eph. 1:22-23) is elected according to God’s foreknown *program* and *purpose* (1 Pet. 1:2) which is to save a large company of people (corporately or collectively) through the death of His Son Jesus Christ.

The church concept expresses a community of believers that God has chosen instead of individuals. True, individuals make up the group but the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament stresses a corporate body that is elected and a body or community of believers *that any person can enter upon individual faith* (Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2). William Klein has stated: “Christian security rests not in an individualistic ‘God chose me,’ but in the reality that by faith ‘I am a member of his chosen body.’”

Argument #3

Peter unequivocally confirmed the corporate nature of election in 1 Peter 2:9 – “a chosen generation,” “holy nation,” and peculiar people.” This terminology reflects the Old Testament analogy of Israel’s corporate election. This does not mean the church replaces Israel in God’s plan (covenant Theology) but it does suggest the mind of God in relationship to election. God views election of His New Testament people (the Church) as a corporate entity instead of individual people. Paul also places a heavy emphasis on the corporate-solidarity and nature of election in Romans 11:5 – “a remnant according to the election of grace,” Romans 11: 5 - “the election hath obtained it,” and Romans 11:28 - “but as touching the election, they are beloved.” Paul stresses the thought of election when viewing the church as a corporate entity (Eph. 1:4-5, 11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

When election is understood in this light it simplifies those passages that have often been used to teach unconditional election – God choosing some people to go to Heaven and others to go to Hell. Instead God has chosen a corporate people and all who come to faith in Christ enter into the corporate body that God chose from eternity past.

Argument #4

The stated purpose for this present dispensational age or stewardship of God's working involves calling out a people for God's name. The words of Peter stress the corporate purpose of God for the world today. Acts 15:14, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." The corporate elective purpose is seen earlier when God turned to the Gentiles to call out a corporate group of people to salvation. Acts 13:46-48, "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you (the Jewish nation), and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

In this context we see how God dispensationally turned from a Jewish mission to a Gentile mission. The picture is that God opened to the Gentiles *the door of opportunity* for salvation and blessing (see Acts 14:27). God began a new program that would take the Gospel to the entire world so that Gentiles could be saved on a worldwide basis (Mark 16:15). This can be viewed as a door of new opportunity (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Thus, the "many" Gentiles who trusted Christ as Savior during Paul's day and throughout the present dispensational era or epoch of time in which we live today become part of the corporate body that God has chosen to salvation.

The understanding of "a people for his name" (Acts 15:14) with "many" (Acts 13:48) suggests a corporate nature of election. The expression "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" is not teaching individual selection among the Gentile populace of people but a corporate group of people that God arranged to become part of His new saving program among the Gentiles. They are not the *many* God chose to save over others but the *many* He chose to save in view of His corporate elective purpose in His present dispensational outworking.

Argument #5

The reference to the church in the second epistle of John is further proof of the corporate nature of election. 2 John 1:1 speaks of the “elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.” John may be personifying a local church as a lady and the children she had as fellow Christians in the congregation (1 Pet. 5:13 - “elected together with you”). Obviously the church is comparable to a lady in much the same way as the bride of Christ is used as a proper metaphor and reference to the church (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). The adjective “elect” in 2 John 2:1 tells us how God elected the church to possess a special bride relationship to Jesus Christ that is comparable to a man and woman relationship. So “the elect lady” probably refers to a specific local church and “her children” are the believer’s fellowshipping in the church. “Thy elect sister” (2 John 13) may refer to a sister church or congregation that was sending Christian greetings.

Argument #6

There are many New Testament symbols of the church that have strong corporate overtones: the vine (John 15:4-5), the body (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 12:13-26), the temple of God (2 Cor. 6:16), the flock (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Pet. 5:2-3), “other sheep” of a different “fold” (John 10:16) and the people or nation of God (1 Pet. 2:9). These expressions and personifications of God’s people all point to the corporate nature of election, or the way God views election, instead of John Calvin or any other modern-day Calvinist.

Argument #7

The Biblical concept of a lost race of people being in Adam (Rom. 5:12) and then a race of people being in Christ (Rom. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 15:22) further illustrates the corporate nature of God’s plan of election in Christ (Eph. 1:3-4 - “in him”). Romans 5:12-21 reveals that Paul views people corporately. In Romans 5:12 Paul views the human race as participating in Adam’s sin. What Adam did, we all did. In our corporate solidarity with Adam, all people participated in his sin. In a similar way, God views his elect group of people as a corporate group, or community of people, who are willing to participate with His plan of

salvation. He chooses to save a group of people who respond to His proposals upon their lives. Those who participate with God's plan and offer of salvation become part of the elect group that He has chosen to save in the counsels of past eternity.

Argument #8

The use of the adjective "elect" is mostly always in the plural form and when it is not it is referencing something that is plural in nature. So election, being chosen by God, is a concept that has a plural emphasis throughout the Scriptures. God chose a corporate company of people in eternity past to become His choice people and those who respond to His universal offer of salvation and overtures upon their soul can become part of this chosen corporate company of elect people. People who respond to the Gospel message are given the privilege to have the title of God's elect (Titus 1:1; Rom. 8:33) and become part of the corporate body of people that God has decided to save and predestinate to Christ's image even before the world was framed (Rom. 8:28-30).

Argument #9

God has always elected on a corporate basis. This was true even of the angels who did not fall in the rebellion (1 Timothy 5:21 – "the elect angels"). The corporate election of Israel, the church, and even angels seem to stress God's plan for corporate election. God elects people without bypassing man's freedom to choose his eternal destiny. This was true even in the angelic realm. God built into the angels the capability for choice. Both men and angels are a body of personal beings that God corporately elected without giving particular distinction to individuals. Within the corporate body of men and angels there would be an elect company of personal beings that follow God's initiatives instead of the devil and they would become the elect company.

After studying the Scriptures William Klein arrived at a corporate view of election. I agree with his conclusion: "These data present an impressive case that election is not God's choice of a restricted number of individuals whom he wills to save, but the description of that corporate body which, in Christ, he is saving." Later he writes: "Anyone

who believes may enter into this elect nation. To make election restrictive is to limit God's boundless mercy."

Romans 10:21 says, "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Paul is quoting Isaiah 65:2. The obvious observation is this. If the unbelieving Israelites in both Isaiah's day and Paul's day were simply nonelect, why do Isaiah and Paul express such anguish over their souls? *The issue is their need for faith – not God's selective election. People enter God's general or corporate elective program through faith.* They receive the title "the elect" and become part of the universal body that God has decided to save from eternity past. When a person places their faith in Christ and becomes saved they enter into God's corporate elective program.

I again concur with what William Klein says: "Election is not a prior selection by God that excludes nonchosen individuals from salvation. God has chosen a people in Christ, but individuals must decide whether or not to accept God's salvation and so enter that body (Rom. 10:13)."

Clark Pinnock agrees:

"Election is not God's choice of a restricted number of individuals whom God is willing to save – it is a description of the corporate body which God is in fact saving through Jesus."

In short, election has a corporate emphasis in Scripture. Election is not a narrow teaching but a broad and open teaching that involves God's way of saving the nations. It involves God choosing for Himself a community of people whose election and salvation comes to fruition through the death of His Son and offer of salvation to all (John 3:16; Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). It is God's will to save lost humanity (2 Pet. 3:9) through the agency of the corporate community that He has elected. Election involves an open growing community or body of people (1 Pet. 2:9 - "a chosen generation"). Election is not God's choice of a restricted or selective number of individuals whom God is willing to save over others (the non-elect). It's a description of the corporate body which God is in fact saving through Jesus Christ and one which all can enter. "No one will ever be able to stand before God and say, "I wanted to be saved, but was unable to do so, because I was not elected."

#10

No one would deny on the basis of Scriptural fact that Christ has chosen the Church to be His special love and children (Eph. 1:3-23; 1 Pet. 5:13). However, it's very interesting that Revelation 22:17 says, "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." This invitation is given by the Church ("the bride") and Holy Spirit and is a universal invitation ("whosoever") for all people to "come." Why a universal invitation to all people? It's because all people can come by faith and take part in the corporate body which Christ has chosen to save. The Bible views election and those who become part of God's elect body, as an open group of people, who respond to the call of the Church and the conviction of the Spirit. Scripture repeatedly suggests that election is on a corporate basis and that entering Christ's elect body is not closed to anyone but open to everyone.

The Doubt and Suspicion of Moderate Calvinism

Moderate Calvinist's teach that God would never create non-elect people for damnation. Rather, God *bypasses* the non-elect for reasons unknown to us and only known in the counsel of His own will. Moderate Calvinist's teach that Christ died for all mankind but only the elect can be saved and will be saved in the end. Moderate Calvinists teach that God only gives His drawing power and efficacious grace to those who He intends to save (the elect) over others (the non-elect). Man has a free will, but God makes sure that only the elect will choose salvation, since He is sovereign over man's eternal destiny. The moderate, four point Calvinist says that we can be sure God loves all of mankind, but does not intend to give some people the opportunity to be saved, through His drawing power. His love is manifested by the simple fact that Christ died for them even though they (the so-called un-elect) can't be saved in the end.

Maybe I'm missing something, but the end results of both hyper Calvinism (double predestination) and moderate Calvinism (single predestination) is the same! God does not want to save all mankind nor does He intend to save all mankind. His love has limits for ultimately only the elect will be saved. Is this really the expression of

God's love as found in the Bible? According to moderate Calvinism God is going to make sure that some people are bypassed and have no hope to be saved. He is going to make sure that some people will be damned in hell for all eternity for the simple reason that He has chosen not to save them and damn them to hell for all eternity. Moderate Calvinists respond, "God never says He raises up people to damn them to hell" but their moderate Calvinistic thinking leads to this conclusion.

Let's stop kidding ourselves about the conclusions of moderate Calvinists. Calvinism in all of its forms comes to the same conclusions and really teaches the same things. Lurking behind the shadows of moderate Calvinism is hyper Calvinism. What is the difference between God choosing to predestinate people to hell and choosing to *bypass* them so they can be sure to be damned to hell? And what good news (Gospel) can we really give to people who were born to be eternally *bypassed* by God according to His own reasons?

The fact that Christ died for all but only wants to save the elect is the conclusion of moderate Calvinists who want to tone down the severity of hyper-Calvinism. What assurance does moderate Calvinism give for those who are not saved? According to moderate Calvinism no person can be sure that God loves them enough to draw them to the place of salvation. They can only hope that they are not doomed to hell? They can only hope that God has elected them to salvation. They can only hope that God has not chosen to bypass them. What assurance does this give for those who are soul-winners? The soul-winner can only conclude that God does not intend to save everybody since they are not all elected. The soul-winner can share the Gospel in one breath and say that "Christ loves you and died for you" and then turn around and say under his breath, "I hope you are one of the elect or else you are damned forever." Is this really what the Bible teaches? Is this really the expression of God's love toward mankind?

The conclusion of moderate Calvinism is the same as hyper-Calvinism. It's just overlaid with softer words and sophisticated reasoning. Here is the conclusion. No person can say with assurance that they can be saved and no soul winner can say with assurance that those they witness to can be saved. After all, they may be eternally bypassed by God and doomed to die the sinner's death simply because God chose

to pass over them for His own unknown reasons (preterition). Let's face it; any form of Calvinism, when brought to its ultimate conclusion, leaves people open to doubt and suspicion regarding God's desire to save all people.

We have now seen that election is corporate in nature (the elect body of believers) and whosoever comes to faith in Christ (Rev. 22:17) becomes part of the elect body, which is an open, growing, community of people (1 Pet. 2:9 - "a chosen generation"), who receive the title "elect" (Titus 1:1). The term elect is a title of dignity that reflects the corporate saving purpose of God for mankind. God draws all men and wants all to be saved (John 12:32; 16:8) and those who respond become part of God's elect body that He has chosen to save out of the world. Election is not God choosing some people, over others, but God choosing to save a corporate body of people out of humanity (something He did not need to do). The way God has chosen to carry out this purpose is through Gospel proclamation (Mark 16:15) and human response to His universal love, call, and plan of salvation.

Let's state it in a simple fashion. Both the creation of God's elective purpose and the carrying out of God's purpose is ordained by God. When a man comes to repentance and faith he becomes part of the elect body. God ordained the end (the salvation of a corporate group of people) and the means to the end (free will - man's response to the Gospel invitation). He is sovereign over all! God has chosen to elect a corporate group of people in accordance with His complete saving purpose, which is found in all the texts of Scripture, which involves human choice (1 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 2:9; John 3:15-16; 7:37; 12:46-47). The church ("the body" - Eph. 1:22-23) is elected according to God's foreknown *program* and *purpose* (1 Pet. 1:2), which is to save a large company of people (corporately or collectively), through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. The carrying out of this plan occurs through the Spirit's work in people's hearts.

Elect According to the Foreknowledge of God

Peter says the church is "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Pet. 1:2). In Romans 8:29 it states that the Church is that class of people that God foreknew ("For whom he did foreknow"). It does not say "For what he did foreknow" (what people would do). Some teach

that God knew what would happen and then just reacted. In other words, God reacted to what He knew would happen or what people would do with His offer of salvation. They claim that God looks through the corridor of time at what people would do on their own free will and He chooses them on the basis of this foreknowledge. If this were the true understanding of “foreknowledge” then this would make election (God’s choice) rather meaningless.

If God chose people in this manner, we would have to call God’s choice the doctrine of *divine reaction* (God reacting to what men do) or the doctrine of *human sovereignty* instead of God’s sovereignty. However, the word “know” which is linked to God’s foreknowledge is more than just having information. What kind of knowing are we talking about? It is not talking about knowing people through mere *information* (what they would do) but knowing them in an *intimate* manner, or a loving, saving relationship with God (what God would do). This is brought out in other verses when investigating the word “know” (John 10:27; 17:25; Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:2; 1 Cor. 8:3; Matt. 7:23).

What did God know that caused His election or selection of people? Was it something he knew that people would do within His plan of salvation or something that He knew that He would accomplish with His plan of salvation? Since the word “foreknowledge is linked to God’s election or choice it would suggest that the word foreknowledge has to do with God’s plan to love and save a specific group of people that He foreknew to be part of His saving plan. The concept of foreknowledge (what God knows) has to do with knowing His elect body (the Church) in an intimate and loving relationship through His foreordaining purposes. It does not mean to merely know what people will do but what God has willed to come to pass for His own children. God determined to establish a love relationship with His elect body.

Foreknowledge is a predetermined, foreordained, and foreseen sovereign determination to love His elect body and have a relationship with them (Rom. 11:2 – “his people which he foreknew”).

1 Peter 1:19-20 declares:

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

Of course, God did not just have information about Christ and looked ahead to see if Christ was going to end up on a cross. God knew this would take place because He ordained it to occur according to His foreknown purpose and plan. The same is true in regards to our salvation. It was something that God determined in eternity past (Eph. 1:4) or something that He established and fixed to occur. This is how foreknowledge works. God's foreknowledge points to that which He has planned and purposed. It references the known people that He loves and has plans for in His all-encompassing purpose of salvation.

Acts 2:23 says: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Here we see how God's elective purpose and foreknowledge work together. The one compliments the other. Christ was delivered by God's predetermined plan (the destined purpose and plan or decision of God) and this was according to the foreknowledge of God (prognosis – God's known purpose that He brings to fulfillment in relationship to the people He chooses to love in a special way).

At this point, many quotes could be given of moderate Calvinistic writers, who would suggest there is an unresolvable mystery between election and free will. Many will hide behind the verse that says, "the secret things belong unto the LORD" (Deut. 29:29). It's also suggested that the exact purpose behind God's foreknowledge, as stated in Peter's famous phrase ("elect according to the foreknowledge of God" - 1 Pet. 1:2), cannot be resolved. The so-called classic and most common answer is this: "It is nowhere stated in any Scripture what is in God's foreknowledge that determines His election." And they are right. For this reason, most people write it off as the mysterious and unknowable purpose of God that is not revealed to mankind. However, when we examine the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27), we will come to the conclusion that *whatever God foreknew had to do with His overall purpose of salvation, which is clearly revealed throughout Scripture*. It would not contradict His other stated purposes of salvation, which reveal a universal plan to save all sinners through Christ's death for all mankind (Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1). It would not contradict the clearly stated purposes of salvation in other passages of

Scripture concerning God's love for every man (John 3:16) and His desire to see all men repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

Nevertheless, election is something that God has chosen to do for men, not what men choose to do for God (John 15:16). Therefore, election involves the forethought of God's own plan and purpose. It involves the choice of God, His prearranged plan, what He chooses to do for mankind. God's foreknowledge is always linked to His own sovereign plan or set purpose ("the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" - Acts 2:23); it is not determined on the basis of what men choose to do with God's plan.

Although the decisions or choices of man may be intertwined with God's purpose, the purpose itself is set by God. So what was Peter referring to when he spoke about people being elected according to the foreknowledge (prognosis) of God or the prearranged plan of God? He was referring to God's own corporate plan and purpose to elect a body of people called the Church. God's foreknown saving and elective purpose is described as "the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9) "which he hath purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9). This mystery refers to the formation of the Church (Eph. 3:9-10) in the present dispensation (Eph. 3:2-3).

Election has to do with God's work and plan to save a community of people that He can call His own children. Therefore, what God foreknew, or arranged, was His own plan and purpose, to bring the corporate election of His Church to fruition. Simply stated, what God foreknew (2 Peter 1:2) was His own purpose or prearranged plan (2 Tim. 1:9), which He designed, in order to bring corporate election to pass, which involved selecting a group of people for salvation.

The foreknown plan of God centers upon what God has purposed to bring to pass and not what man necessarily does to bring it to pass. God's choice is part of His predetermined plan. The emphasis in this text (1 Pet. 1:2) is not what God knows people will do within His plan but what God knows He has done in creating His plan and bringing it to pass. God did NOT elect people by looking ahead to their individual faith (foreseen faith), since election deals with that which God wanted to do for man, and not what man wanted to do with God. God certainly knows who will become part of the elect body, through their "belief of

the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13), but the response of individual people did not determine God’s plan. This is missing Peter’s point. God did not originate or confirm His saving plan based upon the individual faith of some people, but upon His own original decree to save a community of people by grace, through faith. This is what Peter is emphasizing. The original saving decrees of God are in Peter’s thinking – not the future responses of people.

What God foreknew in eternity past (“the foreknowledge of God”), or His foreknown purpose, was His own corporate plan for election and salvation, which was a decreed plan to form His Church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:4-14). The plan would be carried out by giving all men opportunity to be saved. It was a general redemptive plan designed to save people and bring them into His elective purpose. This plan would also be carried out as people respond to His overtures or proposals upon their lives (Eph. 1:12-14).

As already stated, God did not need to look forward in time and see what individual people would do in order to create this plan. The foreknown plan centers upon what God wanted and not what man actually would do in the future. This is very important to understand. Although God devised a plan that involves human freedom and choice, the foreknown plan is what God actually decreed and willed to come to pass, without any human choices (Isa. 14:24). *The emphasis on the foreknown plan is what God has created and willed to happen in relationship to His corporate elective purposes and not what man has done.* Peter is saying that God foreknew or prearranged His corporate plan of election, and it was coming to pass just the way He foreknew it, or originally designed it to come to pass, in the past counsels of eternity.

Let’s state it this way. God did not decide to create the plan of election by first seeing what individual people would do. God did not have to know what people would do before He made the plan of election. Instead, He simply created the corporate plan of election in eternity past (“from the beginning chosen you to salvation – 2 Thess. 2:13) and carries this plan to fruition, by allowing people to become part of this plan, through their response to the Gospel message in eternity present (Thess. 2:13 – “through belief of the truth”). Both the creation and carrying out of the plan was designed by the sovereign God. However,

man is not the cause of God's sovereign plan. God knew who would individually respond to His initiatives, but God's plan was not determined by human response, even though human response is part of His overall sovereign purpose, in bringing His plan of election to fruition.

God has willed or determined in eternity past that an elect corporate body of people would become His children who respond to His proposals upon their lives. The foreknown plan is what God has willed to happen, whereas the expression of a man's faith, at the time of his salvation, is simply the fulfillment of this plan. Human faith, or response, is not the reason for God's past election, but the fulfillment for His plan of election. The *means* of this plan was God's purpose to save people by His grace whereas the *medium* to bring this plan to pass was human faith. The origin of God's plan lies in His own purpose of grace (Eph. 1:9).

Although a man's faith or human response to the offer of salvation is part of God's plan, it was not the foundation, origin, or cause of God's purpose. The foundation and cause of this plan was God's grace (Romans 11:5-6) and desire to save all humanity by His grace (Titus 2:11). The hymn writer said, "His grace has planned it all! 'Tis mine but to believe!" How very true. What was happening in Peter's day and our day is the fulfillment of God's original elective purpose. God's purpose was to save a collective group of people by His grace that respond to His proposals or initiatives upon their lives. God was the cause and originator of His plan and He was not motivated by human response in any way. What motivated God to put a corporate elective plan into action was His own kindness, mercy, and love for the human race (Titus 3:4; John 3:16, 1 John 3:1) – not man's response to this plan.

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

1 Peter 1:2 once again states:

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

In this verse, Peter gives three steps to our salvation. The first step was God’s elective purpose in eternity past. God’s foreknown decree or purpose was behind election (“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God”), which had to do with His plan to save a large community of people. It was this purpose and plan that was motivated by God’s own grace, mercy, love, (2 Tim. 1:9) and desire to see all people saved (2 Pet. 3:9). It was a corporate and collective plan to save mankind, who still retains freedom of choice (autonomy), to respond to God’s proposals.

Once again, the foreknown plan of God centers upon what God has willed and designed (God’s set purpose); it is not determined on the basis of what men choose to do with God’s plan. A man’s faith at the time of his salvation is simply the carrying out of God’s corporate, elective plan. This is Peter’s emphasis – “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” – or the foreknown plan of God (Acts 2:23). The foundation of this corporate elective plan was God’s grace (Eph. 1:6-7) and the medium by which it is carried out is man’s faith (Eph. 1:12-13). But all of this was woven together in God’s master plan. Man had nothing to do with creating it or bringing it to pass within the past counsels of eternity.

The second step in salvation is sanctification of the Spirit. This aspect of sanctification takes place before conversion. It is a ministry of the Holy Spirit by which He sets people apart to belong to God (see also 2 Thess. 2:13). It logically follows election by God the Father. In *eternity* God foreknew and chose men. In *time* the Holy Spirit operates to make that election real in the lives of the individuals concerned.

The third step in the soul’s salvation is the sinner’s response to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is described as obedience to Jesus Christ. This means obeying the gospel by repenting of one’s sins and receiving Christ as Savior. The concept of the Gospel as something to be obeyed is a common expression in the New Testament (Rom. 2:8; 2 Thess. 1:8).

Foreknowledge vs. Foreordination

Something else needs to be said at this point. The *foreknowledge of God does not mean that God foreordained the actions of people*. God's foreknown purpose simply means that He created a corporate elective plan, which revolves around the salvation of people, who are given the freedom of choice. God's foreknown purpose was to elect a corporate group of people known as the Church (Acts 20:28), through the universal proclamation of the Gospel to all men (Luke 24:47), so that all people could have opportunity to respond (Rev, 22:17), be brought into His corporate elective purpose (Eph. 1:4 – "us"), and the blessings of grace and salvation (Titus 2:11). In short, what God foreordained was His purpose to save an elect body of people to salvation. However, God did not foreordain the choices of people who become part of the elect body (John 3:16; 5:40; Acts 17:32-34). There is a vast difference between the two.

The view of corporate election, God's choice to save a collective and open group, or general class of people, instead of a closed group of individual people, seems to take the mystery out of election and place it in accord with the non-mysterious statements of Scripture. It also removes the unbiblical conclusions of double predestination and opens up the teaching of election as God's outreach to save the nations of mankind. Granted, corporate election does not solve all the questions related to election, nor is this study planning to do so, but corporate election does provide solid Scriptural and non-mysterious conclusions concerning the entire saving purpose of God, as presented in the Bible.

Non-Mysterious Truth

Is election really designed to be something that is totally mysterious and unresolvable with the truth presented about the free will of man? At this point in our study we must conclude there are many things that are not a mystery when it comes to salvation.

- There is no mystery that God loves everybody (John 3:16).
- There is no mystery that Jesus died for everybody (Hebrews 2:9).

- There is no mystery that God wants everybody to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).
- There is no mystery that God calls all men to salvation (Matt. 11:28).
- There is no mystery that the Spirit convicts all men without exception (John 16:8).
- There is no mystery that the Father wants to draw all men to Christ without exception (John 12:32).
- There is no mystery that man has freedom of choice (John 5:40).
- There is no mystery that man can resist God's call upon his life (Acts 7:51).
- There is no mystery that a man can exercise his own faith -("your faith" (Luke 7:50), "his faith" (Rom. 4:5), and "their faith" (Matt. 9:2).
- There is no mystery that God's program of election would never override these *non-mysterious* truths. This is because God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:40), He never lies (Titus 1:2), and His Word is true and without contradiction (John 17:17).

So what is the mystery about election? I don't think there is one! The truth is this; God's program of election must line up with those Biblical truths that are not a mystery and which are taught elsewhere in the Bible. Let's stop calvinistically confusing ourselves with the truths regarding election, Christ's death for all mankind, and freedom of choice. If God wants all men to be saved (John 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9), and convicts men to this end (John 16:8), then election must link up with His greater purposes. Therefore, we can conclude that election never overrides the truth of God's plan to save all mankind or His genuine offer to present the Gospel to all men.

In essence, God has chosen to corporately elect the Church (1 Pet. 2:9; 5:13; 1 Thess. 1:1, 4), or a group of people in eternity past (Eph. 1:3-13), and those who want to be part of this saving or elective program have the privilege, through faith, to receive the title of God's elect children (Col. 3:12) in eternity present. They have the privilege to enter into God's elective purpose. God wants to save the nations via election and all can be part of His elective program.

The church ("the body" – Eph. 1:22-23) is elected according to God's foreknown *program* and *purpose* (1 Pet. 1:2), which is to save a large company of people (corporately or collectively), through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ (Matt. 20:28 – "to give his life a ransom for many"). It's not a person's faith that God foresaw which motivated His election but His own purpose, plan, and passionate grace (Eph. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:9) toward a lost human race. It was God's purpose to love and save all mankind (Heb. 2:9) and include an opportunity for all mankind to enter into His corporate program of election. It was the foreseen plan of God to save people that motivated election – not the faith of people. There is a difference. God's foreknowledge is grounded upon God's decree and rests upon His pre-arranged plan (Acts 2:23). It was a saving plan that was foreseen, foreknown, and foreordained in the past counsels of God's infinite wisdom and sovereignty.

God foreknows what will be, since He has decreed what shall be (Ps. 115:3). God's decree is to save a collective group of people, a "holy nation" and "peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9), through the sacrifice of His Son (Heb. 9:26), and carry out this redemptive plan through human response, to the Spirit's initiatives (2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 22:17). Once again, both the creation of the plan and carrying out of the plan is ordained by God and part of His sovereign purpose. The God who ordained the end (the salvation of people) also ordained the means to the end (corporate election and personal faith).

What Does God Know?

Of course, God has total and complete knowledge of what will actually happen, even the free actions and choices of man (John 6:64), since He has allowed to occur within the scope of His sovereign master plan. If God does not know something, He would no longer be God (Ps. 139:1-6). Therefore, the whole idea that God does not know something

(the open view of God's knowledge) is absurd. God knows the entire outcome of His decreed purpose from start to finish regarding man and salvation. This is because God possesses knowledge of every facet of His all-encompassing plan, which includes man's personal responses to His proposals (Psalm 139:2 – "thou understandeth my thought afar off").

In Revelation 21:6, Christ declares:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

God knows the end from the beginning for He is eternal and knows everything regarding His redemptive and elective plan, which includes offering salvation to all those who are thirsty for salvation (John 7:37), and building a corporate entity of people, through the medium of their response to His gracious overtures (initiating move) upon their lives. In one sense, God foreknew His entire saving purpose, which was to express love to all people ("God so loved the world" - John 3:16), and His special election of a corporate group of people that would come to fruition, by offering salvation to all people ("the Saviour of the world – John 4:42; 4:14).

We must remember that God's elective program revolves around His complete saving purpose, which is to reach out to the entire world of lost mankind (2 Pet. 3:9), and legitimately offer salvation to all men (John 3:15; 11:26; 12:46). So it's this entire foreknown plan that was in God's mind when electing people. In short, God's foreknown purpose was to see people saved and become part of His corporate elective program of the Church. It would be carried out through God's sovereign initiatives, without overriding the personal choices of people. This was the plan of God and it was a plan that was motivated by love, grace, and mercy (Eph. 1:6 – "to the praise of the glory of his grace").

"When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing His praise
Then when we first begun."

As we have already discussed, Peter says we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Pet. 1:2). The foreknown plan of God was to elect or choose a corporate group of people (the Church) to be

His own children by extending God's love (John 3:16), grace (Titus 2:11), and salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) to all people. The fulfillment of this plan which is also part of God's sovereign purpose is brought to pass through the faith of people (John 6:47), as they respond to God's convicting initiatives or proposals upon their hearts (John 6:44; 12:32; 16:8).

Those who respond and become part of the corporate growing body of the Church are the "many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). They are NOT the many God calls, while leaving the others behind, but the many He calls with open arms, to bring His plan of corporate election to fruition, or the community of people that He has planned to save from eternity past. Those who respond are the "such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47) or those that have been "rescued from danger and destruction." It's these people that were ordained to become part of God's elective body, the New Testament Church, from eternity past. These people were saved to fulfill God's corporate plan for election. This group of people was also "the many that were ordained to eternal life" (Acts 13:48), or the many that God chose to be part of His collective body of people (the Church), and corporate program of salvation. They are NOT the "many" chosen over others, but the "many" who were chosen in eternity past to become part of God's elective program.

We are then elect according to God's foreknowledge, which is the foreknown purpose and plan of God to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), and make them into an elect body of people, which He has chosen to save and win by His marvelous grace (Rom. 11:5). Those who are saved become part of God's elective outreach to save the nations. What motivated God's heart in eternity past, to put a corporate program of election into motion, was His love for people (John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world"), His grace (1 Tim. 1:9 – "according to his own purpose and grace"), and His desire to see all men saved (1 Tim. 2:4 – "Who will have all men to be saved").

The other side of the sovereign scenario is this. God always reserves a special love for those who respond to His overtures (initiating moves) and become part of God's elective purpose (Rom. 11:28 – "as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sake"). God has a special love for those who respond to His pleas and proposals upon their lives

and who become part of His elective program (John 13:1 – “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”). In conclusion, God’s corporate elective program to save people was designed in eternity past as God’s foreknown plan (“foreknowledge” – 1 Pet. 1:2) and brought to fruition in eternity present through the salvation of the lost (“to every one that believeth” – Rom. 1:16). Salvation is all of God from start to finish (“salvation is of the LORD” - Jonah 2:9). God decreed the foreknown plan and brings it to fruition in His own time and in His own way.

All Things Work Together for Good

Romans 8:28-30

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

God’s sovereign and saving purpose for every believer (“them”) works together for their good. Everything that happens in the believer’s life today is in accord with God’s saving purpose, which is to ultimately conform His saints to the likeness of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Bringing God’s saving purpose (Christlikeness) to pass in our present lives is based on God’s past work of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. We could never experience God’s saving purpose in our lives today, if God had not predetermined to bring it to pass in our lives.

God’s saving purpose is explained as:

1. Confirmation (“Foreknown”)

God confirmed that a group of people would become His children in eternity past (Eph. 1:8-9). There is a certain line of teaching that says God looked down the corridor of time and saw that we would believe in Christ, and therefore he chose us to be part of God's elect because of what we were going to do. However, this verse once again says "for

whom he did foreknow" (what God did) and not "that which he foreknew" (what people would do). In other words, God chose a corporate group of people to be His loving children, and on this ground, He foreknew us to be His child. The word "foreknow" (1 Pet. 1:2) speaks of God knowing and loving His elect body with a special love (John 10:27). It is not a word of *information* but *intimacy* based upon God's predetermined plan. This word speaks of a predetermined choice to set His special love on the Church as He did with Israel (Rom. 11:2) and establish an intimate relationship with His corporate Church (Eph. 1:4). All this happened in eternity past.

2. Conformity ("Conformed")

After the confirmation comes the conformity! This is the ultimate purpose of our salvation – conformity to Jesus Christ. Predestination means "to mark out, appoint, or determine beforehand." The corporate group that God chooses, He also destines for His chosen end - which is likeness to His Son! Predestination means that God determined the destiny of an elect body of people to be like His Son. And this destiny was marked out before Creation.

Please note that the Bible never speaks of double predestination, where God predestines some people to Heaven and others to hell, even before they were born. Strict Calvinism teaches that God predetermined and predestined some people for hell and damnation. The Bible nowhere teaches this Calvinistic conclusion. The Bible teaches that God's Church is predestined "to be conformed to the image of his Son." It never says that unsaved people are predestined to hell. Predestination has nothing to do with hell. It has to do with God's determination to save and make His Church like Jesus Christ. Let's study our Bibles! The goal of God's predestined purpose for His own is that they would be made like Jesus Christ. This is the "prize of the upward calling" (Phil. 3:14).

All this happened in eternity past! When all the saints are made like Christ (in actual experience), when He returns in the Rapture (1 John 3:2), it's then that Christ will be exalted as the Firstborn among many brethren or brothers. In other words, the resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ will possess the highest privilege and position over a new

race of humanity (Christlike saints) that has been purified from all sin, prepared to be like Christ, and live eternally in His presence.

3. Calling (“called”)

Again, this points to God’s predetermined call or choice in eternity past, to bring an elect group of people to salvation.

“He called me long before I heard,
Before my sinful heart was stirred,
But when I took Him at His word,
 Forgiv’n, He lifted me.
From sinking sand He lifted me,
 With tender hand He lifted me;
From shades of night to plains of light,
 Oh, praise His Name, He lifted me!”

God’s initial call for our salvation happened in eternity past. His present call goes throughout the world today in order to save the elect, corporate body (1 Cor. 1:2 - “called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”).

4. Cancelling (“Justified”)

In justification, our past and future sins are taken away forever, and we are cleared of all our guilty charges before God. In short, our sins are canceled out and we are declared legally righteous in God’s holy presence (Rom. 5:9). All this happened in eternity past.

Friend, our salvation begins and ends with God. Salvation is of the Lord (compare Jonah 2:9). God gets all of the credit and all of the glory for our salvation (1 Cor.1:29, 31). Man cannot boast (Eph.2:8-9) and say, "Look what I have done!" No, salvation is "OF GOD" (1 Cor.1:30; John 1:13). We don’t thank ourselves, but we say, "THANK YOU LORD FOR SAVING MY SOUL!" God does all the saving. This does not take away man's responsibility. Man must do the believing (John 3:16-18; Acts 16:31) and man is blamed for not doing so (2 Thess.2:10-12; John 5:40; compare Matthew 23:37), but God and God alone must do the saving.

5. Christlikeness (“glorified”)

Glorification refers to the time when we will receive our new glorified bodies. It's during this joyous moment, when we will become just like Jesus Christ, morally and spiritually, in our new bodies. To be glorified is another way of saying that God's children will be “conformed” to His Son; which is God's ultimate saving purpose for our lives. No longer will we “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23 – the moral glory of God). We will be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Paul writes about all of these blessing in the past tense! He is saying that all of these salvation blessings have already happened from God's perspective and in God's mind! All this happened in eternity past. Our destiny to be conformed to the image of God's Son was confirmed in eternity past and is slowly coming to pass today (Rom. 8:28). But there is a coming a glorious day, when we will be exactly like Jesus Christ, in moral virtues and practice. We will one day be like Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2).

Ray Stedman said:

“We are being prepared for something -- we can't really tell what it is, specifically, but we are getting ready for something. And one of these days, at the end of our lives, if not before, we will step out of time into an incredible experience of glory, something that begs description -- a glory that Christ himself shares, and that we all shall share with him.”

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 says:

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

God decrees our salvation and Christlikeness in the past and you will note that no one will be lost in the process of bringing all this glorious transaction to pass! Our salvation was sealed, secured, and signed, as a done deal, in the past counsels of the Godhead.

Here is my point; God never moves without purpose or plan. And His plan in eternity past was to save an elect body and make them into the

likeness of His Son. Beloved, what God determined in the past, will come to fruition in the present. There is an unbreakable chain that extends from eternity past to eternity present. Not one link can be broken! This is why we can know that “all things” (Rom. 8:28), or all the events of our lives, are working together to bring God’s purpose to pass, which is to conform us to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Two questions need to be asked at this point. First, who are these people that God foreknew? They were those people who were part of the corporate or collective body that God has chosen to save and have for His own children (Gal. 3:26 – “all the children of God by faith”). Second, we must ask the reason why God “foreknew” these people. The Bible says that God foreknew these people to be His children on the basis of *His own elective and saving purpose* – “according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). It was not the purpose of those He saved, but God’s purpose (Eph. 1:9), which brought them into the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7; 3:8). The emphasis in election is not what people have done to deserve it, but what God has done to bring them into His saving purpose. God’s saving purpose in this verse and passage was to predestinate, call, justify, and glorify these people. However, we must remember that Romans 8:29-30 does not reveal the entire saving plan and purpose of God.

Other aspects of God’s saving plan, explained in other Scriptures, clearly reveal that He does not override the freedom or choices of people. This can be seen in that God offers salvation to all (John 3:16), that people can choose to reject God’s offer of salvation (John 3:18, 36; 5:40), and that every person is saved when they express their own personal faith in Christ (Luke 7:50; Rom. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:9). It’s clear that human choice (free will) does enter into God’s saving plan.

In fact, when concluding the greatest passage of Scripture on God’s sovereign elective purposes of the corporate body of the church, Paul speaks of those “who first trusted Christ” (Eph. 1:12) and “In whom ye also trusted” and “after that ye believed” (Eph. 1:13), in order to verify that human choice was somehow interwoven in the grand scheme of God’s corporate elective purpose. In other words, God’s saving and elective purpose is not complete without the faith of people entering into His sovereign scenario or plan. God has chosen to incorporate

man's response to His initiatives into His sovereign program of corporate election.

A Bridge Between the Past and Present

The point is this. The one side of God's saving purpose for man that He has determined to bring to pass (Rom. 8:28-30) will never override the other side of God's saving purpose (Rev. 22:17 - "whosoever will"). A bridge must be built from the past to the present. Let's state it simply. There is a bridge from God's past saving purpose to His present saving purpose for mankind that cannot be broken. The past and the present pieces of God's saving purpose are linked together and meet in the middle of the bridge, so that His total saving plan can be understood, without mindless and paradoxical contradiction.

God's past foreknown purpose was to elect a corporate group of people ("us" – Eph. 1:4), to be His children, and bless them, with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). It is this same corporate group that He predestinated, called, justified, and glorified in eternity past (Romans 8:29-30). However, the past saving plan was already reconciled with God's present saving plan. God ordained the end (an elect body) and also the means to the end (the free will response of people). God's present saving program has to do with saving people that believe in Jesus Christ, as they respond to the Spirit's convicting initiatives, upon their lives (John 16:8). They are the "whosoever wills" (Rev. 22:17) and those who have "first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12). It's these people who become part of the elect body.

The two pieces of God's sovereign saving plan can never be separated without destroying the bridge that leads from the past (the corporate election of God) to the present (the freedom of people to choose their eternal destiny). This is because the past elective purposes of God were rooted in His present program to save people. In short, the elect body, which God chose in eternity past, comes into existence in eternity present, through the free will responses of men, responding to God's initiatives. *Human faith, or response, is not the reason for God's past election, but the fulfillment for His plan of election.*

In short, the complete saving purpose of God must be taken into account. God's saving purpose is a complete package. The Godward side is that God has prepared the plan of salvation, set it in motion (Rom. 8:28-30), and steers people to the Savior (John 6:44). The manward side is that a *man's faith sweeps him into God's saving and corporate elective purpose, which originated in eternity past*. Both the creation and carrying out of the plan was part of God's sovereign purpose. To emphasize one at the expense of the other is to destroy the sovereign plan of Creator.

The provisional plan of a person's salvation is rooted in God's corporate purpose for election in past eternity, when God willed to save a group of people by His grace (2 Tim. 1:9), but the practical possibility of a person's salvation exists in eternity present, the faith period (Rom. 10:13), and a person's "Yes" or "No" to the Gospel message. In short, the collective group that God chose to save in eternity past (Rom. 8:28-30) comes to fruition in eternity present as people become part of this elect body through faith.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

"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 (the elect body of eternity past) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (the growth of the elect body in eternity present)."

So what God "foreknew" (1 Pet. 1:2) regarding salvation was His own foreknown purpose, to elect and save a corporate group of people to salvation, by His own loving grace. God never chooses to save certain individual people and bypass other individual people in the matter of salvation (1 Tim. 2:4, 6). God's foreknown plan in eternity past was to save a collective group of people ("whosoever believeth" – John 3:16) through the medium of human response to His gracious pleas upon their souls ("Come ... all ye that labour and are heavy laden" – Matt. 11:28). The *fulfillment* of this elective plan is brought to pass by those who put their faith in His Son ("whosoever will" - Rev. 22:17). This brings the past and present saving plan of God together.

The two aspects of God's saving purpose meet in the middle of the bridge of God's sovereign purpose. God's purpose to elect and save

people, by His grace, and call people by His grace, without violating a person's individual faith, meet together on the bridge, in order to bring God's full saving and sovereign plan to fruition. *Election and human choice are friends that hold hands in the middle of God's bridge of salvation.* Election and free will kiss one another. Free will and a man's faith is the way God's corporate elective purposes are brought to pass.

Election for Dummies!

So what have we learned about election and free will? Let's try to state it in a simple fashion. God decrees certain plans in eternity past that can never be undone. Isaiah 14:24 says, "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand." God knows His purposes will come to pass. God from the beginning knew the end, since He mapped it out by His own sovereign choice. This is certainly true regarding the plan of salvation. Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), but it's equally true that a corporate group of people were chosen to salvation "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9) and were given the promise of eternal life, as God's elect, before the world began (Titus 1:1-2).

These subjects of sovereignty, or group of people that God has chosen to save (Rom. 8:28-30), can never override God's other sovereign purpose, which was to include a man's freedom of choice and response to God's initiatives (Rev. 22:17). An honest assessment of Scripture will verify this to be true, since God pleads with all men to express faith in His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 10:13; John 1:12; 3:16). God has allowed human choices to enter the salvation scenario. A person can become part of the elective body, or collective group of people that God has chosen to predestinate, call, justify, and glorify in eternity past (Rom. 8:28-29), if that person will express faith in Jesus Christ. Election is not closed but open to all mankind. God allows a large class of people to enter His elective program today and become part of a collective community of people He has chosen to bless.

In summary, the corporate group of people ("God's elect" - Rom. 8:33) that God foreknew ("whom he did foreknow" - Rom. 8:29) to be His children, according to His own predetermined choice and plan, which was from the beginning (2 Thess. 2:14), was a collective group of

people that were given the privilege to respond to His offer of salvation (John 3:16). God has brought these same people into the rich spiritual blessings of salvation (Rom. 8:29-30). It's these people (the corporate body) that were actually predestinated *in eternity past* to be like His Son Jesus Christ, called, justified (declared legally righteous in God's sight), and then given a glorified body in God's reckoning of things who "calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

The "all things" (Rom. 8:28) in relationship to God's saving plan (calling, predestination, justification, glorification) do work together for the good of the elect body. How much more goodness can God express to His elect body of children? How much more security do we need? God gave us all of these blessings in eternity past. The truth is this. God's elective and saving plan was prearranged, and seen to come to pass in eternity past, without overriding man's freedom of choice. Everything, from God's vantage point, both His choice to save a collective group of people, and a "whosoever will" invitation (Rev. 22:17), was remarkably woven together in the past, in accordance with God's infinite knowledge ("in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" – Col. 2:3).

God chose to elect and save a corporate group of people without violating human choice. God has planned to call and compel a group of people, by His grace, without overriding human choice. Grace does the saving (Eph. 2:8-9), even though man is given a valid choice, regarding his eternal destiny. The creation, carrying out, and conclusion of the entire master plan originated with God. Only God could create such a plan as this. Romans 11:33 says, "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

It seems to our finite human minds that the sovereignty of God and our human responsibility are like two parallel lines that do not seem to intersect within our brains! But, God's ways are "past finding out" as Romans 11:33 reminds us. Proverbs 3:5-6 warns us not to trust or lean to our own understanding. We must learn to say what God says – no more and no less!

The Hermeneutics of Election

We must always remember the interpretive rule of reading or examining, the less clear verses of the Bible, in light of the clear verses of Scripture. When we practice this hermeneutic (principle of Bible interpretation) we can arrive at a balanced position in regards to election and man's free will. When we interpret the Bible in this manner, we will also discover there is no irresolvable paradox, or mystery, connected to the doctrine of election. The perplexing and obscure Scriptures can and must be clarified by the certain, simple, and clear. In fact, the clear Scriptures are so clear, the perplexing Scriptures need not perplex us.

Norman Douty said:

"Things that are not clear can never neutralize things that are."

John Miles used to say:

"The main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things!"

Based upon proper hermeneutics, we can come to a final conclusion. Since Jesus died for everyone (1 John 2:2), and God wills all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), then all ("whosoever") can be saved (John 3:16; Acts 10:43; Rom. 10:13). This is because God has from eternity past elected people *in the framework of a corporate or collective group*. Any person can enter God's elective purpose and become part of the elect body. Those who respond in faith are part of the *other side* of God's saving plan, a plan designed to offer salvation to those, who respond to God's initiatives, upon their souls ("all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" – 1 Cor. 1:2). Election is based upon God's *entire saving plan*. First, God chose to save a collective group of people by His grace. Second, He also chose to bring this elective purpose to pass by human response and faith. This was God's choice and plan. Man had nothing to do with it. It's all of God. God says, "This is my plan and this is the way it will be carried out."

God foreknew by His own elective purposes a corporate group of people that He wanted to save (Rom. 8:29). God also informs us that any man can enter this corporate body of people, if he will embrace His

offer of salvation (John 6:47). Furthermore, it's this corporate group that had their destiny prearranged from the very beginning ("God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" – 2 Thess. 2:14). God has chosen to elect a corporate group of people in accordance with His complete saving purpose, which is found in all the texts of Scripture (1 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 2:9; John 7:37; 12:46-47).

Since this is true, God's foreknown elective purpose, which is to save a collective group of people by grace, comes to fruition as people respond to His calling, and decide to participate with His universal plan for salvation and election. This corporate body is the very people that He called, predestined, justified, and glorified even before the world was ever created and people enter this body through faith. The "foreknown" (Rom. 8:29) whom God chose to save are foreknown as a unified and corporate body of people, who would one day enter God's elective program, through faith in God's crucified and resurrected Son.

Let's state it in a simple fashion. *God put the plan of election into motion in eternity past and brings it to fruition in eternity present.* God ordained the end (the salvation of a corporate group of people) and the means to the end (free will - man's response to the Gospel invitation). Both the creation and carrying out of God's plan originated with His sovereign grace. The concept of *corporate* election does not promote the philosophical conclusions, which many assign to election, but it does put election into the entire framework of Scripture, and gives a clear, non-Calvinistic, and non-mysterious conclusion regarding man's salvation. God has chosen the Church, a corporate company of people, not individual people, to become His elect group. This maintains a valid "whosoever" (John 3:15-16; 4:14; 5:54; Romans 10:13; Rev. 22:17) invitation and Gospel proclamation that is receivable by all men (John 1:12).

In election God's choice was to save a corporate company of people by His grace and it was this plan that He foreknew (1 Pet. 1:2 – "elect according to the foreknowledge of God"). We are elect according the foreknown purpose of God. God's corporate elective purpose *allowed* for human faith, but His plan was not *created* or *inspired*, because of man's faith. It was inspired and originated out of God's grace alone (2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:6). God's elective program was to save a corporate group of people by His grace but in bringing this program to fruition

God allowed for the human response or faith. The same God who ordained the *means* of salvation and election (by grace – Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9) also ordained the *medium* of salvation and election (through faith – Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:13). God foreknew His whole corporate plan for salvation, which *allowed* for human freedom or choice, and God would use human choice or freedom, to bring His corporate or community saving purposes to pass.

In the past counsels of God’s wisdom (Eph. 1:8), He said something like this. “My choice and purpose (Eph. 1:4, 11) is to save a company of people out of the human race. I will initiate a corporate elective plan (1 Pet. 2:9), which is a program to save a collective group of people by grace (Eph. 1:6-7; 2 Tim. 1:9). I will make sure that this group is predestinated, called, justified, and glorified even before they are born (Rom. 8:29-30). I will then send My Son to die for everybody in the human race to bring this program to fruition (John 3:16; Heb. 2:9).

“I will assist or compel every person to come to salvation (Matt. 11:28; John 16:8). But people will make the final choice in regards to their eternal destiny (John 3:36; 5:40). If people want to enter into My corporate elective plan, which involves saving the human race, they can respond to the Gospel message, through the Spirit’s conviction (John 16:8), and be saved (Rev. 22:17). Their faith brings them into the elect body (Eph. 1:12-13), and gives them the assurance that their salvation was sealed and secure in eternity past, since they have been linked with this group of people (Rom. 8:28-30; Titus 1:2). This is my plan and no man will ever change it.”

What About God’s Other Purposes?

Any verses that suggest God’s individual choice of people will always find their roots in God’s corporate election program. Out of this master program of election, God fulfills His further purposes, which involves choosing people, in relationship to their certain vocations in life. We know that God does have selective purposes of *service* connected with the lives of people (Gal. 1:15; Acts 22:14; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:13-17; John 15:16), but these arrangements of God are pre-programmed, like a computer chip, into God’s corporate program of election, and man’s freedom of human choice, which God has intricately woven together in eternity past, into one grand plan. The arrangements of God for

salvation and service are pre-programmed, like a computer chip, into God's corporate program of election (God choice to save a body of believing sinners). God's purpose is also pre-programmed, as a computer chip, to include man's freedom to choose his eternal destiny and vocation in life. God then moves people to His intended purpose and goal without violating their human choices and freedom.

For instance, God never overrides a man's will in the matter of salvation (John 5:40). God never unconditionally decides a man's salvation against his will (Matt. 23:37). The same is true in relationship to His earthly calling. When the Bible says that God conditionally decides a man's calling and course on earth in relationship to his service, we must always remember that human agency also enters the picture. What is true with corporate election and human freedom (choice) is also true of God calling people to fulfill earthly vocations. We discover that when God specifically selects individuals to assume special roles or tasks, they can forfeit their responsibility and God's calling.

Such was the case with Saul. God chose Saul as king (1 Sam. 10:24) but because of Saul's sins, God rejected his kingship (1 Sam. 13:13-14; 15:10-11, 23, 26-29). Judas was also chosen but rejected his appointed ministry and betrayed the Lord: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). God called John the Baptist to a task that He wanted him to accomplish (Luke 1:13-17). All that is described is God's choice of John and the task that God wanted him to perform. However, John didn't have to obey this call. John was given the responsibility, not only to believe in the Messiah, but also follow His mission. *The fact that God called John does not mean that God caused him to do His will.* God makes His sovereign choices regarding personal vocations (Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:11-17; Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:6-13); however, this does not override the choices that people make regarding their assigned duties in life.

God, in the process of reaching His predetermined outcome or goal, gives us genuine freedom. God in some remarkable way lets our choices be a factor in the shaping of history (Genesis 1:28-4:16; Acts 2:23). God never treats people according to an irresistible eternal decree but gives them valid choice in fulfilling His intended goals for their lives. God genuinely interacts with our decisions. Sadly, both

Calvin and Luther insisted that this is not what the Bible teaches. They taught that God not only determines the end, but also the decisions of people, by overriding their freedom of choice (human autonomy).

Just as these people had to respond to God's earthly calling upon their lives, so a man must respond to the Gospel invitation (John 6:47). A man can choose to respond to the Gospel message, and enter into God's corporate, elective purpose, or he can choose to reject the Gospel, and miss out on God's community, elective purpose for mankind (John 3:36). One thing is certain. God ordains a man's salvation and his earthly purpose, while at the same time, intricately interweaving man's free actions into the picture.

Man's response to God's call of salvation and his earthly vocation are interwoven into the fabric of God's eternal purpose for every human being, which is born on earth, such as a Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul. God has everything planned out in His past eternal counsel and prearranged in eternity past (Isaiah 46:10-11), without violating human agency or function, and predetermining the actions of people. God is not a heavenly puppeteer making people choose their destinies and vocations in life. In short, the free will actions and choices of men are fabricated into the eternal purpose of God.

Some Calvinists teach that Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and John (Luke 1:15) were already saved while they were in the womb. This conclusion is erroneous. Neither Jeremiah nor John was saved while in the womb. No person is saved or converted from birth since we are sinners by birth (Ps. 51:5 – "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me"). God can determine the destiny of people, possessing the desire to save them from hell (2 Pet. 3:9) and serve Him while living on earth (John 15:16), but He does not override their will in making this determination. God's determination does not override man's determination (Acts 2:23). In fact, God's decrees come to pass within the boundaries of man's choices.

Allow me to reiterate what I've already stated on two occasions. The fact that salvation is all of God, that God is the planner, provider, and pursuer of salvation, does not mean that man is excluded from making a valid choice regarding his eternal destiny. Some people think that

salvation can no longer be “all of God” if a person can choose to believe on the Son of God or go against God’s saving purpose for his life. But this is not the case at all. God scripted the plan of salvation by creating a saving program whereby people can be saved on the basis of their faith in the Son of God (Rev. 22:17). God has chosen to display His sovereignty in relationship to man’s choices. The fact that God sometimes chooses to limit the display of His sovereign power does not make Him less sovereign (Matt. 26:53-54). God can still maintain His sovereignty, or remain in charge of His own plan and purpose in salvation, without overriding man’s freedom of choice.

Mart DeHaan writes:

“Just about the time I am thinking freedom to choose is only an illusion, I remember the Old Testament story of Job. In a conversation that took place in heaven, God asked Satan to consider one man who stood out from all of the rest of mankind. Satan’s response was that Job was better than other men because God had bribed him to behave well. According to the adversary, God was giving Job protection and wealth in exchange for Job’s faithfulness. Satan’s argument was significant. It focused on Job’s choices and motives, not on the accusation that God had sovereignly caused Job to be better than others.

“Satan acknowledged that Job chose to serve God, but said that he did so from self-serving motives. Satan’s comments combine with the Lord’s to show that Job was an issue of conversation-because of Job’s choices. Nothing in the story leaves God open to the charge that Job was merely a puppet-servant who did what God programmed him to do.”

2 Peter 3:12 declares we can be: “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” This verse teaches that believers can hasten the coming of the Day of God or the commencement of the eternal state. This is an amazing revelation of Scripture. God’s people can literally “speed on” or “urge on” the beginning of eternity, or the eternal state, which follows the dissolution of the heaven’s and earth. How do believers hasten it? One example would be through godly living and witnessing. As we live godly, pray, witness, and lead others to repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:9), we bring eternity one step closer! When the last person is saved and

becomes part of the elect body, Jesus can return (2 Pet. 3:14), and we will be one step closer to eternity. How amazing that we can be part of God's sovereign plan, when it comes to ushering in the eternal state!

Bauckham writes:

“Clearly this idea of hastening the End is the corollary of the explanation (v 9) that God defers the Parousia because he desires Christians to repent. Their repentance and holy living may therefore, from the human standpoint, hasten its coming. This does not detract from God's sovereignty in determining the time of the End . . . , but means only that his sovereign determination graciously takes human affairs into account.”

God's Word teaches that people's decisions and prayers are part of how He intends to carry out His sovereign plans (Matt. 6:10). It would appear from Revelation 5:8 and 8:3–4 that the prayers of God's people are related in some way to the pouring out of God's wrath on the nations. Believers can affect God's timetable by witnessing, praying, and leading people to Christ (Josh. 10:12–14). Many times God chooses to bring His decrees to fruition through the autonomous prayers, acts of service, and choices of people.

Mart De Haan wrote:

“There are two extremes in ministry that we must avoid. One is the attitude that we are ‘locked into’ God's sovereign plan in such a way that nothing we do will make any difference. The other extreme is to think that God cannot get anything done unless we do it! While God's sovereign decrees must never become an excuse for laziness, neither must our plans and activities try to take their place.

“Perhaps two illustrations from Old Testament history will help us better understand the relationship between God's plans and man's service. God delivered Israel from Egypt and told the people He wanted to put them into their inheritance, the land of Canaan. But at Kadesh-Barnea all except Moses, Joshua, and Caleb rebelled against God and refused to enter the land (Num. 13–14). Did God force them to go in? No. Instead, He had them wander in the wilderness for the next forty years while the older generation died off. He adjusted His plan to their response.

“When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, his message was clear: ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ (Jonah 3:4) It was God’s plan to destroy the wicked city, but when the people repented, from the king on down, God adjusted His plan and spared the city. Neither God nor His basic principles changed, but His application of those principles changed. God responds when men repent.”

Warren Wiersbe adds these thoughts:

“If God’s work today is calling out a people for His name (Acts 15:14), then the sooner the church is completed, the sooner our Lord will return. There is a suggestion of this truth in Acts 3:19–21. While Matthew 24:14 relates primarily to the Tribulation, the principle is the same: man’s ministry cooperates with God’s program so that promised events can take place. There are mysteries here that our minds cannot fully understand or explain, but the basic lesson is clear: the same God who ordains the end also ordains the means to the end, and we are a part of that means. Our task is not to speculate but to serve.”

Here is the point. God does not choose men and force people to be saved against their will, nor does He change their heart and make them willing, without their personal volitional choice. In addition, God does not force men to serve in a certain vocation of life, or even make them willing, without their personal choice. God chooses people for salvation and service without overriding their human response.

A.W. Tozer said:

“So when man exercises his freedom [of choice] he is fulfilling the sovereignty of God, not canceling it out.”

In other words, man uses the power of choice, which God gave to him, in order to bring His ultimate purposes to fruition. God is no-less-sovereign in working out His plan in this way. Calvinism wants God to be sovereign, according to a philosophical system, which says God must make every choice to remain sovereign (in control). In other words, sovereign grace, to the hyper Calvinist, means God prearranges and predetermines everything, even the decisions that people make, both good and bad. God determines who will be individually saved and damned, and then makes sure these people reach their assigned destiny, by providing them with faith, or neglecting

to give them faith. However, the Bible paints a different picture of God's sovereignty. God, in the outworking of His sovereign purpose (Eph. 1:4), has devised an earthly plan, which includes the decisions and choices of man (Eph. 1:12). The sovereignty of God does not cancel out human choice.

What about the issue of open or closed theism? In other words, do some things take God by surprise? Does He choose to limit His knowledge about certain people and events? We can answer this question in a simple fashion. No! God knows everything that will occur in relationship to earth and the lives of people, if He did not, He would not be God (Ps. 139:1-6; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 45:12-13; Nahum 1:3; Rom. 9:13-18). As far as God is concerned, the future is *closed* and nothing will occur outside His plan, or take Him by surprise. This is because God has already arranged the future for every person, both their privilege to be part of His corporate plan of election and also their service on planet earth. However, man's personal choices and decisions were not predetermined by God. And yet, all of man's human responses were amazingly and sovereignly prefigured into God's eternal plan.

Acts 2:23 records:

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

As it was in the crucifixion (Acts 3:18), so it was in the plan of salvation. God's complete foreknown plan was taken into consideration in eternity past. The cross of Jesus Christ was prearranged in eternity past. It was going to happen for God ordained that it would happen (Rev. 13:8). However, God allowed the human response of men, toward Jesus Christ, to bring His purpose to pass. God can work with man's choices to fulfill His intended purposes and goal (Rom. 9:17). The cross was the "determinate counsel" of God and this foreknown plan was brought to fruition through man's choices.

God could weave together a perfect plan of redemption *without violating man's freedom of choice*. In a similar way man's freedom of choice, or personal response to God's salvation call (Rom. 10:13), and even his call to service (Gal. 1:16), was not overlooked by the omniscient God (1 Sam. 23:1; Matt. 11:21; Psalm 139:1-4) in eternity

past. In other words, God did not overlook human freedom or choices when creating His marvelous plan of salvation and service for men. God wove human choices into His sovereign purpose and plan for this world. He arranged His sovereign plan without violating human choices.

For instance, Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him (Luke 22:34), in the grand scheme of things, but He did not coerce Peter to deny Him (James 1:13). In a similar way, God did not decree people to be evil, to reject His offer of salvation, to receive His offer of salvation, or follow a certain vocation in life, by violating their human freedom, or choices. *God decreed that people would be free agents, and in creating His plan, He masterfully wove together human freedom, with His saving purpose for mankind.* God in His sovereignty and providence (Psalm 115:3; 135:6) can choose to weave together His purpose, within the bounds of man's free choices.

Herb Vander Lugt stated:

“Certain Bible passages lead us to believe that God in some mysterious way lets our choices be a factor in the shaping of history.”

God can use man's free volitional choices to work out His decrees, and create a marvelous plan and purpose that will come to fruition, just as He originally planned. It is certain that the efficacious and permissive decrees of God are not inconsistent with man's freedom of moral and volitional choices (Acts 2:23; Matt. 18:7; John 13:27). God can foreknow His purpose without overriding man's freedom and will. God can also foresee how men will respond, without causing them to respond, in the way they do. God moves men to accomplish His will (Prov. 21:1); however, He never coerces men to do evil (James 1:13). At the same time, God uses the free will acts of men (freedom of choice) to fulfill His intended purposes related to salvation, service, and secular world events (Rom. 9:9-17). In short, some of God's decrees are worked out through man's choices and actions.

Let's illustrate it this way. A man can carry a goldfish bowl. At the same time the goldfish on the inside of the bowl has the freedom to swim about wherever it pleases and eat food. The bowl illustrates God's sovereign hand over the lives of people in salvation and call to service. The gold fish inside the bowl illustrates the freedom of human choice and movement. God is moving us in the direction that He wants us to

go but we are still free to choose how we want to be part of His great moving purpose. God is in charge of taking history and people to His intended course. In relationship to salvation, God's desire is to take man to the intended course of Heaven. In relationship to service, God's wants man to fulfill His intended purpose for their lives.

God is moving. However, like the goldfish in the bowl, which must move about and eat food to survive, so man must be willing to make a valid move and choice for Jesus Christ. Like Paul or Jeremiah, man must also yield to God, in order to follow His earthly purpose for his life. Without believing or yielding a man falls short of God's blessing. In short, God can fulfill His purposes, without interfering with the free agency of man. God can bring His purposes to fruition, allowing man to move freely, and make decisions regarding his life and salvation. God has willed not to violate the free will of man (Genesis 3:1-7) and He is sovereign in the way He has chosen to work out His decrees.

God bases the events of history, or as somebody said, "His story," by taking into consideration the freedom of man's actions and choices, and then *prearranges* the future, without changing any of His plans and purposes in any way. The point is this. Man's actions can carry out God's purposes. God's decrees and man's freedom were prefigured, known, planned, and intricately woven together by God's infinite wisdom (Eph. 1:8); in order to fulfill His purpose (Eph. 1:9). God's decrees are really seen as one decree or purpose that He is bringing to fruition (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11).

Shedd says:

"The things decreed come to pass in time, and in successive series: but they constitute one great system which as on *whole*, and a *unity*, was comprehended in one eternal purpose of God."

How marvelous that God can accomplish His decreed purpose without violating the freedom of man's choices. God in His infinite wisdom can bring to pass His decree with everything that occurs. There is nothing else we can say. We can only worship. Psalm 139:6 declares: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*"

"Our God is far greater than words can make known,
Exalted and holy, He reigns on His throne.

In infinite splendor He rules over all;
Yet He feeds the poor sparrows, and He knows when they fall.
His power is great and will ever endure,
His wisdom is peaceable, gentle, and pure.
But greater than all these glories I see,
Is the glorious promise that He cares for me."

God's Elect

I think we need to remind ourselves that when we read the phrase "God's elect" (Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1), we must view it like the Scriptural expression "first born" (Col. 1:15, 18), which is used of Christ, as a title of dignity. Elect is a title only applied to those who are believers, and the term non-elect is never used of the unsaved, or mentioned in the entire Bible. If a Calvinist talks about the "non-elect" he is not using Bible language. The preeminent thought in election, and the expression "God's elect," is one of rank, privilege, and dignity. The elect are a chosen group of people that have received the privilege of being part of God's corporate body, which He has chosen to save and bless.

Andrew Telford writes:

"Let us remind ourselves that when we read the phrase 'God's elect,' it is not a mere statement of fact or even of a purpose, but like the Scriptural expression 'first born,' it is a title of dignity and that title was only applied to those who were believers. The pre-eminent thought in election is *rank*, and *privilege*, not deliverance from damnation or eternal torment."

When a person responds to the universal call of the Gospel (Rev. 22:17), and the conviction of the Spirit upon his heart and life, it's then that he receives the privileged title of "God's elect" (Titus 1:1), and becomes part of a privileged company of people, who were ordained to be part of God's corporate elective program. He becomes one of the chosen people ("chosen in the Lord" - Rom. 16:13) who share in God's corporate plan of election ("a chosen generation" - 1 Pet. 2:9). Once again, the plural emphasis on election, in relationship to salvation, cannot be overlooked, and whenever a person looks at themselves, as "chosen in the Lord," or chosen by God, they have become part of a

privileged corporate group, which God has chosen to save from eternity past (Eph. 1:4).

Calvinistic Pathways in the Bible

Calvinism has certain paths that it takes through the Scripture in an attempt to prove its teaching, but these winding paths are off the tried and true paths, which present the whole picture of salvation. The Calvinistic pathways in the Bible do not line up with the entire scope and full counsel of God's truth (Acts 20:27) regarding His plan of election, free will (human choice), and salvation. I want to examine some of the more prominent Calvinistic pathways through the Bible, or study those verses and passages, which are used to support Calvinism. We want to interpret these texts of Scripture in light of the clear and unmistakable Scriptures, which present a plan of salvation that is available to all men, and where human choice is part of God's corporate plan of election. The simple truth about corporate election, keeps men's responses valid, and opens up the true meaning of many passages, which have traditionally been given a Calvinistic spin in their interpretation. With a corporate view of election, and when considering the entire plan of God's saving purpose for mankind (freedom of choice), one can arrive at non-Calvinistic conclusions in regard to many passages, which have been interpreted with bias and theological prejudice.

Proverbs 16:4

"The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Notice, this text does not say that God made the wicked for the day of destruction, the Lake of Fire, or damnation in hell. Hell is only prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The Bible is teaching that God made "all things for himself" which means to serve His own purposes and promote His own glory and praise. Even the wicked are subservient to God's eternal purposes. God uses Hitler's, Stalin's, and serial Killers for His purposes! This verse informs us that God, in His own providential way, uses evil people and their wicked decisions and actions, represented by "the day of evil," to fulfill His own purposes (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). In other words, God allows the wicked to have their evil day in this world, so God, through their actions, can express

His own purposes and glory. For one thing, the wicked serve as a black backdrop, which allows God's righteousness to shine brightly, which in return, actually glorifies God's character. Every time a wicked person reveals himself, God is praised, simply because His holiness, righteousness, and impeccability are magnified against the evil, wickedness, and sin.

Notice that the Bible does not say God preprograms these wicked and evil people to perform these dastardly deeds. God does not make people sin (James 1:13), or create people to sin (Gen. 1:31), but He allows the course of their sinful lives to play into His overall sovereign plan, which will ultimately bring praise to God, for His wonderful workings and purposes on earth. God is moving everything toward His intended goal. Even the wicked and godless people will in some way bring praise and glory to God, both in this life, and the life to come. God's righteousness and holiness will be seen against the backdrop of such wickedness and sin and God will ultimately get the glory.

It's equally true, and even more difficult to understand and accept, that the punishment of unrepentant sinners is in keeping with God's justice (Rev. 16:7). Therefore, even their future punishment will in one sense glorify God's character of justice and righteousness. The "Lord hath made all things for himself" or God has in His own providence, allowed every past, present, and future event, even the judgment of lost sinners, to bring glory to His name. God's holiness working in judgment glorifies Him! Psalm 76:10 says: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

The Bible teaches that the railings against God, His beloved people, and what is right are actually turned into praise to God. Against the backdrop of evil and the blackness of sin God's holiness and righteousness shines all the more. Also, God uses the wrath of man to accomplish His plan and purpose in the world (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). In addition, God will providentially bring the wicked down some day and His absolute justice will be seen (Jer. 23:25; Rev. 20:11-15). God's punishment of sinners always reveals His righteous workings and justice (Rev. 19:2).

Sin and evil taking place in the world brings praise to God (Ps. 76:10; Ex. 11:9; Numb. 14:21) by magnifying the greatness of God (Rom.

9:19) and His character of love, grace (Eph. 1:6) righteousness, and justice (Rev. 15:3; 16:7) against the black backdrop of evil and sin. In every way man's wickedness will praise God. God knows how to turn the tables! However, God says that He lets man go only so far. He has His limits on what man can do on this earth ("the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"). God is still on the throne. The emphasis is on God's providential control over all things or doing things "after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Here is the point. We exist for Gods' glory, whether we are good or bad, saved or lost. If we live for God, then God gets the visible glory right now (1 Cor. 10:31). If people live for themselves, God still gets the glory, but they miss out on *directly* giving God glory in this life. Our wicked rebellion and sin, sets itself against God, and *indirectly* gives God glory, allowing God's holy and righteous standard to be seen against the backdrop of our sin, or when we transgress His will. The point is this. God is accomplishing His purpose today and therefore He gets the glory for everything that happens – the good, bad, ugly. He is the One running things and moving everything according to His plan.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said:

"The very wonderful thing is that God is moving this universe according to His plan and purpose. The Greeks had a proverb: 'The dice of the gods are loaded.' That is exactly what God is saying in this proverb. Whether you like it or don't like it, God is saying to you, 'Don't gamble with Me. Don't act as if I don't exist. You can play house as if I don't exist, as if this is your universe and you are going to work it out your way. But I want you to know that if you start gambling with Me, you will lose. You see, this is My universe, and I make the dice to come up My way, not your way. My dice are loaded—I already know how they are coming up, and you don't.' The thing for us to do is to get in step with God."

Isaiah 45:7

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

Some Calvinists actually teach that God is the direct creator of moral evil. They use a verse, such as this, to arrive at this conclusion. If God is sovereign, or in control of everything that happens, then the Calvinist

assumes that God must have also created moral evil. However, the Bible teaches that God is absolutely flawless, impeccable, and holy (Lev. 11:44; Hab. 1:13); therefore, He could never be the author of sin and evil. God is not directly responsible for evil coming into this world. Sin and evil acts are attributed to man (“by one man sin entered into the world” - Rom. 5:12).

Some suggest the word “evil” does not mean moral wickedness in this instance, but rather sorrow, difficulties, or tragedies, which are those things that are the fruit of evil, or the fruit of sin. However, certain tragedies are the direct result of evil men and wicked actions; therefore, they should be considered as something which is morally evil. The evildoers create evil results.

Of course, this reference is not referring to God directly creating moral evil; it’s referring to God providentially working with evil nations, such as the Persian kingdom, who was allowed by God to defeat the Babylonian kingdom (Isa. 45:1). This is referring to God using one nation to punish other evil nations. Think of it this way. What God permits, He is often said to create. God creates evil only in the sense that He permits evil to run its intended course, as He has ordained, and keeps His providential hand over evil actions and events in the world (2 Thess. 2:7).

The truth is this; God in His providence allows evil people and nations to express their wicked ways. While overseeing the evil that is already present in the world, God allows certain calamities, disasters, and wars, to come upon nations, in order to get their attention, and fulfill His sovereign purposes (“shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” - Amos 3:6). In other words, God turns the hearts of evil kings (Prov. 21:1; 2 Chron. 36:22), and indirectly works with wicked people and godless nations, allowing them to fulfill His purposes in a fallen world of sin (Rev. 16:16). God is not directly creating evil, but neither is He ignoring it. God in His providence causes bad or evil things, as well as good things, to happen to people, for His own reasons, but He does not directly cause people to make morally evil decisions (James 1:13).

God creates evil in the sense that He providentially uses the wicked people, and nations of this earth, to bring judgment and evil calamities,

upon other people and nations. Furthermore, God allows this occur for His own purpose and glory (Ps. 76:10). This is true even when evil nations and dictators rule over others. Although God does not directly create evil rulers, dictators, and terrorist bombings, He has a sovereign purpose behind all of these evil actions. While using evil people and nations, God creates the boundaries of their wickedness, how far they can go, and how much they can get away with, in a fallen world. God is not the author of evil, but He is directly involved with all the affairs that take place on earth, even the wicked and godless actions of nations and evil men (Prov. 16:4). So much for deism!

Matthew 1:21

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

This verse is sometimes used to support that Jesus only died for a specific class of people (the elect) and that He determines to save only a special elect group that He died for (limited atonement). However, this is a fallacy, simply because “his people” were the national people of Israel, and many within the nation rejected Him, and were not saved (John 1:11). The fact that Jesus died for His national people (John 11:51) does not mean that all of them are elect and will be saved (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-7). While this text says that Jesus came to die for His national people of Israel, it does not mean that He *only* died for the Jews. It simply states a fact. Jesus came to die for His own people since He loved them deeply (Isa. 53:5-6). Jesus will always have a special love in His heart for Israel (Deut. 7:7-8; Isa. 49:15-16). However, Matthew’s conclusion does not mean that Jesus only loved the Jews and that He only died for them (John 3:16). This is reading more into the text than Matthew wanted to convey. The fact that Jesus died for His people is simply a statement to express His love for His own national people – the Jews.

Matthew 11:27

“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.”

In this verse Jesus was saying that the only ones who can know the Father, and the things He has revealed, are those whom the Son chooses (John 6:37). In other words, only those that the Son chooses will personally know the Father and His teaching. Calvinists suggest this proves that only a certain number (the elect) can be saved and know the Father and His teachings. However, this conclusion is not accurate for the simple reason, that in the very next verse, Jesus gives a universal call to all mankind for salvation (Matt. 11:28). If any man comes to the Son (“Come unto me”) then he will know the Father. Elsewhere Jesus chides unbelievers for not being willing to come to Him (Matt. 22:37).

The point is this; although the Son chooses those, who can know the Father, Jesus did not say that He wished to reveal to the Father, only a select company of people. The corporate nature of election can once again be applied to this passage and helps us to understand that Jesus chooses people in relationship to His greater purpose, which involves the offer of universal salvation to all people. Those who respond (“all ye that labour and are heavy laden” – Matt. 11:28) become part of God’s predetermined choice, and greater purpose, which involves selecting a corporate group of people to salvation. Corporate election best explains this verse.

Matthew 20:28 – “a ransom for many”

Elsewhere Jesus said that he came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 26:28; Mark 10:45) and “bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). Extreme Calvinists say this particular group of people (“many”) are actually the elect that Christ died for (limited atonement) and intended to save apart from the so-called non-elect. But once again there is no reason to take this statement in a restrictive sense (the many God intended to save over others). The word “many” is not used as a restricted number but a large indefinite number (Rom. 5:15). If “many” is used to mean the elect, or a select group of people, then only some people, not all, are condemned because of Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:15 – “many be dead”). An unlikely scenario! The fact of the matter is this; the words “all” and “many” are used interchangeably in this passage (vv. 12, 15, 18). The Bible says in John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Once again the “many” is referring to a large

indefinite and unlimited number of people. It has no restrictive meaning as the Calvinist contends.

Matthew 22:14 – “many are called but few are chosen”

Many put a Calvinistic twist on this verse and other similar verses (Matt. 20:16) by implying that God chooses some people to salvation and leaves the rest to be judged in hell. However, if God calls people then why wouldn't He save them? This cannot be satisfactorily answered by Calvinism. Furthermore, the Calvinist, when looking at this verse, must concede that the word “many” is not used in a restrictive sense but in a universal sense. This passage does not teach Calvinism. Jesus said, “many are called but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Why were many Jews not chosen to enter the earthly marriage feast or kingdom? Was it because God refused to choose them in eternity past? No! It's because they refused the invitation of the Messiah (Matt. 22:3 – “they would not come”) and were not spiritually prepared to enter. In fact, others who were invited came but were not wearing the appropriate wedding gown of God's righteousness and were refused (Matt. 22:12). For this reason, they were not chosen to enter the feast.

This passage teaches us that in the inception of the earthly kingdom the unbelievers will be cast out who refuse the invitation (“thrust out” - Luke 13:28). In this historic setting the “many” chosen (the Jews living in Jesus' day) were the ones originally called or invited to the earthly millennial feast (Matt. 22:10), so they might have a part in this earthly kingdom. However, it's concluded that “few are chosen” to enter the Messianic feast (earthly kingdom) simply because of their rejection of Christ's invitation (Matt. 22:1-5). Calvinism should not be read into this parable since it is not teaching, or even alluding, to the doctrine of election. Election is not an issue in this parable. It is simply teaching the result of the Jews rejecting Jesus as their personal Messiah and God turning to another group of people dispensationally, who would one day enter the earthly theocracy or kingdom.

In this case, the second group of people (Gentiles) were not pre-selected and chosen over the first group of people (Jews) before the foundation of the world; they simply were chosen because the first group (the Jews in Jesus day) rejected Him as the Messiah (John 1:12). Once again, the unbelieving Jews in Jesus' day were not

welcome to the feast because of their refusal to accept the invitation of the Messiah (Matt. 22:8). The others (Gentile masses) were then chosen to enter the earthly theocracy, when they received the invitation, and someday another remnant within the nation of Israel will also turn to the Messiah, when Christ returns, and they too will enter the kingdom feast (Luke 13:34-35).

Let's stop reading election into a passage that does not teach it. Many of those that were invited to the wedding feast "would not come" (Matt. 22:3) and therefore "were not worthy" (Matt. 22:8) to enter the banquet. This is human choice! They were invited, refused to come, and were rejected. Actually, these verses do not speak of election in any Calvinistic and restrictive sense. The people were being chosen to enter the banquet room and the choice was based upon their response to the invitation. These verses do not teach the system of Calvinism or election which has often been assigned to them. There is no mention of this doctrine in these verses and they should not be given the elective connotation that is normally associated with them. These verses make a general statement; many were called to enter the earthly kingdom, but because of their refusal of Christ and His offer of salvation, they would not enter. The choice in this parable does not center on election (God's choice) but on the people's choice, so reading election into them is making the parable teach something that God never intended to convey from this section of Scripture.

John 1:13

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

This verse is used to suggest that man does not have any freedom of choice in the matter of salvation and new life (new birth). Since this text says that being born again does not come about "by the will of man" then man most definitely has nothing to do with his salvation. Calvinism says that it's all "of God" in the sense that God chooses who will be saved and places elective faith in their hearts, and only the elect can and will believe due to the work of God. This is the basic Calvinistic spin on this verse. However, the context itself destroys this interpretation. The previous verse clearly declares, "But as many as receive him" and "to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

This connotes that their response to God's offer brings the salvation of God into their lives ("power to become the sons of God" – John 1:12). Furthermore, the expressions in John 1:13 do not speak of determinism and the election of people by God. John is not talking about God's arbitrary selection of sinners but His power in converting and bringing new life into the spirits of sinners. This Bible verse is merely teaching the manner in which people are saved. It has nothing to do with God electing some to Heaven and others to hell. This verse is addressing the subject of God's power in bringing about the new birth without human involvement or human achievement. God is the initiator and supplier of the new birth. This is the main teaching of this verse. Don't read more into the verse. Just teach what it says.

John is speaking about the natural descent ("blood"), human determination to bring about physical birth ("the will of the flesh"), and the human desire to bear children ("the will of man"). These expressions refer to physical conception and birth and how people can plan to have a child. In this verse, John is making a contrast, and is teaching that spiritual birth is nothing like human conception and birth. *Although people plan to bring forth children, no person can independently plan to be born again.* Spiritual birth is opposite of physical birth in that man has nothing to do with his spiritual rebirth. This does not imply that man has no freedom of choice (John 1:12). It simply means that man does *not initiate* the new birth, nor can he *merit* or earn this new birth by human achievement, intellect, and sheer determination. It takes the working of God upon the human heart to bring new life into a person's spirit. God is the *source* by which the new birth is given (John 1:13) but free will is the *means* by which it is received (John 1:12).

Now let's contrast these physical expressions to the realm of the spiritual birth. The words "not of blood" speak of *human descent* (the new birth does not come by physical ancestry). Our family history does not result in the new birth. God has no grandchildren! People are not born again simply because they have parents or other ancestors who are born again (John 8:33). The point is this; spiritual birth does not happen in the same way as physical birth.

The words "nor of the will of the flesh" speaks of *human determination*. In other words, spiritual birth does not take place in the same manner

as physical birth, where parents make an effort to bear children through physical relations. Personal determination or effort does not bring forth a spiritual birth. The new birth does not come by the personal efforts or attainments of the flesh (good works, legalism). God must trigger the need for new birth in the heart of man. Our human works do not result in the new birth. Human determination to do what is right (reformation) has nothing to do with salvation (John 6:63). Man cannot obtain salvation and new life by his human efforts and good deeds (Titus 3:5).

The words “nor of the will of man” speaks of *human decision* (the new birth does not come about through mere human decision). A couple can decide to have a baby but the new birth is different. God must move in the heart and create the desire for new life. In short, when the Bible says the new birth is not connected with “the will of man” it means God is the *initiator* and *source* of a man’s faith or choice for salvation. Our independent human choice, without God’s aid or involvement, does not result in the new birth.

Of course, Calvinists set up a straw man argument by this statement which states man has no choice in his eternal destiny. However, this is not the case, and destroys the clearly stated fact of the previous text. John is simply recording the truth that it’s ultimately God’s will and purpose, which brings new life into a person’s human spirit (John 1:13), and this is demonstrated through God being the initiating source and cause of a man’s new birth, through His intervention and power. In other words, God must get credit for the new birth – not man. However, John is not excluding man’s final choice regarding his destiny (John 1:12 – “But as many as received him”).

Let’s break this down further. First, people without God’s aid or assistance, cannot determine the time they will be saved (John 3:8). God determines the time of a person’s new birth by working in the hearts of unsaved people by His Spirit. God chooses the time when He wants to bring new birth into the lives of lost people. Second, as we have already seen in this study, God must do a pre-salvation work in a person’s heart before a person can respond favorably to the Gospel invitation. *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 threshold of salvation and allows them to make a valid choice regarding their eternal destiny (John 12:35-36).

The point is this. What is true in the physical realm is *not* true in the spiritual realm. You can determine to have a baby through physical relations but no person can determine to be born again independent of God's assistance, through human ability, power, and sheer determination. This is because the new birth comes about through the work of God upon the human heart. God must make the first move to initiate and call a person unto Himself and to new life. No person can make a move toward God until God makes a move toward them (Luke 19:10). When the Bible says that the new birth is "not by the will of man," it simply means that man has nothing to do with his spiritual birth, in the sense that he cannot *merit* salvation, *initiate* salvation, or *produce* salvation in his own spirit.

Independent of God's help and enablement, man would not come to the place of salvation and new life. It takes the work of God upon the human heart (John 1:13) before the will of man can respond favorably to salvation (John 1:12). God is the initiator and source of the new birth – not man. This is why the new birth is said to be a supernatural work "of God" (John 1:13) which initiates and brings new birth into a person's spirit. We repeat. God is the initiator and source of the new birth – not man ("not by the will of man"). However, man is the responder and embracer of God's work ("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).

Let's illustrate it this way. People say, "I think I will try Jesus today." We read those bumper stickers that say, "Try Jesus." People seem to suggest by these statements that they have the ability, in and of themselves, to be born again. They feel that they can just change their life and become a Christian in their own way of thinking and living. However, people cannot attempt to make themselves a Christian without the working of the Spirit of God moving in their hearts and lives. People also say, "I have found the Savior." Actually, the Savior really found you! God is responsible for bringing you to the place of faith and salvation, through His divine assistance upon your soul.

John 3:8

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Calvinism teaches that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, blows where it wants to. This means that God only is going to elect some people over others. The movement of the Holy Spirit is likened to the wind because it only blows upon the elect. Therefore, God is in control of electing some to salvation and leaving the rest to suffer the fate of hell. This once again is reading election theology into God's Word instead of God's theology. In John 3:8 Jesus uses the wind illustration of the Spirit's work to teach that God does the work in the hearts of lost people to regenerate them. The new birth is the result of God's power (John 1:13). The verse has nothing to do with election. Rather, it is speaking of God's work upon the human soul, which brings about new life. We must let God's Spirit work in the human heart for only He can bring new life into the inner spirits of lost people.

In John 3:8 Jesus uses the wind to illustrate how the Spirit regenerates. The work of the Spirit (pneuma) is invisible and mysterious like the blowing of the wind (pneuma). Man controls neither. You cannot explain or predict the movements of the wind and in the same manner you cannot predict and explain the movement and work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. The action of the Spirit on the soul of the sinner is a remarkable work of God. It is a work that cannot be fully explained in human terms. It a mysterious work that seeks to bring light into the mind of a sinner and a work that begins to compel the heart of the lost sinner to the Savior.

The work of God upon the soul is both a marvel and mysterious work. Like the wind, the work of the Spirit in bringing about spiritual birth is *unpredictable* (cannot state when and where it will take place), *invisible* (works on the inside of the human heart), and yet *visible* in its effects (changed thought patterns and living). The new birth is also like the wind because it is *God-directed or empowered* (it's not a power man has in his own hands). God alone can bring a person to salvation. The wind of the Spirit must blow into the soul to bring a person to the place of new birth. The obvious point is this; if man would have control over the new birth, then God would have no part or control in the new birth. But God is the One who supernaturally works in the hearts of people to bring them to the place of new life or birth.

What does it take to be born again? It takes the supernatural act of God upon the human heart. It's God who works in the human heart and

implants new life in the human spirit (“but of God”). It bears repeating; man has nothing to do with his spiritual birth, in the sense that he cannot *merit* salvation, *initiate* salvation, or *produce* salvation. Salvation and the new birth is a supernatural act of God. As already stated, these conclusions do not undermine the doctrine of free will (John 1:12; 5:40); they simply put free will in proper perspective, and conclude that man without God’s help is hopelessly lost and without life (Rom. 3:11). No one can save us but God! God gets all the glory in salvation.

John 3:16

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

Calvinism teaches that Jesus did not die for every person in the world. It’s asserted the Christ died only for the elect or those who He intended to save. Calvinists are quick to tell us that the terms “world” and “whosoever” in John 3:16 do not mean all people. They are used in a restrictive or limited sense. According to the Calvinist they only refer to the world of the elect and “whosoever” (all) is a reference to the elect that God chooses to save over the non-elect. Furthermore, only the world of the elect or people that Christ died for can come to faith. Everyone else is left to die the sinner’s death. So the Calvinist uses his contorted or twisted logic to try and prove his five-point Calvinism (Christ died only for the elect).

Is John actually using the term “world” in a restrictive or limited sense? Absolutely not! The immediate context tells us that John is using the term in an inclusive or comprehensive sense. In John 3:17-18 he uses the term world in a universal sense. All Calvinists will agree that the entire world (not just the elect) is condemned (“to condemn the world” – vs. 17). They would never say that only the elect are condemned. This is absurd. It is unmistakably clear by the context that the term for “world” (vs. 16) means the whole fallen race of humanity for it is the same world that is under condemnation (vs. 17).

Surely the entire populace of humanity is under condemnation – not just the elect. If the term “world” means only the elect, then it would also follow that he “of the elect” that believe may be saved and he “of

the elect” that believeth not is condemned (John 3:18). But whoever heard of the elect people being damned and yet this is precisely what the limited interpretation of the term “world” leads to in John 3:16 when one follows a limited concept of the teaching of this word.

The Bible says that Christ “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6). Is the word “all” used in a restrictive sense in this verse? The Calvinist asserts that it does but once again they are committing the error of eisegesis. An old cliché goes like this: “All always means all and that is all that all means.” The old cliché is true when we view the context and use common sense regarding the passages of salvation that teach God’s universal love and sacrifice for all people.

Calvinism misrepresents the clear meaning of Scripture. For instance, they retranslate John 3:16 to make it support their Calvinistic presuppositions and say, as John Owen did, that “God so loved his elect throughout the world, that he gave his Son with the intention, that by him believers might be saved!” This is a severe case of eisegesis—reading into the text. It is also adding to the Word of God, which is condemned by God (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19).

The attempt by Calvinists to redefine the meaning of words and restrict the meaning of “whosoever” (all) to mean only the elect in the redemptive or salvation contexts of Scripture have failed. The Calvinist Palmer contends that “all does not mean all” or whosoever does not mean whosoever in John 3:16. This is theological doubletalk! John consistently uses the term “world” (kosmos) in a universal sense when speaking about people (John 1:10; 29; 3:15-16; 4:42; 6:51; 8:12; 16:8; 12:31, 36, 46-47; 17:21).

The uses of the terms, “world” and “whosoever” (all) people, in redemptive or salvation contexts, always refer to the entire human race. These terms are never used in a limited sense within the salvation contexts of Scripture. Calvinism destroys the obvious meanings of salvation texts in order to make their theory of limited atonement work. Calvinism forces Scripture to say what it does not say. The word “whosoever” is found 183 times in 163 verses in the Bible and it means as the Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary says, “Whoever; whatever person: an emphatic form.”

There are no alternate meanings to this word unless you are a Calvinist trying to support Calvinism. To remake “whosoever” to mean a certain select company of people called the elect is to destroy the obvious meaning of words and the Bible. There is nothing in the “whosoever” passages that suggest God has a limited meaning and sense to this word. Calvinism teaches that there is a disclaimer in the fine print, which can’t be seen by the ordinary eye. Only the initiated in the Calvinistic club can see it. And the disclaimer is that whosoever does not mean whosoever, but only the elect.

Sir Robert Anderson, in the preface of his book *Forgotten Truths*, has written the following: “In the early years of my Christian life I was greatly perplexed and distressed by the supposition that the plain and simple words of such Scriptures as John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:6 were not true, save in a cryptic sense understood only by the initiated.” Anderson is referring to those Calvinists who teach that God only died for the elect, or those individuals He chose to salvation, and did not die for the rest of people. They are understood in a cryptic way to mean the world of the elect.

Calvinism tries to sidestep the context by pointing out that in certain other passages the term “world” has a limited sense. They point to a verse such as Luke 2:1 where the term “world” refers to the geographical area of the Roman world. This kind of circular reasoning is futile. So what does this text really mean? It means that the whole geographical Roman world would be taxed. There is actually no limitation in this meaning by the writer, and if the Calvinist wants to use it to portray a limited concept of the term world to salvation, then it must mean that every person in the Roman Empire would be saved!

The point is this. The context of Luke 2 has nothing to do with salvation. The ploy of the Calvinist is to try and divert the unmistakable inclusive meaning of John 3:16 and other salvation texts (John 4:14; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 10:43; Rom. 10:11, 23; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 22:17) to those passages where the term “all” does not mean the whole human race (Matt. 10:22; John 12:19). However, these texts are not in the context of God’s offer of salvation to people and have no relationship to any salvation passages. They are statements made to express how a large number of people would react to the disciples and Christ. Furthermore, to assume a limited meaning for the terms “world,” “whosoever” or “all”

in every passage of Scripture, by examining those scanty passages where the words have a limited understanding, outside the context of salvation, is committing exegetical fraud. It is Scripturally and logically unsound to restrict the usage of these words to always have a limited meaning in every context of Scripture. The fact is this, they overwhelmingly have a universal meaning in most texts of Scripture, and in all texts related to salvation.

To change the meaning of salvation passages “to the world of the elect” and the “whosoever of the elect” and “all of the elect” is changing the meaning of Biblical texts to support Calvinism instead of the writer’s clear intent and obvious meanings. It becomes an exegetical fallacy of the worst sort. Would the Calvinist contend that the “all” of Romans 3:23 is limited in its scope? Furthermore, did death pass upon “all” men (Rom. 5:12) or just the elect men? Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Who would dare say that only the elect have sinned and come short of the glory of God? No Calvinist would come to these conclusions. The term “all” does mean all and it does mean that Christ died for all people without exception (2 Cor. 5:14-15; 5:19; Heb. 2:9). Both Jesus (Matt. 23:37) and Paul (Rom. 10:1-2) desired that all their kinsman of the flesh would be saved. All truly means all in every salvation or redemptive verse (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

If it’s silly to conclude that the term “all” in Romans 5:12 means that death only passed upon the elect, then it’s silly to conclude that “all” in Romans 5:18 (“all men unto justification of life”) only means the elect. The obvious point is this. Christ died to actually provide salvation and righteousness for all men. The Calvinist cannot have his cake and eat it too! The term “all” does mean all in the context of salvation. Notice what great lengths the Calvinist must go to reinterpret the Scriptures.

Here is a Calvinistic interpretation of 1 John 2:2:

“And he is the propitiation for our sins (the sins of the elect): and not for ours only (the elect sins only), but also for *the sins of* the whole world (the sins of the elect).”

Of course, this interpretation does not make sense! The reason it does not make sense is because this is not what the text is teaching. The words “all” and “world” are used in a universal sense in the salvation passages of Scripture. If one views them as referring to a limited group

of people (the elect), or some special group of people, they destroy the obvious sense of Scripture, and are inconsistent with what the Bible actually says. And yet John MacArthur reasons that the term world in this verse “is a generic term, referring not to every single individual, but to mankind in general.”

This sounds like doubletalk. He then clarifies what he means by this statement. “Christ actually paid the penalty only for those who would repent and believe” and says that the term “world indicates the sphere, the beings toward whom God seeks reconciliation and has provided propitiation.” To MacArthur the term “world” does not mean all of humanity without condition. Christ only paid for the salvation of those who would believe on Him (the elect). MacArthur omits references where the term “world” clearly refers to every member of Adam’s lost race (John 3:16; Rom. 5:12). On what basis does He restrict the term’s meaning in this verse? It’s obvious that his theology dictates what the passage must mean.

John MacArthur also stated that “actual atonement was made only for those who believe; cf. John 10:11, 15; 17:9; Acts 13:48; 20:28; Rom. 8:32, 33; Eph. 5:25). The rest of humanity will pay the price personally for their own sin in eternal hell” (MacArthur Study Bible). This is a terrible Calvinistic statement, made by a popular Calvinist author, and shows how biased Calvinistic teachers are with the simplistic statements of the Bible.

Charles Spurgeon, a Calvinist, said:

“I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God.”

Think of this. If the offer of salvation is not genuinely offered to all people, then why did Christ tell His disciple to go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15)? Is not Christ giving a false impression to His disciples and all those who read His command? Jesus repeatedly offers salvation to all or whoever would believe and receive Him (John 5:24; 10:7). Why? It’s because Jesus died for everybody and wants everybody to be saved (John 3:16) – even the apostates (2 Pet. 2:1). This is the simple and sublime truth of what Christ taught in the salvation passages of Scripture. Christ came to redeem all men (Gal. 4:4-5).

Other Calvinists will attempt to say that the “whosoever” and “all” passages are simply teaching that salvation was not intended to be given only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. The words are used to indicate the mistaken idea that Christ died only for the Jews. Therefore, the understanding of the words “all men,” “whosoever,” “all nations,” “every creature,” and “world” means that Christ died for all elect men without *distinction* (referring to Jews and Gentiles) but not all men without *exception* (for the purpose of saving all men).

Again, this is reading something into the salvation texts that the writers never intended to convey. None of the salvation writers, who use these words, use them to prove the distinction among the Jews and Gentiles. One must look in vain for contextual evidence for such limitations. Rather, the use of these words point to the universal application of Christ’s death to all people in the entire world. One must strain the context to try and find this Jew-Gentile distinction in such passages as John 1:29; 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Titus 2:11, Hebrews 2:9, and 2 Peter 3:9. Christ died for all people *providing* salvation for them. Salvation is then *secured* for those who believe (John 1:12).

Calvinism seeks to uphold its view of limited or particular redemption of salvation to only the elect, by appealing to certain verses that speak of Christ dying for only the Church and His sheep, which He intends to save, and make part of the Church or His own people. Let’s comment on these passages.

Ephesians 5:25

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

Acts 20:28

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

John 10:11

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

John 10:15

“As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Calvinism concludes that Christ only died for the Church and the sheep or people are the ones that God intends to save over others. Therefore, Christ only died for the elect and the “whosoever” verses must out of necessity speak of the elect, which God intends to save over others. Of course, this is circular reasoning instead of Biblical reasoning. The Bible clearly and unmistakably teaches that Christ died for everyone in the world (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:6). Christ also died for Paul (Gal. 2:20), He died for Israel (John 11:51), and He died for the Church (Eph. 5:25). But it’s equally true that Christ died for all mankind without exception (John 3:16).

All these conclusions are true and you cannot exclude any person or group. Any verses that seem to stress a limitation to Christ’s death must be examined in light of those verses that teach the unlimited nature of Christ’s death – not vice-versa. *The fact that some verses teach Christ loved and died for a special group of people (His sheep or corporate body – the Church), does not mean that He fails to love all people, or die for them.* The fact that God loves some people does not mean that He excludes other people from His love and Son’s death. This is simply the assumption of Calvinism. This is not what the Bible teaches. One truth does not exclude another truth.

One of the principles of Bible interpretation is the important hermeneutical principle known as “the analogy (similarity) of Scripture.” This principle states that no passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture. Confusion is created when certain obscure Scriptures are used to override the clear and unmistakable teachings of other Scriptures. When the overwhelming evidence of Scripture supports the truth that Christ died for all people, the burden of proof always rests on the shoulders of the Calvinist to teach otherwise.

It must be understood that the interpreter of Scripture should always begin with the clear verses in the Bible, and then interpret the less clear verses, in light of the clear verses. The cause of Calvinistic confusion concerning Christ’s death lies in the fault of the exegete, who fails to

use proper hermeneutical skills, when interpreting the Bible. Context, grammar, repetition, and agreement principle, or the comparison of Scripture with Scripture (1 Cor. 2:13), will allow the student to ascertain the correct meaning of specific Bible passages.

Now what do these verses teach that speak of Christ dying for the Church or His sheep? First, they teach that Christ's death reaches across dispensational lines. Christ died for a new group of people which would be included in the purpose and plan of God, a group of people that is composed primarily of Gentiles. The mention of Christ's death for His Church and sheep was *primarily a dispensational point* since Christ was moving from the Jews as a corporate nation to the Gentiles as a corporate people in His salvation outreach (John 10:16; Acts 15:14). Christ was saying that His program was changing from the Jewish people to the Church (the new sheep). Many will make a mountain out of a molehill when dealing with these verses.

These verses can't mean that Christ's death was limited in its scope, or that Christ died to only save the elect (the sheep or Church), since this would contradict the rest of Scripture. What they are teaching is a simplistic truth. First, Christ was suggesting that He would also, within the dispensational plan of God, die for another corporate group of people called the "sheep" (Church – "other sheep" - John 10:10). He was not excluding the Jews from His death and He certainly was not saying He did not love the Jews (Jer. 31:3). Jesus was making a dispensational point concerning His coming death. He would die to save a new group of people called His sheep (the New Testament Church). When understood in this *dispensational manner* the many arbitrary and restrictive interpretations of Christ's death cannot be applied to this passage, since Christ died for several groups of people, His original covenant people (John 11:51) but also the Church (the new people of God) in order to bring His providential program to fruition.

Second, when reflecting on Christ's death for His "church" and "sheep" (the corporate body), we can once again conclude that Christ died for a collective group of people who would, throughout history, enter His elective and redemptive program. The group was *specific* in that it was called the "sheep" or "Church" but in another sense the group was *collective* (universal) in that it would include all those who enter God's new program of election, through faith in the Son of God ("the faith of

God's elect" - Titus 1:1). Christ had to die for everyone (John 3:16) in order to get to His sheep and Church in the plan and program of God, His elective group of people that would bring glory to His name and grace (Eph. 1:6). In short, Christ died for everyone, so people could enter His elective and collective group, and become part of His beloved Church and sheep.

As stated earlier, the invitation given by the Church ("the bride") is a universal invitation ("whosoever") for all people to "come," which means that all people can take part in the corporate body (the Church), which Christ has chosen to save, and become part of the Bride of Christ. This is not the church inviting elect sinners to salvation but all sinners to salvation so they might become part of the elect body, which all can enter, according to His purpose and grace. When dying for the Church, Jesus specifically died for a group of people, which would be invited to join His universal elective purpose and program. Therefore, the Church or called out assembly is actually a growing body of people who throughout history accept Christ as Savior (1 Cor. 1:1-2) and which are then baptized into Christ's mystical body (1 Cor. 12:13). This is what Jesus was teaching regarding Christ's sheep (John 10:16).

The Gentile sheep would become part of the New Testament Church and have Christ's special attention, love, and salvation. The Church, or sheep, is an open and growing group of people that Christ intends to save, as they respond to His overtures. Christ's death is not limited in its extent or scope (He died for all); it's only limited in its application to those who believe, or those who become part of the growing, elect body of people, called His Church or sheep.

This is what these verses are teaching. Christ died for the Church and His sheep, a special called-out group of people He wants to save, which is based on His universal death for everyone, and who become part of this corporate body because of His universal death for everyone. God's chosen group stems from Christ's universal death for mankind. Since Christ died for all mankind (Heb. 2:9) all people can become part of God's new body of elect believers (the sheep and Church) in the present dispensational age. However, in order to get to the elect body, Christ had to die for all mankind, since all can become part of the universal body He has called to save (Rev. 22:17). Calvinists

want to start with elect and end with the elect. But this is not the Biblical order. One must start with everyone in order to get to the elect.

In actuality, these verses are not teaching a limit to Christ's death, but the *securing* effect and *application* of Christ's death, to those who believe in Him for salvation, within the growing and corporate body of the Church – God's sheep. Christ died to be the potential Savior of all mankind (1 John 4:14), but the efficiency and application of Christ's death would only be extended to those, who would believe in Christ, and become part of His collective Church body, or flock of sheep. This stresses that Christ's sacrifice would only be applicable and efficient to those who believe and become part of Christ's mystical body and corporate flock of sheep.

Here is something to remember. The salvation provided by the death of Christ is possible for all men, but not actual, until it is received by faith (John 1:12). Christ's death is sufficient to save every one, without exception, but only efficient to save those who believe. In other words, the death of Jesus Christ *provided* a means by which all people can be saved. Christ paid the sin debt and made a sacrifice for every man (Heb. 2:9).

2 Corinthians 5:19-20 declares:

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

This verse clearly teaches that Christ's death provided a satisfying, substitutionary sacrifice for all mankind. When Christ died on the cross He “reconciled the world” (not the Church or sheep). This means He provided a sacrificial provision for all humanity to be reconciled to God. Without Christ's sacrifice no person could ever be saved.

J. Vernon McGee remarks:

“Now that Christ has died, the position of the world has been changed. Today God has His arms outstretched to a lost world. He says to a lost world, ‘You can come to Me.’ The worst sinner in the world can come to Him. Today it doesn't make any difference who you are, you can

come to Him. Because Christ died, a holy God no longer deals with us in judgment, but now He reaches down to save all those who will come to Him. Jesus Christ bore all that judgment on Himself so that now the world is reconciled to God. You don't have to do anything to win God over. God is not waiting around the corner to hit you over the head with a bill club. God is not angry with you. God does not hate you. God *loves* you. Christ did not come to charge man's sins against him but to pay man's debt."

Through the death of Christ God has placed the entire world of lost humanity into a savable position. His death provided the means by which the entire world can be saved. Now provision is one thing but securing salvation is another thing. Christ's death provided salvation for the entire world (2 Cor. 5:19-20; John 1:29; 2 Pet. 2:1; John 3:15-16); however; it only secures the salvation of those who become part of His growing, elect body of people (the Church or sheep). Only those who actually place their faith in Christ will benefit from the sacrifice of the Son and have their salvation secured.

Christ's death is unlimited in the sense that His death is *sufficient* to save all mankind and that God wants to save all mankind without exception (John 3:16). It is unlimited in the sense that God *provided* the substitutionary sacrifice by which all mankind can be saved (1 John 2:1-2). However, the actual *securing* and *application* of salvation to the lives of people, limits the extent of Christ's death, to the elect body called His Church, or His flock of sheep. Christ's death is not limited in its scope and outreach to all mankind (Heb. 2:9), but in its application to those who believe, and become part of His growing elect body (Acts 20:28). The atonement is not limited in its extent but it is limited in its application to the Church and sheep. The *provisional* extent of Christ's death is unlimited but the *securing* aspect of Christ's death is limited to His open, growing, and corporate body – the Church or sheep. Chafer said that Christ's work is "actual in its availability, but potential in its application." This is true. The pardon for sin is offered to the whole world but is received only by those who believe (John 1:12; 5:24) – the Church and sheep.

2 Timothy 2:10

"Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

In this verse, Christ is once again seen dying for a specific group of people, much like He died for the Church and the sheep (Eph. 5:25; John 10:11). This verse is teaching about the *application* of Christ's death to a specific group of people. Christ died to save all people provisionally (1 Tim. 2:6) and potentially (John 3:16), but He died to secure the salvation of the elect (those who would actually believe on Him and become part of the elect body) with certainty. We must once again understand that the elect ("for the elect's sake") is a corporate and collective group of people that God has chosen to save from eternity past. This study has revealed that God did not elect certain people to salvation, over others, but has determined to save an elect body of people, who are willing to respond to His offer of salvation. Election has a community emphasis and leaves the door open for a valid "whosoever" Gospel. The term election is a title of dignity granted to those who believe in Christ (Rom. 8:33) – not God's selection of one person over another person.

The term "non-elect" is never mentioned in the Bible for God never selects or elects people to damnation. *The elect from our perspective is an open and growing body of believers, who believe in Christ, and receive the title elect, but from God's perspective, they are a fixed group of people already known by Him, a group of people He has determined to save, since He knows the end from the beginning (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).* In eternity past God determined to save a corporate body of people ("the elect's sake") who respond to His offer of salvation (John 3:16).

God has chosen to save this group of people in eternity past and has confirmed that they will obtain salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to see God's program of corporate election come to fruition during his own day and time ("that they may also obtain the salvation"). Although election occurs in the past counsels of God's wisdom (Eph. 1:4) His elective program actually comes to fruition in the present Gospel period (2 Tim. 2:10), and focuses on God's plan to save a group of people, out of lost humanity, who respond to His pleas or overtures upon their lives (John 3:15). The *application* of Christ's death is only applied to the elect, or the growing body of believers, which are being formed today (1 Cor. 1:1-2).

Think of this. If “the elect” are a group of people that God chooses to save, over other people, then the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) is only good news to the elect, since they are the only ones who can be saved. The Gospel would actually be bad news to the so-called non-elect people that God has not chosen to save. According to Calvinism the doom of the non-elect is sealed and there is nothing that can be done to change it. Therefore, the good news of the Gospel cannot be good news to the non-elect. The Gospel would only confirm the non-elect to be predestined to the eternal torment of hell forever and forever without the opportunity for belief and salvation.

Calvinists also make the claim that Christ only died for a certain group of people (the elect) since the Bible uses personal pronouns and phrases such as “we,” “our,” and “for us” (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 4:25; 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13) in connection with Christ’s death. Calvinists contend that this means Christ only died for the elect that He intended to save and did not die for the so-called non-elect. This is unsound and unbiblical reasoning. In the first place, these personal pronouns are used to describe the *application* of Christ’s death to those who have already believed and not the extent or provision of Christ’s death. Only a Calvinist would assume that Paul was a fellow Calvinist supporting tulip teaching by these statements. Second, the reason why personal pronouns are used is self-explanatory. It’s the only way believers could address one other in respect to their salvation. They were not promoting Calvinism by these personal pronouns but rejoicing in their own personal salvation.

If a brother would stand up and give a testimony in church and say, “I’m so thankful that Jesus died for me and saved me” he would not be inferring that Jesus only died for him and no one else in the world. He would simply be giving a testimony of thanksgiving for his personal salvation and the sufficiency of Christ’s death on his behalf.

If salvation for only the elect was meant by these personal pronoun statements and phraseology, then it must mean that only the elect experience depravity in sin, since the Bible records that “we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Of course, this is absurd and the whole Calvinistic

conclusions regarding the use of personal pronouns, as referring to the elect, which God wants to save over other people, is a complete farce.

John 6:37

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

Calvinism teaches by this verse that the Father has decided to give only some people (the elect ones God chose to save over others) the privilege of being drawn to Christ for salvation. The non-elect can't come to Christ and be saved. Of course, this is reading into the verse biased, presuppositional, Calvinistic conclusions instead of Scriptural conclusions. The Scripture does not teach that God elects some people over others. The concept of corporate election fulfills God's saving purposes (Eph. 1:3). All people can enter into God's saving purpose in election and this is precisely what Jesus is saying. The word “all” (“All that the Father giveth me”) is not used in a restrictive sense but in an open sense. The “all” are not a limited group but an open and growing group of people that the Father was giving to Christ. When election is viewed as a corporate growing body of people the term “all” is not viewed in a restrictive but inclusive sense.

“All that the Father giveth me” is a salvation statement – not an arbitrary selective statement. This refers to the “all” related to corporate election and not the all related to determinism or Calvinistic election (God choosing some over others for salvation). Here is the simple and sublime truth. All those who keep coming to Christ for salvation, through the Father's drawing power (John 6:44), do so because they are given to Christ through the Father's corporate elective plan for salvation. The “all” that Jesus spoke about has reference to the corporate elect body which is being formed today as people respond to the Son's offer of salvation (“him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”). The word “all” with the words “him that cometh” once again teach how God's elective program comes to pass. *The Father has previously determined that an elect body will come to faith and it's these people who are drawn by the Father's power and given to the Son.* Both the origin of this plan (“all that the Father giveth”) and the bringing to pass of this plan (“him that cometh to me”) work together to fulfill God's sovereign purpose.

Of course, Calvinism teaches that “him that cometh to me” refers to the elect or those people that God arbitrarily chose to be saved over others. But this once again reads more into the text than is stated. Jesus simply states that “all” those who are coming to Him can be assured that they are coming on the basis of the Father’s plan of corporate election (“All that the Father giveth me”) and the fulfillment of this plan through His drawing power upon their lives (John 6:44; 12:32). So let’s read the Bible verse again without the spectacles of Calvinism.

John 6:37

“All that the Father giveth me (in God’s corporate program of election) shall come to me (the unfailing purpose of God to save His corporate body); and him that cometh to me (human choice and freedom) I will in no wise cast out (assurance of acceptance and eternal life).”

The fact that there are people given to Christ as a gift is repeated in many verses. We are going to look at these verses. This giving of people to Christ speaks of the Father’s eternal plan of corporate election that was coming to fruition during the earthly ministry of Jesus. People were being given to Christ as they were responding to the Father’s drawing upon their lives (John 6:44). Notice the repeated emphasis.

John 6:39

“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

This once again refers to the “all” related to His corporate elective body and not the all related to determinism or Calvinistic election (God choosing some over others for salvation).

John 17:2

“As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

These again are the “many” that relate to God’s corporate elective body that He was forming while His Son was on earth. The Father would draw “many” people to salvation to form the corporate body and give these people as gifts to His Son. This would then be the fulfillment of

the Father's eternal and sovereign plan of salvation. The word "many" does not connote the many God chooses over others but the many that respond to His invitation and drawing. The word "many" is not used in a restrictive sense in the New Testament but in an open sense (see Rom. 5:19; John 1:12).

John 17:9

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

John 17:11-12

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

John 17:24

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

This cluster of verses in John 17 once again focuses on God's community of people that He intends to save in order to fulfill His corporate elective purposes. All these verses reflect the Father's eternal purpose in eternity past to elect a group or community of people to salvation. This is why the words "all" and "as many" and "them" are used. The corporate nature of election is once again emphasized and when people were coming to Christ during Christ's day it proved that the Father's eternal plan was coming to fruition.

There are no Calvinistic overtones of determinism (God choosing some people to salvation and bypassing others) in these verses. They are simply stating God's eternal elective purpose to select a corporate entity of people. The way God's corporate election ("as many as thou hast given" – John 17:2) is brought to pass is through human response to the offer of salvation, as the surrounding contexts clearly reveal (John 6:47; 54; 7:37; 17:20). The people that are then given to Christ, as gifts, refer to the corporate body of people, or to "them also which

shall believe on me” (John 17:20). Looking down through the corridors of time, brings assurance to Christ, that the Father’s plan of electing and drawing a corporate body of people (the Church) to salvation will come to pass, just as He planned.

John 6:44

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

The drawing and teaching of God refers to His inner work that disposes (inclines) people to accept the truth about Jesus and respond to Him. Through God’s inward convincing and convicting ministry, upon the human will, He helps people to have faith, but He does not override their human will, or make them have faith. God promotes faith in the hearts of the unsaved, but does not implant faith in a person’s heart without their personal choice. These verses are simply teaching how a sinner responds to God, through His assistance; they do not imply that the sinner has no personal response of faith, as a result of God’s drawing and inner conviction upon his soul.

Calvinism assumes that this verse is teaching that God only wants to save the elect (the ones He has chosen to save over others), and that these same people will be drawn by the Father, by His irresistible grace, proving that human freedom or choice has nothing to do with a man’s salvation. However, this is the conclusion of Calvinism, which reads into the drawing verses of Scripture Calvinistic assumptions, rather than viewing them as simple facts that represent God’s inner work upon lost souls. Neither this verse, nor any other drawing verse found in the Bible, would contradict the clear statements that we have already discussed about human autonomy or freedom, Christ dying for the entire world, and wanting to save all mankind.

It’s theologically correct to conclude that no person can respond to Christ’s invitation of salvation except the Father draws him. Man’s heart must be softened by the touch of God and the satanic veil of blindness must be lifted (2 Cor. 3:3-4), if a person is ever going to be saved (John 12:35-36; 2 Cor. 3:16). These conclusions are Biblical and correct. What is not correct is to assume that God only draws some people

efficaciously (effectively), by His grace (the elect), while others (the non-elect), He only gives common grace, and bypasses them, refusing to draw them to the place of salvation. Reformed Theologians say we can't understand the reasons for God refusing to draw some people to salvation and others to the place of salvation. We must simply accept what God has decided to do knowing that He is all wise. Of course, these are Calvinistic conclusions, but they are not God's conclusions.

In John 6:44 Jesus is simply acknowledging the Father's drawing power upon the lives of those people who decide to come to Him for salvation ("him that cometh to me" - John 6:37). Jesus is not creating the Calvinistic scenario that only some people are irresistibly drawn by the Father to Christ and the rest are left to themselves. All will agree that the Father draws people to the place of salvation. However, this is not a *selective* statement dealing with election, but a *saving* statement, on how people actually come to salvation. Only the Father can bring the lost to the place of salvation. This is not a matter of selection but a matter of salvation.

If a person comes to place faith in Christ, it's because the Father has inclined him to come (John 6:37). Second, we have already studied how the Father gives people to Christ on the basis of His corporate elective program (John 6:37). He leaves the door open for all mankind to enter His program of election. Therefore, it is Biblically right and reasonable to conclude that the Father also draws all people, without exception, and desires to save all mankind, through His drawing power. Anyone is eligible to be drawn by the Father and become part of the growing elect body that God has chosen to save. The drawing of individual people to salvation (John 6:44) results in God's greater purpose coming to pass, which is to form the corporate body that He has chosen to save (the Church).

John 12:32

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me."

This is once again a statement of fact. God draws all people ("all men") to salvation and all who have been saved, or ever will be saved, have been drawn by the power of God. In other words, as a result of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, all kinds of people would be drawn to Him. This is not a statement about individual election but a statement

on salvation. It's not a statement of selection but salvation. This is how "all" people are saved.

The Calvinist wants us to believe that "all" means the elect but in coming to this conclusion he commits exegetical fraud. Terms like "all" and "world" in their common usage always point to the universal scope of mankind (John 3:16). To limit them to a select group of people distorts the normal sense of the words and results in biased theological conclusions. The sense of the word "all" would represent that God's drawing power is extended to all mankind and every person that has ever been saved is saved by God's drawing power. All people of the open, growing, elect, body are and will be drawn to Christ.

Herbert Lockyer said:

"The uplifted Christ possesses a Universal Magnetism. The Cross draws all men. Truly this foreshadows the universality of the Gospel with all nations, clans, conditions, participating in the fruits of Calvary."

God's drawing, here depicted as Christ's drawing power, is never a selective drawing, but a universal magnetism that goes out to all men, since all men can believe and be saved (John 12:46). The Bible teaches that God is willing and ready to draw, or compel all mankind to the place of salvation, through the Gospel and missionary activity (John 16:8). This is because God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). And one thing is certain; if God is not willing that any should perish, then He will seek to draw as many people, as He can, to the place of salvation, without making any exception among them.

God will not selectively draw some people and bypass the rest as moderate Calvinists teach. To conclude that God wants all to be saved, and then turn around and say that He does not allow all to be saved, is a contradiction of the worst sort. In fact, it creates spiritual schizophrenia for moderate Calvinists who believe in elect and non-elect individuals. Why schizophrenia? It's because everyone knows you can't have God wanting all people to be saved without exception (John 3:16), and then turn around and not want all people to be saved, by withholding His drawing power to these same people. This is not a case of mystery but madness! It's a case of neglecting to use Scriptural and Spirit taught logic, while studying the doctrine of election, the free will of man, the universal love of God for all mankind, and His desire for all to be saved.

God does not mock men! If He desires all to be saved, then He gives all the opportunity to be saved, as the Gospel and truth are made known to them (Acts 17:30 – “God ... commandeth all men everywhere to repent”). If all men are called upon to repent, then Christ is willing to “draw all men” unto Himself” (John 12:32). This is not only logical, from a human perspective, but also from God’s perspective. *There is no Calvinistic mystery linked to the drawing power of God.* God wants to save and draw all mankind, and when men respond to the magnetism of God’s drawing power upon their lives, they become part of the corporate elect body, which God has chosen to save before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3), and is continually building to this very day, as people are added to the organism of the Church (Acts 2:47).

The drawing verses that Calvinism has been using for so long are actually abused and distorted in order to teach the philosophy of Calvinism. However, when looking at them, without bias and preconceived Calvinistic spins attached to them, the interpreter will come to the conclusion that God never said, He draws some people to salvation, at the expense of others. God never said that He selectively gives some people to the Son and refuses to give others. This is reading into the drawing texts. The overall teaching is simple; God draws all people to salvation, and every person who has been saved, or ever will be saved, has been drawn to salvation by the power of God. No man is left out, and yet no man can come, without God first doing the work in his heart, and drawing him to the Savior. As men respond to God’s drawing power upon their lives, they have the privilege of becoming part of the corporate elect body, which is being formed right now, as we study this passage of Scripture.

John 10:26

“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.”

Calvinists generally conclude that this means man has nothing to do with his belief in Christ and they assume that man can only believe if he is one of Christ’s elect sheep to whom was granted the elective gift of faith. But this is reading into the text something that is not there. Actually the text says they can believe but did not believe He was the Messiah since they were not saved. This verse is simply a statement

of fact. The Jews in the temple doubted that Jesus was the Christ (vv. 22-24). This caused Jesus to make the statement that the Jews would believe that He is the Christ, if they were part of His fold of sheep – those who were already saved (vs. 26). This is merely a statement of fact and not a statement of pre-selective salvation. If the group of Jews would believe on Him as their Messiah, they would be one of His sheep, but since they chose to not believe (“ye believed not” – vs. 26), they could not be one of His sheep.

John 12:39-40

“Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”

This statement is sometimes used to promote Calvinism. It’s assumed that people cannot believe unless God selectively gives to them the faith to believe. The rest are not given faith and are ultimately doomed and consigned to hell. This again is reading into the text something that God never intended to convey. The fact that they could not believe (vs. 38) was stated in light of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 53:1-12) where it was predicted that most Jews would not believe in him. The people in Jesus’ day, like those in Isaiah’s day, refused to believe (“yet they believed not on him” - vs. 37).

As a result of their own rejection, God confirmed them in their own choice, so they could not believe (v. 39). Similar illustrations of God’s punishing of persistent sin by hardening are common (Ex. 9:12; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thess. 2:8–12). In short, the prophecy regarding the nation’s unbelief does not overturn the responsibility of the nation to believe in the Messiah. Furthermore, the Bible reveals that both judicial and satanic blindness comes as the result of a person’s willful and stubborn unbelief (John 12:37; 2 Thess. 2:10-11; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). It is not the result of God or Satan overriding the will of a person. The devil did not make you do it nor did God make you do it. You did it. You failed to believe! It’s your own fault.

John 15:16

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain:

that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

So what is the crux of the whole matter dealing with election: Did I choose God because He chose me or did God choose me because I chose Him? The answer to this question is easy. God chose us (Eph. 1:4). This refers to God’s initial choice to save a group of people from among humanity. This refers to the origin and plan of our salvation in eternity past. God put His elective program into action and *made the move* to choose a corporate group of people from among the human race to salvation. God chose us so we could one day choose Him. Without God’s choice no person would ever choose to respond to Jesus Christ and His saving work. The human *depravity* of man would keep a person from responding favorably to Jesus Christ. So God chose to save an open company of people and He would make sure that they are saved by bringing His drawing power upon their lives.

Calvinists love this verse for they think that it categorically teaches man has nothing to do with his salvation. It’s assumed that God chooses a person and this means a person has no choice in the matter of his salvation. In other words, a man has nothing to do with his salvation. However, the Bible reveals a different story. Although the origin of election and salvation began with God, as this verse teaches, this does not override the truth that man has a responsible choice in the matter of his salvation (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:17). The fact that God chose an elect body does not mean that man cannot choose to receive Christ as Savior (John 1:12). God’s choice has to do with the origin and plan of salvation, in relationship to the corporate elect body, but man’s choice confirms his own salvation (John 3:36) and entrance into God’s elective purposes (Eph. 1:4). This is abundantly clear from Scripture and the repeated emphasis on personal responsibility (John 3:15-16; 4:14; 5:25, 40; 6:47; 12:36).

Acts 2:47

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Calvinism wants us to believe that this verse teaches some people were predetermined to be saved over other people. In other words, God did not want all people to be saved. It’s argued that this proves

God only wants the elect to be saved and that He allows the rest to go to their ordained judgment. Once again this is proof-texting a portion of Scripture and reading into it Calvinistic presuppositions. Luke earlier confirmed that God was reaching out to all people through His calling ministry upon their lives and that the people were responsible for their own salvation (Acts 2:39-41 - "Then they that gladly received his word").

These verses are the commentary on verse 47. In other words, all those people, by their own free choice, received the Gospel truth (vs. 41), when responding to God's initiating call upon their lives ("as many as the Lord our God shall call" – vs. 39), were now gloriously saved ("And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" – Acts 2:47). *One again, these were not the many people God chose over other people to be saved, but the many people He called to fulfill His corporate plan for salvation and election.* It's these same people that were being saved and added to the corporate body of the Church ("added to the church daily" - vs. 47). The Greek word "sozo" which is behind this English phrase ("such as should be saved") suggests a group of people being rescued from danger and destruction. It literally reads, "to keep safe, deliver, rescue or protect." Again, the emphasis is on a corporate group of people being rescued or delivered from hell.

The UBS New Testament Handbook says:

"Those who were being saved must be understood in light of every day. The meaning of the verb phrase were being saved is temporal and not theological, that is, Luke is not concerned in this passage to present a theory of salvation as a progressive experience; rather he is saying that day after day the Lord kept adding to their group those people who became believers."

It's this group of people that were ordained to become part of God's elective body, the New Testament Church, from eternity past. These people were saved to fulfill God's corporate plan for election. This group of people were also "the many that were ordained to eternal life" (Acts 13:48), or the many that God chose to be part of His collective body of people (the Church), and corporate program of salvation. They are not the "many" chosen over others, but the "many" chosen to become part of God's elective program, as a result of their response to God's gracious proposals upon their lives.

The Greek behind this text does not support the wording “such as should be saved.” Again, the sense of the one Greek word (“sozo”) speaks of those who were being saved (rescued) and becoming part of the New Testament Church, a group, or body of believers, being formed on the Day of Pentecost. In other words, these people were saved to fulfill God’s corporate plan for election.

This group of people in Acts 2:47 are “the many that were ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48), or the many that God chose to be part of His collective body of people (the Church), which was being formed on the Day of Pentecost, and those who were to be part of God’s corporate program of salvation. This verse points to God’s purpose in bringing to fruition His plan to build the Church. People needed to be saved to carry out God’s plan of election for the corporate body the Church (Matt. 16:18). God determined to save those who put their faith in Jesus Christ to begin the process of building His corporate Church and elective body from eternity past. It’s this group of people that were ordained to become part of God’s elective body, the New Testament Church, from eternity past. However, this does not bypass their human responsibility. We know that those who heard the Gospel were responsible to accept Jesus Christ by a definite act of their will (Acts 2:41).

The Lord’s electing and adding by the Spirit’s baptism (1 Cor. 12:13) to the corporate body (the Church) does not rule out human responsibility. Freedom of choice brings God’s plan of corporate election to fruition. Therefore, a group of people who respond to God’s call upon their lives (vs. 39) were being saved in order to fulfill God’s elective purposes in building His corporate body – the New Testament Church (Acts 2:47). In other words, the salvation of people on Pentecost is something that is dispensational, and something that must take place, in order to fulfill God’s plans for His Church. Something must happen in order to bring God’s purpose to fulfillment regarding the New Testament body – the Church. In short, souls must be saved.

Acts 13:48

“... as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

Some extreme Calvinists teach from this verse that salvation occurs prior to belief. In fact, they claim that these elect people were actually

saved in eternity past, but this is not what the verse teaches. It is not teaching that all who believe were already saved, but those whom God foreordained, would eventually be saved, and receive eternal life. In fairness, this verse does not say these people believed and were afterward elected, but they were ordained to eternal life, through election, and for this reason (ordination and election), they could believe. However, their prior election does not mean their prior salvation. They were not saved until they believed (Acts 16:31; John 6:37). Nor does their selection imply that God chose them over other people and consigned the rest to hell. Here is the simple truth. God had ordained this group of people to salvation, according to His corporate elective program, when He decreed and designed the whole plan of salvation for the Church, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:28-29).

What about these “many” people that were ordained to eternal life? One thing is certain. These people were not the many that God chose over others but the many He chose in His corporate elective program in eternity past. The word “many” is not used in a Calvinistic restrictive sense (a limited number of people) but in an inclusive sense (a large number of Gentile people open to God’s new dispensational plan of salvation for the masses). God chose a corporate body that includes “many” Gentile people that would become part of His elective program of salvation. Luke views those who have been appointed to salvation as a corporate group of Gentiles who were now becoming part of the new body of Christ – the Church.

This group of Gentile people are contrasted with another Jewish group of people, which have rejected the Gospel message and therefore made themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). One group rejects eternal life and another group receives eternal life. Election is once again seen in a *corporate* and *dispensational* sense as God reaches out to “many” Gentiles (Matt. 22:14). The “many” (a large number of growing Gentiles), who were collectively ordained to eternal life, in eternity past, could now become part of God’s corporate elective purposes, found in the formation of the Church. Again, many Gentiles were saved as a result of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah (Matt. 13:46) and they were now given the opportunity to be included in the Father’s corporate elective plan for the Church.

Acts 16:14

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

Calvinists assume that since the Lord opened Lydia’s heart, man has nothing to do with his salvation. It’s argued that man does not have any freedom of choice in the matter of salvation since it’s the Lord who opens the heart of every individual and gives faith to His elect and selective group of people so that they alone can believe. Of course, no one who reads the Bible would argue that God does not open the heart of people through His convicting and compelling ministry (John 12:32; 16:8-10). God makes the first move to bring man back to Himself; however, it’s wrong to assume that God automatically and selectively gives faith to a man, when He begins to open his heart. Faith is still man’s responsibility (Luke 7:50; Rom. 4:5; 1 Cor. 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:9; Rom. 10:17).

The opening of Lydia’s heart was God’s work, but the response of her faith, was her part. Man still has the responsibility to commit his will to Christ (2 Tim. 1:12), even when God opens his heart, through internal conviction and persuasion. God moves in us before we can move toward Him. However, we have the choice to reason and respond to His call and conviction upon our hearts (“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” - Isa. 1:18). Even Lydia “attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14) which indicates her freedom of choice in responding to the truths that Paul presented, even the truth about the Gospel. The fact that God opens the heart does not ensure that everybody will be saved. It only means that they are given the opportunity to express their faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. Such was the case with Lydia. The Lord did the sovereign work upon her heart and this allowed Lydia to express her faith in Christ. God makes the first move (the divine side of salvation) so that man in return can make his move (the human side of salvation).

Romans 3:11

“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”

Calvinists think this puts the nail in the coffin regarding free will salvation. Since there is none that can understand and seek God, this must mean that man has nothing to do with his salvation. Man can have no freedom of choice regarding his eternal destiny, since man does not understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14), and since God does the seeking of man. However, we know by comparing the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27), that all men can seek God, when God calls men to the place of salvation (John 11:28). God would not call (John 7:37) and draw all men (John 12:32) to the place of salvation without giving them the revelation, illumination, and conviction that they need (John 16:8), in order to be saved. God summons mankind to seek Him, while He may be found, and to call upon Him, while He is near (Isa. 55:6: John 12:35-36).

When God calls a man to salvation, He opens his eyes to truth (Eph. 1:18; Heb. 6:4; 10:32), and compels the sinner to come to Christ for salvation, through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-10), so man might place "his faith" (Rom. 4:5) in Christ's person and work. It's true that God seeks the sinner, but He brings the sinner to the place of openness and responsiveness, whereby he can choose to turn the Savior and be converted (Acts 3:19). This is truly a work of God; however, the work of God in seeking the sinner (Luke 19:10), does not override the responsibility of man in seeking the Savior by his own volition and decision to place faith in Christ (Luke 15:7, 20).

It's true; there is no person that understands or seeks after God (Rom. 3:11). If left to himself, fallen man would never seek after God. He would never want to be saved. This is the clear and unmistakable teaching from God's Word. However, the teaching of Romans 3:11 does not provide us with the Calvinistic reasoning that a person must first be irresistibly drawn, and regenerated, before they can understand the truth about the Gospel (1 John 5:1; Acts 16:31; Eph. 1:13), and be saved. Romans 3:11 does not infer that man, when aided by God, cannot turn from his sin, and have the viable option to place his own faith in Christ as Savior.

When studied in light of other Scriptures, Romans 3:11 simply means a person needs God's spiritual aid, to help him understand the Gospel, and to compel him to come to Christ for salvation (Eph. 1:18). A man must first come to the knowledge of the truth before he can be saved

(1 Tim. 2:4-6) and understand the Gospel facts in order to be regenerated. An unsaved person can hear the truth presented to Him, as God opens His heart, through His drawing influence (John 6:44), and then respond either positively or negatively to God's initiatives upon his life and will ("the dead shall hear" - John 5:25). Let's study our Bibles instead of Reformed Theology!

Romans 9

Romans chapter nine is one of the favorite Calvinist pathways in the Bible. Calvinists love to apply their unconditional election to these verses of Scripture and make God into a Person, who has determined to hate certain people, and damn them to hell, even before He created them. The issue is whether or not Calvinists are being true to Scripture and properly representing God's character in Romans Chapter nine. As we will see, they do not accurately interpret the texts and take pot shots at the very character of God. Therefore, we want to spend some time with the various verses in this chapter that have been assigned wrong interpretations. We will need to lay some groundwork to get the overall picture and context of this chapter, which deals with Israel's history of election, and God's salvation and elective purposes, which extend to the world of Gentile humanity.

The overall view of Romans chapter nine is this. God is seen to be sovereign in His election of Israel and the outworking of His elective purposes for Israel (Rom. 9:1-5). When we say that God is sovereign, we mean that He is in charge of the universe, and that He can do as He pleases (Psalm 115:3; 135:6). Therefore, to say God is sovereign, simply means we must allow God, to be God. We should not be afraid of this truth or apologize for it. It is a glorious doctrine that should cause us to worship. However, the ploy of the Calvinist is to link God's sovereign choices to man's salvation, in a way that paints God to be as a fatalistic creature, who hates people, and robs man of personal responsibility for his own salvation.

The Calvinist wants to create a God that does not allow His creatures to interact with His salvation program. The Calvinist fears that God will no longer be in charge, or sovereign, if man has any choice in the matter of his eternal destiny. Of course, this is a flawed understanding of God's sovereignty. Just because God is sovereign, does not mean

He makes every choice for a man, nor does it mean He takes away man's freedom of choice. This is merely an unproven assumption of the Calvinist. God is sovereign and has created a sovereign plan that allows man to interact with His plans and purposes.

Romans 9:6

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

The apostle now faces a serious theological problem. If God made promises to Israel as His chosen earthly people, how can this square with Israel's present rejection and with the Gentiles being brought into the place of blessing in the Church age? Paul insists that God's blessing of the Gentiles does not indicate any breach of promise on God's part regarding Israel. The failure of the Jews to respond to the Gospel of Christ and God turning to the Gentile people (vs. 24) does not mean God's Word has failed concerning Jewish promises and election (“not as though the word of God that taken none effect” – vs. 6). He proves this by saying that God has always had a sovereign election process based upon the Jewish promise of salvation through Isaac and not just on Jewish lineal descent (“For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel”).

In other words, just because a person is physically born into the nation of Israel does not mean that he is an heir to the promise of salvation through the seed of Isaac (the Messiah). Within the nation of Israel, God always has a true, believing remnant. Therefore, the promise of salvation through Isaac's seed is still being given to those Jews who believe in the Messiah today and who are saved. So “they” (the Jews in Paul's day and today) are not “all Israel” (true Israel who is saved) who are merely part “of Israel” (the Jewish ancestry of Israel). He explains further in verse 7 by saying that just because a Jew is the physical descendent of Abraham (“seed of Abraham”) does not mean they “are all children” (the spiritual children of Abraham and God).

To state it simply, many of the Jews in Paul's day were not the true Israel that God has promised to save and bless. All the physical Israelites of today are “not Israel” in the sense of being the true children of God. The qualifying word is that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (vs. 7). This means that only those Jews that have been saved through

the Messiah, who came from Isaac's line, can become the true Israel that God is blessing today. The apostle clearly distinguishes between Israel as a nation and Israel who is born again (Rom. 2:28-29). He does the same thing in Romans 9:8. "That is, They which are the children of the flesh (physical descendants), these *are* not the children of God (born again Jews): but the children of the promise (the promise of Messianic salvation through Isaac's line) are counted for the seed (spiritual seed)."

Then in Romans 9:9-12 Paul goes on to explain how God fulfilled His promise ("word of promise" – vs. 9) concerning Jewish Messianic salvation coming through the line of Isaac. By His own sovereign choice God chose Isaac over Ishmael (vv. 9) and Jacob over Esau (vv. 10-12) since God said "the elder shall serve the younger" (vs. 12). These sovereign choices of God would be the sole reason why salvation through the Messiah was made possible to the Jews. In these choices we see the sovereignty of God at work or God doing whatsoever He pleases "that the purpose of God according to election might stand" (Rom. 9:11). *In other words, God made the choice to bring His Son into the world through the proper line so that Jews today can be saved.*

This is God's sovereign and saving purpose for Israel. Paul says elsewhere "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). Paul's point is this. God is not finished with His people (Rom. 11:1-2) for even today the salvation promises through Isaac are being fulfilled in a believing remnant of Jews who are "the children of promise" (vs. 8). God has not failed on His salvation promise to Israel. He has carefully chosen the people through whom Christ would come (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and kept Israel's salvation promise alive today.

Pannenberg writes:

"Only in detaching the statements in Romans 8:29-30 and 9:13, 16 from the context of salvation history in which Paul set them makes it possible to link them to the abstract notions of election that since the days of Origen and Augustine have been determinative in the history of the doctrine of predestination."

J Sidlow Baxter concludes by saying:

“As to the scope of this passage, it will become obvious that it is all about God’s dealings with men and nations historically and dispensationally, and is not about individual salvation and destiny beyond the grave.”

Romans 9:13

“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

Calvinists love to use this verse to prove that God hates certain people and chooses to damn them to hell from eternity past and that God only loves His chosen children electing them to the place of salvation (double predestination). In response to these Calvinistic conclusions, we must make several comments. First, the context is not talking about loving or hating the children of Rebecca in respect to their salvation but in choosing which son would be the line through which the promise of the Messiah and salvation would come. Second, the word “hated” is not used in a bad ethical sense but in a comparative way. Jesus used the word “hate” in this way when speaking about hating family members in comparison to loving Him most of all in life (Luke 14:26).

God’s “hatred” for Esau was seen in His rejecting Esau for the line of promise through which the Messiah would come. Hatred in this sense is not absolute but relative to a higher choice (Matt. 6:24; John 12:25). God’s choice between Jacob and Esau has nothing to do with the matter of their salvation, but which son would be in the promised line of blessing, through which the Messiah would come. *Paul is speaking of the historical destiny of different nations and not individual salvation.* Romans chapter 9 does NOT say that Jacob was chosen over Esau in relation to salvation and everlasting life. Jacob was chosen to be in the line of the Messiah but Esau was not chosen to be in the line of the Messiah. This is God’s sovereign choice to bless one nation above another; Jacob (representing Israel) over Esau (representing the Edomite Gentiles – Arab peoples). This is national election – not individual election.

To claim that God loved Jacob’s soul more than Esau’s soul is a terrible misinterpretation of what God is saying in these verses. To say that God wanted to damn Esau to hell to fulfill His own elective purposes for salvation is to ignore the context and make this verse become a

pretext. Third, the Bible teaches that God loves all sinners (John 3:16), so God is not contradicting His character in this verse. Fourth, it can be accurately stated that God hated the actions of Esau in selling the birthright for temporal blessing (Heb. 12:16-17) and therefore chose Jacob over Esau. One thing is certain. God hates sin but not the sinner (1 Tim. 1:15).

Malachi 1:3 states:

“And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.”

God did not hate Esau as a person, nor did he hate Esau’s soul, and predetermine to damn him to hell, as some hyper Calvinists assume. God loves people; He does not hate people (John 3:16). However, the idea behind God’s “hate” has to do with rejection of Esau for his sinful ways; therefore, God also rejected Esau from being in the line of Christ.

It is true that God is love but this is not all the truth. This is only one of His attributes. His love can never be exercised at the expense of any other attribute such as God’s righteous anger and hatred against sin. God hates every sin that human race commits against Him. The fact that God is love does not mean that He is incapable of hating; however, His holy hatred is always aimed at the sins of the sinner – not the souls of sinners.

Psalms 5:5 declares:

“The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”

Psalms 11:5

“The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.”

Once again, God’s hatred is not aimed at the souls of people but at the sinfulness of people. Let us never forget this.

In the context of Romans 9:13, God simply has the power and prerogative to choose the servants He wants to use, in order to bring His earthly goals and plans to pass. Paul explains that God makes His own choices in the matter of raising up certain people to fulfill His own purposes and lavishes His mercy upon those people that He chooses

to fulfill His earthly plans (vv. 14-16). Is God unrighteous or unjust (vs. 14) in choosing Isaac over Ishmael or Jacob over Esau? Absolutely not, He is sovereign! The issue in such matters is not justice but sovereign decision, as God's word to Moses (vs. 15 with Ex. 33:19) quoted by Paul indicates. Paul quotes something God said to Moses (Ex. 33:16) to prove His sovereign choice of using certain individuals for His purpose. As the sovereign God, He has the right to show mercy to whomever He chooses. In fact, He is not under obligation to extend mercy to anyone.

One must understand that God does not have mercy on some and refuse to have mercy on others in regards to salvation (Rom. 11:32). However, God does extend mercy on people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order to specifically work through them to bring His earthly goals to fruition *concerning the promised Messiah, the salvation of the nation of Israel, and ultimately His plan to save the Gentiles masses* (Rom. 9:24; 11:32).

Paul's subject in Romans 9-11 is the salvation history of Israel and eventually the global outreach to the entire world ("that he might have mercy upon all" – Rom. 11:32). This is not a section of Scripture regarding individual salvation but how corporate salvation would come to the Jews and eventually the entire world. *There is no hidden decree of reprobation regarding people that God hates and who are predetermined to be damned by God from eternity past.* There is only good news! God's mercy would extend to even the Gentiles throughout the world (Rom. 9:24; 11:32), as a result of God's own purpose to bring forth the Savior into the world, through His sovereign choice of people such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It's not that any of these men deserved to be chosen as vessels through whom God would work. God simply showed favor and showered mercy upon them in order to bring His goals to fruition. God chose certain individuals to fulfill His salvation plans in connection with the nation of Israel and eventually the entire world. The same was true of Pharaoh.

Romans 9:17

“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

God raised up Pharaoh for a purpose. It was not the purpose to damn Pharaoh to hell as the extreme or hyper Calvinist assumes. *God's purpose for Pharaoh had to do with the nation of Israel.* He would be the human figure in history that would refuse to release the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. This would in return allow God to show forth his power (“that I might show my power”) in bringing His people out of Egyptian bondage. The Bible clearly states that Pharaoh was not raised up by God for a damnation purpose but for the purpose of demonstrating God's power (“that I might show my power”) and for God's glory (“that my name might be declared throughout the earth”). The Bible says nothing about God raising Pharaoh up to damn His soul. The matter of salvation has nothing to do with God's purpose for Pharaoh. Let's study our Bibles!

Romans 9:18

“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

God does shower mercy or judgment upon those people He wants to use to fulfill His earthly goals and purposes. This was true of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now Pharaoh. God judged Pharaoh, instead of showing mercy to Pharaoh, because of Pharaoh's wrong decisions. One thing is certain. There are no salvation or reprobation overtones in these verses. These verses have to do with God's choice of certain people (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) who would be in the Messianic line and God's choice to bring temporal judgment upon specific people (Pharaoh, Egypt) to assure Israel's destiny as a people and nation. The verses do not convey God's purpose and pleasure in damning an Esau or Pharaoh to hell. God never purposes to elect people to damnation or hell (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). The simple truth is this. Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41) - not for people. The devil was predestined to hell – not people.

Calvinists sharpen their axe at this point and claim that God raised up Pharaoh to be a vessel of damnation and that he also chose to harden

Pharaoh's heart to make sure that he ends up in hell and not Heaven. Again, this is not what the Bible states in the historical dealings that God had with Pharaoh. Pharaoh in some measure, by his own will, had already hardened his heart even before the plagues actually began (Ex. 3:19). Pharaoh was perfectly free in his action. This means that God did not override Pharaoh's will. In fact, Pharaoh's will was already set. Furthermore, the Scriptures suggest that Pharaoh was responsible for hardening his own heart (Exodus 7:4, 22-23; 8:15, 32; 9:34).

Because of Pharaoh's own choice, God judicially hardened Pharaoh's heart, through the outward plagues that He sent upon Egypt (Exodus 7:13; 8:19; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10). In other words, God confirms people in their own obstinate choices (Rom. 1:24; 2 Thess. 2:10-11) and then uses them to fulfill His purposes on earth. He interacts with a person's own sinful choices and defiant decisions by judicially hardening their hearts and then in His own sovereign way uses them to fulfill His earthly purposes. This is how a sovereign God works.

The hardening of Pharaoh was then a reciprocal process. Pharaoh first made the choice to harden his own heart and become defiant to God's will. As a result, God in return used the plagues upon Egypt as the instrument to judicially harden Pharaoh's heart, so he would not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt (Exodus 7:3). It's interesting that as a result of the ninth plague, when the firstborn died, Pharaoh's heart was softened for a time in history (Exodus 12:31- 33). Through this devastating judgment God softened this man's heart.

It is true that God ultimately receives credit for everything that happens, since He is sovereign and nothing can happen without His providence. This does not mean, however, that God is the direct cause of everything. For instance, the Bible states that Satan moved David to number the people against God's will (1 Chronicles 21:1), but God's providence was ultimately behind this and He used the situation for His purpose (2 Sam. 24:1). It may be said that God was involved because of His sovereign oversight of the matter, but not because He personally motivated David to sin (James 1:13). God indirectly permitted Satan to trouble Job (Job 1:12; 2:6) and also allowed an evil spirit to torment Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). Similarly, God in His providence hardened Pharaoh's heart indirectly, through the various plagues sent upon Egypt, and then confirmed Pharaoh in his own choice.

What we must understand from history is that God does not choose to arbitrarily harden some people's hearts and not harden other hearts. People's hearts become hardened by their own choice and this choice is often confirmed through the outward circumstances allowed to come into their lives by God. The reason for Pharaoh's hardened heart lay not only with God, but with Pharaoh, and his reaction to God's judgments on Egypt. God indirectly hardened Pharaoh's heart through the plagues on Egypt.

God's circumstances are like the sunlight. The same sunlight that melts the hard ice also hardens the soft clay. How you react to the sunlight or the circumstances of God will determine whether or not you will be hardened or softened to God's sovereign work. God was not unrighteous in His dealings with Pharaoh because He gave him many opportunities to repent and turn from the error of his ways. Nevertheless, Pharaoh's own negative reaction to God's judgments caused his heart to become calloused. We might add that God can use the hearts of leaders ("kings") to accomplish His goals on earth. Through outward circumstances and the inward conviction of heart, God can turn the heart of kings to accomplish His earthly goals (Proverbs 21:1; Ezra 1:1; Rev. 17:17). God can even use the wrath of a wicked ruler or people to accomplish His purpose on earth and to in some way bring praise to His name (Psalms 76:10; Prov. 16:4).

Here is some important truth concerning the heart of man and His choices. The Bible teaches that the light or revelation shines upon the human heart (John 12:25-36), but men choose to reject the light, and remain in their darkness ("lest darkness come upon you" – vs. 35), since they choose to not believe the light of the Gospel message concerning Christ. *Their choice confirms their blindness.* The light shines, but their hardened heart and refusal, keeps them from seeing the light of truth and revelation, and they continue on in their darkness. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "In whom the god of this world 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."

One again, we discover that people are blinded, only because they choose to "believe not" or reject the light of revelatory truth. When a person chooses to stubbornly resist the Lord the devil keeps them in blindness (Luke 8:12 – "then cometh the devil, and taketh away the

word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved”). Eventually God reaches over and turns off the lights altogether and forever. God does not give up on people but people do give up on God (Rom. 1:24) and eventually God turns off the lights and confirms a person in their choice. And when the lights go out we are in a condition of no return. This was the case with Pharaoh.

“There is a time, we know not when;
There is a place, we know not where
That seals the destiny of men
For glory or despair.”

Romans 9:18

“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

When returning to Romans 9:18, we must understand that God chose to shower His mercy and compassion upon Moses and the Israelites. This can be seen in that He allowed the Israelites to be rescued from Egyptian bondage. On the other hand, because of Pharaoh’s rebellion to God’s orders, He did not extend mercy or compassion to Pharaoh or the Egyptians. This is evidenced by the plagues which He brought upon them. This simply means that God is in control of the events of earth’s history and moving them according to His sovereign plan. God does exactly as He pleases in regards to His purposes and plans with nations and the people connected with those nations.

What we must understand is that God’s mercy and compassion has nothing to do with saving one person while damming another person to Hell. It has nothing to do with loving one person, over another, in relationship to their soul and eternal destiny. The reference here is speaking about God moving in the events of history in order to fulfill His earthly purposes. In doing this, God works through the lives of different people. These verses are dealing with the privilege and blessing of certain people here upon the earth – not the salvation or damnation of souls in the next life.

Romans 9:19

“Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?”

As we approach Romans 9:19-21, an imaginary objector reacting to God's sovereign workings, or dealings with others, might come along and say, "How can God find fault with man since man cannot resist God's will or purpose for individual people. If God's earthly purposes with people's lives cannot be changed ('who hath resisted his will?') then how can God 'find fault' with those people (like Pharaoh) who sin and do wrong? If God makes the choices, how can He hold man responsible? Man is merely a puppet or pawn in God's hands."

To this objector, God's sovereign ways upon earth are seen as a fatalistic maneuver, which makes God out to be a tyrant, an individual who is unfair, and who does not care about people. The objector reasons that nothing man can do, or say, will ever change his earthly fate, since God has purposed the man to pass through the terrible experience and given him no choice in the matter. The objector reasons that God works above the will of a person in all of His dealings with mankind. Man is simply a rock in the hand of God, incapable of making any kind of response to God, other than what God has decreed.

Of course, this objection is not correct, since it is based upon a faulty understanding of God's sovereignty. The objector must remember that God is just in finding fault with sinners for going against His prescribed plan. This is because God does not override the will of people in order to bring His earthly purposes to pass (Ex. 9:34-35). God does not make people sin (James 1:13) or cause people to respond in an evil way toward His revelation (James 1:14). God in His infinite wisdom interweaves the earthly responses of people, with His sovereign ways and predetermined choices, in order to bring His program to completion (Acts 2:23). Pharaoh was responsible for his actions. This is because God does not choose to run the lives of people like a man would run a puppet on a string.

In Romans 9:19, Paul is dealing with the disrespectful attitude of the objector toward God and His sovereign purposes. The objector must remember that God and the outworking of His ways are always just and right (Rev. 15:3). Therefore, no person should ever talk back to God and question what God is doing on earth in relationship to people's lives. God is bringing to pass His predetermined script without violating human choice and volition. God can allow people to make their choices and then confirm them in their choices (Rom. 1:21-24) in order to bring

His purposes to pass. Paul is dealing with a person that is a fatalist, who thinks God has created a certain path for every individual on earth, and that human choice cannot make a difference in the course of one's destiny. He creates God into an unloving monster that shoves something down the throats of people against their will. This is utterly false reasoning that defies how God actually does work with people on earth.

Romans 9:20 asks:

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?”

Who would dare find fault with the Creator of the universe and His sovereign ways? Finite man, loaded down with sin, ignorance, and weakness, is in no position to talk back to God, or question the wisdom and justice of His ways (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 119:160, 164, 175). God is always just and right in whatever He does, since He never overrides a person's choices, nor does He allow anything that will not ultimately glorify Himself. The point is this; God places men in earthly circumstances and sends particular events into their lives, which have been preordained to take place. However, God does not preordain man's choices, nor does He override a person's will, in order to bring these sovereign events to pass in their lives. So stop chiding and questioning God! “Who art thou that repliest against God?” Puny man should not complain to God, nor ever question Him, since He is sovereign, in charge, and always just in carrying out His plans for people's lives, and since He never overrides human choice in bringing His purposes to pass. So, “Who art thou that repliest against God?” Rebuking God is the result of people rejecting God's sovereign workings and ways in the world (Isa. 45:9).

“Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?” Paul is drawing an analogy from the imagery of a Potter making vessels. Obviously, a potter from the same pile takes some clay to form a decorated vase and takes other clay to make a cooking pot (Jer. 18:4-6). And the clay has no right to complain! In a similar way, the sovereign Creator has the same authority over His creatures, especially in light of man's origin from dust (Gen. 2:7). God can use people in any way He sees fit to accomplish His earthly purposes like He used Isaac, Jacob, Moses, or Pharaoh.

Paul is teaching by this statement that God creates people to pass through specific circumstances on earth even when these circumstances are harsh and difficult. God places people in specific situations and strategic locations in life, which He has ordained for them, without violating their freedom to choose their own path.

Romans 9:21

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

Again, Paul is using the illustration of the potter and the clay to vindicate the sovereignty of God. The potter comes into his shop one day and sees a pile of formless clay on the floor. He picks up a handful of clay, puts it on his wheel, and fashions a beautiful vessel. The potter, of course, is God. The clay is a picture of people like Pharaoh and Moses. God brings about His plan and purpose, in connection with the lives of people on earth, even as a potter shapes or fashions clay. God arranges the course of people’s lives and destinies on earth. But no fault can be found with God since He does not violate human choice.

Now let’s consider an important point. When pictures and parables are presented in the Bible, one main truth is brought out. To try and make more of a picture than God does is to go beyond His intent in trying to convey one primary truth. The lesson of this picture of the potter and clay is designed to illustrate all that has been said before concerning the lives of people on earth. Here is the point. God is in control of the earthly events of people’s lives, such as Isaac, Ishmael, Esau, Jacob, Moses, and now Pharaoh. In relationship to their earthly circumstances and placements in life, they were just like clay in the potter’s hand. This was also true in relationship to God’s dealings with the nation of Israel while on earth (Jeremiah 18:6-8). It was true regarding Moses and Pharaoh who are especially in Paul’s thinking (Romans 9:15, 19).

Calvinistic predestinarians in search of unconditional election have used these verses (21-23) to prove their fatalistic theories of God choosing and predestining some people to be damned to hell. The point we need to reemphasize is that Paul was teaching about God’s dealings with men (Ishmael, Esau, Jacob, Moses, Pharaoh) while they were living upon earth. The idea that God predestined people like Esau and Pharaoh to the judgment of hell, before they were ever born

(reprobation), cannot be supported from these verses. In the case of Jacob and Esau, or Moses and Pharaoh, God raised up these men to fulfill His earthly program in relationship to their own personal lives on earth (“throughout the earth” - Rom. 9:17). God’s program had nothing to do with choosing some men to Heaven and others to hell, before they were born. This is the dream of the hyper Calvinist.

Romans 9:21

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

Romans 9:21 speaks of God, the divine Potter, raising up Moses to a place of earthly “honour” or dignity (not Heaven). God used the life of Moses to rescue His people and to be His spokesman. On the other hand, God raised up Pharaoh to a place of earthly “dishonour” or disgrace (not damnation), since Pharaoh opposed God. Therefore, God defeated him with many plagues. The lesson is this. God honors those that are on His side but dishonors those that are against His righteous purposes. In the sovereign plan of God, Moses was determined to be honored and Pharaoh was determined to be dishonored. God, as the Potter, has predetermined man’s placements and positions in this life, but He does so without overriding their human reactions and will (Acts 2:23). The Lord has raised up people to bring about His ultimate sovereign plan and purpose to fruition on earth. He creates their pathways in life without violating their personal choices. Therefore, no fault or fatalistic doctrine can be found in God’s ways and workings with people within the human race

Romans 9:22

“*What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.”

The first part of this verse teaches how God wanted to display His earthly wrath (“show his wrath”) to Pharaoh and Egypt through all the plagues or judgments He brought upon them. Through these outward judgments and miraculous happenings, God wanted to make His “power” (same as verse 17) known or displayed throughout Egypt, so these people might realize that He is the only true and living God (1 Cor. 8:6), who is in charge of the universe.

This verse then goes on to speak of “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom. 9:22), such as Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, who rejected God’s authority over their lives while they lived out their days on earth. Because of Pharaoh’s failure to respond to God’s initiatives, commands, and authority, both he and his kingdom came under the temporal and ultimately eternal judgment of God (Heb. 9:27). Pharaoh and the Egyptians, like a piece of pottery, molded by a potter, were designed to suffer the vengeance of God, since they rejected God’s purposes for them while living on earth. The word “fitted” means “prepared” or “arranged” and suggests that God arranges certain people for “destruction” (spiritual ruin and loss in hell), while they are living on earth, since they have rejected Him and His ways. Because of the rejection of the Potter’s ways, the Potter arranges the destruction of people in direct proportion to their rejection of Him.

Romans 9:22 marks a turning point in the discussion. Paul is about to apply God’s past dealings with Moses (Jews) and Pharaoh (Egyptians), with His present dealings with those who become part of the Church (a corporate company of elect people) and those who refuse to become part of this open and growing community of people, a group of people that God has called to salvation (Romans 9:24 - “Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”). In Romans 9:22, Paul turns from God’s *past* earthly dealings with people and begins to present God’s *present* earthly dealings with mankind.

The overall teaching of Romans 9:22-24 is clear. Those who refuse to become part of God’s present-day Church (Romans 9:24) are like Pharaoh of old, who stubbornly resisted God and was judged. Again, God arranges or prepares people for the eternal judgment of hell (Rom. 9:22), in view of their own stubbornness and rebellion, to His offer of salvation, *while they are living on earth*. Pharaoh and Egypt were judged for their rebellious sins, since *during their lifetime on earth*, they rejected God’s offers or pleas to release His people. Their resistance to God, which occurred during their earthly existence, resulted in God’s judgment coming upon them.

In a similar way, all those who resist God’s present-day offer of salvation, who refuse to become part of the Church (Rom. 9:24), will also be judged for their unbelief and rebellious sins. They are arranged

to be judged by God in an eternal hell. In a sense, they are “tagged” for hell. This is made very clear. However, those who respond favorably to God’s salvation pleas, *while living upon earth*, and become part of the New Testament body (Church), will be arranged or prepared for the future glory of Heaven. They are termed as “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23) and become “tagged” for Heaven.

The work of the divine Potter is clear. God, as the Potter, arranges or prepares people to be judged, who repeatedly resist His proposals upon their hearts. Their judgment, like Pharaoh’s, is not arranged in eternity past, but eternity present, as they repeatedly reject God’s proposals upon their lives. The Potter has spoken! This is the way the divine Potter has chosen to work with His clay. *The imagery of the Potter and clay must stay within the confines of Biblical revelation.* The Calvinist makes more of the potter and clay (Rom. 9:20-23) and the dead corpse illustration (Eph. 2:1-2) than the Bible does.

The Potter does not mold people’s individual decisions and destines from eternity past. The Potter, according to Biblical revelation, molds or arranges the destiny of people, based upon their response to His pleas and requests, during their present life span on earth (“he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” - John 3:36). This once again fits into God’s corporate elective purpose (“vessels of mercy”) that He is bringing to fruition today.

Of course, the Calvinist insists that a potter must do everything to a piece of pottery or else he would not be a true potter. Once again, this is taking an illustration and turning it into something that God never intended to teach or convey in His Word. A man is not a literal piece of clay or a literal dead corpse. He is a living, breathing, rational being, which God can communicate with, and who is responsible before God (“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” - Isa. 1:18).

The Potter illustration is designed to teach that God has the authority to choose and shape where people should be placed in life (earthly vocations), when people should be saved (during this life), why people should be saved (to fit them for Heaven) and what happens to people who reject His saving call (prepared for judgment). The illustration is not intended to convey that God decides the individual salvation or fate of people, before they are ever born, but that God does have a saving

plan people must embrace, while they are living on earth, or else they will experience His wrath and judgment.

The Potter illustration teaches one primary truth. It reminds us that God has created, arranged or molded a general script and all-encompassing plan together, regarding the earthly and eternal destinies of people. If people reject this saving plan, they are prepared for God's wrath and judgment ("vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" - Rom. 9:23), *while they are still living on earth*, like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. However, if they embrace this saving plan, they are prepared for Heaven ("vessels of mercy" - Rom. 9:24), while they are still alive on earth, even as Moses and the Israelites were seen to be vessels of God's mercy.

As the Potter, God is in charge of saving people, or sending them to hell, and He implements, or carries out this plan, while people exist on earth, not prior to their birth and entrance into the world. We simply must allow God to be the Potter, instead of John Calvin or John Owen. God, as the Potter, arranges the eternal destinies of people, only after they receive or reject His repeated offers of salvation. This is illustrated in the life of Pharaoh.

W. E. Vine has said concerning this section of Scripture:

"The form of the word rendered "fitted" may be regarded as in the middle voice, which implies action done by oneself with a view to one's own aims and interests. There is a suggestion, therefore, that the persons referred to as "vessels of wrath" have fitted themselves for destruction, and this was actually the case with Pharaoh, as we have seen from Exodus."

Griffith Thomas has stated in regards to the setting of this passage:

"Men fit themselves for Hell, but God fits them for Heaven."

Harry Ironside comments:

"...they deliberately fit themselves to destruction, can anyone find fault?"

Apparently the fatalistic Calvinist can find fault! As seen in verse 19, there is the type of person who claims that God acts as a tyrant and predetermines everything, even the sinful actions of people, without the interaction of a person's will. This type of person, like the fatalistic

Calvinist, finds an objection to the way God desires to really work out His own sovereign program upon earth. This is especially true in relationship to God's sovereign program and universal plan of salvation among lost humanity. In essence, God prepares people for judgment in this life by confirming them in their own choice (Rom. 1:24, 26; 2 Thess. 2:10-12). But the preparation was not arbitrary but based upon a person's rejection of the offer of salvation. So, in one sense these people got what they deserved – a ticket to damnation.

It's interesting that Romans 9:22 states how God "endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Paul is responding to the person (a fatalist) who objected to God's earthly sovereign ways (Romans 9:19) by thinking He was too harsh. In doing so, he makes a most astounding statement. God is longsuffering toward those who are against His will and plan for their lives. God's past dealings with Pharaoh prove that God is longsuffering. God lovingly, graciously, and patiently waited for Pharaoh to repent of His sinful ways before God. God was "longsuffering" toward Pharaoh. He gave Pharaoh many chances to repent of his wicked ways and stubbornness.

Once again, Pharaoh's his own heart toward God and His purposes (Exodus 7:14; 8:15, 32; 9:34). God had pleaded with Pharaoh time and time again. Only after Pharaoh hardened his own heart, did God choose to harden his heart, through the repeated outward plagues or circumstances that He was sending upon Egypt (Exodus 10:20, 27; 11:10). God knows the hearts of all people (Eph. 4:19), and when there is no point in pleading with them any longer. He hardens them, judicially blinds them (2 Thess. 2:10-11), and gives them up to their own choice and sin (Rom. 1:24). This reminds us that stubborn people, who repeatedly reject God's light and offer of forgiveness, eventually are judged by God and experience His wrath in hell (Matt. 12:31).

We see by this historical story that Pharaoh was not a pawn in the hands of God after all, as the objectionist presumed in verse 19. Pharaoh had freedom of choice by which he could respond and turn his life and kingdom over to God. That is why God was "longsuffering" and waited for him to respond. This verse brings another verse to my attention that we studied earlier.

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

This allows us to understand that God did not create and prepare Pharaoh, or any person for that matter, to be predestined to hell. He did not arbitrarily choose and prepare Pharaoh or any person for the judgment of hell. In actuality, Pharaoh made the choice to reject God and His ways. The whole point is this. In Moses and Israel God revealed the riches of His mercy, but in Pharaoh and Egypt, He revealed His power and wrath (vv. 17-21). Next, in verses 22-24, Paul is actually using His past dealings with Moses, as an illustration of how He is dealing with people today, who make up His present-day Church, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24).

God’s favor and mercy has been showered upon the Church which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. God would extend His mercy upon a company of people called the Church (vs. 23-24). However, God uses the illustration of Pharaoh, to demonstrate how He extends His wrath and destruction on those, who refuse to become part of the Church, through belief and salvation (Rom. 9:22). What was true in the past is also true in the present. God showers mercy upon some people and His wrath upon others. However, the way God goes about expressing His wrath and mercy is very important to understand.

Calvinists have made a lot of noise about the “vessels of wrath fitted for destruction” (Rom. 9:22). They conclude that God in His own sovereign purposes, unbeknown to man, “fitted” (arranged or prepared) certain people to “destruction” or spiritual ruin in the past ages of time. God, as the divine Potter, has created certain people to be damned to hell. This reasoning creates a travesty of God’s Word. Why would God, in longsuffering, wait for people to respond to Him when He has already predestined their soul to hell? The whole argument that God predetermines to damn people to hell is rather absurd. Why would God be longsuffering toward someone who was already fitted or prepared to go to hell? There is not one ounce of common or Biblical sense in the theory of reprobation.

God in His “longsuffering” (Rom. 9:22) waits for people to respond to Him (like Pharaoh), *while they are alive upon planet earth*. He wants the unsaved to respond to Him and become part of His corporate body – the Church (vs. 24). Nothing is ever said of God predestinating Pharaoh, or anyone else to hell, *before they were born*. This is the exegetical dream of the Calvinist who is avoiding the setting and context of what is being said.

The context of all the verses (Rom. 9:8-24) is dealing with the events of people’s lives, while they are living upon earth. The verses have nothing to do with the eternal counsels of God, marking out certain people to destruction, or hell, while choosing to save others. The Potter fits people for destruction, while they are still living on earth, in response to their rejection of His offers. The divine Potter (God) prepares a person for judgment in the afterlife, only when they reject His offers and overtures, during their present life. The preparation of these vessels for destruction, by the Potter, has to do with the God’s decision to allow people to be judged, due to their own rejection of His light and saving purposes (John 1:5; 12:35-36).

Earlier, Paul concluded that when a man rejects God, He confirms a man in His own choice, and that man is then prepared by the Potter to face the reality of His own decision (Rom. 1:24). Because man rejects God’s pleas, He arranges man to face judgment, for his own sins (Heb. 9:27). By refusing to respond to the offers and plan of God, Pharaoh was sealing his own eternal destiny and fate. The same is true of every person today who rejects the offer of salvation and eternal life (John 3:36).

Acts 13:46 says:

“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

These people actually became a judgment to themselves, by rejecting the claims of Jesus Christ, made by Paul. God did not consign them to hell in eternity past but they judged themselves to be unworthy of everlasting life by their repudiation of Christ. Both Pharaoh, and these people in Acts 13:46, would not receive the gift of eternal life and

salvation. Why? It's because they missed God's call upon their lives. Therefore, God could do only one thing – prepare them for hell and judgment. The Potter prepares a man for eternal judgment after his own choosing. No one can find fault with God for preparing people for judgment after rejecting His repeated offers of salvation. The illustration of God's repeated dealings with Pharaoh proves this to be true.

Romans 9:23

“And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.”

In Romans 9:23 Paul concludes the illustration of pottery vessels. He now says that God has prepared certain people, who are called “vessels of mercy” for the future “glory” (splendor and majesty) of Heaven. This company of people is the New Testament Church – a community of people who respond to His message of grace and salvation (Rom. 9:24). The words “afore prepared” (Rom. 9:23) are one word in the Greek which means to “prepare or make ready beforehand.” The obvious meaning of this text is that God has made people ready for Heaven while they are still alive on earth. It does not suggest that God, in eternity past, predetermined or ordained the destiny of Moses over Pharaoh. God does not prepare some people for Heaven and others for hell prior to their entrance into the world.

This expression is not the same as being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). A community of people are chosen to be saved and enter Heaven, before the foundation of the world (2 Thess. 2:13), but they are not prepared or made ready to enter Heaven until they are saved, while living on earth. The Calvinistic notion that people are actually saved and prepared for Heaven in eternity past is not Scriptural. God's plan and goal was to CONFIRM the salvation of an elect, corporate, body in the past (Rom. 8:29-30); however, the bringing to pass of this plan takes place in the present, as people come to faith in Christ (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17).

In addition, there is a calling and confirmation of the salvation of God's elect body, which took place in eternity past (Rom. 8:29-30), but there is also a calling and confirmation of the elect's salvation in eternity present, when they actually respond to God's call and invitation (“Even

us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” Rom. 9:24 with 1 Cor. 1:2, 24; Matt. 11:28).

The question is this. When does God actually “prepare” (Rom. 9:23) individual people with salvation and fix their destiny? Was it in the past ages of time, before the world was ever created, or when people actually believe in the sacrifice and provision of Jesus, while they are alive on earth? The answer to this question is that God prepares people for salvation and eternal life, when they believe on His Son, during their span of life on earth (John 6:47). God does not save people in eternity past as the Calvinist claims. When does God save a person and prepare them with salvation and eternal life? The answer to this question is simple. God saves people when they are living on earth, at the very moment they respond to Christ.

Acts 16:31

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

John 3:36

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life...”

The Potter prepares people and fits them for Heaven when they come to saving faith in Christ in response to His overtures upon their lives. God prepares people for Heaven while they are residing on earth. The context of Romans chapter nine is dealing with the lives of earthly people. Therefore, Paul is actually saying something altogether different than the Calvinist concocts from this verse. Paul is suggesting that God has showered His mercy or pity upon a corporate group of people (the Church), who have believed on Christ, while they are alive upon planet earth. God in return has then made them fit for Heaven, while they are still living upon the earth (Romans 9:23). In short, God prepares or makes people ready for Heaven “afore” or before they pass out of existence from this world (Romans 9:23).

The truth is this; no person is prepared to go to Heaven, until God saves him, and makes him fit to enter Heaven. This can only be done while a person is living upon the earth. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. The corporate body of the Church is prepared for Heaven, through the salvation that Christ provides for them, during this present life (Eph. 1:3-14).

This interpretation best fits the context of God's *earthly* dealings with people, since the entire section of verses is dealing with the sovereign ways, which God chooses to work with people's lives upon earth. Those people who *finally* reject God's offers of salvation on earth are prepared by God for judgment (2 Peter 2:3 – "their damnation slumbereth not" and John 3:36 – "condemned already" and Matthew 12:31-32 – "shall not be forgiven"). Their rejection of God's offer of salvation, while living upon earth, makes themselves a "vessel of God's wrath fitted for destruction" (Rom. 9:22) or future spiritual ruin. However, those who receive God's free offer of salvation, while living on earth, will be prepared for the "glory" and splendor of Heaven (2 Cor. 4:17). This of course is only accomplished by God's matchless grace. The lost sinner today can be prepared for glory tomorrow through the salvation of God's son. If we are saved today, we can say that God has won us by His grace!

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

Let me remind you that God wants to shower His mercy upon everyone who is alive on earth. God does not arbitrarily pick out certain people, to shower His mercy upon, when it comes to salvation ("mercy upon all" - Rom. 11:32). God extends mercy to every person who is living within the world. This reminder was given to the Jews who did not expect God's saving mercy to be extended to the Gentiles. This is why Paul says in the very next verse of Romans 9:24: "Even us (Jewish people), whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

God's purpose was also to save the Gentile people and make them part of the New Testament Church. This is really what all these verses (9:8-23) are leading up to. God works the way He chooses with people's lives on earth. Therefore, God has made the choice to turn to the masses of Gentile people and offer salvation and mercy to them. God will have mercy upon the Gentiles also and bring many into His corporate body which is called the Church.

Paul's teaching in Romans 9:24 and 11:30-32 convey the truth that election does not limit the mercy of God, but extends God's mercy to the nations. God would reach out to the Gentile masses within humanity and form His elect body, or community of people, called the Church. This was a worldwide outreach that would bring salvation to the nations (Matt. 28:19), as they respond to the proclamation of the Gospel message, become part of the growing community of God's elect body, and prepared for Heaven while they are still living on earth.

When a person reads Romans 9:23, without the philosophy of Calvinism imbedded in his mind, or thinking, he will actually open up his understanding to God's true saving program. God is willing to show mercy upon all people (Rom. 9:24; 10:12-13; 11:32), while they are still living upon earth (Rom. 9:22). When they reach out and receive that mercy (Rom. 10:13), God will actually prepare these people for Heaven, before they pass from this life, into the next. These same people will then become the actual objects of God's mercy ("vessels of mercy" – vs. 23), while they are still living upon planet earth, and become part of the many Gentiles that God is calling in order to form His elect body the Church (Rom. 9:24 – "but also of the Gentiles").

There is no fatalistic doctrine of election in Romans chapter nine as Augustine and Calvin taught. The Augustinian-Calvinistic interpretations of these verses do not fit into the greater context of the passage, nor do they square up with the rest of God's sovereign program, which offers salvation to all mankind (John 3:16) and extends mercy to all people (Rom. 11:32). We must come to the conclusion that none of these verses overturn God's sovereign program, which deals with His universal or worldwide offer of salvation to all people upon the earth (John 4:42).

Romans chapter 9 is a treatise that begins with God's sovereign dealings with people in relationship to their earthly placements in life (Jacob, Esau, Moses, Pharaoh) in order to ultimately bring salvation and the Redeemer to mankind through the Messianic line. Since the Messiah has come, it ends with how God prepares millions of people for eternity in relationship to His sovereign plan of calling out a people for His name (Acts 15:14) among an elect and growing body of people.

Romans 9:24 repeats the same truth:

“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

1 Peter 2:7-8

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

The Calvinist will tell you that the unbelievers were destined to disobey the word and therefore elected to damnation. Is this what this verse really means? No, this verse teaches that all those who willfully disobey the word are destined or appointed to stumble. The words “whereunto also they were appointed” refer back to the entire preceding clause, “them which stumble, being disobedient to the word.” In a general but not selective sense, God has appointed or decreed that all people, who refuse to embrace the Lord Jesus as Savior will stumble.

There is absolutely no reason to read election into this verse unless you are wearing Calvin’s eyeglasses. The message is clear. If a man insists on continuing in unbelief, then he is appointed or destined to stumble at Christ and His message of eternal life. In short, God appoints people to stumble at Christ and His message (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14) because they are disobedient and choose not believe. Their disobedience is not what God has ordained, but the penalty for their disobedience is ordained – stumbling at the truth (Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:8, 11, 30–32).

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

In almost unbelievable fashion, the Calvinist will often turn this verse into an elective verse. However, the term “usward” speaks of those who were once unsaved. It’s not a reference to the elect. The Bible does not teach this. Don’t presume upon the Bible! Peter is simply

remembering that God was longsuffering toward every person who is now a believer in Christ. He was waiting for them to be saved and longing for them to be saved. This verse magnifies the heart and compassion of God for everyone in the human race. The words “any” and “all” as we have seen always refers to everyone in the salvation contexts of Scripture (1 Tim. 2:6).

Hebrews 2:9

“... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

Of course, there are those Calvinists who claim that “every man” is a reference to the elect but there is nothing in the context that would indicate this. This is taking exegetical license on a text of Scripture and making it conform to one’s opinions. Other Calvinists realize the futility of limiting this verse to the elect and get around unlimited atonement in a different way. They claim that Christ did die for everyone in some generalized sense. They argue that there are unlimited benefits tied into the atonement with *common grace* or the kindness of God, much like the common grace that is displayed in sending rain upon the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45).

They also speak of God displaying His goodness to everyone in His death in a physical and temporal way. The Calvinistic conclusion of this verse goes something like this: “He’s the savior of all men in a temporal or physical way in that sinners don’t immediately get what they deserve and therefore Christ’s death expresses mercy to everyone in a general way as it reveals the loving character of God.” However, the Calvinist still concludes that Christ did not die for those in an eternal and spiritual way who are not the elect.

Of course, this is a bizarre interpretation that has no Scriptural proof. There is absolutely no place in God’s Word where it teaches Christ died for others in order to save them from temporal judgment? Where is the exegetical evidence for this interpretation? What verses actually teach this? If it were not for Calvinistic presuppositions no person would ever come to this type of “common grace” conclusion regarding Christ’s death on the behalf of people. God does send rain upon the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45) but Christ did not die for the just *and* unjust. He died for everyone since we are all unjust (1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:9).

There is nothing in any Biblical context regarding Christ's death that would lead anyone to come to this "common grace" interpretation which basically says that Christ died to only demonstrate His mercy by holding back immediate and *physical* (temporal) judgment from all sinners, but He did not die to save all sinners *spiritually* from hell. This would be saying that Christ's death was only a temporary sacrifice or covering that was merely an aid to hold back judgment from sinners but not a sacrifice that could save all sinners. This conclusion runs contrary to the entire argument of Hebrews and the final sacrifice of Christ upon the cross to take away sin forever (Heb. 10:12-14). To present Christ's death in this way is anti-Biblical and mocks the death of Christ.

Revelation 17:8

"... whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world..."

Calvinists assume that since certain names have never been recorded on the roster of the redeemed in Heaven, that this means there are those that God has chosen to save over others. In other words, God records the names of the saved in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world and excludes others on the basis of His elective program and double predestination. In short, those who don't have their name recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life have been predestinated to hell. Once again, this is assuming things that the Bible does not teach. It is true that those who worship the beast never had their names written in the Lamb's scroll, or book of life, and they will be eternally lost and destined for damnation in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 14:9-11). However, this was not because God chose to damn these people (beast worshippers) to hell, in eternity past, but because these people confirmed themselves in their own choice (2 Thess. 2:11-12), and refused to participate (Acts 14:46-48) with God's saving program (2 Pet. 3:9).

If some names were never recorded in Heaven, this obviously means that some names were recorded in Heaven, in eternity past, within the past counsel of the Godhead. God records the names on Heaven's roster of all those who desire to become part of His corporate elective program (1 Pet. 2:9), which was foreordained by God (1 Pet. 1:2), and which involves saving a community of believers who respond to His

gracious call upon their lives (Rev. 22:17). This recording occurred prior to creation, in light of God's foreknown purpose, which involved saving a corporate group of believers who enter His elective program (John 6:64).

God, also in His sovereign counsel, called this same community of people, justified them, and glorified them prior to creation (Rom. 8:29-30). The choice of the elect community occurred before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:4) and the names of people, who would become part of this community of believers, were recorded in the book of life (Roster of the Redeemed), prior to their birth and the creation of the world (Rev. 17:8), and these names can never be erased (Rev. 3:5). God elects and records down the names of people on the basis of His corporate elective program, and foreknown purpose (1 Pet. 1:2), which is to save a community of people, who respond to His overtures (John 3:16).

Election – Conditional or Unconditional?

The hyper or extreme Calvinistic/Augustinian doctrine teaches that God elects some people to Heaven and gives them the faith to believe, while others He selects to hell (double predestination) without giving these people the opportunity to believe, or accept His offer of saving grace. Others teach that God bypasses certain people (moderate Calvinism), which is a nicer way of saying that in the end God still wants to damn the non-elect to hell, without giving them any opportunity to repent and believe on Christ. In other words, God's election bypasses a person's faith and ability to choose or reject Christ. This is why Calvinists call this part of their teaching unconditional election. God elects certain people to salvation without considering a person's faith. In short, God places faith in the hearts of only the elect (those that God chooses to save), essentially believing for them, and does not give the non-elect any faith to believe, bypassing them and damning them to hell.

When considering all the theological relevant passages on election and God's entire plan of salvation, we can conclude that election is both unconditional and conditional. First, divine election is *unconditional*, only in the corporate sense, which teaches that God initially chose (John 15:16) a community of people to fulfill His salvation purposes in

the world (1 Pet. 2:9); however, individuals must freely choose whether to become a part of the elect body (Rev. 22:17). God's choice to save a group of people was not conditioned upon anything that people would do, but solely upon His purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:9). Therefore, it can be concluded that election is unconditional in regards to God's initial purpose and plan to reach out in grace, to save a company of people, who were without any hope (Eph. 2:12).

Election is also unconditional in the sense that God *thought* of us (Eph. 1:4), *sought* us (Luke 19:10), and *brought* us (John 6:44) to Himself. Man left to himself, would never seek after God (Rom. 3:11). Therefore, salvation must be based upon God's intervention and action. He wins us by His grace! Election is unconditional in the sense that man does not merit God's election in any way (Titus 3:5; Rom. 11:5 – "the election of grace"). Election always takes place according to the unmerited favor or grace of God.

Of course, election is not unconditional, in the way the Calvinist assumes, when he concludes that man is *preselected* without having any personal choice regarding his salvation and eternal destiny. When Calvinism pleads for unconditional election, it assumes that man is incapable of any legitimate response toward God's pleas, that God elects people without any human choice in the matter of salvation, and that from eternity past He chose some people to salvation and bypassed the rest. This simply is not true based upon the simple facts of Scripture (John 5:24; 7:37-38).

The other side of corporate election is *conditional* since God's eternal elective purpose and decree (electing a community of believers) is brought to pass in eternity present through man's volitional response to the Gospel (Eph. 1:13 – "after that ye believed"). Both the creation of God's plan (His choice) and carrying out of God's plan (human choice) is ordained by God. When election is seen corporately, non-calvinistically, and brought alongside of Christ's death for the entire world (Heb. 2:9), and with a "whosoever will" Gospel presentation (John 3:16; Rev. 22:17), one can readily conclude that election is not completely unconditional. Instead, it is built upon the entire plan of God's saving purpose, which revolves around building an elect, collective body of believers, who respond to His initiatives through human freedom and choice.

Election comprehends all men potentially but no one unconditionally. It is open to all. Those who believe become part of the elect body. Election comes to fruition, through the faith of sinners, who respond to God's initiatives, and who are then joined to the elect body. We can arrive at this Biblical conclusion, since election will never override any other clearly revealed aspects of God's saving plan, which involves a universal offer of salvation to all people (John 1:29; 12:46-47), Christ's death to save all people (1 Tim. 2:6; 1 John 2:2; Heb. 2:9), and the sufficient means for the entire human race to respond to the Gospel presentation (John 16:8; John 12:32). Therefore, it can be rightly, Scripturally, and non-calvinistically concluded that God has in eternity past elected a corporate body of people to be His children (Rom. 8:29-30), who through God's initiatives upon their souls, will trust in Christ (Eph. 1:13) and become part of God's saving and sovereign program.

This involves human response to God's initiatives upon people's wills (Romans 10:13). All of this was part of God's eternal and unchanging decree or sovereign purpose (Eph. 1:9). As studied previously, only the corporate view of election opens up the true meaning of many passages, which have traditionally been given a Calvinistic twist, in their interpretation.

When one understands election on a corporate and community basis, the individualistic statements on election, which were made by our Lord (John 6:44), do not teach divine determinism, and the unconditional selection of some people over others, in regards to their salvation. Rather, they only suggest the fulfillment of God's greater purpose of corporate election, as seen in the contextual verses that speak of the community dimension of election (John 12:32; 17:20-21, 30; Acts 13:46; 1 Pet. 2:9). In other words, individuals are drawn and brought into the growing, corporate body, which God has chosen to save in eternity past.

Individual people being drawn to salvation (John 6:44), results in God's greater purpose coming to pass, which is to form the corporate body that He has chosen to save (the Church). On the basis of corporate election (not individual election), God has allowed genuine human response and freedom to enter into the salvation scenario. People who choose salvation in Jesus Christ (John 1:12) can become part of God's elect and corporate program, which involves the salvation of many souls. This program was decreed by God in eternity past and was

designed, in such a way, to allow all men to enter the blessing of salvation and election. Both the creation and carrying out of the program was in accordance with God's sovereign control.

The beloved Harry Ironside is on record as saying:

"And so you can settle it for yourself whether you will be among the elect or not."

I agree with this simple conclusion. Any person can become part of the elect body ("many are called" – Matt. 22:14) that continues to expand and grow, as people throughout the nations become part of this growing community of faith. God makes a man's election possible through electing a corporate body of believers by His grace (2 Tim. 1:9). However, a man's own responsibility to take the water of life (Rev. 22:17), and believe in Christ (John 7:37-38), makes his election permanent or sure, in regards to his salvation (John 6:37). A man's changed life can then give him a secondary confirmation of his election (2 Pet. 1:10).

The concept of corporate election fulfills God's saving purposes (Eph. 1:3). Let me repeat something I said earlier. Election does not involve God *individually* choosing some people to salvation, over others, but *corporately* choosing a body (Eph. 2:16. 4:14; Col. 3:15) of people, or redeemed company of people from mankind ("a chosen generation" – 1 Pet. 2:9). Only this view of election leaves the door open for a valid whosoever Gospel proclamation (John 3:16). Election can be viewed as open and not closed. People are becoming part of God's elect body that He has chosen to come into existence in eternity past (Rom. 8:29-30). Through the centuries people are becoming linked to a growing community or body of believers through faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 10:17). God's elect (Rom. 8:33; Titus 1:1) are a growing church body that is being progressively formed over many years, since the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Matt. 16:18).

Calvinism teaches that God only elects certain individuals to salvation and makes sure they are saved by His drawing power of irresistible grace (man cannot resist the salvation call). The Calvinistic system also teaches that God refuses to elect others and fails to provide them with the drawing power that leads to salvation. The Calvinistic conclusion is this. God either damns the non-elect to hell (hyper-

Calvinism) or chooses to bypass the non-elect, for His own reasons, and offers them no assistance in salvation (moderate Calvinism).

The problem with either one of these Calvinistic systems is this. First, God never calls anybody the non-elect. This is a manmade title. If God chooses some people to salvation over others, then why did the Lord Jesus say this about little children: “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Matt. 18:14)?” Second, we must remember that God cannot love the entire world of mankind (John 3:16), and genuinely want all mankind to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), if He chooses to not save certain men, or provide them with the necessary assistance that is needed to draw them to salvation. Third, no Scripture, when taken in its historic context, teaches that God bypasses certain people in regards to salvation (1 Tim. 2:4).

Only a corporate view of election fits the entire salvation picture, which offers a genuine call of salvation to all mankind (Matt. 11:28), a legitimate drawing of all people (John 12:32) through a worldwide Gospel ministry (Mark 16:15) and the mission of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), which is intended to save masses of people throughout the entire world of mankind. Only a corporate view of election makes God’s sovereign plan of salvation Scriptural, simple, sensible, and soteriologically harmonious, instead of secretive and sadistic.

The Non-Mysterious Truth – In Laymen’s Terms!

The simple and non-mysterious truth is this. God has chosen to save a community of people and prepare them for Heaven (John 15:16; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). Without God making this choice, we would all be doomed to hell. God is sovereign. The Bible teaches that “after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11), God in his infinite “wisdom,” “prudence” (Eph. 1:8), “pleasure” and “purposed” decree (Eph. 1:9), has created a corporate program of election (1 Pet. 2:9 – “chosen generation”), whereby He wills all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and enter the community of elect people. Because of His love and desire to see all people saved (2 Pet. 3:9), God sets the program of election into motion, and chooses to save out of the human race a company of people (“whosoever believeth” – John 3:16) that willingly respond to His initiatives upon their hearts. God is still sovereign (in control) over

the entire plan of salvation and His grace is still magnified throughout the entire process, since He created the plan of salvation, pursued man, and saves man.

Election always occurs within the parameters of God's corporate purpose and allows God's elective purposes to be open and enjoyed by all (Rev. 22:17). All men can be saved and become part of God's elective program, since God created it as a corporate plan, which all men could enter through faith. Election is open and is designed to save the nations (Mark 16:15). It's not a closed, arbitrary, scary doctrine, or "dreadful decree" as Calvin asserted (*Institutes* 3.23.7). Election comprehends all men and women potentially and no one unconditionally. It is open to all. God is not the special property of any one person. The privilege of election belongs to all people.

When people "judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46) they miss out on God's corporate elective program or plan, which is to save all people (John 3:16), and make them part of the body called the church (Acts 20:28). However, when a person believes in Christ (Eph. 1:13 – "after that ye believed") they confirm and fulfill God's desire and eternal purpose, which is to select a group or community of people, who respond to His initiatives upon their hearts and wills, so that He can call them "God's elect" (Rom. 8:33).

This special group of people was elected in the past counsels of eternity (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:20-30), but the actual election program is brought to fruition, when people trust in Christ ("in whom ye also trusted" – Eph. 1:13). The corporate chosen group of people, who receive the dignified and the privileged title of God's elect (Titus 1:1) are drawn to salvation through the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; Rom. 1:16) and the Spirit of God (John 16:8; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Thess. 2:12). The "whosoever wills" (Rev. 22:17) are the very ones who become part of God's corporate elective program and the "whosoever wents" (John 5:40; Luke 13:34) are the many that are called (Matt. 22:14), but who refuse to respond to God's universal offer of salvation (Matt. 11:28), and wooing upon their souls (Acts 7:51).

W. B. Riley said:

"The soul's election depends upon the soul's choice. Thou, my friend, art the only person who can settle this question of election."

This is true in view of open election and the growing community of people, “the chosen generation” (1 Pet. 2:9).

D. L. Moody used to say:

“The whosoever wills are the elect and the whosoever wons are the non-elect.”

Actually the term “non-elect” never appears in the Bible, but Moody does bring the point across that God does not play favorites (Acts 10:34), when it comes to saving men (1 Tim. 2:4). If a man can make his calling and election sure *after* salvation by fruitful living (2 Pet. 1:10), he can surely make his election sure *for* salvation (1 Pet. 1:2-3) “through faith” (1 Pet. 1:5), and even more personally - by “your faith” (1 Pet. 1:9). God makes a man’s election possible; man makes it actual. In other words, a man can become part of God’s corporate program of election when he places faith in Christ. Election is based upon God’s foreknown plan to create a community of believers called the Church (1 Pet. 1:2), by reaching out to save all mankind (1 John 4:14), and giving people a legitimate opportunity to respond to God’s grace, and enter the elect body (Rev. 22:17).

People receive the title “elect” (2 Tim. 2:10) as they respond to Christ’s call upon their lives (John 6:37). It’s these same people who become part of the growing elect body that God is forming (Acts 2:47) and the very ones the Father promised to give to Christ (John 17:6, 9). God makes the salvation of the elect body possible through His drawing power (John 6:44). Those who respond to God’s drawing power are the ones who become part of God’s corporate program of election (John 12:32), which was ordained in eternity past (Eph. 1:4).

More than once Charles Spurgeon prayed:

“Lord, hasten to bring in all Thine elect, and then elect some more.”

Although Spurgeon did not embrace the teaching of corporate election his statement seems to bring out the true teaching regarding God’s election program. God’s elect are the very ones that “he had afore (beforehand) prepared unto glory” (Rom. 9:23) in view of His total and grand scheme of salvation, which is to elect a corporate group of people that respond to His overtures upon their hearts, during this present life. God prepares the elect body for their future life in Heaven

(1 Pet. 1:2-4) by saving them in this present life (John 3:16). Those who do not become part of God's corporate saving program of election are "fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22), or become prepared for God's judgment in the next life, because of their failure to repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5) and believe on Christ (John 3:36).

Being a merciful God, He only damns people after "much longsuffering" (Rom. 9:22; 2 Pet. 3:9). The door to salvation is shut for no one (John 10:9). The entrance is open to everybody ("Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in" - Luke 14:23). There is no fatalistic for-fixing of man's eternal destiny. God pleads with all men ("Turn ye ... for why will ye die, saith the Lord - Ezek. 33:11) and Paul persuades all men (2 Cor. 5:11). God gets no pleasure out of the death of the wicked ("I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" - Ezek. 33:11). The Lord is not willing that "any" (not many) should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

A Calvinist once said to a preacher:

"I would like to explain why I believe as I do. Suppose a man went to an orphanage. He had predetermined by his grace that he would adopt a certain boy and a certain girl and take them into his family. Could anyone reasonably accuse the man of being unjust or unfair because he chose these two and left the others?"

The preacher replied to the Calvinist:

"Certainly not! As you have explained the situation I would find no problem of any kind with the man's purpose and his choice." Then the preacher said - "But suppose the man went to the orphanage and sent word to all the children throughout the orphanage saying, "I love all of you and WHOSOEVER WILL may come home with me!" But then the same man, who said those words, refused to take any children along but the two he had originally intended to take. With that I have a problem which Calvinism cannot resolve."

In short, the way to Heaven is not through election or predestination. The way to Heaven is to express faith in God's gracious offer of salvation. God's corporate election of a group of people, who respond to His proposals, makes a man's election *possible* whereas man makes it *permanent* or sure, when he moves in faith (Gal. 3:26), and enters God's general elective program. God does not elect blindly but

according to His overall plan of salvation which is to offer salvation to all people (John 7:37). God neither pushes a man into hell nor pulls him into Heaven.

In addition, God does not *coerce* (dominate) a man's will *against* his wishes. God brings people to the threshold of salvation by ministering to the will and motivating the will, but He allows man to be competent in the matter of his salvation, and leaves a person free (autonomous) to choose the way of life or the way of death, the way of blessing or the way of banishment (Gen. 2:16-17; Joshua 24:15; Isaiah 1:18). *A man's will becomes the final obstacle to his salvation (John 5:40)*. A man's faith becomes the channel for his salvation ("through faith" – Eph. 2:8), not the ground of his salvation. Salvation comes to the soul that comes to salvation (John 6:37). The free will of man determines the final result of a man's salvation – not election or predestination. This is a Scriptural, simple, sane, and satisfactory conclusion to the entire revelation of Scriptures regarding God's plan of salvation for mankind.

Friends!

Charles Spurgeon said that the sovereignty of God and free will of man are friends that don't have to be reconciled. This is true because both are both part of God's saving program. So we can conclude that the sovereignty of God's elective program and the free will of man are two truths and twin truths that are close friends. Friends work harmoniously together and do not seek to destroy one another. Such is the case with election and free will. Both work together, and with the very clear and non-mysterious truths presented about salvation, one can readily conclude that election is *not* based upon God favoring certain people over others for salvation, but upon His love for all mankind, and His universal desire to save all mankind (John 3:16). God is not a "respector of persons" (Acts 10:34) when it comes to election and salvation. Instead, He desires all to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), wills all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and died so all can be saved (John 1:29; Heb. 2:9) in order to become part of elect body (1 Pet. 2:9).

Richard Halverson said:

"Nothing God planned interferes with human freedom ... Nothing humans do frustrates God's sovereign plan!"

Douglas R. McLachlan comments on Calvinism and Arminianism:

“The trouble with reasonable and logical is that it’s not always Biblical and theological. There is the tendency to go beyond what Scripture says or to radically reinterpret certain sections of it in order to make it fit one’s preconceived system.”

“God’s servants begin to excuse their personal responsibility on the basis of an eccentric and unbalanced view of divine sovereignty. Among other things, this constitutes a failure to see that a sovereign God is free to ordain not only the end but the means.”

“Conversely, it is undeniably true that somehow, within the circle of divine sovereignty, God has granted to His image-bearers an authentic exercise of their wills (Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51. 2 Peter 3:9, 15; Romans 10:13). They are responsible creatures who will be held accountable by their Creator. This can only mean there is in the matter of personal salvation an inscrutable synergism, a mysterious working together of the divine and human wills.”

“For my part, I have been content to say that God has devised a plan which insures the fulfillment of the divine will without intersecting the integrity of the human will.”

“What I know and understand about God’s integrity gives me confidence regarding what I don’t know or understand about God’s sovereignty (cf. Genesis 18:25).”

“What we need with respect to the matter of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is a Biblical balance.”

In short, God can prearrange the free will decisions that men make, and allow them to be interwoven into His grand sovereign scheme, which is designed to bring His decrees and purposes to pass. God can call and compel people to salvation, without violating their human choices, and yet allow their choices to fulfill His sovereign plan and purposes. God can place people in their vocations of life, without making them choose right or wrong, and yet allow their choices to enter into His sovereign plan. He can allow them to express faith in His saving plan, without destroying His sovereign plan.

H. H. Hobbs said:

"Election is not mechanical. It involves a God who is love and man who is morally responsible."

In conclusion, because of the *non-mysterious* truths surrounding election and human freedom, we can conclude that God has established a corporate program of election, which all people can enter by faith (Rev. 22:17 – "whosoever will").

"Whosoever will, whosoever will!
Send the proclamation over vale and hill.
'Tis a loving Father calls the wanderer home:
Whosoever will may come."

Dr. Harry Ironside said:

"Whosoever means *whosoever*. Only a biased theologian with an ax to grind could ever think that it meant only the elect."

Spurgeon is also on record as saying:

"If you say that you cannot come in under 'whosoever,' I ask you how you dare narrow a word which is in itself so broad, so infinite. 'Whosoever' – that must mean every man that ever lived, or ever shall live, while yet he is here and wills to come."

Is the truth about election a hidden mystery or is it simply misunderstood? I would conclude from this study that it's primarily misunderstood, due to the influence of Augustinianism or Calvinism on the church for many centuries. Simple-minded people with simple-minded faith in the Scriptures know that God loves everybody and wants everybody to be saved. Therefore, God has devised an election program that will never overthrow His glorious plan to save all mankind. So let's remove some of the mystery from election.

Let's look at the Scripture without Calvinistic bifocals. The "whosoever wills" (Rev. 22:17) are the elect! Those who respond to God's universal call of salvation ("with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" - 1 Cor. 1:1-2) become part of God's universal, selective, and elective program, called the Church. When people respond to God's call upon their lives they become part of God's corporate or community program of election, which was formulated

before the world was ever framed (2 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 8:29-30). Many are called, but few are chosen, due to their failure to believe and become clothed in God's righteousness (Matt. 22:12-14). The call of God is universal (Matt. 11:28), but the coming of the unsaved to Christ is limited, due to man's love for sin (John 3:19).

Lost In Wonder!

Does this study put together all the pieces of the puzzle regarding election? Does it answer all the questions? No. I am happy to concede that God can resolve things that I cannot resolve. Only God can unscrew the unscrewable. Anyone who thinks he has all of the answers on this matter simply has not yet heard all of the questions! Yes, we are not meant to understand everything. However, let's not plead total ignorance regarding election and free will. There is a sense of wonder and amazement when meditating upon God's elective and saving program.

My intent with this study was to keep election within the parameters of those clear passages of Scripture that speak of God's saving purpose for all mankind. It was researched in order to bring difficult doctrines down to a level where the average layman can understand them, without a lot of Reformed theological jargon, Calvinistic presuppositions, proof-texting of Bible passages, and manufactured creeds of a fatalistic nature. Dearly beloved, if we will but "think on these things" (Phil. 4:8) we will see the truth about election and the free will of man to be simple, sublime, and satisfactory.

Here is God's plan; God's way! Election is open - not closed (1 Pet. 2:9). God's elective program is designed to be opened to everyone; it is not closed to anyone. God's choice is to save a collective, growing, and open group of people, instead of a closed group of individual people, who were favored by God, over other people. Election is not God's choice of a restricted number of individuals, but the description of a corporate body in Christ, which He is saving.

God does not play favorites in the matter of salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). God does not bypass anyone for salvation (John 3:16; 16:8). God chooses to save a company of people who respond to His initiatives upon their wills (Rev. 22:17). It's these people who enter into His corporate

elective plan, which was already designed in eternity past, within the counsels of God's sovereignty (Eph. 1:4). Both the creation and carrying out of God's plan is according to His sovereign design. God's spacious love for the entire world (John 3:16) moves to His special love for His elect body (Rom. 11:28), which He saves out of the world, as people respond to the Spirit's worldwide conviction (John 16:8).

So what is our response to God's sovereign plan and saving purpose? Romans 11:33 declares: "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!" Or, as Charles Wesley simply put it, "Lost in wonder, love and praise."