## God’s Sovereignty and Human Freedom: Old Testament

One of the most intensely discussed questions among believers and Bible teachers concerns human free will. If God is sovereign over heaven and earth, does that mean that He directly controls all that takes place, or does He grant people genuine freedom to make their own choices? One’s conviction in this regard has an enormous effect on one’s general understanding of God’s nature and His plan. Therefore, it is imperative to do a careful study of the question of predestination. We will pursue this study sequentially through the Old and New Testaments.

### А. Predestination and Free Will in the Torah

The Bible begins with the account of God creating the world and the human race upon it. People were created “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), which, in the opinion of many, includes the ability to make free choices. The Genesis narrative appears to confirm this. God gave Adam and Eve a specific command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, they yielded to temptation and transgressed God’s command. It appears that the first humans were acting freely in their choice to disobey. God intended for people to use their freedom to choose obedience, but Satan knew that they could use their freedom improperly as well and therefore tempted them.

In the very next chapter, God warns Cain to be on guard against sin: “Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Gen 4:7). Cain needed to exercise his will in order to “master” sin, but failed to do so. The fact that God subsequently punished Cain demonstrates that Cain was culpable for the sin he committed. The same can be said for people in Noah’s day, who also received just recompense for their iniquity. It would be unjust for God to punish those whom He predestined to sin.

We see in Genesis, however, that individuals not only sinned against the Lord, but at times showed great faithfulness to Him. Noah obeyed God to construct the ark (Gen 6). Abraham forsook his homeland and followed the Lord to a land unknown to him (Gen 12). He was also ready to sacrifice his son at the command of the Lord (Gen 22). Joseph stayed true to Yahweh in spite of all the trials he endured. Nowhere in the narratives of these heroes of faith is any compulsion by God to obey mentioned or implied.

Among those who served God in their time was Moses. Through Him, Yahweh gave His people the Law, which defined for them proper behavior. The giving of the Law implies an expectation to keep it. A promise of life was given to those who would: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them” (Lev 18:5). Moses urges Israel to keep God’s commandments with these words:

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it (Deut 30:11-14).

In his final appeal to Israel, Moses summons God’s people to choose life through obedience: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live” (Deut 30:19).

Based on what we have said so far, it appears that the Torah affirms human free will, which people can employ to make right decisions and for which they are held responsible. At the same time, the following factors qualify our understanding of human free will.

First, some passages of Scripture indicate that human nature has a bent toward sinning. For example, when the people of Israel, in one of their rarer moments, actually responded appropriately to God, He responded, “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always” (Deut 5:29). So then, in the hearts of God’s people (and, presumably, in all human hearts) some factor hinders people from consistently obeying the Lord. Furthermore, Moses predicted that Israel would break the covenant: “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you” (Deut 31:29). This is the case, as Moses explains, because “to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (Deut 29:4). Therefore, God will need to “circumcise” the hearts of His people to make them obedient (Deut 30:6).

Second, we encounter instances when God apparently exerted a direct influence on someone’s will, thereby directing their behavior. For example, God “did not let” Abimelech touch Abraham’s wife Sarah (Gen 20:6).[[1]](#footnote-1) The following example may demonstrate that God might not only prevent wrong behavior, but actually promote it: “Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go” (Ex 10:20, сf. Ex 4:21; 11:10). Exodus 9:16 reveals God’s aim in this act: “For this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.” At the same time, we learn that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart (Ex 8:15, 32; 9:34). Deuteronomy 2:30 records a similar occurrence: “Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for Yahweh your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand.”

Other cases exist where God used people’s wrong choices to accomplish His purposes: Sarah’s jealousy of Hagar (Gen 21), Rebecca’s and Jacob’s deception of Isaac (Gen 27), Laban’s abuse of Jacob (Gen 31), Joseph’s trials (Gen 45:5-8), etc. Nevertheless, in none of these cases is it stated that God caused these actions. One may suggest that God simply took advantage of situations where people freely chose the wrong course in order to accomplish His plan.

The following passages record the role of human choice in turning to the Lord. Jacob was a sly, ambitious individual, until his personal encounter with the Lord, which brought about reorientation in his life. The Lord even gave him a new name – Israel (Gen 32:28). We see no indication in the biblical text that his conversion was anything but freely embraced. Other biblical characters repented of sin, such as the brothers of Joseph and Judah in particular (Gen 44:18-34). These acts of repentance appear to arise from their own volition and in response to their situation.

An interesting fact to note is the mention of a book, in which apparently God has already recorded the names of the saved (Ex 32:32-33). This recalls the “Lamb’s book of life” from Revelation 21:27. We observe that inclusion or exclusion from this book depends on person choice, not God’s election: “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (Ex 32:33).

Divine election in nonetheless a prominent theme in the Torah, especially in the book of Deuteronomy. Yahweh chose Israel (Deut 4:37; 7:6-7; 10:15; 14:2) and its future place of worship (Deut 12:5, 11). He chose Israel not because it was a great nation, but just the opposite: “…for you were the fewest of all peoples” (Deut 7:7). His election of the nation was based the election of their patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom He loved (Deut 4:37; 10:15). The honor of the priesthood was also determined by divine election – the tribe of Levi was chosen. The following passages speaks of Yahweh’s election of Abraham:

For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice, so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him (Gen 18:19).

In summary, we discover from the Torah several features of God’s election. People were created in God’s image, which likely implies the power of self-determination. God gave the first humans the opportunity to use their freedom for obedience, but instead they rebelled. From that time, the Lord continually appealed for obedience, yet the majority of people refused. Consequently, God punished their disobedience. Some, however, served God faithfully in their time, although they also fell short of perfection. This history of God’s call to obedience and of people’s response to it – sometimes positive and other times negative – supports the idea that humans possess true freedom of choice.

Although people possess free will, they have an inborn tendency toward sin. Their freedom of choice is therefore limited by a sinful nature. God’s intervention is needed to correct the situation – a circumcision of the heart, that is, a removal of the sinful impulse. The Torah does record instances when people turned to the Lord and demonstrated a subsequent change in behavior.

On the other hand, is seems that divine influence may have determined behavior in selected cases, either for good (Abimelech) or evil (Pharaoh, Sihon). However, in Pharaoh’s case it is written that he first hardened his own heart. One may theorize that God simply (as Paul put it) “gave him over” to the intention of his own heart (see Rom 1:24-28). In Abimelech’s case, God may have prevented him from touching Sarah by mitigating circumstances.

Finally, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His people, Levi to be His priests, and the future Jerusalem to be his capital. Yet, this type of election in no way impinges on free will, but simply demonstrates the Lord’s authority to appoint whomever He pleases to whatever position He pleases.

### B. Predestination and Free Will in the Historical Books

The next stop in our Old Testament survey is the historical books, where we discover many points already noted in the Torah. In particular, God continues to call His people to obedience. Joshua challenged the people, “…choose for yourselves today whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15). In addition, Yahweh punishes transgressions of the covenant, which indicates that people are responsible for their wrong choices. As before, most people are in disobedience, but occasional “bright lights” appear on the scene, who walk before the Lord in faithfulness.

Instances where Israel turns to the Lord when chastised by Him are a prominent feature of this literature. The book of Judges records the repeating cycle of apostasy – punishment – restoration during this period. Clearly, the Lord’s discipline is able to motivate people to repent, even if just for a time. Turning to the Lord in trouble is characteristic of human free will responding to God’s discipline. We may add other examples, such as Manasseh’s repentance (2 Chr 33:12) and the conversion of Naaman after his supernatural healing (2 Kin 5). Again, there is no indication of God’s direct influence on people’s will. Their conversions occur by purely natural means – a human response to divine discipline or divine mercy.

A more unique feature of the historical literature is that it recalls times when people once faithful to the Lord turn away from Him. In Solomon’s case, for example, “his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to Yahweh his God” (1 Kin 11:4). Saul displayed an initial devotion to God early in his reign, but also turned back from following Him. In both cases, we can detect a perfectly natural reason for their unfaithfulness – the desire to please people.

As was the case in the Torah, we learn that God can and does use people’s wrong choices to further His plan. He used Samson’s anger to strike the Philistines (Judg 15:1-8), the assassinations of Abner and Ish-bosheth to deliver the kingdom over to David (2 Sam 3-4), and the Gentile military assault against Judah to punish the Southern Kingdom (2 Kin 15:37). The immaturity and foolishness of Rehoboam led to the fulfillment of the prophecy against Solomon (1 Kin 12:12-24). Nevertheless, we see no indication in the biblical text that such choices were made under divine compulsion. God simply took advantage of the situation to further His plan.

However, certain passages may demonstrate God’s direct action on a person’s will. It was prophesied of Saul, “Then the Spirit of Yahweh will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed (הָפַךְ) into another man” (1 Sam 10:6). The verb הָפַךְ (*haphah*) in the *Niphal* form (“be changed”) is used to describe a fundamental change in something, like water to blood (Ex 7:17,20), sling stones to stubble (Job 41:28), or sadness to joy (Est 9:22).[[2]](#footnote-2) It seems that the Spirit of God moved on Saul so strongly that he no longer resembled the person he was before. A similar event occurred when Saul and his servants pursued David. The Spirit came upon them and, as a result, they ceased chasing David and began to prophecy (1 Sam 19:20-23). In these examples, the Spirit supernaturally altered Saul and his servants’ intention.

Similarly, in Joshua 22:31 the obedience of the Gileadites was a sign that “Yahweh is in our midst.” This shows that the Israelites saw the intervention of God’s Spirit in that act of obedience. In 2 Chronicles 30:12, we read of Hezekiah’s reform, “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of Yahweh.” The Spirit’s effect on the people of Judah created a willingness to support the king’s program. When Solomon prayed to Yahweh at the temple dedication, he acknowledged Israel’s dependence on Him for grace to obey: “…that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances” (1 Kin 8:58).[[3]](#footnote-3)

In other cases, it seems that the Lord hindered people from making right choices. In these instances we encounter the formulas מֵיהוה (“from Yahweh”) or מֵהַאְֶלֹהִים (“from God”), followed by a conditional clause introduced by the conjunctions כִּי, לְ or לְמַעַן (“in order that”), which indicate that this event was part of God’s plan. Judges 14:4 reveals that Samson’s marriage to a Gentile was מֵיהוה (“from Yahweh”) for “He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.” The preposition מ before the name Yahweh indicates that the marriage was from God, but does not detail how exactly God arranged it. It is reasonable to suppose that God did not predestine Samson’s decision, but just foreknew his future free choice and worked it into His plan.

Moreover, it was מֵהַאְֶלֹהִים (“from God”) that Amaziah did not listen to the counsel of Joash, and as a result he was defeated in war. This was God’s punishment because he “sought the gods of Edom” (2 Chr 25:20). Here, the biblical text closely ties Amaziah’ actions with the Spirit’s influence on him – the reason he did not listen was כִּי מֵהָאְֶלֹהִים הִיא (“because it was from God”). Thompson comments, “God guided even Amaziah’s own pride in such a way that it brought about his downfall. In judgment for his apostasy God made Amaziah blind to the truth and deaf to wisdom.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

We discover in 1 Kings 12:15 a similar explanation as to why Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the people: “So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn {of events} from Yahweh, that He might establish His word, which Yahweh spoke through Ahijah.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The same occurred in 1 Samuel 2:25, where the sons of Eli failed to heed their father’s warning, “for Yahweh desired to put them to death.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Finally, we read in Joshua 11:20 about the inhabitants of Canaan something similar to what God did to Pharaoh and Sihon:

For it was of Yahweh to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

In 2 Kings 24:18-20, Zedekiah rejects God’s plan for the following reason: כִּי עַל־אַף יהוה הָיְתָה בִירוּשָׁלַםִ, i.е., “through the anger of Yahweh {this} came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence.”

We will look more closely at another passage in this regard, 2 Samuel 24:1, which reads, “Now again the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’” It appears that God again caused a person’s behavior. On the other hand, a comparison with the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21:1 will prove insightful: “Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.” It appears that God’s effect on David was not direct, but mediated through an enemy attack (“Satan stood up”), which moved David to perform a military census.

All the other instances listed above, though, can be explained. Either God simply took advantage of the situation people themselves created, or He merely intensified the original intent of the person making the wrong decision.

We will highlight several instances where the Lord stirred up Gentile nations to attack Israel.[[7]](#footnote-7) In 1 Chronicles 5:26, we learn that God “stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh.” Similarly, in 2 Chronicles 21:16 “Yahweh stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who bordered the Ethiopians; and they came against Judah and invaded it.” Finally, “Yahweh brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh” (2 Chr 33:11).

The cases examined above give the strong impression that the Lord actually acted on certain individuals in a way that affected their actions. We must also keep in mind, though, that this divine influence likely did not differ from the personal intention of these parties, but rather intensified it.

In addition, the following text appears to contradict the claim of constant divine control over human volition: “Even {in the matter of} the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to (Hezekiah) to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him {alone only} to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart” (2 Chr 32:31). Here is it evident that Hezekiah exercised free choice in deciding to show the envoys from Babylon his treasures.

God’s election of David as king was not unconditional, but based on his inner character. God explained to Samuel His reason for choosing David: “God {sees} not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). David truly was “a man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14).

Another key passage showing God’s election based on foreknowledge of a person’s character is found in the case of Abijah, the son of Jeroboam. Of him it is written, “He alone of Jeroboam's {family} will come to the grave, because in him something good was found toward Yahweh God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam” (1 Kin 14:13). We are not specifically told how old Abijah was at this time, but the Hebrew terms נַעַר (*naar*) and יֶלֶד (*eled*), which describe him in verses 3, 12, and 17, can indicate that he was a young boy, maybe even an infant.[[8]](#footnote-8) This means that God foreknew His character before he was actually old enough to fully display it and on that basis granted him special favor.

In summary, we conclude that the Old Testament historical books repeat some of the features seen in the Torah, namely that Yahweh expected obedience from His people and on occasion intervened in a more direct fashion to ensure His desired outcome, even to the degree of influencing someone’s will and consequent decision, such as the case with Saul and his servants. Nevertheless, God never acted on people’s hearts to incite an evil intent, but did at times intensify people’s personal evil intent by “giving them over” to it. These writings also support the idea of election/blessing based on foreknowledge, as when David was chosen king and Abijah was shown favor. Finally, these writings record people turning to the Lord, or turning away from Him. These life changes are explainable not by supernatural, but natural causes.

### C. Predestination and Free Will in the Poetical Books

In the poetical books, the key passages concerning human free will are located in the Psalms and Proverbs. The following texts seem to support the doctrine of divine determinism:

- Ps 37:23 – The steps of a man are established by Yahweh, and He delights in his way.

- Prov 16:1 – The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from Yahweh.

- Prov 16:9 – The mind of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps.

- Prov 19:21 – Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of Yahweh will stand.

- Prov 20:24 – Man's steps are {ordained} by Yahweh, how then can man understand his way?

Let us begin with Proverbs 16:9: “The mind of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps.” Here, a person’s intentions is compared with what the outcome actually is. At first glance, it seems that no matter what a person plans, God will determine the outcome. Garrett feels that this verse shows “divine providence over human affairs…. events and circumstances are all in God’s control.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Murphy agrees, “The final result is the Lord’s doing, over which humans have no real control.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Yet, these comments do not ascribe to God control over a person’s will, but simply over the resulting circumstances.

One must also consider the meaning of the verb כוּן (*kun*), i.e., “directs,” in the *Polel* form. In this form, the basic meaning is “make firm,” with the following connotations: “direct,” “establish,” “make,” or “prepare.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Employing the definition “establish” yields a different sense. The verse would mean, then, that persons can plan their way, but only God has the power to establish it or make it succeed. This would then be a call to depend on God’s strength, not one’s own.

The same idea is echoed by the psalmist, who desires that Yahweh would “direct” (כוּן, i.е., “establish”) his way “to keep Your statutes” (Ps 119:5). The psalmist wants to keep God’s Law, but realizes that only God can enable him to do so. In Proverbs 16:3, we see the same: “Commit your works to Yahweh, and your plans will be established (כוּן).” Again, we perceive that only by God’s strength can we accomplish our good intentions. Therefore, it is necessary to “commit our works to Yahweh.” In another place, the psalmist expresses his confidence that God is ready and able to do this: “Yahweh will accomplish what concerns me” (Ps 138:8).

In the light of our interpretation of Proverbs 16:9, we can reasonably attribute the same sense to Psalm 37:23: “The steps of a man are established by Yahweh, and He delights in his way.” The same Hebrew verb, כוּן (*kun*), is employed. Again, the issue is not God determining a person’s intent, but His actualizing it. Keil and Delitzsch confirm this view, “By Jahve… are a man’s steps made firm, established; not: ordered or directed.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Concerning Proverbs 16:1, “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from Yahweh,” this verse is in the same context as Proverbs 16:3 and 16:9, and likely carries the same nuance. Three interpretations, however, are advanced. Keil and Delitzsch feel that we are dealing here with needing God’s wisdom and guidance when a person needs to respond to someone, but does not know how.[[13]](#footnote-13) Murphy suggests that God not only helps a person know how to respond, but actually determines what he/she will say: “The response of human beings cannot escape divine dominion.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Others think that the genitiveמַעְַנֵה לָשׁוֹן (“the answer of the tongue”) refers not to what a person says, but what God has to say about that individual’s plans.[[15]](#footnote-15) This would correspond to Proverbs 16:3 and 9, where God has the final word about the accomplishment of what someone desires to do.

Next, we consider Proverbs 19:21: “Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of Yahweh will stand.” The teaching of determinism is absent here as well. The sense again is human intention and divine intervention. People may plan the direction of their lives, but they lack power to carry it out. Success comes to those who submit their plans to the Lord. We encounter the same teaching in a passage well known to many: “Trust in Yahweh with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prov 3:5-6).

The text that supports the idea of divine determination more than the others is Proverbs 20:24: “Man's steps are {ordained} by Yahweh, how then can man understand his way?” Here, we read not only that people’s behavior comes from the Lord, but also that they cannot even understand why they do what they do. Several commentators seek to interpret this verse without disallowing free will.

Keil and Delitzsch feel that God merely coorindates people’s free actions to coincide with His plan: “Man is indeed free to turn himself hither or thither, to decide on this course of conduct or on that, and is therefore responsible for it; but the relations co-operating in all his steps as the possible and defining conditions are God’s contrivance and guidance.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Murphy objects to a Calvinistic interpretation of Proverbs 20:24 because of the strong emphasis on human responsibility seen throughout the book of Proverbs. This verse draws our attention, then, to the mystery of the relationship between divine determination and human freedom. In fact, another book in the “wisdom literature,” Ecclesiastics, speaks often of God’s mysterious ways (3:11; 7:13; 8:17; 11:5).[[17]](#footnote-17) Garrett is of the opinion that this verse refers to God directing human behavior not by controlling people’s wills, but by manipulating their circumstances. Therefore, the Lord directs human behavior indirectly by orchestrating conditions that can promote or prevent certain actions.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The Old Testament poetical books continue several themes introduced in earlier books. Humans usually abuse their God-given freedom to sin. The psalmists speak of the universality of human sinfulness. In Psalms 14:3 and 53:3, we learn, “They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Does God predetermine such behavior? Psalm 92:6-7 might be taken this way: “A senseless man has no knowledge, nor does a stupid man understand this: that when the wicked sprouted up like grass and all who did iniquity flourished, it {was only} that they might be destroyed forevermore.” On the other hand, the likely sense here is that God did not raise up doers of iniquity in order to destroy them, but rather that their own willful disobedience leads to their ruin.

A more problematic text for defenders of human free will is Proverbs 16:4: “Yahweh has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.” Did God create wicked people for the purpose of condemning them? Both Keil/Delitzsch and Murphy hesistate to affirm this interpretation. They feel that God in His overall plan has merely appointed a determined *outcome* for the wicked – they will perish.[[19]](#footnote-19) Therefore, all is under God’s control in the sense that “nothing, and especially not the wicked, escapes God’s domination.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

The poetic books also echo the thought that Yahweh can harden the heart of His enemies. Psalm 105:25 ascribes the Egyptian’s hatred of Israel to God: “He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants.” Earlier, we explained similar cases by stating that God simply gives people over to their natural inclinations and can even intensify their evil intents (сf. Rom 1:24-28). Psalm 81:11-12 may prove insightful here: “But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.” This verse may enlighten us as to how God “hardens hearts.”

God’s work of election for blessing is highlighted in the poetic books as well, both in a general sense: “How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near {to You} to dwell in Your courts” (Ps 65:4), and concerning specific individuals: “Yahweh has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession” (Ps 135:4, сf. Ps 77:68-72). God elected David as well: “Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust {when} upon my mother's breasts” (Ps 22:9). The verb בטח (*batath*), “made me trust,” in the *Hiphil* form indicates causation – God *granted* David to trust in Him.

The final texts to examine are Psalm 119:67, 71 and Psalm 107:10-22, where we learn that in troubled times people turn to the Lord. This shows that circumstances may influence a person and lead to a response of repentance coming from a free and willful choice of that individual.

So then, in the poetic books we witness a development of our theme of divine determination and human free will. All people are sinful, implying an inherent moral defect that, while not eradicating the human will, hinders the ability to do good. We also learn that without God’s help, a person is unable to accomplish the intentions of his or her heart. We see earlier themes repeated, such as people choosing to turn to the Lord, and God’s hardening of hearts. Concerning the latter, Psalm 81:11-12 may be key to understanding this thorny question, since God may simply be “giving them over to the stubbornness of their heart.”

### D. Predestination and Free Will in the Prophetic Books

What do the Old Testament prophetic books contribute to our study? God declares through Isaiah that He has chosen Israel and will never forsake them: “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its remotest parts and said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.’” (Isa 41:8-9). Therefore, as stated before, Israel obtained its special status before Yahweh not due to its own merits, but by God’s sovereign choice. By virtue of God’s election, Israel had the confidence to appeal to Him for restoration, even after turning away from Him: “For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Yahweh, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name” (Isa 63:16; cf. Isa 63:7-19).

In relation to God’s election of Israel, the passage in Isaiah 45:9-10 is of special interest:

Woe to {the one} who quarrels with his Maker – an earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, “What are you doing?” or the thing you are making {say}, “He has no hands?” Woe to him who says to a father, “What are you begetting?” or to a woman, “To what are you giving birth?”

The apostle Paul quotes these words to justify God’s judgment of sinners, supposedly predestined by Him for condemnation (Rom 9:20-21). It is curious to note, however, that in the Old Testament context, these words have a positive connotation – God has elected Israel (see Isa 45:11) and will deliver him through King Cyrus (see Isa 45:1, 13). In any case, the main point is the same: Yahweh has the full right to do with His creation whatever He pleases. However God may act in relation to His creatures, they can make no legitimate objection.

At the same time, Isaiah does not hesitate to claim that God directly acts on a person’s will. In not a few passages, Isaiah points to God’s work of hardening the hearts of the disobedient. Concerning worshipers of idols, he writes,

They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot comprehend… a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa 44:18-20).

The word translated “smeared over” is טַח (*tath*). Scholars debate as to whether this verb should be rendered in the active or passive voice.[[21]](#footnote-21) However, since the verb is in the singular, not the plural, God must be its subject. Keil and Delitzsch equate this verse with Paul’s commentary on idol worshippers in Romans 1:28: “God gave them over to a depraved mind.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The sad consequence of this condition is that those so hardened cannot escape from their deception (see v. 20).

Isaiah provides another concrete example of God hardening hearts, this time in regard to Egypt:

So I will incite Egyptians against Egyptians; and they will each fight against his brother and each against his neighbor, city against city {and} kingdom against kingdom. Then the spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them; and I will confound their strategy, so that they will resort to idols and ghosts of the dead and to mediums and spiritists…. Yahweh has mixed within her a spirit of distortion; they have led Egypt astray in all that it does, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit (Isa 19:2-3, 14).

Several divine acts result in Egypt’s downfall. First, God incites the Egyptians to war among themselves. The word “incite” is שָׂכַךְ (*sahah*), “to prick or spur on.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Second, He “confounds their strategy.” Finally, He “mixes within her a spirit of distortion.” The result is Egypt’s defeat in battle. Yet, we note that God is not inciting an immoral decision, but confusing their judgment for the purpose of leading them into judgment.

God hardens not only Gentiles, but at times His own people. During a time when Israel was experiencing the Lord’s discipline, Isaiah marvels that “There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You” (Isa 64:7). Then he reveals the cause of their apathy: “For You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.” In other words, the Lord “gave them over” to their own waywardness.

The most oft-quoted passage on this theme is Isaiah 6:9-10:

וַיּאמֶר לַךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לָעָם הַזֶּה שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמוֹעַ וְאַל־תָּבִינוּ וּרְאוּ רָאוֹ
הַשְׁמַן לֵב־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאָזְנָיו הַכבַּד וְעַינָיו הָשַׁע וְאַל־תַּדָעוּ׃

יָבִין וָשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ׃ וּלְבָבוֹ יִשְׁמָע וּבְאָזְנָיו בְעַינָיו פֶּן־יִרְאֶה

*He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.”*

The Septuagint renders an entirely different version, in which Israel’s unresponsiveness does not result from God hardening them, but due to their own poor spiritual condition.

καὶ εἶπεν Πορεύθητι καὶ εἰπὸν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ Ἀκοῇ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε, ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου, καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν, μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς.

*He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘You will keep on listening intently, but you will not perceive at all; you will keep on looking closely with your eyes, but you will not see at all.’ For the heart of this people is insensitive, with their ears they have hardly heard, and they have shut their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return, and I should heal them.”*

Two theories exist to explain the Hebrew text, where God commands Isaiah to “render the hearts of this people insensitive.” First, through Isaiah’s preaching of the Word and the subsequent rejection of it by God’s people, the latter would harden their own hearts to the Lord. Thus, Isaiah would “render their hearts insensitive” indirectly through his preaching. If he has not preached to them, then they would not have hardened their hearts.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Others posit a more direct action of God in this affair. When Isaiah would pronounce God’s judgment on His people, the Lord would respond by activity hardening their hearts. In this way, He would prevent them from repenting and prepare them for judgment. God does this in response to their stubborn disobedience.

Isaiah 29:9-10 may shed light on this question: “Be delayed and wait, blind yourselves and be blind…. For Yahweh has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes.” God is warning His people of coming chastisement, but the prophet reveals that Israel is not in condition spiritually to take the Lord’s warning seriously – they have “blinded themselves.” It seems that Yahweh has actively prevented His people from understanding and receiving this prophetic warning. Yet, this occurs only after Israel has already blinded themselves. According to Keil and Delitzsch, “This self-induced condition would become to them a God-appointed punishment.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

We have already touched on Isaiah 63 in connection with God’s election of the sons of Jacob. We will revisit verse 17: “Why, O Yahweh, do You cause us to stray from Your ways and harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage.” Twice in this verse, the author employs the Hebrew causative verb form *Hiphil* to describe God’s actions. The Lordתַתְעֵנוּ (“caused us to stray”) and תַּקְשִׁיחַ (“hardened our heart”). Keil and Delitzsch comment here, “When men have scornfully and obstinately rejected the grace of God, God withdraws it from them judicially, gives them up to their wanderings, and makes their heart incapable of faith.”[[26]](#footnote-26) In response, Isaiah prays that God would “return.” Here, the text implies that only with God’s help and intervention can Israel correct its errors.

Not only Isaiah, but all the Old Testament prophets stress personal responsibility before God for our actions, which coincides with belief in free will. Ezekiel chapter 18 is possibly the most straightforward text in this regard. Verse 20, for example, reads, “The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”

Accordingly, the Lord appeals to people to “repent and live” (Ezek 18:32). Such calls to repentance characterize all the prophetic books. Isaiah writes, “Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected, O sons of Israel” (Isa 31:6), ”Return to Me, for I have redeemed you” (Isa 44:22), and, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh” (Isa 55:7). Jeremiah declares, “’Return, O faithless sons,’ declares Yahweh…. Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness” (Jer 3:14, 22). A call to repentance is an appeal to a free moral agent.

At the same time, Jeremiah also speaks of God’s intervention in people’s decisions. God promises those Judeans in exile, “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer 24:7). The Hebrew reads:

וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב לָדַעַת אֹתִי כִּי אְַיִ יהוה וְהָיוּ־לִי לְעָם

וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים כִּי־יָשֻׁבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל־לִבָּֽם

Discussion arises about the conjunction כִּי (*ki*) in the second half of the verse. Typically, it denotes causation, i.e. “for they will return to Me.” According to this rendering, Yahweh is making an unconditional promise to bring His people to Himself. Another possible variant, though, is to render כִּי (*ki*) ”if.” Now, Israel’s restoration is conditional: “if they will return to Me.” This translation corresponds to the general tone of Jeremiah’s prophecy, where blessings come through obedience.[[27]](#footnote-27) On the other hand, Keil and Delitzsch defend the option of an unconditional promise from the Lord: “The turning to the Lord cannot be regarded as the condition of their receiving favour, because God will give them a heart to know Him; it is the working of the knowledge of the Lord put in their hearts.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Key to the spiritual transformation of God’s people is their receiving a new heart. Jeremiah 32:38-39 teaches the same: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for {the good of} their children after them.” Israel’s turning to the Lord results from receiving a new heart from the Lord. Furthermore, this inner transformation is part of God’s new covenant with His people: “’But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares Yahweh, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it’” (Jer 31:33). God declares the same through Ezekiel, implying that the new heart will result in obedient lives:

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezek 36:26-27).

On the other hand, Jeremiah seems to imply of evil resulting from “the anger of Yahweh.” It is written about Zedekiah, “He did evil in the sight of Yahweh like all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of Yahweh {this} came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence” (Jer 52:2; cf. 2 Kin 25:18-20).

Jeremiah 10:23 reminds us of similar verses in the poetic books of the Old Testament: “I know, O Yahweh, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct (or “establish”) his steps.” It is remarkable that the terms כוּן *(kun)*, דֶרֶךְ *(dereh)*, and צַעַד *(tsaad)*, found in similar citations from the poetic books, are found in this verse as well. This leads us to conclude that the same idea is in view – a person can plan his way, but only the Lord can realize his intentions.

The context of this verse speaks of God punishing Judah by sending them into exile. Therefore, Jeremiah is acknowledging here that people cannot stay loyal to God without His assistance. Keil and Delitzsch confirm, “It is not within man’s power to arrange the course of his life, nor in the power of the man who walks to fix his step.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Huey agrees, “We know that we are unable to direct our steps aright apart from God.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Accordingly, in the next verse Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of all Judah, appeals to Yahweh, “Correct me, O Yahweh, but with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing” (Jer 10:24).

Finally, the prophetic books affirm that God can use the evil and destructive acts of people to accomplish His purpose in the end. The book of Joel supports this idea. Yahweh uses locust (chp. 1) and enemy armies (chp. 2) to chastise His people. Yet, it is nowhere stated that God causes an immoral decision. He merely takes advantage of already existing human ill intent to accomplish His goal of punishing His people.

In summary, the prophetic books continue themes highlighted in earlier books. On the one hand, human free will is evident in that: (1) people are responsible for their sins, and (2) God repeatedly summons sinners to repentance. On the other hand, we see instances where the Lord directly influences human choice: (1) people need His assistance to turn to Him, and (2) the Lord on occasion hardens people’s hearts. Concerning the last point, though, God never initiates an evil act, but may intensify a person’s own evil intention.

### E. Predestination and Free Will in the Exilic/Post-Exilic Books

In this literature, God’s effect on human intention and choice tends in a more positive direction. In other words, instead of hearts being hardened, hearts are being moved to do good. For example, Ezra 1:1 relates, “Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” to permit Judah to return to their homeland.[[31]](#footnote-31) The term used for the influence God exerts is עוּר (*ur*), which in the *Hiphil* form means “rouse, stir up, to activity” (see Ezra 1:1, 5 and Hag 1:14).[[32]](#footnote-32)

In the same chapter, we discover, “Then the heads of fathers' {households} of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:5). In Williamson’s words, “The response, as much as the issuing of the decree itself… resulted from God’s prompting rather than human opportunism.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Furthermore, the Levites joined the company returning to Judah because of “the good hand of our God upon us” (Ezra 8:18-19).

In the same way that the Lord prompted people to return to Judah, he also impelled them to rebuilt the temple. After Haggai’s prophecy, the leaders among the remnant, together with the remnant itself, answered the summons to rebuild the temple (Hag 1:12). In verse 14, however, we learn what was behind their positive response: “So Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of Yahweh.”

Keil and Delitzsch assert that God made people “willing and glad to carry out His resolutions.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Mason compares this with what took place during the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness (see Ex 35:20–36:3). Unlike the incident in Exodus, however, “There it is the people’s hearts that stirs them to action. Here it is Yahweh.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Moreover, God conditioned the heart of Artaxerxes to support Nehemiah’s initiative to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah, chps. 1-2). Nehemiah summarizes the event: “And the king granted {them} to me because the good hand of my God {was} on me” (Neh 2:8). The book of Nehemiah also reveals why God chose Abraham: “…who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees…. You found his heart faithful before You” (Neh 9:7-8).

The book of Zechariah, however, affirms that God can motivate negative actions as well. Before the Judeans rebuilt the temple, God “set all men one against another” (Zech 8:10). Looking into the future, Zechariah predicts that the Lord will “cause the men to fall, each into another's power and into the power of his king” (Zech 11:6). In addition, rejection of Messiah will be the Lord’s doing: “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate…. Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered” (Zech 13:7).

Daniel 12:1 speaks of a book recording the names of the saved ones in Israel. This recalls Moses’ words: “But now, if You will, forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (Ex 32:32). It is fair to identify this book with the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21:27). Yet, as we noted earlier, the inclusion (more precisely, the “exclusion”) of people from that book depends on their free choice: “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (Ex 32:33).

Finally, Malachi wrote the following provocative words about God electing Israel: “’I have loved you,’ says Yahweh. But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’ ‘{Was} not Esau Jacob's brother?’ declares Yahweh. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and {appointed} his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness’” (Mal 1:2-3). Smith explains this by referring to Yahweh’s covenant with Israel. By “loved” and “hated” the Lord means that He has “chosen” Israel and “not chosen” Esau.[[36]](#footnote-36) Yet, Keil and Delitzsch insist that God truly hated Esau, expressed in that He “made his mountains a desolation and {appointed} his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

Here, one must consider that according to the biblical principle of “corporate personality,” God can deal with an entire people group as with one individual. That individual’s destiny becomes the destiny of the entire group. Thus, Esau’s attitude toward his inheritance: “who sold his own birthright for a {single} meal” (Heb 12:16), would give God grounds to “hate” Esau. In line with the principle of “corporate personality,” those consequences could extend to all his descendants.

### F. Predestination and Free Will in the Intertestamental Literature

We will highlight several passages from the intertestamental period that address our question about human free will.[[37]](#footnote-37) On the one hand, writers of that time echo Malachi’s words about God’s relationship with Esau. In *4 Ezra*, we read, “And thou gavest him Isaac, and to Isaac thou gavest Jacob and Esau. And thou didst set apart Jacob for thyself, but Esau thou didst hate; and Jacob became a great host” (*4 Ezra*, 3.16). Similarly, the author of *Jubilees* writes, “For Ishmael and his sons and his brothers and Esau, the Lord did not cause to approach Him, and he chose them not because they are the children of Abraham, because He knew them, but He chose Israel to be His people” (*Jubilees*, 15.30).

On the other hand, Philo sees in this story God’s predestination based on His foreknowledge:

Again, they say that Jacob and Esau, the former being the ruler, and governor, and master, and Esau being the subject and the slave, had their several estates appointed to them while they were still in the world. For God, the creator of all living things, is thoroughly acquainted with all his works, and before he has completely finished them he comprehends the faculties with which they will hereafter be endowed, and altogether he foreknows all their actions and passions (*Allegorical Interpretation*, 3.88).

The classic passage on human free will of this period is found in *Sirach*, 15.11-20:

Say not: “From God is my transgression,” for that which He hateth made He not. Say not: “(It is) He that made me to stumble,” for there is no need of evil men. Evil and abomination doth the Lord hate, and He doth not let it come nigh to them that fear Him. God created man from the beginning, and placed him in the hand of his Yeṣer. If thou (so) desirest, thou canst keep the commandment, and (it is) wisdom to do His good pleasure. Poured out before thee (are) fire and water, stretch forth thine hand unto that which thou desirest.

### G. Summary

Let us attempt a summary of the Old Testament teaching regarding divine determinism and human free will. First, God sovereignly chose certain individuals and locations to play key roles in His overall plan, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, David, Jerusalem, etc. Yet, we cannot agree that their election was unconditional. In two clear examples, Scripture connects God’s election to specific qualities these individuals had. For example, God “found (Abraham’s) heart faithful before (Him), and made a covenant with him” (Neh 9:7-8), and David was “a man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; cf. 1 Sam 16:7).

Second, the stress in the Old Testament on human responsibility for sin and frequent calls to repentance, testify to human freedom. A just God would not condemn someone for sinful acts He Himself compelled them to do, or to require repentance of those who had no ability to freely respond. The biblical text also records many instances where people appeared to turn to God, or turn away from Him, of their own volition.

Nonetheless, the Old Testament testifies of universal human sinfulness to the point that Moses could even predict Israel’s future apostasy. The psalmist confirms, “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Ps 13:3). Nevertheless, some Old Testament figures served the Lord faithfully (though not perfectly) in their time. Thus, the Old Testament supports the idea of universal human sinfulness (everyone sins), but not total human depravity (not everyone sins all the time).

In the light of the fact of universal human sinfulness, it does not surprise us that the Old Testament teaches that people need the Lord’s help to be obedient. The new covenant will introduce a “new heart” (Ezek 36:26-27), the “law written on the heart” (Jer 31:33), and a “circumcision of the heart” (Deut 30:6), which will cause God’s people to become an obedient people. Ezekiel even prophesied that this inner renewal will guarantee obedience (Ezek 36:27). While still in the context of the old covenant, God sometimes moved on individual’s hearts to prompt a decision and produce a response in line with His plan.

On the other hand, the Bible records not a few instances where God hardened people’s hearts in disobedience. Yet, as noted in our discussion above, He simply intensified their own personal evil intention by “giving them over to it.” So then, the Lord did not motivate people to do evil, but rather enforced their own hostile intentions toward Him or His people in order to prepare them for judgment. In many cases, God used the evil acts of people to advance His plan. Nevertheless, we see no indication in the biblical text that such choices were made under divine compulsion. God simply took advantage of the situation to further His good will.

In surveying divine determination in the Old Testament, one should keep in mind Boyd’s suggestion that in the polytheistic milieu of the Ancient Near East, it was necessary to present Yahweh as “*bringing about* events he *merely allows* with a divine purpose.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Boyd continues his thought:

This way of speaking was in keeping with their conception of Yahweh as an ancient Near Eastern monarch and served to emphasize, over and against the polytheism of surrounding cultures, that the one and only Creator takes responsibility (though never the moral culpability) for all that come to pass in His creation.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In summary, we come to the following conclusions. God created humans with free will, from whom He expected obedience, and whom He justly punished for disobedience. However, people have an inherent tendency to sin, which limits their ability to do good. If people stubbornly persist in rebellion, God may harden that intention of their hearts with the result that they become fixed in their pursuit. Yet, for His faithful ones, the Lord has prepared a new covenant providing a new heart, in virtue of which obedience becomes possible and even guaranteed. Even in Old Testament times, God occasionally moved in such a way on human hearts to secure their cooperation. In addition, God exercises His sovereignty in choosing certain people to play key roles in His plan. However, He does not do this unconditionally, but based on His knowing their character beforehand.

In closing, two clarifications are in order. The bondage to sin in which all people are trapped does not eliminate the freedom of their will. Sin is not some outside force coercing the will of individuals to impel them to make wrong decisions. Sin is incorporated into the very fiber of human nature, so that people, being evil by nature, choose to sin of their own volition. Thus, God is perfectly just in punishing humans, sinful by nature, for doing sinful acts. In the same way, the guarantee of obedience provided in the new covenant does not rob humans of freedom either. As in the case of sin, the “new heart” is not an outside force impinging on the human will, but rather the essential person himself/herself. The obedience such a person renders is truly genuine and free.

## God’s Sovereignty and Human Freedom: New Testament

### А. Predestination and Free Will in the Synoptic Gospels

In this section, we will discover our Lord Jesus’ teaching concerning divine determinism and human freedom contained in the Synoptic Gospels. As in the Old Testament, the Gospels echo a call to follow God. Along with a call to discipleship is a summons to repentance. Both Jesus and John the Baptism began their ministries with the announcement: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17). A call or summons is an appeal to the will and implies a free response to it. Correspondingly, some responded to the call (see Mk 1:17), while others did not (see Mk 10:21).

Nonetheless, the Synoptic Gospels contain references to God’s election. Although “many are called,” “few are chosen” (Matt 22:14). The days of the Great Tribulation are shortened “for the sake of the elect” (Matt 24:22), whom the Antichrist could not mislead (Matt 24:24), and whom the angels will gather at the return of Christ (Matt 24:31).

How do God’s elect differ from other people? Matthew 11:25-26 (parallel Lk 10:21-24) will prove insightful here: “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from {the} wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.” Before saying this, Jesus reproved the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for rejecting Him. Jesus explained that not all are able to receive His revelation, since the Father grants this understanding to those whom He wills. He has “hidden these things from {the} wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Most likely, “these things” refers to the understanding of who Christ is and what He came to do.

So then, the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum we unable to appreciate the person and mission of Christ because the Father had not granted them that revelation. This presents the difficulty of why God withheld this understanding from them. Two answers are proposed. First, Jesus began His prayer to the Father with the words, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” which emphasize His sovereignty. Jesus follows with the words, “You have hidden these things from {the} wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants… for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.” The sovereign God has the full right and privilege to reveal truth to those to whom He is pleased to do so.[[41]](#footnote-41)

On the other hand, God’s election here is not unconditional. The Father hides these things “from {the} wise and intelligent” and reveals them “to infants.” Receiving His revelation depends on the spiritual condition of its recipients. The word “infants” is clearly a metaphor for simple, humble people. The words “wise and intelligent” contrast with “infants” and refer to proud and self-reliant persons. Jesus is not condemning wisdom and knowledge, since the Bible speaks positively of them (see Proverbs). The Bible does condemn, however, pride and conceit, which often accompany the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Therefore, this passage touches on two aspects of God’s providence. On the one hand, He reveals truth to those He pleases. On the other hand, He pleases to reveal it to those who are simple and humble as infants. Such individuals are more likely to possess an inner predisposition to truth. So then, an inner predisposition to truth exists among those characterized as infants – the humble and lowly. This is the primary prerequisite for receiving revelation from the Lord. Jesus alluded to this dynamic in His Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3).

Next, Matthew 15:13 hints at predestination for salvation. Commenting on the spiritual condition of the Pharisees, Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted.” Predestination based on foreknowledge, though, is not ruled out here. The “plants, planted by the Father” could be those He foreknew would respond to Jesus.

Morris suggests that the word “plants” refers not to the false teachers (i.e., the Pharisees), but to their false teaching. In this case, the Father uproots the teaching that He did not establish.[[43]](#footnote-43) Blomberg, however, reminds us that the image of a “plant” is likely taken from Matthew 13:29 or Isaiah 60:21.[[44]](#footnote-44) In these texts, “plants” refers to people.

The Synoptics also affirm universal human sinfulness. Jesus declared to a certain ruler, “No one is good except God alone” (Lk 18:19). Jesus also called all peoples “evil” (Matt 7:11) and claimed that all need repentance (Lk 13:3). Yet, we marvel that the Synoptics offer little promise of God’s help for living a moral life, except for the promise of the Spirit to those who ask for Him (Lk 11:13).

In summary, the Synoptic Gospels stress Jesus’ call to repentance and discipleship. Little is said about how one attains these goals. It seems that, even though people are by nature evil, their response to the Lord depends on themselves. We also encounter in the Synoptics brief mentions of God election. According to Matthew 11:25-26, though, His election is not unconditional, but based on the humility and openness of His chosen ones.

### B. Predestination and Free Will in Acts

The main theme of the Book of Acts is preaching the gospel to the whole world, beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). In light of the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, is seems that He desires salvation for all. Paul, standing before King Agrippa, expresses the desire “that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26:29).

However, in Acts we encounter references to predestination for salvation as well. It sometimes seems that, although the gospel is preached to all, God determines who will respond to the call for salvation. Concerning the ministry in Antioch, we read, “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). On the other hand, the expression “the hand of the Lord was with them” may refer not to God’s predestining some for salvation, but the working of signs and miracles to confirm the good news, leading to mass conversions. According to Polhill, this expression means that “’the hand’ of the Lord, that is, his power and Spirit, was with them.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Peterson connects this verse with the prayer of the disciples in Acts 4;30: “…while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

Acts 13:48 presents us with a more direct reference to predestination. In Pisidian Antioch, Paul’s preaching prompted the following reaction: “When the Gentiles heard this, they {began} rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” The word “appointed” is τεταγμένοι (*tetagmenoi*). This verb is in the passive, Greek “perfect” tense, which describes an action in the past that has continuing effect in the present. The verb’s root is τάσσω (*tasso*), meaning “arrange.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Accordingly, God “arranged” in the past that when these individuals heard the gospel, they would believe.

Polhill sees in this instance a synergy between God’s Spirit and the new converts. The Spirit of God “was moving in them, convicting them, appointing them for life,” but the people themselves responded.[[48]](#footnote-48) Peterson also stresses God’s contribution:

Luke draws attention to the way in which God uses the gospel to call out his elect and to save them…. Not everyone is affected in the same way by the preaching of the gospel. God must open hearts, to enable people to listen and respond with faith.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Curiously, in the immediate context, divine determination did not determine the response of the hearers in Iconium, but rather the quality of preaching: “In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks” (Acts 14:1). Here, it seems that people believed not because God predestined them for salvation, but because Paul and Barnabas preached well, that is, they persuaded them.

We might compare this instance with the narrative of Matthew 11:21, where it is claimed that if the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had seen the miracles Jesus performed, they would have repented. So then, under different circumstances the outcome might have been different.[[50]](#footnote-50) It seems that, just in Acts 14:1, their response to the Word depended on the quality of the ministry they received.

Acts 9:32-42 records a similar case, where God, through Peter, does two great miracles: a healing of a cripple and a resurrection from the dead. In connection with these works of power, “many believed in the Lord.” We may assume that without these miracles, people would not have turned to the Lord, at least not at that time. Again, the quality of the ministry has an effect on the response to the gospel.

We also note that in the same context, we learn that those in Pisidian Antioch who rejected the Word did so by their own volition. Therefore, Paul announces the following verdict: “…you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life” (Acts 13:46).[[51]](#footnote-51)

In Acts 16, we discover an example of God’s direct influence on an individual leading to conversion. In Philippi, during Paul’s preaching, “a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). The word “opened,” διανοίγω (*dianoigo*), was used previously by Luke in his Gospel (Lk 24:31), when Jesus opened the physical eyes of those accompanying Him on the road to Emmaus so that they recognized Him, and in Luke 24:45, when He opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures.[[52]](#footnote-52) Therefore, in Acts 16:14, Luke again employs this term in relation to aiding someone’s spiritual perception.

Lydia’s reaction to the Spirit’s work in her heart is described by the verb προσέχω (*proseho*), i.e., “to respond.” The basic meanings of this word are: (1) to be concerned about, (2) to pay attention to, and (3) to devote oneself to.[[53]](#footnote-53) Peterson observes that Lydia heard Paul’s preaching before God opened her heart, but she responded in faith only after the Spirit’s move.

Looking at this situation from a different perspective, we may posit that God opened Lydia’s heart not “while” she was listening to Paul, but “because” she was listening to him. It is significant that the word “listening” (ἤκουσεν - *eikousen*) is in the Greek imperfect tense, which indicates continual action in the past. This means that she was listening to Paul for some time before God opened her heart. We also read that she was “a worshiper of God” and was at a “place of prayer.” Therefore, she was already positively disposed to the Lord.

Can we conclude that the Spirit’s action on her heart was not the result of God’s unconditional election, but due to her devotion to the Lord? Polhill notes a commonality between what occurred here and the case with Cornelius (see Acts 10). He writes, “As he had with Cornelius, God responded to her faith and ‘opened her heart’ to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul proclaimed.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

We will next examine Acts 18:10. During a time when Paul was especially stressed in his ministry, God assured him about his future success in Corinth with the words “I have many people in this city.” This statement could indicate that God had predestined many in Corinth for salvation, or that according to His foreknowledge, He knew that many would receive the gospel.

Aside from passages indicating God’s involvement in people’s conversion, Acts 4:27-28 relates God’s “participation” in an evil deed – the crucifixion of His Son: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”[[55]](#footnote-55) A comparison to Acts 2:23 will prove helpful here: “This {Man,} delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death.” Here we see that God’s “predetermined plan” was associated with His foreknowledge. This means that God did not incite Herod and Pilate to crucify Jesus, but merely foreknew their actions and included them in His plan.

In summary, although the book of Acts advances the idea that the gospel should go to the entire world, in certain cases we discover that God predestined those who respond to it. Most of these cases, though, can be explained by appealing to predestination based on foreknowledge, with the notable exception of Acts 13:48, where it is written, “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” However, if the example with Lydia illustrates God’s work of election, it is possible to suggest that He chooses those who have an inner disposition to embracing the truth.

### C. Predestination and Free Will in the General Epistles

The following biblical passage is key for understanding divine determination and human free will in receiving salvation – 1 Pet 1:1-2.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

The key elements of the passage are as follows. First, God chooses His elect “according to His foreknowledge.” Second, the means by which God brings them to Christ is by “the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” Third, the goal of election is “to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.”

According to Peter, the Holy Spirit draws people to Christ. The term “sanctification” is ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*), having a basic meaning “separation.” Thus, the Spirit “separates” people unto God, that is, draws them to salvation. Yet, God’s election for salvation is not unconditional, but derives from His foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις - *prognosis*).

It will interest us to learn how the term πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) and its related verb form προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) are used in the New Testament. In Acts 26:5, προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) means “known for a long time,” and refers to the Jews’ knowing Paul’s former way of life. In 2 Peter 3:17, the word refers to simply knowing the future and refers to the anticipation of a coming apostasy.

At the same time, the word can suggest “appointment” or “predestination.” In 1 Peter 1:20, for example, Jesus was “was foreknown (προγινώσκω) before the foundation of the world.” In addition, Romans 11:2 states, “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew (προγινώσκω).” Some feel that the words πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) and προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) are synonyms for “predestination.” They affirm that “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are the same divine actions.

Dunn, for example, employs several Old Testament texts to show that “knowledge” (in Hebrew יָדַע, *yadah*) can connote the sense “appointment.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

- For I have chosen (יָדַע = “knew”) him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh (Gen 18:19)

- Before I formed you in the womb I knew (יָדַע) you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:5)

- I cared (יָדַע) for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought (Hos 13:5)

- You only have I chosen (יָדַע) among all the families of the earth (Amos 3:2)

On the other hand, in other places πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) and προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) cannot mean “election.” In Romans 8:29 and Acts 2:23, another term clearly denoting election stands alongside πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) or προγινώσκω (*proginosko*):

- For those whom He foreknew (προγινώσκω), He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29).

- This {Man,} delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις) of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death (Acts 2:23)

In these texts, we cannot ascribe the meaning “election” to πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) or προγινώσκω (*proginosko*), since that idea is already expressed by another term. It is vital to note that Romans 8:29 specifically indicates that in relation to salvation, God’s foreknowledge differs from His work of predestination. They are separate works. 1 Peter 1:1-2 teaches the same.

Thus, the New Testament usage of “foreknow” does not confirm Dunn’s assumption that the New Testament writers borrowed Old Testament terminology for “know” including its connotation of “election.” We must conclude, rather, that the Old Testament expresses both concepts of “foreknowledge” and “predestination” in one term, יָדַע (*yada*). In other words, the Old Testament examples cited above refer both to election and to the foreknowledge on which it is based.

We can assert the same regarding 1 Peter 1:20 and Romans 11:2, where the single term προγινώσκω (*proginosko*) combines both concepts: predestination and the foreknowledge from which it is derived. Most likely, these verses are following the Old Testament precedence of combining both concepts into one. In distinction from this, however, Romans 8:29, 1 Peter 1:1-2, and Acts 2:23 make clear that predestination and foreknowledge fundamentally differ from one another. The first indicates God’s action, while the second reveals the basis for that action.

Another key verse appears later in Peter’s first epistle:

For {this} is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner {stone,} and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner {stone,}” and, “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this {doom} they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for {God's} own possession (1 Pet 2:6-9).

Here, believers are called “the chosen.” Yet, we object to assigning to this term the full weight of “predestination to salvation.” Peter’s goal here was not to teach God’s predestination of believers, but to compare God’s Old Testament people with believers in Christ. The Church now enjoys the status that Israel did and possesses the same titles that they did, including the “chosen people.”

What does Peter mean, though, when he writes that unbelievers were “appointed” to disbelief? The Greek here reads, οἳ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν. The word “appointed” translates τίθημι (*titheimi*), which literally denotes “put, set, lay” or in a derived sense, “appoint.” The same word appears in the beginning of verse six, where it is translated “lay.”

It is worth noting that the conditional clause, “to this {doom} they were also appointed,” is introduced by a relative pronoun of the neuter gender and singular number: εἰς ὃ (“to this”). Thus, its antecedent is not a single word in the previous clause, but the clause in its entirety. The main verb in that previous clause is προσκόπτουσιν (*proskoptousin*), “stumble.” The word ἀπειθοῦντες (*apeithountes*), “disobedient,” is a participle modifying the main verb. Consequently, the words “to this” refers not to “disobedience,” but to “stumble.” So then, unbelievers are not appointed to “disobedience,” but are appointed to suffer the consequences of that disobedience, that is, “to stumble” over the “rock of offense.” The New American Standard translation, employed above, reflects these considerations in its translation, “to this {doom} they were also appointed.”

Michaels adds the observation that the word “stumble” refers not to the unbelievers’ rejection of the gospel, but to the consequence of doing so. Therefore, the “stumbling” that the unbelievers are appointed for is not rejecting the gospel, but incurring the consequence of doing so. In other words, God has not appointed certain people to reject the gospel, but has determined the consequences that will ensue if they do. This produces a parallel between the believers’ and unbelievers’ experience – the former “will not be disappointed” (v. 6), while the latter “stumble” (v. 8).[[57]](#footnote-57)

Several features of Peter’s second epistle favors the doctrine of genuine human free will. In 2 Peter 2:1, we learn that Jesus died for false teachers as well: “There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.” If Jesus died for all people, then it logically follows that His will is for all to be saved. Peter directly states, in fact, the Lord is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

So then, salvation is sincerely offered to all people. If some do not receive it, logic compels us to attribute that to human freedom of choice. If only the elect can receive salvation, then God, who offers eternal life to all, enables only some to receive it. The inconsistency is blatant.

Finally, in 2 Peter 2:20-22, Peter reveals that believers can abandon their faith:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, {returns} to wallowing in the mire.”

The former condition of the backslider is described as having “escaped the defilements of the world,” having “known the way of righteousness,” and having “washed.” These items can only refer to a true convert to Christ. According to the doctrine of predestination, God will keep the elect faithful to the end. Backsliding, however, is an indication of free will in operation.

On the other hand, Jude promises that God will keep His own from backsliding:

- “Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ” (v. 1).

- “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy…” (v. 24-25)

- We can add Peter’s inspired testimony: “…to {obtain} an inheritance {which is} imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:4-5).

At the same time, it would be incorrect to assume that Jude denied the possibility of a believer’s backsliding. The main thrust of his epistle is to warn the church about the influence of false brethren, who might mislead true Christians. Jude is not trying to exclude the possibility of apostasy, but rather to assure believers that in the face of pressures to compromise, God is able to keep them. Yet, the human factor also plays a role: “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21).

Jude also reveals that these false brethren “were long ago marked out for this condemnation” (v. 4). The Greek word for “marked out” is προγράφω (*prographo*). This term could have three possible meanings in this context.[[58]](#footnote-58) First, it could indicate that the condemnation of these false brethren was marked down in heaven from before creation. Yet, the recording of their future condemnation does not force the conclusion that God predestined them for it – it could simply be a foreknown fact. Second, Jude may mean that previous Christian writers have already predicted their judgment.

Third, the meaning could be that Old Testament prophets foresaw their intrusion into the people of God. Davids and Bauckham prefer this option for the following reasons. The adverb πάλαι (*palai*), “long ago,” does not align with the proposal that earlier Christian writers are in view.[[59]](#footnote-59) In addition, in his epistle, Jude frequently cites Old Testament and intertestamental sources to confirm his teachings.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The epistle of James is remarkable for the following features. On the one hand, he writes, “Did not God choose the poor of this world {to be} rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (Jam 2:5). Here, it seems God is inclined to predestine the poor for salvation. On the other hand, James did not state that God chose the poor *exclusively*, but rather that they are not *excepted* from the kingdom. James is seeking to correct any tendency in the Church to discriminate against the poor (see chp. 2). If God has chosen the poor, then the Church must not exclude them.

 Moreover, many proponents of unconditional predestination insist that the Lord determines all human choices, even evil ones. Yet, James directly contradicts this claim: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone” (Jam 1:13). Later, he explains, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jam 1:17). Therefore, sin originates in the human free will.

Moving on to the epistle to the Hebrews, verse 15 of chapter 9 stands out: “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were {committed} under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Who are the “called?” Hebrews 3:1 answers our inquiry: “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling….”[[61]](#footnote-61) From this verse, one may conclude that God has called people to salvation, and that believers in this congregation have become partakers of that calling. How they entered into that status, though, is not detailed. Was it by God’s work of unconditional predestination, or the result of their free choice? Therefore, the expression “those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” does not enlighten us as to the role of divine determination or human choice in attaining salvation.

In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is called the “author and finisher of our faith,” thus stressing the role of the Son of God in preserving the believer in faith. Nonetheless, we do not want to exclude the human factor here. The entire epistle is devoted to the theme of preventing apostasy, more specifically, to prevent Jewish Christians from returning to Judaism. This reveals that the epistle’s author recognizes the human element in preserving faith, otherwise there would be no sense in imploring believers to remain true to Christ.

The epistle to the Hebrews contains specific warnings about backsliding. In Hebrews 10:26-27, we read that those who “received the knowledge of the truth” can subsequently fall into willful sin. The most well known of such warnings is Hebrews 6:4-6:

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and {then} have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

We can confirm that the term “who have once been enlightened,” i.e., (φωτισθέντας – *photithentas*) applies to believers in Christ. The same word in found in Hebrews 10:32 where it unquestionably refers to Christians. In addition, the word “partakers” (μετόχους - *metohous*) here also refers to believers, as in Hebrews 3:1 (believers are “partakers of a heavenly calling”) and in Hebrews 3:14 (they are “partakers of Christ”). The reference in Hebrews 6:5 to those who have “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” is again of true believers who might still “fall away.” The same verb, γεύομαι (*geuomai* – “tasted”) is used to describe the reality of Christ’s “tasting” death (Heb 2:9).

We can summarize the contribution of the General Epistles as follows. This literature acknowledges God’s work of predestination to salvation, but bases that work on God’s foreknowledge, apparently of people’s openness to Him. False brethren will arise, but not by God’s direction. Unbelievers are appointed not to reject the gospel, but to suffer the consequences of such a rejection. God’s will is to save all persons – Jesus died for all, even false teachers. Although the Lord is able to keep believers faithful to the end, the apostles nonetheless warn of the dangers of backsliding. Finally, it is misguided to assert that God causes people to commit sins: “For God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

### D. Predestination and Free Will in Paul’s Writings

What does the apostle Paul have to say about divine determinism and free human choice? We can start with the general observation that Paul, even more than other Scripture writers, employs argumentation to convince his readers of the truth of his positions. Such an appeal to reason corresponds to the claim that people have free will to respond to logic and evidence. In addition, Paul allows that believers might indeed fall from faith and so painstakingly exhorts and encourages them.

Characteristic of Paul’s teaching is that humans are by nature sinners (Rom 3:9-23; Eph 2:1-3). Although the Old Testament does not specifically teach inherited depravity from Adam, Paul insists on this truth (Rom 5:12-19). Consequently, sinful humans will use their freedom to make sinful choices. It becomes plain, then, that if people are slaves to sin (Rom 6:6-22), God’s grace must be an element in their conversion.

We will turn our attention to those passages that seem to indict Paul in teaching determinism. In Paul’s first epistle, addressed to the churches in Galatia, he claims that God’s plan for his life began even before his physical birth – God set him apart from his “mother's womb” (Gal 1:15). This statement, however, could support either unconditional election, or election based on foreknowledge.

A more substantial saying is found in Galatians 4:9, where Paul claims that the saints know God in virtue of the fact that they are “known by God.” We encounter a similar thought in 1 Corinthians 8:3: “If anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” Many regard that Galatians 4:9 speaks of God taking the initiative in bringing people to Himself.[[62]](#footnote-62) Yet, we cannot rule out God’s foreknowledge underlying His election here, especially when the word “know” is employed.

Paul’s next letters were written to the church of the Thessalonians. When Paul reflects on the success of His ministry among them, he attributes the power that accompanied his ministry to the fact that these individuals were the elect of God.[[63]](#footnote-63) We read, “…knowing, brethren beloved by God, {His} choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thes 1:4-5).[[64]](#footnote-64) Yet again, the basis for God’s choice is not detailed.

Paul also penned the words, “God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5:9). Green, citing BAGD, comments that the verb τίθημι (*titheimi*, “destined”) means “to destine or appoint someone to or for something,” as in Romans 4:17; 9:33; 1 Corinthians 12:18, 28; and 1 Timothy 1:12.[[65]](#footnote-65) Wanamaker takes these verses as support not only for predestination to salvation, but to condemnation as well.[[66]](#footnote-66) Contrary to Wanamaker, though, only predestination to salvation is asserted. The fact that God has not “destined us for wrath” does not imply that He does so toward unbelievers.

Paul’s goal here is to assure the believers of their glorious inheritance. In contrasting the saved with the lost, Paul is not teaching that the Lord appointed only certain people to become believers in Christ, but that believers *as such* are not appointed to wrath, but to salvation. Paul does not comment, though, on *how* a person becomes a believer – by God’s predestination or by free choice.

Our final passage for discussion in this epistle is 1 Thessalonians 5:24. Here, the Lord promises to complete the work of sanctification in the believer. Paul raises this topic in other passages as well (see Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 1:12; Rom 14:24). Yet, God’s faithfulness in accomplishing the Christian’s sanctification does not necessarily guarantee that the believer, from their side, will continue in the faith. In spite of the Spirit’s sanctifying influence, a person may still resist Him (see 1 Thes 5:19; Eph 4:30). Therefore, Paul exhorts believers to remain in the faith (Col 1:22-23; 1 Cor 10:12).

In Paul’s Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, we turn our attention to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-13:

…and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Here, those who reject the gospel are contrasted with those who accept it.[[67]](#footnote-67) Correspondingly, Green counsels us to understand Paul’s “thanksgiving for those who responded to the gospel… in light of the rejection of the call to salvation by others.”[[68]](#footnote-68) The latter “did not receive the love of the truth.” For this reason, “God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false” and subsequently go on to judgment. We have already discovered from previously studied passages, though, that God may hardened the hearts of those stubbornly resisting Him. Again, the unbeliever is initiating the rejection, and the Lord is merely intensifying their own personal intention.

Therefore, it would be misguided to see in the passage a claim to predestination to condemnation. Martin correctly states, “There is no direct statement in the New Testament to the effect that the option of salvation is unavailable to certain persons or that God has chosen some for damnation.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

In verse 13, however, Paul does claim that God takes the initiative to save people: “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.” Yet, God’s election does not violate human free will. On the one hand, the Spirit “sanctifies” (i.e., “separates”) a person to God, while on the other hand, the person exercises “faith in the truth.” Therefore, God’s work of election includes both a divine and a human factor.

We must also consider that Paul uses an atypical term here for “chosen.” Instead of the usual word for election, i.e., ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*), we encounter the word αἱρέω (*aireo*), which in other contexts reflects not God’s election of people, but human choice between alternatives (see Phil 1:22; Heb 11:25).[[70]](#footnote-70) Consequently, this term has a connotation of “preference”[[71]](#footnote-71), which weakens the claim that God’s election is unconditional. Reasons exist as to why God’s chooses His own.

The final passage for our consideration in the Thessalonian correspondence is 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5, where Paul is assuring the church of God’s protection and support:

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil {one.} We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will {continue to} do what we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

Does Paul promise here that all believers in Jesus will successfully complete their spiritual pilgrimage? On the one hand, God is truly faithful to strengthen and protect His own. If someone, however, steps away from Him, the Lord is not to blame. Commentators note that not all members of that congregation were leading a conscientious Christian lifestyle (see v. 6-12).[[72]](#footnote-72) Possibly, Paul is speaking more generally of God’s action in the church than of each separate individual.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Therefore, when Paul writes, “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will {continue to} do what we command,” he is pursuing two goals. First, he is emphasizing that success in Christian living depends not on human striving, but on the grace of Christ.[[74]](#footnote-74) Second, Paul uses the expression “we have confidence in the Lord concerning you” not so much as a guarantee of spiritual success, as much as a means to stir up the church to obedience. Such a motivation technique was employed in the literature of that time (also see Gal 5:10; Philemon 21; 2 Cor 2:3).[[75]](#footnote-75) In addition, Wanamaker notes a parallel with 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, where Paul begins the passage with mention of God’s election of the Church, then concludes it with a call to corresponding obedience.[[76]](#footnote-76) Therefore, success in Christian living in not only in God’s hands, but involves human volition as well.

Next in chronological order of Paul’s epistles in his Corinthian correspondence. We quote 1 Corinthians 1:28-31:

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Immediately, we note the similarity with Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:25-27, which we discussed earlier. In both passages, the Lord chooses simple people to receive special blessing. Paul expounds on Jesus’ teaching here. God’s goal in election is to humble human pride, so that “him who boasts, boasts in the Lord.” Again, God’s election is not unconditional. He seeks out humble hearts and finds them mainly among the poor and despised of the world.

Carson comments that this has been God’s agenda from the beginning. God chose Israel not “because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples” (Deut 7:7). Genesis enlightens us that God “consistently bypasses the firstborn,” and throughout the Bible, we see that “God chooses the most unlikely figures.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

God desires that people would live in dependence on Him. This is why “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus.” The phrase “by His doing” does not have to point toward predestination of just certain individuals to be in Christ, but rather implies that God took the initiative to include all of humanity in a relationship of “corporate solidarity” with Christ, from which believers now benefit. Since the Lord is not obliged to offer grace to anyone, only “by His doing,” that is, only by His gracious deposition toward us, do we have access to blessing in Christ.

Without doubt, the most hotly debated passage on the doctrine of predestination is found in Romans 9:10-24). In this context, Paul’s aim is to explain why God’s elect, Old Testament people failed to inherit the promise of salvation given to them. In discussing this question, Paul touches on the issue of God’s election and predestination.

Israel at that time relied on their physical descent from Abraham and their personal adherence to the Law for receiving salvation. Appealing to the Old Testament, though, Paul shows that not all descendants of Abraham are included in God’s people (e.g., Ishmael), and that good works do not determine inclusion in the inheritance (e.g., Jacob and Esau).[[78]](#footnote-78) All is determined by ἡ κατʼ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ, i.е., “God's purpose according to {His} choice.” Thus, it appears that God’s election is unconditional, i.e., not dependent on any human factors.

Nonetheless, we can still defend here the doctrine of predestination based on foreknowledge without any compromise to God’s absolute sovereignty. Although God foresaw and foreknew the character of Esau and Jacob, their future character and behavior *in no way* compelled Him to choose one and not the other. God’s election is based solely on His sovereign choice. Our assertion that He will choose those whose character pleases Him does not mean that He *must* so choose. God remains sovereign in His election, although He does take into consideration His foreknowledge.

Further on, Paul introduces the instance with Moses and Pharaoh. He quotes God saying, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,” to demonstrate that God’s basic aim is to show mercy (see 11:32), even if it involves hardening someone.[[79]](#footnote-79) Pharaoh here represents Israel, whom God temporarily hardened so that the gospel would go the Gentiles (Rom 11:7-11, 25).[[80]](#footnote-80) Through Pharaoh’s hardening, Yahweh’s power and name would be known worldwide (Rom 9:17), while through Israel’s hardening, the whole world would have access to the gospel (Rom 11:7-11).

Later in this same epistle, Paul argues that Israel itself in to blame for their unbelief – they rejected the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3).[[81]](#footnote-81) The same can be said for Pharaoh, who hardened his heart before God did. In summary, Morris writes, “Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself.”[[82]](#footnote-82) In chapter 1 of Romans, Paul already declared that God “gives over” the disobedient to their own desires (Rom 1:24-28).

Although Paul’s mail goal in this passage is to explain Israel’s failure, he nonetheless expands his discussion in verses 22-24, where he compares believers and unbelievers under the figures of “vessels of mercy” and “vessels of wrath.” Commentators point out a difference between how these groups are described. The “vessels of wrath” are “prepared (κατηρτισμένα – *kateirtismena*) for destruction,” while God prepared (προητοίμασεν – *proeitoimasen*) the “vessels of mercy” for glory.

Here, we note the use of different verbs: κατηρτισμένα (*kateirtismena*) and προητοίμασεν (*proeitoimasen*). Because of this, Dunn feels that God’s “preparatory” work is different for the two groups.[[83]](#footnote-83) Morris notes that the first verb is in the passive tense. Thus, we are not told who prepared these vessels for destruction. The second verb is in the active tense, the subject of which is God, who prepared the vessels of mercy.[[84]](#footnote-84) Dunn concludes that both God and the unbeliever participate in this process of preparation for destruction, while Morris feels that the unbeliever alone is responsible for their pitiful condition.

Finally, Morris also comments that Paul does not say that the vessels prepared for wrath actually perish.[[85]](#footnote-85) Might we propose that through personal repentance they might become “vessels of mercy” as well? (see Rom 2:4).

We will turn our attention next to Romans 8:29-30: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”

Immediately we note the combination “foreknew” (προγινώσκω – *proginosko*) and “predestined” (προορίζω – *prooridzo*). We recall our previous discussion of the term προγινώσκω (*proginosko*), that it refers not to predestination, but to knowledge of the future. This conclusion finds confirmation in that a separate word is used for predestination – προορίζω (*prooridzo*), which means “decide upon beforehand, *predetermine*.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Morris, who adopts a Calvinistic view of this verse, nonetheless admits, “We must be on our guard against making the two say the same thing.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

Unlike Morris, the Calvinist Dunn insists that the two terms repeat the same idea: “Since προέγνω has such a full sense, the προώρισεν adds little to the meaning.”[[88]](#footnote-88) For Dunn, both terms denote predetermination. Contrary to Dunn, however, we point out that in the enumeration of God’s salvation plan provided by Paul here (i.e., foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified), each term designates a concrete step in this process. So then, “foreknown” must differ from “predestined” in meaning as well as indicate the basis for which God chooses His elect.

Mounce expresses concern that if God predestines on the basis of foreknowledge, “this would mean that in election God would not be sovereign; he would be dependent upon what he would see happening in the future.”[[89]](#footnote-89) Mounce fails to consider, though, that God’s knowledge of the future does not oblige Him to make any certain choice. The fact that He knows ahead of time who will be open to Him and who will not, does not require Him to choose the former and not the latter. In spite of the fact that His election is indeed conditional, it remains nonetheless sovereign and free.

We move on to Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. In chapter 1, he speaks in general terms about God’s redemptive plan. In verses 3-12, he speaks several times about God’s “kind intention” (πρόθεσιν - *prothesin*) or “will” (θέλημα - *theleima*). Verse 10 details God’s plan: “…the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.” Correspondingly, all of the Lord’s blessings come through Christ and in Him, including election: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).

It is important to note that verse 4 is connected to the previous verse by the word καθώς (*kathos*), which means “just as.”[[90]](#footnote-90) Therefore, just as “every spiritual blessing” is “in Christ,” believers are elected in the same way, i.e. “in Him.” This leaves the impression that God does not choose individuals, but Christ. He is God’s Chosen together with those who are in Him by faith.

Verse 5 further clarifies this point. God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” God’s predestination, then, is to adopt as sons those who are in Christ. The same thought is repeated in verses 10-11: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose…,” that is, God predestined that those who are in Christ would receive the inheritance.

On the other hand, Lincoln proposes that the phrase “before the foundation of the world” (v. 4) indicates that God’s election “was provoked not by historical contingency or human merit, but solely by God’s sovereign grace.”[[91]](#footnote-91) Yet, contrary to Lincoln, the text here does not indicate the reason for God’s election. Paul does not comment on this. One of Paul’s goals in this passage was to highlight the abundance of God’s grace in Christ. Therefore, Paul emphasizes God’s sovereignty in election, that is, what He did from His side to save people. God had no obligation to choose anyone at all. His election is a pure expression of His gracious disposition. Yet, this does not exclude the possibility that in His freedom and sovereignty, God chose those whom He foreknew would be open to Him. Again, Paul’s use of the term προορίζω (*prooridzo*) reminds us of Rom 8:29-30, where God’s predestination derives from His foreknowledge.[[92]](#footnote-92)

The last feature to investigate in this passage is the description of God as the one “who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11). The participle “works” is ἐνεργοῦντος (*energountos*) from the verb ἐνεργέω (*energeo*). It is not stated that God “controls” all things, but that He “works” all things according to His plan. The implication here is that God must apply some energy in order to bring all things in line with His purpose. This is so because He allows people to make their own choices. Yet, human freedom does not hinder the all-wise and almighty God from accomplishing His plan. In order to accomplish it, however, He must work, i.e., apply “energy.” This interpretation of Ephesians 1:11 coincides with Paul’s words in Rom 8:28: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose.” Here, the text again teaches that God transforms into blessing not only the good that He does, but also the evil that comes from Satan and wrong human choices (see v. 35).

Another key passage is Philippians 2:12-13: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure.” Here we must recognize both the divine and human factors. God is at work “to will and to work for His good pleasure,” yet the Philippians must “work out your salvation.” There is no compulsion by God, but a cooperation between God and His people. God supplies the grace to obey, and we respond to that grace.

Paul’s final writings are his Pastoral Epistles. In them, he makes the straightforward claim that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). This teaching directly contradicts the Calvinist claim that God appoints only certain individuals for salvation.

On the other hand, in 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul describes God as the one “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” Do the terms “calling” and “purpose” imply predestination?

First of all, we must define when God “saved” and “called” believers. If God’s “calling” should be equated with His predestining for salvation, then we would expect it to precede the word “saved,” as in Romans 8:29: “…these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified.” Since God “saved” before He “called,” however, we assert that Paul is referring to the subjective experience of salvation followed by His “calling” believers to sanctification. To confirm this view, we note that the “calling” is modified by the adjective “holy.”

How are we to understanding Paul’s reference to God’s “own purpose?” How is salvation and the call to holiness related to God’s purpose? The word translated “purpose” is πρόθεσις (*prothesis*). It is used in Scripture with various shades of meaning. Sometimes it refers to a decision someone makes and therefore indicates volition or choice (see Eph 1:9, 11; Acts 11:23; Rom 9:11). More frequently, though, it refers to a goal someone has set before themselves (see Rom 1:13; 8:28; 2 Tim 3:10; Acts 27:13; Eph 3:11). Commentators often attribute to the word πρόθεσις (*prothesis*) the sense “choice” and see it as referring to God’s unconditional election of the saved.[[93]](#footnote-93) Yet, the second option coincides better with the context of the passage. In other words, God saved and called us not because of our works, but in accordance with His eternal *plan* of saving people through Christ.

Also notable is that after the word πρόθεσις (*prothesis*), Paul speaks not of predestination, but of “grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus.” The conjunction καὶ (*kai*) between the words πρόθεσιν (*prothesis*), “purpose,” and χάριν (*harin*), “grace,” may explicate the former. We would then paraphrase the verse: He saved us and called us not according to our works (i.e., not as people usually understand the way to salvation), but according to His eternal plan, i.e., by the grace granted to us in Christ from all eternity.

Other passages in the Pastoral Epistles are important to investigate. In 2 Timothy 2:10, Paul writes, “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus {and} with {it} eternal glory.” Thus, Paul’s goal in ministry was to reach God’s elect (сf. Tit 1:1). This resonates with Jesus’ words to him in Corinth, “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10). Knowing that some will accept the gospel encourages the apostle that his evangelistic work will enjoy success. Nevertheless, Paul does not comment on how these individuals became God’s elect, i.e., on what basis – unconditional election or foreknowledge.

Finally, we turn to 2 Timothy 2:19-25. Verse 19 reveals, “The Lord knows those who are His,” which echoes the same thought in Galatians 4:9.[[94]](#footnote-94) In light of our discussion of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29, we can conclude that Paul here employs an Old Testament formula, where the concepts of foreknowledge and predestination are combined. In the Old Testament usage of “to know,” no distinction is made between election and the foreknowledge on which it is based.

Verses 20 and 21, where Paul speaks of vessels for honorable or common use, recalls his word in Romans 9:21 (the same adjectives are used: τιμή - *timei*, and ὰτιμή - *atimei*). Significant here is that Paul urges the vessels of dishonor to become vessels of honor: “If anyone cleanses himself from these {things,} he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.” Morris proposed the same in his interpretation of Romans 9:22-23 above – possibly, God endures “vessels of wrath” with the goal that some of them might become “vessels of mercy.”

In verse 25, Paul counsels Timothy, “…with gentleness correct those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” Here again, God is taking the initiative in bringing people to repentance. Yet, as we saw before, the basis on which God acts is not mentioned – unconditional election or foreknowledge. Also notable is that a positive response by the opposition depends on how Timothy relates to them as well. Timothy must “with gentleness correct those who are in opposition” so that “God may grant them repentance.” So then, repentance depends on both divine and human factors.

In summary, like all authors of Sacred Scripture, Paul appeals to reason and the free will of his audience by offering arguments, exhortations, commands, and the like, expecting an obedient response. He regards only believers as capable of such obedience – unbelievers are still in bondage to sin.

At the same time, Paul stresses God’s work of predestination in regard to the elect. In addition, he assures believers that the Lord will preserve them in faith to the end. Nonetheless, receiving salvation requires human participation as well – one must exercise personal faith in the gospel and remain in Christ. Additionally, election is not unconditional, but derives from God’s foreknowledge, which essentially differs from predestination. The key term, πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*), means knowledge of the future without any nuance of compulsion. In 1 Corinthians 1:28-31, Paul hints at what exactly God foreknew in His elect – humility and openness to Him (сf. Matt 11:25-27).

Although Paul teaches that God does indeed harden the disobedient, he never specifically refers to predestination to condemnation. He desires to save all. He hardens hearts only after the disobedient persist in their rebellion. Yet, even His work of hardening some leads to blessing for others.

### E. Predestination and Free Will in John’s Writings

John devotes much attention to God’s intervention in the conversion and preservation of the believer. In particular, the Father gave certain ones to the Son (Jn 6:37; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24), draws them to Him (Jn 6:44-45, 65), and keeps them in Him to the end (Jn 6:39; 10:28-29; 17:12; 1 Jn 5:18). If people turn away from the Lord, it was because they were never true believers (1 Jn 2:19). Jesus’ sheep know His voice and follow Him (Jn 10:3-5, 8, 14-16, 27). Unbelievers do not know His voice (Jn 10:26). Jesus does not pray for them (Jn 17:9). They do not believe because God has hardened their hearts (Jn 12:37-41).[[95]](#footnote-95)

If we read John’s writing from a different point of view, though, we uncover an entirely different description of God’s relationship with the world. He loves the world and does not judge it, but saves it (Jn 3:16-17). The Son died for all people (1 Jn 2:2; Jn 1:29; 6:51), giving life to the world through His flesh (Jn 6:33). He draws all people to Himself (Jn 12:32) and enlightens every person coming into the world (Jn 1:9). His desire is for the whole world to hear of and believe in Him (Jn 14:31; 17:18, 21, 23). If a person does not remain in Christ, he or she will be rejected (Jn 15:6).[[96]](#footnote-96) Finally, the Gospel of John abounds with invitations to believe in Jesus on the basis of evidences advanced in support (e.g. Jn 5:34-47), which implies that people can be convinced by these proofs and, as a result, believe in Jesus.

How can we reconcile these apparent contradictions in John’s presentation of salvation? We must take into consideration the location of the passages in question in the overall thematic flow of John’s writings. John’s Gospel highlights God’s kind intentions toward the world in general. He enlightens every person coming into the world (Jn 1:9), takes upon Himself the sins of the world (Jn 1:29, сf. 1 Jn 2:2), and was sent not to judge the world, but to save it (Jn 3:16-17). Hence, we discover God’s general disposition to the world – He desires the salvation of all and strives to accomplish it (see Jn 17:18, 21, 23).

However, in chapters 6, 10, and 12, when the Lord encounters opposition and rejection, He explains it by appealing to God’s election. In light of what we said above, it is misguided to think that God’s work of predestination implies that He is indifferent to people’s salvation or reserves salvation only for a select number.

Although the Father did not “give” everyone to the Son and does not draw all people to Him in no way means that He does not desire everyone’s salvation or does not offer it to everyone. Borchert correctly observes that Jesus seeks to convince even those who are not of His sheep that He is Messiah (see Jn 10:38).[[97]](#footnote-97) Unfortunately, John does not inform us why the Father does not draw all to the Son. Even though in John 6:37, Jesus promised that “all that the Father gives me will come to Me,” we must also note that verse 40 creates the impression that anyone may come to Him: “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”[[98]](#footnote-98)

John 12:32 seems to indicate that Jesus does in fact draw all people to Himself: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” Yet, one must consider the context here. Some Greeks just came on the scene, wanting to see the Lord. Therefore, it is quite possible that Jesus meant not that He would draw all people to Himself *without* *exception*, but that He would draw all *without* *discrimination*, i.e., not only Jews, but also Gentiles.[[99]](#footnote-99)

An unlikely explanation of this seeming contradiction in John’s view is that Jesus’ appeal to predestination applies only to the people to whom He was speaking, that is, to the first-century Jews. This proposal contradicts several passages that show that God’s election extends beyond the limits of first-century Palestine. Jesus said, “*All* that the Father gives Me will come to Me” (Jn 6:37), “*No one* can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (Jn 6:44), and “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice” (Jn 10:16).[[100]](#footnote-100)

Most commentators regard this issue as one of God’s mysteries. Somehow, on the one hand, God predestines people for salvation, but on the other hand, people are responsible before God to come to Christ and believe in Him.[[101]](#footnote-101) Although John does not specifically speak of God’s foreknowledge, factoring in this feature eases the tension considerably.

If we assume that John’s readers were already acquainted with the Synoptic Gospels, then the contents of those Gospels may enlighten them as to why God draws only some, but not all, to Christ. As noted earlier, the Father has “hidden these things from {the} wise and intelligent” and has “revealed them to infants” (Matt 11:25). God does not randomly elect those who receive insight into His revelation, but gives it to those humble and open to Him. Possibly, John does not explain this because he was aware that his readers already understood this from reading the Synoptics.

A final passage of interest is Revelation 17:8, where all whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will follow Antichrist. It seems that their destiny was already decided before the world was made. Yet, it does not follow that God predestined them to that behavior. Inclusion in God’s book may reflect His foreknowledge. It is important to note that the phrase in Revelation 13:8, “from the foundation of the world,” can apply also to the sacrifice of the Lamb, which God *foreknew* from eternity past (see 1 Pet 1:20). Also important to note is that God can erase a name form the book of life (Rev 3:5), which contradicts the Calvinistic doctrine of divine preservation of the saints.[[102]](#footnote-102)

In summary, John’s writings present a picture of God’s election, of His desire to save all, and of people’s participation in conversion to and preservation in Christ. A reasonable conclusion would be that God’s work of predestination does not operate contrary to human volition, but by means of His foreknowledge of its free operation. The fact that God loves the world and works toward its salvation excludes the possibility that He is indifferent to people’s redemption.

### F. Summary

The New Testament makes a significant contribution to our understanding of God’s sovereignty and human free will. The New Testament abounds with exhortations to respond to God’s Word, which strongly implies freedom of human choice. However, human depravity has corrupted the human will, so that divine intervention is needed to free us from bondage to sin. Numerous Scriptural passages indicate that God takes the initiative in bringing people to Himself.

These observations create an apparent inconsistency between God’s stated will to save all and His predestining some for salvation. The key to resolving this conflict is to factor in the element of God’s foreknowledge, as stated in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2. Foreknowledge provides the basis for God’s election. The New Testament also hints at what qualities the Lord seeks: humility and openness.

Such a view in no way contradicts God’s sovereignty. The fact that God’s choice derives from foreknowledge of His elect does not mean that God is obligated to choose these, or anyone else. His election is totally sovereign and free.

On the other hand, the Lord not only draws His elect to Himself, but also hardens those who persist in disobedience. Even in this, though, He is often pursuing a redemptive end. The New Testament never teaches predestination to condemnation.

Finally, the New Testament abounds with God’s promises to sanctify believers and keep them in faith until the end. This truth inspires disciples to hold fast to the Lord and rely on His keeping power, and not on their own strength. On the other hand, the New Testament also contains many warnings about backsliding, which remind us that sanctification and preservation require our cooperation as well.

## God’s Sovereignty and Human Freedom: Theological Considerations

In previous chapters, we studied the question of divine determination and human freedom in the light of key biblical passages. In this chapter, we will compare our findings in Scripture with various theological views on the topic that have been voiced in the history of the Church.

Four major views exist: Calvinism, Arminianism, Monism, and the so-called “Openness of God.” The final theory holds that God does not know the future and therefore cannot control or precisely predict what people will do with their freedom – He simply reacts to what they do. We already discussed and refuted this theory in the chapter on God’s omniscience. Therefore, we will investigate only the first three views.

### А. Survey of Views

1. **Calvinism**

According to classic Calvinism, God directly controls all things, including human choices, to accomplish His plan. God predestines who will be saved. He even causes sinful acts to be performed. Humans have no freedom of choice. The following five points, represented by the device TULIP, characterize Calvinism.

***T****otal depravity* means that people are completely sinful. Every thought, desire, intention and choice people make are evil. We can do nothing right in God’s sight, and are not even able to repent without divine aid. In order for someone to come to Christ, God must draw that individual to Himself. Only in the strength of God’s grace can conversion take place.

***U****nconditional election* claims that God chose His elect for salvation independent of any condition, that is, free from all consideration of what this person might become. Election happens purely by God’s good favor. People have no inherent qualities that would prompt God to choose them. This view contrasts with predestination based on foreknowledge, which affirms that God chooses those whom He foresees that they will be open to Him. In Calvinism, however, God’s election is unconditional.

***L****imited atonement* claims that Jesus died only for the elect, not for the entire world. His blood was not shed in vain, that is, for those whom God has not chosen to accept the gospel. Calvinists ask, “If a person will in no case be saved, then why would Jesus’ blood be shed for that individual?” However, not all Calvinists accept this point.

*Irresistible grace* proposes that when the Spirit draws a person to Christ by His grace, that individual cannot resist Him. All whom the Father calls will unfailingly come to Him. His grace is too compelling to resist. A sinner’s conversion, then, is entirely the work of God, not the result of human choice.

***P****reservation* relates to God’s keeping His elect faithful to Him until the end. A true believer will never forsake his or her faith. Curiously, many Baptists accept only this point of Calvinism.

Discussion on the “degree” of predestination also arouses interest. Two options are proposed. *Single predestination* says that God destines some for salvation, but allows the rest to go on to damnation of their own accord. God is active in relation to the saved, but passive toward the lost. Since the latter are in slavery to sin, they will never turn to Him, and God does not interfere with this outcome. *Double* *predestination* claims that the Lord both elects for salvation, and predestines for damnation. Here, God is active in both directions: He draws the elect to Himself, enabling their conversion, and actively repels the lost, hardening their hearts against Him.

Scholars sometimes discuss the “order” of predestination, which involves discerning the order in which God decreed to accomplish His plan. Three views exist: supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism. A famous proponent of supralapsarianism was Theodore Beza (1519-1605). He believed that God’s order was: (1) save the elect, (2) create the world, (3) allow the Fall, (4) provide salvation. In this scheme, God’s first priority was to form a people for Himself.[[103]](#footnote-103)

The founder of infralapsarianism, Francis Turretin (1623-1687), suggested the following order: (1) create the world, (2) allow the Fall, (3) save the elect, (4) provide salvation. In this scheme, God’s first priority was to create the world.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Finally, sublapsarianism consists of the following order of divine decrees: (1) create the world, (2) allow the Fall, (3) provide salvation, (4) save the elect. This is a “softer” form of Calvinism, since God’s act of predestination occupies the last position.

According to Calvinists, why does God predestine (or allow) people to be lost? The answer is connected to the “theological center” of Calvinistic thought. In this school, the central feature of the Lord’s plan is to bring Himself glory. So then, in order to display His mercy and grace, He predestines some to be saved. For the demonstration of His righteousness and wrath, however, He appoints others for condemnation. Therefore, through the redemption of some and damnation of others, God manifests all of His qualities and receives greater glory.[[105]](#footnote-105)

**2. Molinism**

Molinism operates off the principle of God’s so-called “middle knowledge.” His middle knowledge is the knowledge of those things which would have occurred under different circumstances.[[106]](#footnote-106) In light of His middle knowledge, God can precisely predict what would happen under all possible conditions. Thus, He can accurately foresee what decisions any individual would make under certain conditions. In order for God to attain His desired results, then, He simply needs to arrange the conditions in which persons find themselves. In this way, He can secure the decisions from them that fit into His plan.

In discussion of this view, the idea of “all possible worlds” arises. In His middle knowledge, God foreknew all possible worlds that could exist. He chose to actualize one of these orders – the world in which we live. He chose this arrangement since He considered it the most favorable among all possible worlds for realizing His purpose. One of the features that God desired in this “best of possible worlds” was the quality of human freedom of choice.

The advantage of the molinism theory is that God can guarantee the success of His plan without compromising human free will. God simply arranges the conditions under which people act, knowing how they will respond in any circumstance. Craig characterizes this view as follows: “He (God) is thus like a Grand Master who is playing an opponent whom he knows so well that he knows every move his opponent would make in response to his own moves.”[[107]](#footnote-107)

Regarding God’s election to salvation, Craig comments, “Given his middle knowledge, God can providentially order the world so the everyone who would freely respond to the gospel if he heard it is born at a time and place in history where he will hear it.”[[108]](#footnote-108) As far as God’s “predestination” of evil deeds (for example, the crucifixion of Jesus), God merely places a person at a time and location where conditions will lead him or her to make the free decision to do the wrong that He foreknew.

**3. Arminianism**

Arminianism is the antagonist to Calvinism. According to this teaching, people have genuine freedom of self-determination to accept or reject the Lord. God’s will is to save all people, but not all turn to Him for salvation.

Since the concept of predestination is present in Scripture, exponents of Arminianism acknowledge this teaching. Yet, they qualify this doctrine by saying that God does not randomly or unconditionally choose His elect. Instead, they advance the following explanations. First, some feel that Jesus is God’s only “chosen one,” and that all who are in Christ are chosen “in Him.” The second and more widely accepted view is that God’s election is based on His knowledge of the future, i.e., His foreknowledge. From eternity past, God foreknew who would be open to Him and predestined those individuals for salvation. Unlike Calvinism, Arminianism does not teach unconditional election, but election based on God’s foreknowledge of people’s hearts.

Arminianism’s explanation of the Spirit’s drawing people to Christ differs from Calvinism as well. Most Arminians agree with Calvinists that people are totally sinful and unable to come to God without Him drawing them to Himself. Calvinists feel that God draws only His elect, while Arminians teach that the Spirit draws all people to Christ, providing them with the grace that will enable them to repent and believe. Calvinists call God’s grace leading to salvation “irresistible grace,” while Arminians call it “prevenient grace.” Prevenient grace will prepare sinners for repentance, but not compel them. Moreover, Arminians teach that true believers can turn away from God.

Arminianism also has a “theological center” that guides their perception of God and His plan. For Arminians, the focus is on God’s love. God’s primary goal is to establish a relationship of love with His creation. Consequently, He made people free, so that they could respond to Him freely in love without compulsion.

### B. Historical Survey

The Early Church, in general, held to a free will view and believed that God’s election was based on His foreknowledge.[[109]](#footnote-109) Although the Western Church, under Augustine’s influence, departed from that trajectory, the Eastern Church continued to defend that position and does so to this day.[[110]](#footnote-110) John of Damascus, in his *Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, wrote:

We ought to understand that while God knows all things beforehand, yet He does not predetermine all things. For He knows beforehand those things that are in our power, but He does not predetermine them. For it is not His will that there should be wickedness nor does He choose to compel virtue (2.30).

But of actions that are in our hands the good ones depend on His antecedent goodwill and pleasure, while the wicked ones depend neither on His antecedent nor on His consequent will, but are a concession to free-will. For that which is the result of compulsion has neither reason nor virtue in it (2.29).

The first early thinker who deviated from the accepted Church teaching was Augustine. Initially, Augustine felt that God elected based on His foreknowledge. Later on, though, Augustine changed in view in light of His understanding of God’s grace. He reasoned that if predestination was based on foreknowledge of the condition of people’s hearts, then people would, in a sense, merit their salvation, which would violate the principle of salvation by grace alone. Therefore, Augustine abandoned his previous position and embraced the doctrine of unconditional election.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Augustine’s understanding of human freedom coincided with his deterministic views. He theorized that if persons do what they want to do, then they are acting freely, even if that decision was divinely determined. Therefore, God acts not directly on human will, but on human desires, creating the readiness to do His will. Moreover, since these decisions are thus “free,” people are responsible for their choices.

Augustine also taught that people are unable to do good without God’s enabling grace. He posited three operations of God’s grace on the elect. “Operating grace” inclines the will to the Lord. Also necessary are “cooperating grace” and the “grace of perseverance,” so that an individual stays true to the Lord to the end.[[112]](#footnote-112) Furthermore, God regenerates people before they believe in Christ. The new birth enables their conversion.[[113]](#footnote-113)

However, Augustine made the qualification that God predestines individuals only to salvation, but not to condemnation. The Father simply allows unbelievers to remain in their unbelief and does not draw them to Jesus. Berkhoff summarizes Augustine’s view: “Reprobation differs from election in this that it is not accompanied with any direct divine efficiency to secure the result intended.”[[114]](#footnote-114)

During the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas proposed that God acts on people’s wills in such a way that they unfailingly perform God’s will, but do so “willingly.” In other words, God predetermines what “free” choices people will make. Thus, people enjoy self-determination, yet God’s will still prevails. The 16th-century Jesuit, Luis de Molina, advanced another view.[[115]](#footnote-115) His teaching, now known as Molinism (see above), ran contrary to the teaching of Aquinas. The Roman Church endorsed both views. Later on, Molina’s teaching found acceptance among some Protestants as well.

As time went on, however, the Western Church moved closer and closer to a position of genuine, unconstrained human freedom. The Roman Church teaches human freedom to the present day.[[116]](#footnote-116) Only during the Reformation was Augustine’s doctrine recovered, especially in the teaching of John Calvin. Calvin’s followers even intensified his teaching, insisting that God predestines not only to salvation, but to condemnation as well. Luther also held to a form of determinism,[[117]](#footnote-117) yet his compatriot Melanchthon tended toward respecting human free will.[[118]](#footnote-118)

At the end of the 16th century, Jacobus Arminius opposed Calvin’s position, insisting that people possessed genuine freedom of choice. His followers released a definition of their views, the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*. It advances the following points. First, God’s predestination is His determination to save all who believe in Christ and remain in Him, and to condemn those who reject Him. Second, Jesus died for all people, yet only those who receive Him benefit from His redemptive sacrifice. Third, a fallen individual can do no good apart from the help of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, God’s grace is necessary for doing good, yet a person may resist His grace. Fifth, God’s grace is able to keep the Christian faithful to the end, but one can still fall away from the Lord. In response to the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*, the followers of Calvin assembled at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and worked out the five points of Calvinism listed earlier (TULIP).[[119]](#footnote-119)

Another ardent defender of free will was John Wesley. Although Arminius and Wesley were united in this basic tenet, they differed in details. Wesley taught that humanity receives from Adam both inherited guilt and inherited depravity, while Arminius accepted only inherited depravity. Wesley thought that God gives all people the ability to believe in the gospel because of His great love, while Arminius held that God did this out of His sense of justice.

### C. Evaluation of Views

When evaluating the question of divine determinism and human freedom, one must consider several key aspects of the issue. We will investigate each in order from the perspective of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Molinism.

**1. God’s Sovereignty**

Our first investigation concerns the question of God’s sovereignty. Supporters of the Calvinistic position fear that if we admit true human freedom, God is robbed of His sovereign rule over creation. They believe that creatures depend on the Lord not only for their existence, but also for their actions. If someone or something can act independent from God, then He is no longer the ultimate source of all things.

Calvinists speak of primary and secondary causes in the universe. God is the primary source and cause of all things. He permits creatures the autonomy to act only in a secondary sense. He causes secondary causes to always act in line with His sovereign will. Therefore, people can make their own decisions, but their actions are nonetheless overshadowed and determined by the One who is the source of all occasions.[[120]](#footnote-120)

We can illustrate this point as follows. A billiard player strikes a ball with the cue stick, thus driving a ball into the pocket. The billiard player is the primary cause, while the cue stick is the secondary cause. In one sense, the cue stick caused the ball to enter the pocket. However, the cue’s action was determined by the billiard player. Therefore, the cue stick is only a secondary cause. In a similar manner, God, the primary cause, acts on the human will in a way that causes the individual to carry out a certain action in accordance with His will.

Let us further comment on primary and secondary causes. Augustine attempted to show how God conditions the human will.[[121]](#footnote-121) As described above, Augustine argued that persons are acting freely when they do what they want to do. Therefore, Gods acts not directly on the human will, but on human desires, so that persons, following after their desires, will freely choose the option God decreed. In such a way, God prompts a “free” choice by the person, yet retains His sovereignty and secures His desired result.

Augustine supported his position by asserting that such an understanding is consistent with God’s freedom. God must always act in accordance with His nature. Yet, this does impinge on His freedom. If we define freedom as doing that which one wants to do, then God, whose actions are determined by His nature, is still acting freely. God always acts in accordance with His good pleasure, that is, He does what He wants to do. Although He is not able to do otherwise, He is nonetheless free.

Aquinas taught the following. On the one hand, God gives creatures (in their capacity as secondary causes) “intrinsic power to act.” At the same time, Aquinas advanced the concept of the “extrinsic premotion of God.” This means that God’s action precedes human action and determines it.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Helseth claims that these “secondary” actions of humans are real actions. Yet, they never occur divorced from God’s superintendence. If people can act independent from God, then the Lord has a rival for control in the universe. How can people, whom God created, have the ability to create something independent from their Creator?[[123]](#footnote-123) In this case, “this intrinsic something creates a reality that does not ultimately originate in God.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Highfield adds that such attributes as “self-possession, sovereign control over their being, and exclusive self-control over their actions” belong only to the Lord. Otherwise, along with God humans could be considered, in relation to their own actions, “Prime Movers.”[[125]](#footnote-125)

So then, Calvinists teach that the sovereign God must always remain the First Cause and Source of all, including every event. Although Calvinists attempt to describe just how God predestines the free choices people make, they themselves admit that they cannot fully explain it.[[126]](#footnote-126) Either God has not given us revelation of this mystery, or our minds are too weak to comprehend it.

Exponents of Calvin’s doctrine, however, need to take into consideration the following points that stand in contradiction to their theory.[[127]](#footnote-127) First, the Bible frequently speaks not only of God’s sovereignty, but also of human freedom and responsibility. Carson summarizes: (1) Scripture is full of commands and exhortations, (2) in Scripture, people choose, obey, and follow God, (3) people sin against God, (4) God judges people for their sins, (5) God tests people, (6) people receive rewards from the Lord, (7) people are responsible for their response to God, (8) people pray to God, and (9) God implores people to repent and receive salvation.[[128]](#footnote-128) All these observations are consistent with the position that humans possess genuine freedom of choice.

In regard to the claim that if people can perform an action from their own initiative, then that creates a reality outside of God and independent of Him, Craig properly responds that the nature of the human soul is exactly that – the ability of self-determination. This is a reflection of God’s creative genius, who created us in His image. God endowed humans with both a free will and the freedom to use it. We affirm with Moreland, “A free acts is one in which the agent is the ultimate originating source of the act.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

Strictly speaking, an act of the human will does occur independent of God. In our chapter on creation, we discussed “divine concurrence,” according to which God provides the power for any action to occur, including acts of human volition. At the same time, He allows people to determine what those actions will be.[[130]](#footnote-130) God can allow things to happen that He would not actually endorse.

In summary, Craig writes,

Universal, divine determinism makes reality into a farce. The whole world becomes a vain and empty spectacle. There are no free agents in rebellion against God, whom God seeks to win through his love, and no one who freely responds to that love and freely gives his love and praise to God in return. The whole spectacle is a charade whose only real actor is God Himself.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Furthermore,

God would be like a child who sets up his toy soldiers and moves them about his play world, pretending that they are real persons whose every motion is not in fact of his own doing and pretending that they merit praise or blame.[[132]](#footnote-132)

Craig challenges us with the pertinent question, “Why should we think that our experience of indeterministic freedom is illusory?”[[133]](#footnote-133)

Boyd sees a connection between the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and pantheism: “If the world is 100 percent determined by God, its ‘primary cause,’ then, so far as I can see, the distinction between God and the world is merely verbal.”[[134]](#footnote-134) Boyd also raises the important question of the love relationship between God and people.[[135]](#footnote-135) In the Calvinistic system, God is merely loving Himself.

We also consider that human freedom does not undermine God’s sovereignty, but is in total harmony with it. When God created humans, He made the sovereign choice to endow them with free will. No one forced the Lord to create us that way. Therefore, whenever persons make a free decision (even a sinful one), God’s will is done in the sense that they are using the volitional ability that God intended them to have and utilize. God’s sovereignty is manifest whenever humans exercise their power of self-determination. To claim that free will robs God of His sovereignty is actually to undermine His sovereignty by annulling God’s sovereign choice to give humans free will.

We must also comment on a misguided idea advanced by Webster that human self-determination is a harmful thing and that people need deliverance from it.[[136]](#footnote-136) Did not human self-determination lead to the Fall and bring upon the human race all the consequences thereof? Here, however, Webster confuses self-determination with its abuse. God gave humans free will with good intentions, and people do at times use it for good, and in the future it will always be so. We ask, “Would God have created humans with an ability that was intrinsically harmful to them?”

Finally, we remember the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, “Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” This prayer clearly shows that God’s perfect will is not always done on earth, which contradicts the basic tenets of Calvinism.

**2. Nature of Human Freedom**

What exactly is freedom? Two theories are voiced: “compatibilistic” and “non-compatibilistic” freedom. The first theory states that human choices are always consistent with people’s desires and motives. People make the choice that is supported by their strongest desire. A person may have mixed desires, but the strongest one will prevail. Desires and motives, in turn, arise from a person’s character. They reflect who people truly are in their intrinsic personality.

Furthermore, people’s character is formed by the circumstances that influence them, such as their genetic makeup, upbringing, environment, culture, and, behind all that, God’s intervention. God orchestrates all the conditions surrounding people’s lives in a way to form the type of character that fits into His plan. So then, if behavior depends on motives and desires, motive and desires depend on character, character depends on circumstances, and circumstances depend on God, then persons are not genuinely free. Their freedom is externally conditioned, or “compatibilistic.”

The theory of compatibilistic freedom resonates with Augustine’s conception of human freedom discussed earlier – decisions based on desire. If persons do what they want to do, they are acting freely.[[137]](#footnote-137) Nash gives the example of a person sitting in a closed room with no exit. If that individual wants to be there, then he or she is in fact free.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Calvinists who believe that compatibilistic freedom was the way humans were originally created encounter several difficulties. If God controls people’s behavior by orchestrating their circumstances, then people are not truly free. Thus, the term “compatibilistic *freedom*” is a misnomer. Such persons cannot express genuine love for God and thereby fulfill His Great Commandment. In addition, if the Lord predetermines sinful actions by this mechanism, then He is responsible for those sins. Moreover, Boyd inquires, “If God could have created men with compatibilistic freedom that always did right, why didn’t He?”[[139]](#footnote-139)

Let us contrast this with “non-compatibilistic” freedom. Here, it is claimed that people can make decisions independent of their desires and even contrary to them. Desires do not determine decisions. People themselves, as self-conscious beings, determine their behavior independent of external factors. In this system, persons have genuine, non-predetermined freedom.

This view runs contrary to Augustine’s in that people are free not only to make a choice, but at any time to refrain from making that choice.[[140]](#footnote-140) Augustine (and his followers) would say that a people cannot refrain from doing what they want most of all to do. Recalling Nash’s example of someone in a closed room, supporters of non-compatibilistic freedom would say that such a person is not free even if he or she wants to be there, since there is no possibility to choose another option.

The theory of non-compatibilistic freedom better explains what happened in the Garden of Eden. Before being tempted, Eve apparently showed no interest in the forbidden fruit. Only when tempted did she begin to consider it. Moreover, we must acknowledge that God allowed Satan to tempt Eve. Therefore, God is the ultimate cause for Eve desiring the forbidden fruit. According the compatibilistic freedom, then, this desire led to Eve’s sin, and then Adam’s. Yet, God judged this couple because they did not resist this desire. Non-compatibilistic freedom would have provided them a possible escape from this temptation. God judged Adam and Eve because they did not display this kind of freedom. Therefore, they must have possessed it, or else God would have no basis to find guilt in them.

Boyd attempts to combine the theories of compatibilistic and non-compatibilistic freedom. He reasons that people begin life with non-compatibilistic freedom. In the course of time, their character is formed by the many decisions they make and, consequently, they lose their non-compatibilistic freedom. Their decisions henceforth will arise from their character. As a result, God is able to “manipulate” their behavior by orchestrating the circumstances He know will produce the decision He desires. God has in mind His ultimate plan in the decisions He thus determines. Yet, He is not guilty of causing sinful choices that people make, since they themselves, during the initial stage of non-compatibilistic freedom, formed their own corrupt character, out of which these wrong decisions arose.[[141]](#footnote-141) In Boyd’s words,

We begin by making our choices, but in the end, our choices make us. We are gradually but inevitably becoming the decisions we make. In this light, it seems evident that while love must be *freely* chosen, it does not have to be *eternally* chosen in a libertarian (i.e. non-compatibilistic) sense. Rather, the purpose of libertarian freedom is provisional, intended eventually to lead us to a much greater, eternally solidified form of compatibilistic freedom.[[142]](#footnote-142)

Boyd’s system does have the advantage of assuring that no one will sin in heaven, since people’s character is fixed. On the other hand, when God first created humans, they were “very good,” which contradicts Boyd’s assertion that they possessed freedom of an inferior quality, i.e., non-compatibilistic.

Since Boyd is a defender of the “Openness of God” theory, possibly his goal here is to allow God to predict human behavior on the basis of compatibilistic freedom and therefore better secure the accomplishment of His plan. However, as we will demonstrate later, there is no need to rely on compatibilistic freedom to guarantee the success of God’s plan. Craig insightfully notes that if human perfection requires deliverance from non-compatibilistic freedom, then “perfect love” casts out not “fear” (1 Jn 4:18), but “freedom.”[[143]](#footnote-143)

Ron Highfield proposes still another approach.[[144]](#footnote-144) He teaches that freedom is not the ability to make decisions, but the capacity to do the will of God. He cites many New Testament texts on liberation from sin in Christ, which enables us to obey God. He writes, “In the New Testament, freedom in defined not as the power to choose between good and evil but as the power of a new life, in which sin no longer controls us and we love God with all our heart, mind, and strength.”[[145]](#footnote-145) Therefore, God’s aim is to liberate people from everything that limits their “freedom,” that it, their ability to serve Him. Being a Calvinist, Highfield asserts that to accomplish this aim, God controls people’s choices (determinism).

Boyd subjects Highfield’s position to the following criticisms.[[146]](#footnote-146) If God controls this process, by which a person is “liberated” to love God, can we call this genuine love? It is not arising from the free choice of the worshiper. In fact, the Bible urges us to love the Lord, which implies a free response of the will. Additionally, if God determines this process of liberation, then why does He not do it for everyone?

We encounter in this theory another logical inconsistency. If God controls all things (determinism), including the process by which a person is liberated from sin, it follows that He is also responsible for the process that brought humans into sin. God, then, is the source of the problem from which He seeks now to liberate humanity. God delivers people from the situation He Himself created.

Moreover, in his theological system, Highfield does not adequately distinguish “freedom” from that to which freedom leads. In other words, “freedom” is simply liberation from limitation. Slavery to sin in merely one of a multitude of things that a person can be limited by, and obedience to God is only one of the many goals to which freedom can be applied. According to the Bible, Christian freedom can be abused, that is, directed toward an unholy end. This is why Paul warns the church in Galatia: “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only {do} not {turn} your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13).

So then, Highfield is totally correct when he says that the New Testament calls us to freedom to serve God. Nonetheless, he generalizes the concept of freedom to include not only volitional ability itself, but also the goal to which it is directed. Our goal should be not to attain freedom *per se*, but to attain the ability to direct it to serving God.

Of all the systems proposed above, non-compatibilistic freedom boasts the greatest logical consistency and biblical support. Nonetheless, we must make an important qualification. If our freedom is non-compatibilistic, then it differs from God’s freedom. God always acts in accordance with His nature, which more resembles compatibilistic freedom.

We might explain this as follows. On the one hand, God must possess compatibilistic freedom, since He cannot behave in contradiction to His nature. If this was not so, then God’s faithfulness would be in question and all His promises, including those of our salvation, would be unsure. We would never know exactly what to expect from Him.

On the other hand, humans need non-compatibilistic freedom, otherwise we could never freely respond to the Lord’s love, rejecting other alternatives and temptations (as should have been in the Garden of Eden). If our actions were determined by our character, we would resemble robots, controlled by our most dominant desires. Yet, God seeks a love that is expressed freely without compulsion.

We recognize that the system “non-compatibilistic freedom” is not free from flaws, yet it excels the other options. The nature and operation of human freedom does, in the long run, remain to some degree a mystery.

**3. Unconditional Election**

Calvinism holds to the position that God unconditionally chooses those whom He intends to save. That is, God’s election does not depend on any quality in the people He chooses, but solely on His sovereign (random) selection. Several proofs are offered in support. The term “election” itself implies a free, unconditional choice. Furthermore, according to 2 Timothy 1:9 God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” Paul plainly states that the Lord saves not by human works, but by His own purpose.

The Old Testament contains many examples of God’s election. He chose: (1) Isaac and Jacob, along with their descendants, as the heirs of Abraham’s promise, (2) Jerusalem as His capital city, (3) Canaan as the Promised Land, (4) the priesthood of Aaron, and (5) the Davidic dynasty. God Himself determined all these elections. The New Testament speaks of election as well. About 24 times, the idea is applied to believers in Jesus. All the major New Testament figures refer to it, including Paul, Peter, John, and our Lord Jesus Himself.

Furthermore, support is gleaned from Romans chapter 9, where we read, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (v. 15). Thus, God determines who will be saved.

Calvinists also draw our attention to the word “know,” which can refer to the intimate relationship between husband and wife (Gen 4:1; сf. Lk 1:34), and between persons and God (1 Sam 2:12-13; Phil 3:10; 1 Jn 2:3, 13-14).[[147]](#footnote-147) Therefore, if God “foreknew” someone, this implies that He did not merely know “about” that individual or knew him or her personally, but that this one was chosen for salvation. We already showed examples of Old Testament passages where the Hebrew word “know” (יָדַע - *yadah*) can refer to election (Gen 18:19; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2). In addition, Galatians 4:9 and 1 Corinthians 8:3 reveal that God “knew” us, believers in Christ.[[148]](#footnote-148)

However, in our survey of these biblical passages we demonstrated the flaws of these interpretations and do not need to repeat our arguments here. According to the Arminian understanding, God’s election is derived from His foreknowledge, which consists of knowing beforehand the character of those whom He will choose for salvation (see Rom 8:29-30; 1 Pet 1:1-2).

Craig criticizes the Arminian position. He questions why God would predestine those He foreknew? If God knows from eternity past that a certain one already possessed the disposition needed to come to faith, then why would God need to predestine such an individual to come to Him?[[149]](#footnote-149) Arminians may respond that it is important in the conversion process that God takes the initiative, not people, in order to remove a motive for human boasting. In addition, God’s act of predestination with its accompanying manifestation of divine power may assist the sinner to repent and believe and aid in preserving that individual in faith.

What exactly did God foresee in people to incline Him to elect them? The Bible does not specifically say, but, judging form the biblical witness as a whole, we may nonetheless offer some insight. Knowing that one of the main features of God’s plan is to eliminate human boasting (see the discussion in chapter 19, section C), it is highly likely that the desired quality He foresaw was humility. We recall Peter’s words, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5). Thus, God may not only prevent people from boasting in their conversion, but also from taking pride in the basis for their election. How can people be proud of their humility? This coincides with Paul’s exposition to the Corinthians about the humble state of God’s chosen:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God (1 Cor 1:26-29).

In addition, a heart of humility predisposes one to faith. When the Lord predestines His chosen, He does not coerce them into believing, but removes the obstacles that would prevent the display of personal faith. Lydia is a good example, whose heart the Lord “opened… to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Notice that God did not compel her to believer, but enabled her belief. This understanding of conversion harmonizes with the words of our Lord about the character of those who turn to Him: “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it {at} {all}” (Mk 10:15). Just as the simple hearts of children are disposed to trust their parents, the meek hearts of God’s elect dispose them to trust the Lord.

In defense of the Arminian position, it is vital to stress the unviable claim of Calvinists that Arminianism robs God of His sovereignty. God’s knowledge of the future condition of persons may serve as the basis for His election, but in no way *requires* Him to choose them. The fact that He knows ahead of time who will humbly be open to His call, does not *force* Him to choose them. In spite of whatever prompts God to choose one person or another, His choice remains free and sovereign.

Moreover, unconditional election contradicts the clear biblical teaching that God desires to save everyone. God shows no partiality and has the same attitude toward all people (Rom 2:11). Paul teaches that the Lord “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Peter concurs, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Also see Ezekiel 18:32 and 1 Timothy 4:10.

Calvinists respond by drawing a distinction between God’s so-called “moral (open) will” and His “operative (hidden) will.” According to the former, God wants to save all. According to the latter, though, He provides salvation only for the chosen. However, this claim makes God out to be a hypocrite – He says one thing, but does another. Such a description is unworthy of the God of the Bible. Hart affirms, “If God were really to supply saving grace sufficient for all, but to refuse to supply most persons with the necessary natural means of attaining that grace, it would mean that God does not will the salvation of all.”[[150]](#footnote-150)

In reality, God’s “moral” will turns out to be an illusion. Hart shares the insight that the Calvinist theory of unconditional election corresponds with the theological concept of “voluntarism,” according to which God has total freedom to make any decision at any time independent of all factors, even His nature.[[151]](#footnote-151) Whatever decision He makes is the correct one. Voluntarism contrasts with “essentialism,” according to which God’s freedom in “limited” by His nature. In other words, He always acts in conformity with His character. So then, if God’s sovereignty means that He can go against His natural disposition to save all and save only some, then God is acting inconsistently with His character, and we fall into the unhealthy snare of voluntarism.

However, Calvinists dispute this by saying that Arminians, too, believe that God has two wills. If He wants to save all people, then why does He not do so? Highfield shares this challenging thought:

Why shoudn’t God be infinitely better at persuasion than Satan, so that God wins every time?... It violates no law of logic to say that God is able to persuade all free agents to choose the good freely on every occasion. And if it is not logically impossible, there must be another reason why God does not do this.[[152]](#footnote-152)

Arminians conventionally term God’s “two wills” His “perfect will” and His “permissive will.” His perfect will is to save all people. In His permissive will, not all will be saved. The difference with the Calvinistic view is the factor of human freedom, which can prevent God’s perfect will from happening. God wills to save all, but will not violate free choice, but respects it. In the Calvinistic view, however, the only factor that prevents God’s desire to save all from being fulfilled is God Himself. God’s “perfect will” according to the Calvinist is that not all should attain eternal life. Boyd comments,

Only the Calvinist is able to ascribe to God an undefeatable will, though the bitter pill they must swallow for these bragging rights is the horrific belief that it was not God’s will for all to be saved in the first place.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Craig comments that the system Molinism meets up with the same difficulties that Arminianism does. God would have liked to have chosen from all logically possible worlds that order of things that would ensure that all people would be saved. Yet, the factor of human free will prevents all logically possible worlds from becoming actualized worlds. Therefore, God had to be content with choosing an order of things that respected free will, but forfeited universal salvation.[[154]](#footnote-154)

It will be helpful to clarify the concept of God’s “permissive will.” If God’s main priority truly was the salvation of all people, then He would have made humans without free will. Yet, He created them free. Therefore, Arminians must acknowledge that something is more important to God than the salvation of souls. This “something” is generally thought to be a relationship of love. God desired a people with whom He could share such a relationship, which requires humans to possess free will. He was not willing to jeopardize human freedom for the sake of universal salvation by forcing all to convert. So then, in order for their system to have consistency Arminians must acknowledge that people’s salvation is not God’s top priority.

Arminians attempt to soften that position, however, in the following manner. First, God employs every possible means aside from coercion to draw people to Himself. He fervently attempts to convince sinners to repent and believe. If someone objects that if God did more miracles, more people would convert, we would recall the words of Christ concerning the rich man and Lazarus: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk 16:31).

We also note that God’s passionate desire that people would be saved was expressed in the Father sending His Son to die a horrific death for their redemption. In this vein, Paul writes, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). No logical contradiction exists between the statements “there is something more important to God than people's salvation” and “God desires to save all.” God can value something more than an individual’s salvation, yet at the same time desire the salvation of all who meet His requirements.

Finally, along with the biblical testimony of God’s desire to save all persons, we also encounter in Scripture an invitation to all to receive Christ. Paul preached to the people of Athens, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). Additionally, in Isaiah 55:1, the Lord invites all who are thirsty to come and drink. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites all who labor and are heavy burdened to take His yoke upon themselves. Lastly, the call to the Church to evangelize the whole world implies an invitation for all to receive eternal life.

Concerning the call to evangelize, Calvinists hold to the opinion that we must preach the gospel to all people since we do not know who are God’s chosen. In fact, the predestination doctrine is thought not to hinder evangelization, but promote it, since the preacher has the assurance that at least some will respond to the message – God’s elect. Therefore, a degree of success is guaranteed. Paul seems to reflect this attitude in his words, “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus {and} with {it} eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

Also of interest are Christ’s words in Matthew 22:14: “Many are called, but few are chosen.” There can be some who are called, but not chosen. Calvinists distinguish God’s “general call” from His “effective call.” The first is directed to all people, while the second is only for the elect. The latter call is “effective” in that the elect will invariably respond to it. Yet, the non-elect will not respond to God’s “general call” and are not able to do so. Arminians object to this teaching, noting that to invite someone who has no ability to respond is deception. Yet, God is not a deceiver. He is just and faithful. Additionally, the Bible records instances where God’s Spirit was active drawing souls to Him, but they resisted (Matt 23:37-38; Acts 7:51).[[155]](#footnote-155)

**4. God’s Responsibility for Sin**

The Calvinistic teaching that God directly controls all that occurs naturally leads to the conclusion that He is responsible for all the evil deeds that have been done and is Himself the source of evil. In order to escape these consequences of their theory, Calvinists offer various explanations. Millard Erickson suggests that God arranges all the circumstances in a person’s life in a way that only one viable option remains, even if that involves a sinful choice by that individual. Nonetheless, Erickson considers such a decision to be a voluntary one. Thus, God is supposedly absolved of responsibility for that misdeed.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Erickson, though, fails to appreciate that God neither causes sinful acts, nor tempts people to sin. If God arranged conditions so that the only real choice someone has is a sinful one, then that is tantamount to God tempting one to sin. Yet, James offers this sharp rebuttal, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone” (Jam 1:13). Just the opposite is true – He always makes a way of escape, so that one might not sin (1 Cor 10:13).

Another common explanation is that God prompts every good deed that is done, but simply allows sinful acts to occur by a person’s free choice. Therefore, He is behind every good thing, but is innocent of evil. Pink writes, “While God is the Orderer and Controller of sin, He is *not* the Author of it in the same was that He is the Author of good… (he permits sin) only by decretive permission and negative action.”[[157]](#footnote-157) According to Pink, God’s dealings with the elect are unconditional, while His dealings with the non-elect are conditional. So then, the latter are guilty for their own sins.[[158]](#footnote-158)

However, this approach contradicts the essential features of Calvinism – God controls *everything*, and people lack free will. We might call this “semi-Calvinism.” The 17th-century Calvinist Francis Turriten added a nuance to this approach, where God “permitting” people to sin consists in His lack of intervention to prevent a person from sinning.[[159]](#footnote-159) His involvement, then is considered more active than passive. Still, there is an inconsistency here. It turns out that before people convert to Christ, they possess free will (albeit in a sinful condition). Yet, after conversion, God begins to control their all their activities. So then, people obtain salvation at the expense of their personal freedom. What kind of salvation is that?

Another variant is that God indeed does cause evil.[[160]](#footnote-160) Here Calvinists appeals to God’s “two wills”: His moral will and His operative will. God’s moral will is expressed in Scripture, while His operative will is seen in what He actually does. In His moral will, God does not sin, yet in His operative will, He may prompt sinful acts.

Exponents of this variant appeal to Scripture for support. Joseph stated that *God* sent him to Egypt (by way of the hatred of his brothers) (Gen 50:20; Ps 105:17). The Bible records that the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart to resist Him (Ex 4:21; 7:3; Rom 9:16-18, Ps 105:25). God stirred the enemies of Israel to war against them (Josh 11:20; Judg 3:12; 9:23; 1 Kin 11:14, 23). Judges 14:4 reveals that Samson’s marriage to a Gentile, which was forbidden by Mosaic Law, was from God.

Furthermore, the sons of Eli did not heed their father’s counsel because the Lord has already determined to slay them (1 Sam 2:25). An evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul (1 Sam 16:14) and deceived Ahab (1 Kin 22:19-23). In addition, God raised up evil against David and his family (2 Sam 12:11-12). He also incited David to conduct an illegal census of the people (2 Sam 24:1; 1 Chr 27:23-24). God predestined Christ’s crucifixion by evil men (Acts 2:23; 4:27). In the last days, God will send a deluding spirit among unbelievers (2 Thes 2:11-12). Through Isaiah, God proclaimed, “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am Yahweh who does all these” (Isa 45:7).

Calvin describes His position concerning God relation to evil with these words:

The sum of the whole is this, – since the will of God is said to be the cause of all things, all the counsels and actions of men must be held to be governed by his providence; so that he not only exerts his power in the elect, who are guided by the Holy Spirit, but also forces the reprobate to do him service.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Regarding God’s two wills, Calvin writes,

Still, however, the will of God is not at variance with itself. It undergoes no change. He makes no pretense of not willing what he wills, but while in himself the will is one and undivided, to us it appears manifold, because, from the feebleness of our intellect, we cannot comprehend how, though after a different manner, he wills and wills not the very same thing.[[162]](#footnote-162)

Some go to the extreme of supposing that God, being the Most High, is above morality. Since He is God, all that He does is right, even if it does not appear to be so to us.

On the other hand, we recall that in every instance where God sent evil on someone, it is recorded that this individual was already in rebellion against Him. For example, in Genesis 37:3-4, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery with ill intent. According to Exodus 8:32, Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart. In Judges 14:1-3, Samson chose his own wife. Before God sent an evil spirit on Saul and Ahab, they has already rejected Him. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, those on whom God sends a deluding spirit already rejected the love of the truth. So then, when it seems that God is prompting an evil deed, in reality He is giving people over to their own stubborn persistence, as Paul describes in Romans 1:24-28.

Additionally, the following Scripture passages confirm that God, in His holy nature, does not participate in sinful acts: “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5); with God “there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jam 1:17); “There is no unrighteousness in Him” (Ps 92:15).

Moreover, if God is the source of evil, prompting sinful acts, then how can we imitate Him? He would not be for us the model of proper behavior, and therefore we could not follow His example. Even if He does evil for a good end, He would be still be guilty of operating by the principle “the end justifies the means” and the faulty ethical system of utilitarianism.

Concerning the claim that God is above morals, we respond that God’s will does not operate independent of His nature. In other words, He can make no decision that runs contrary to His holy character. He is not “above” morals, but is the embodiment of morality itself.[[163]](#footnote-163)

In their quest to explain God’s relationship with evil, many adherents of divine determinism appeal to the concept of “primary” and “secondary” causes, which we discussed earlier. Although God is the primary cause of people’s sins, He is not considered culpable for them since the person was also involved in the act as a secondary cause. Helm asserts that human deterministic freedom is responsible for evil.[[164]](#footnote-164)

Moreover, defenders of this position appeal to God’s omnipotence. They believe that God is able to do all things, even predetermine a free act of the human will.[[165]](#footnote-165) They also point to God’s transcendence, which somehow “protects” Him from responsibility for the sinful acts He brings about. People themselves, since they stand “closer” to the event itself, are guilty for the transgression.[[166]](#footnote-166)

However, the thinking person views the claim that God, who is supposedly the primary and ultimate cause of every event, can escape responsibility for a sinful act an absurdity. If we return to our example with the billiard cue, if the player misses a shot, the cue is not to blame, but the one handling it. Craig agrees that if “God causes the agent to sin by moving his will to choose evil,” then it “makes the allegation that God is the author of sin difficult to deny.”[[167]](#footnote-167) In addition, Hart correctly comments that if a person is dependent on God’s grace to do good, and God does not provide that grace, the problem lies not with the person, but with God’s refusal to provide the grace.[[168]](#footnote-168)

Concerning the claim that God, in His omnipotence, can cause a free effect, we earlier denied the possibility that God can do what constitutes a logical absurdity or contradiction (for example, create a round square). Determining the free effect of another fits into that same class. The argument from God’s transcendence is also unconvincing. Hart writes that if God can exert an influence on people to the degree that He affects their behavior, then that shows that He is “close enough” to the situation to at least share in the blame for the sinful act. Finally, if God’s transcendence “protects” Him from culpability, it would also deny Him credit for the good works that He causes. The person doing the good, then, deserves the praise for it.

Of note is that even defenders of divine determinism are not entirely happy with their system. Helm, for example, admits that he cannot completely explain the “mutual-causation” between God and people.[[169]](#footnote-169) He also acknowledges that both God and persons share responsibility for sins committed.[[170]](#footnote-170) Pink writes, “There is a real difficulty in defining where one (i.e., human responsibility) ends and the other (i.e., divine responsibility) begins.”[[171]](#footnote-171)

Ron Highfield introduces yet another approach. He admits that God indeed causes evil, but He does so with a good intention in mind. Therefore, His participation is not considered evil. He writes, “God does not do evil when he works in and through and after stupid, ignorant, and evil human acts. God overcomes the stupidity, ignorance, and evil to accomplish his good will perfectly.”[[172]](#footnote-172) And again, “In evil acts, God’s concurrence overcomes the evil in the act, not allowing it to be truly and lastingly realized but instead bringing good out of evil.”[[173]](#footnote-173) Helm echoes this thought, affirming that God can motivate an act of disobedience to accomplish a good end: “The breaking of his will became part of the fulfilling of his will.”[[174]](#footnote-174)

On the other hand, Craig offers the following rebuttal to this position. Highfield wants to prove that since God’s will is accomplished in the end, His participation in the sinful act is not evil. Highfield also believes, however, that all that takes place is God’s will. This introduces a confusion. Was not God’s will being performed when the evil act was initially done? Yet, Highfield delays God’s will being done until later, when He turns the evil into good. If both the initial act and the end result reflect God’s will, then the distinction between evil and good breaks down.[[175]](#footnote-175) In addition, as we said before, God is operating here by the principle “the end justifies the means,” that is, the faulty ethical system of utilitarianism.

In summary, we affirm with Boyd that the Bible clearly instructs us that God and evil are direct antagonists. God attitude toward evil is to oppose it and eliminate it. In fact, the very concept of evil is defined as that which is contrary to God.[[176]](#footnote-176) The explanations offered above by Calvinists are unconvincing. As we demonstrated in our biblical survey, God may use people’s sinful acts to accomplish His purpose or harden the already stubborn, rebellious heart, but He never takes initiative to prompt or cause an evil act.

**5. Success of God’s Plan**

If people truly possess free will, does that threaten the success of God’s plan being fulfilled? Can humans with their freedom of choice prevent God from achieving His aims?Highfield fears that “denying God’s comprehensive control requires placing creation’s destiny partly in the hands of chance, or necessity, or the Devil, or humanity.”[[177]](#footnote-177)

However, in the light of God’s foreknowledge, wisdom, and power, we can confidently assert that the almighty and all-knowing God is able to accomplish His plan in spite of people’s free participation in it.[[178]](#footnote-178) Boyd concurs, “There is simply no reason to assume that God must control *everything* in the world for him to remain in *overall* control of the world.”[[179]](#footnote-179)

In addition, Calvinists object that if people have free will, then they will retain that freedom of choice after death and could potentially commit sin in God’s eternal kingdom. Arminians reject the idea that the saints will sin in the kingdom. The Bible assures us that on the new earth, righteousness will reign (2 Pet 3:13) and that the saints will remain faithful to the Lord (Jn 10:28).

On the other hand, although believers will someday be perfect in character, according to the theory of non-compatibilistic freedom one can behave contrary to one’s character. Consequently, proponents of non-compatibilistic freedom must admit that, theoretically, the *potential* to sin will still exist. Yet, in light of God‘s promises of eternal life, the saints *will never* sin. We will not only be perfect in character, but also have painful life experience to warn us of the dangers of further rebellion. It is highly unlikely that those who have passed through life in a fallen world would want to repeat that experience.

Molinism (see above) offers a system that allows human freedom with a guarantee of God’s success. In this system, God foresaw all the future decisions each individual could make under all possible circumstances and chose that order of things that would accomplish His plan without compromising people’s freedom.

One objection to Molinism arises in connection with the nature of “middle knowledge.” Some say that all knowledge must exist in God. Yet, “middle knowledge” depends on human choices and is therefore “outside of” or independent of the Lord. Since all things must depend on God, we must not speak of a type of knowledge that depends not on Him, but on the variations of human volition operating outside of Him.[[180]](#footnote-180)

This objection, though, is unsubstantial. How can the “middle knowledge” that God possesses somehow exist “outside” of Him? If God knows something (even if that is only theoretical knowledge), then that knowledge is contained in His divine reason. If God’s omniscience is limited to only that over which He has direct control, then His scope knowledge is limited and He is not omniscient. God’s amazing ability to know is on even more dramatic display when He is able to predict with precise accuracy each free decision every individual could make in any given situation.

In addition, Highfield argues that in Molinism, knowledge seems to control the Lord. It defines “what sort of world God can create.”[[181]](#footnote-181) The weakness in Highfield’s argument is that middle knowledge does not “dictate” to God how He must act. Additionally, if God delights to use this type of approach to shape human history, He has full right to do so. He is not forced to employ middle knowledge.

Finally, Body wonders whether the world order we live in is really the best of all possible worlds that God could have actualized. He refers to the sufferings people experience in this life as well as the eternal suffering of the lost.[[182]](#footnote-182) Not only Molinism, but every worldview, in fact, struggles with the same question – how to explain the presence and effect of evil in the world. We will return to this question in the next chapter.

Although Molinism boasts some advantages over Calvinism, the issue of God deliberately arranging the unhappy destiny of lost souls remains problematic. It is true that they chose their outcome freely. Yet, the fact remains that God arranged their life situations to bring about this result. He “tempted” them to sin.

The traditional Arminian position that God’s foreknowledge, wisdom, and power guarantee the success of His plan regardless of human free choice is more than adequate to convince us that is the end, God will triumph!

**6. Human Depravity**

The Bible teaches that humanity is in a condition of depravity and, therefore, is unable to do good without God’s assistance. Numerous biblical passages bring out this truth. Paul wrote to the Romans, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), and, “The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able {to do so}” (Rom 8:7). He reminds the Ephesians that they were “dead in… trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).[[183]](#footnote-183)

Some Arminians believe that people are not totally depraved, but are able to make some right choices, including the ability to freely receive Christ as Savior. Calvinists insist that in light of the biblical portrait of human sinfulness, we must embrace the doctrine of total human depravity. The teaching of partial depravity (called Semi-Pelagianism), was not well received in Church history, resulting in its rejection at a fifth-century Church council in Orange.

Most defenders of Arminian faith, however, believe that sinful humans can come to Christ only by virtue of so-called “prevenient grace.” This means that the Lord bestows on all people a general grace, which liberates their wills from the bondage to sin to the degree that they can understand the gospel and come to Jesus to receive forgiveness and eternal life. Although this grace is granted to all, not everyone responds to it since that depends on their personal choice.

The following passages are cited in support the existence and action of “prevenient grace”: Proverbs 1:20; John 1:9; Romans 2:4; Titus 2:11; John 12:32; Matthew 13:12; Acts 7:51. At the same time, exponents of Arminianism must admit that the biblical evidence is rather sparse. The verses listed above do not specifically identify the type of grace they are claiming.

Other students of Scripture appeal to the power of the gospel as the source of power that enables sinners to convert. When people hear the gospel, power is released to soften their hearts toward the Lord. Yet, this does not force their conversion. The power of the gospel merely makes their faith possible.[[184]](#footnote-184) Some biblical texts seem to confirm this claim. Paul wrote that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). James taught that God “brought us forth by the word of truth” (Jam 1:18). In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, we read, “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” Hebrew 4:12 contributes the following, “The word of God is living and active.” Finally, we note: “The word of God… performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thes 2:13), and, “He called you through our gospel” (2 Thes 2:14).

On the other hand, we must keep in mind that not everyone who hears the gospel receives it. Where is the power of the gospel to convert sinners in that case? Jesus taught that not only does conversion depend on hearing the Word, but also upon the condition of the hearer’s heart (Matt 13:3-8).[[185]](#footnote-185)

Arminians struggle with how to explain a sinner’s conversion. If people in their sinful condition will not turn to the Lord, where does the desire to do so come from? The preaching of the gospel or “prevenient grace” may “soften” or “open” hearts to receive, but if one “softens” or “opens” a totally depraved heart, all one finds is more depravity. Additionally, “prevenient grace” has weak biblical attestation. Those Arminians who hold to Semi-Pelagianism face resistance both from the weight of Church history and Scriptural passages supporting total depravity. Describing the mechanism of a sinner’s conversion remains the weak link in Arminian theology.

The doctrine of total depravity also has problems. Adherents of this view must explain why people of this world often appear to do good. The conventional response is to assume the existence of so-called “general grace,” which enables fallen humans to sometimes practice virtues and resist vices.[[186]](#footnote-186) McGowan describes it thus, “On the negative side, God restrains sin and, on the positive side, God enables human society and grants ability in the arts and sciences.”[[187]](#footnote-187) Whenever sinful people use their natural talents for the benefit of others, this is regarded as an operation of God’s “general grace.” However, general grace is not adequate to bring a soul to Christ. In support of “general grace,” adherents appeal to Matthew 5:43-46. However, nothing in this passage refers to God influence on a person’s will, but only of His benevolence to the natural world.

We must concede that the exact mechanism of a sinner’s conversion remains a mystery.

**7. Salvation by Grace**

Calvinists object that human free will is inconsistent with salvation by grace. If someone participates in some way in attaining salvation, then it is not by grace alone. Calvinists prefer the variant “monergism,” which denotes that there is only one “energy” (mono-ergism) or one active party in salvation’s plan – God alone. The Arminian view is “synergism,” claiming that there are two “energies” or two active parties – God and the human individual.

Calvinists object that synergism contradicts Romans 11:5-6, which claims that election is essential so that salvation would be by grace.[[188]](#footnote-188) They also fear that if people take any part in the work of salvation, it gives them a reason to boast.[[189]](#footnote-189) Helseth, quoting Richard Muller, argues that in a synergistic system, the person becomes “the first and effective agent(s) in salvation.”[[190]](#footnote-190)

However, Arminians consider it improper to call receiving a gift a “work.” If persons receive the gift of eternal life, it still remains a gift. They are undeserving of it and therefore have nothing about which to brag. God always remains “the first and effective agent in salvation,” since He is its initiator and the one who accomplished it. The individual is simply the recipient of what the Lord has done.

**8. Limited Atonement**

From the Calvinist perspective, Jesus died only for those who would believe in Him. This doctrine is called “limited atonement.” Several passages of Scripture state that Jesus died for His people (Matt 1:21; Jn 10:11, 15; 15:13; Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25; Rom 8:32). In His highpriestly prayer, Jesus does “not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours” (Jn 17:9). In Mark 10:45, Jesus gives His life as a ransom “for many.”

Arminians do not challenge the claim that the Lord died for His people. This does not exclude, though, that He died for others as well. His death, however, is effective only for those who believe. The high-priestly prayer of Jesus does not identify for whom Jesus will die, just for whom He is praying. This verse, in fact, is found in the context of world evangelization (see Jn 17:21). It is unlikely that Jesus would speak at the same time about limited atonement and of His desire that the whole world would believe.

When Jesus speaks of giving His life as a ransom for “many,” He is not teaching limited atonement, but citing Isaiah 53:12, which He is about to fulfill by His sacrifice on Calvary. It is interesting to compare Isaiah 53:12 with Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:6, where Paul states that Jesus “gave Himself as a ransom for all.” Additionally, the word “many” is not necessarily exclusive of “all.” “Many” simply means a great number.

Calvinists also object that if Jesus died for all, does that not imply that all are already forgiven? God cannot punish someone twice for the same sin. This objection is refuted by Romans 5:17, where the effect of Adam’s sin is contrasted with that of Christ’s death. The sin of Adam automatically applies to all his natural descendants, but only “those who *receive* the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” In addition, Calvinists do not claim that the elect are “automatically” forgiven by Jesus’ death either. They must personally receive forgiveness through repentance and faith.

Even more convincing for the refutation of limited atonement are concrete biblical texts that state that Jesus died for the whole world, for example: 1 John 2:2; 4:14. Some passages reveal that the Lord died even for those who reject Him (Heb 10:29; 2 Pet 2:1; Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11). We can also cite the following in support of the Arminian position: 1 Timothy 4:10; 1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:14; John 1:29; Titus 2:11; Isaiah 53:6; Revelation 22:17; John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9; John 6:51; 2 Corinthians 5:19.

**9. Irresistible Grace**

Irresistible grace means that when God draws a person to faith in Christ, that individual cannot resist His grace. The New Testament abounds in examples of the Lord calling people to Himself. Only several, though, seem to indicate an irresistible calling. In John 6:37, Jesus says, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,” and in John 10:27, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Other passages speak of the Spirit’s drawing power as well (see Lk 14:23; Acts 13:48).

Other features, however, challenge this claim. The phrase “irresistible grace” is in itself a contraction of terms. If God’s grace is a gift, it seems inconsistent to claim that God forces people to receive it. In addition, the Old Testament records that Israel rejected God’s grace (see Isa 65:2, 12). The New Testament also affirms this – the Pharisees resisted the work of the Spirit in their lives (Acts 7:51; Matt 23:37).[[191]](#footnote-191) Moreover, the biblical texts in support of this doctrine do not specifically connect the Spirit’s drawing with the believer’s response of faith. Other unnamed factors could play a role as well.

Lutheran theology seeks a middle ground here. On the one hand, the Lutheran faith accepts the doctrine of total depravity and the teaching of *solo gratis*, i.е., salvation by grace alone. On the other hand, they also accept the concept of *gratis universalis*, which means that grace for salvation is available to all people. Lutheran theologians do not attempt to explain this discrepancy, but consider it a mystery. Mueller comments,

But if the Christian believer, on the basis of Scripture, maintains both the gratia universalis and the sola gratia, then indeed the mystery remains: Why are some elected and others not?... This mystery the true Christian believer does not try to solve since it belongs to God’s unsearchable judgments and His ways which are past finding out.[[192]](#footnote-192)

**10. Preservation**

The Calvinist position includes the claim that all genuine believers in Jesus will remain faithful to the end and never fall away. God predestined them for salvation and will consequently preserve them in faith. Jesus promised that none whom the Father gave to Him will perish, and that no one can pluck them out of His hand (Jn 6:38-40; 10:28-29). Other passages as well speak plainly of God keeping believers (1 Pet 1:5; 2 Tim 1:12; Jn 17:12; 1 Jn 5:18; Rom 16:25; Jude 24). He will complete the work that He began in them (Phil 1:6; 1 Thes 5:23-24).[[193]](#footnote-193)

In addition, if people have received “eternal life,” then they cannot lose it, otherwise it would not be “eternal.” The Bible also speaks of the Holy Spirit, who abides in the believer as the “pledge” of salvation (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). Paul exclaims, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). The Son of God Himself intercedes for the saints before the Father (Jn 17:11; Heb 7:24-25).[[194]](#footnote-194) He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). The indwelling Spirit can guard us from all danger. Finally, 1 John 2:19 teaches that when someone turns from the faith, it is evidence that that person was never a true believer in the first place.[[195]](#footnote-195)

Nevertheless, numerous other Scripture passages warn the Church of the danger of backsliding, urging them to remain in the faith. The apostle John exhorts believers, “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 Jn 2:24). Paul warns in Colossians 1:22-23, “He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach – if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” It is reasonable to assume that if God warns about apostasy, it is a real possibility. Pekota writes, “In what way are they warnings if they do not correspond to reality?”[[196]](#footnote-196)

Some opponents of the doctrine of preservation view 1 John 2:19 as a special case that applies to the “antichrists,” or false teachers, mentioned in the previous verse. These are the same people of whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 7:15: “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Others explain this verse by pointing out that these teachers manifested that they “were not {really} of us” at the time when they departed from the Church. Yet, they may have been genuine believers before that time.

Several passages unmistakably teach that true Christians can fall away. Peter writes of believers who become “again entangled” in sin (2 Pet 2:20-22). In Hebrews, we learn that “after receiving the knowledge of the truth,” one can “go on sinning willfully” (Heb 10:26-27). The most well known passage in this regard is Hebrews 6:4-6, which we analyzed in detail in the previous chapter. Along with these key texts, many other passages warn about backsliding or indicate that it is possible.[[197]](#footnote-197)

Calvinists attempt to explain some of these biblical texts. In John 15:2, 6 Jesus teaches, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, (the Father) takes away.” It is claimed that such branches had no vital connection to the vine in the first place, otherwise they would have borne fruit. If they had no real connection, then they were never in Christ. Calvinists also hold that if a true Christian “turns away from his righteousness” (Ezek 18:24), this person may die physically, but not spiritually. In their opinion, the phrase “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” does not mean that salvation comes only to those who persevere, but that those whom God keeps for salvation will invariably persevere. Nonetheless, the weight of biblical evidence still falls in favor of the understanding that falling away is a real danger for the Christian.

The Lutheran Church, again, occupies a middle ground. On the one hand, Lutherans feel that “all who endure to the end do so alone by divine grace.” Yet, on the other hand, “All who fall from faith do so through their own fault.”[[198]](#footnote-198)

**11. New Birth**

Calvinism teaches that people turn to the Lord as a result of experiencing the new birth prior to conversion. In other words, regeneration precedes and enables an individual to repent and believer. Since salvation is God’s work, persons cannot repent or believe, that is, fulfill salvation’s requirements, until the Lord gives them new birth. Several biblical texts are cited in support. In Ephesians 2:8, faith is not a human production, but God’s gift (also see Phil 1:29; Heb 12:2; Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:9). According to 2 Timothy 2:25, Acts 11:18, and Acts 5:31, God grants repentance.[[199]](#footnote-199)

Best defends this position as follows.[[200]](#footnote-200) He notes the unbeliever’s inability to perceive spiritual things: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). To such a person they appear foolish (1 Cor 1:17-18). The darkness does not “comprehend” the light (1 Jn 1:5). God first opens the heart to the Word through spiritual new birth. He did so for Lydia (Acts 16:14) and “shone in our hearts” so that we, too, believed (2 Cor 4:6). He prepares the soil to receive the gospel (Matt 13:18-23).

Moreover, God created us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10) and made us alive together with Him (Eph 2:5). He gives us understanding (1 Jn 5:20), just as He enlightened Peter (Matt 16:17). In His light (rebirth), we see light (Ps 36:9). Additionally, Best interprets the following words in a spiritual sense: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made both of them” (Prov 20:12).

Finally, in John 3:8 Best notes the comparison of the work of the Spirit and the action of the wind. Like the wind, the work of the Spirit is life-giving, sovereign, and mysterious, that is, it takes places without our awareness. The same sense is present in Ezekiel 37:9, where the breath (or spirit) “from the four winds” enlivens the dry bones.

On the other hand, Arminians teach the reverse order of things. A person first turns to the Lord, then new birth results. At the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit enters the heart of converts and seals them for salvation. Paul wrote, “After listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). Note that hearing the Word and believing in Christ precedes the reception of the Spirit.

Peter taught the same. On the Day of Pentecost, he announced to his hearers: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38)[[201]](#footnote-201). In his first epistle, he taught that we “have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). Again, receiving the Word precedes regeneration. James also so taught: “He brought us forth by the word of truth” (Jam 1:18).

Upon closer examination of Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith (πίστεως); and that (τοῦτο) not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God,” we discover that the word “that” (τοῦτο - *touto*) stands in the Greek neuter tense. The word “faith” (πίστεως - *pisteos*), however, is grammatically feminine. Therefore, the “gift of God” is not faith. The neuter pronoun refers to the entire previous clause, i.e., the salvation granted by grace.

According to 2 Timothy 2:25, God gives repentance and knowledge of the truth: “…if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” True, God may grant these things, but the individual must personally respond to God’s prompting. We also note that the repentance of those in opposition to the truth depends, in part, on how Timothy behaves. Hence Paul’s instruction: “…with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition.” So then, there is a human factor involved in this process as well.[[202]](#footnote-202)

When Peter gave account before the leaders of the Jerusalem church, they replied, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life” (Acts 11:18). They did not mean, however, that God specially appointed certain Gentiles to be saved, but rather that the gospel was available to all peoples, including Gentiles. Concerning Acts 5:31, that God “grants repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins,” the meaning here is not predestination to salvation, but that God provides opportunity to receive forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son.

Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi, “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Here, it seems that God granted them the ability to believe. On the other hand, the meaning could also be not “ability” to believe, but “opportunity” to believe. In other words, the Lord grants opportunity to believe, but the individual makes the actual decision of faith. This interpretation finds support in the rest of the verse, where believers voluntarily participate in suffering for Christ. Just as God grants Christians the *opportunity* to suffer for the Lord, yet they voluntarily participate in those sufferings, He grants them the *opportunity* to accept Him as Savior, but they do so from their own free will.

According to Romans 12:3, “God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” This instruction, though, concerns spiritual gifts. This is not saving faith, but faith for the operation of spiritual gifts. Without question, God determines which person receives what spiritual gift. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12:8-9 we learn that “to one is given… faith by the same Spirit.” This context again is dealing with spiritual gifts. Faith here is a special endowment by the Spirit along with words of knowledge, prophecy, etc. In addition, faith for salvation is not only for some Christians (“to one is given”), but to all believers in Jesus.

The Lutheran faith views this question as follows. Mueller comments, “Faith, then, according to Scripture is rightly viewed both as the effect of election and as the means by which its purpose is accomplished.”[[203]](#footnote-203) In other words, faith precedes the rebirth, but it is conditioned by God’s election.

**12. Passivity in Morals**

Arminians feel that if we believe that God controls every choice people make, then this would unavoidably lead to passivity in respect to moral behavior. If every act occurs in accordance with God’s sovereign and predestined will and a person cannot chose otherwise, what sense is there in personal striving for holiness?

Calvinist, however, deny that their teaching leads to moral inactivity. They respond that if persons are truly born again, they will have a natural impulse to strive for holiness. An authentically born again believer cannot be indifferent toward proper behavior. Did not Jesus say that His sheep would certainly follow Him?

One must also consider that, although theoretically, people do not *have to* strive for obedience, they nonetheless *will do* so, since God is prompting such behavior within them. The Arminian objection fails when we consider that it has force only if believers have genuine free will – only then they can *choose* to display spiritual apathy. However, Calvinists teach that the elect have no such freedom and are predestined to holy living.

**13. Prayer**

What about prayer? If the Lord predetermines all events, what sense is there to make requests in prayer? Can we really effect the outcome of any situation or exercise any influence on God at all? Calvinists affirm that prayer has no effect on God. Yet, they add that God’s plan is to accomplish His plan through the prayers of His people. God causes saints to pray, then answers their “involuntary” prayers. This is how He performs His will.[[204]](#footnote-204)

However, the question remains as to why God would employ such a convoluted system. Why does He not just act independent of prayer? Calvinists would respond that through the practice of prayer, Christians exercise humility and learn dependence on the Lord. Nonetheless, we still wish to know why God needs to use means such as prayer to develop character in His chosen? He can at any moment cause a change in character to occur sovereignly and unilaterally. It seem that in the Calvinist’s system, prayer plays an insignificant role in God’s overall plan.

**14. Preaching and Miracles**

A similar dilemma arises in connection with God’s miracles. In our survey of New Testament passages, we discovered that through Peter’s miracle ministry many people came to Christ (Acts 9:32-43). Also significant is that, according to Matthew 11:21, if the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had seen the works done by Jesus, they would have repented. We can cite many examples in Scripture where miracles and effective preaching directly resulted in many conversions (e.g. Acts 14:1).

The only response open to the Calvinist is to assume that this is the means that God wishes to use to bring some of His elect to salvation. God could, of course, achieve the same result without using any means at all. They must admit that God can operate independently from all human activity, otherwise, in their mind, He would cease to be sovereign. Therefore, in the system of Calvinism all of God’s actions occur because He wants to do it that way. Preaching and miracles are, in reality, unnecessary.

However, without exception *all* the means God uses to reach people appeal to their reason and will – to *convince* them to turn to Him. If that was not so, then He could use irrational and flippant acts to accomplish the same predetermined effect. Yet, He does not do so because He is making a genuine appeal to people’s reason and volition. His choice of means is not random, but intentional to exert an influence on human free will.

**15. Knowledge of God**

A major deficit in the Calvinistic view is its effect on the knowledge of God. Calvin comments on this aspect of his theology:

Since, on account of the dullness of our sense, the wisdom of God seems manifold (or, as an old interpreter rendered it, multiform), are we, therefore, to dream of some variation in God, as if he either changed his counsel, or disagreed with himself? Nay, when we cannot comprehend how God can will that to be done which he forbids us to do, let us call to mind our imbecility, and remember that the light in which he dwells is not without cause termed inaccessible.[[205]](#footnote-205)

In the light of our discussion of the doctrine of unconditional predestination, it appears that we cannot ascribe such qualities to God as “loving” or “holy,” since He does not give all persons the chance to be saved and Himself causes evil acts to be performed. If the biblical description of God as “loving” and “holy” do not correspond to reality or if the meaning of those terms in relation to God differs from their meaning in relation to us, then any biblical term that describes God could be either incorrect or incomprehensible. Additionally, the problem is not with our misunderstanding of these terms. Where else do we derive our understanding of what “love” and “holiness” mean, except through our study of the inspired Scriptures themselves?

Therefore, looking at Scripture from a Calvinistic perspective robs one of a true knowledge of God. If the words describing God’s character in the Bible hold a different connotation in relation to Him than their conventional sense, then we are totally in the dark as to who God is or what His nature is like.

### D. Conclusions

In comparison with the problems connected with the Arminian view (such as how a sinner is converted), the difficulties encountered in the Calvinist system are much more serious. The Calvinists’ view of God varies greatly from the biblical view in regard to His holiness and justice. Calvinists present God as one who shows partiality (contra Rom 2:11). He chooses some for salvation, but does not provide the same chance for all. Additionally, if every act of the human will is predetermined by the Lord, then He is responsible for all the evil in the world, since He causes people to sin.

This teaching is inconsistent with God’s love as well. How likely is it that God, who loved the world so much as to send His own Son to die for its sins, would intentionally predestine for eternal damnation (actively or passively) those for whom Christ died? Additionally, if God loves only the elect, then He again is showing partiality in whom He chooses to love.

Calvinism also struggles in the area of ethics. If God purposely rejects and condemns the non-elect, how can we follow His example in loving a world that He does not love? If God condemns the non-elect for the goal of receiving greater glory (the “theological center” of Calvinism), then He is employing a utilitarian ethic of the “end justifying the means.”

Also in connection with the “theological center” of Calvinism, if God’s only goal in predestining some for damnation is to have opportunity to demonstrate His justice and wrath, would not the damnation of a small number of people suffice? Why does it seem that the majority of people will be lost (see Matt 7:13-14)?

Finally, the doctrine of unconditional predestination robs the believer of any reliable knowledge of God. Since the biblical terms that describe Him do not actually correspond to who He really is, knowledge of His nature, even on a fundamental level, is inaccessible.

Molinism presents us with a very creative alternative, but is highly speculative and lacks strong support in Scripture. In addition, Molinists commit a major error in positing that God “tempts” people to sin by creating circumstances in their lives that invariably lead to that result. God tempts no one (Jam 1:13), but always makes a way of escape from temptation (1 Cor 10:13).

1. The word “let” is a translation of the Hebrew נָתַן (*natan*), which has the basic meaning “give,” but can also be rendered “let” (Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (electronic ed.). – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000. – P. 679). Here we must also consider, though, that God may have prevented Abimelech from touching Sarah not directly, but indirectly through mitigating circumstances. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Carson D. A. How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 183-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thompson J. A. 1, 2 Chronicles // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. – P. 324. Dillard agrees (Dillard R. B. 2 Chronicles // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 201). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dillard R. B. 2 Chronicles // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 201. Dillard also cites 2 Chr 22:7: “Now the destruction of Ahaziah was from God, in that he went to Joram.” Yet the text does not say that God compelled Ahaziah’s decision, but only that He purposed his destruction. God could well have simply foreknown Ahaziah’s plan to visit Joram. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Blocher H. Evil and the Cross. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994. – P. 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Keil C. F., Delitzsch F. Commentary on the Old Testament. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996. – V. 10. – P. 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 409, 654-655. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Garrett D. A. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993. – P. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Murphy R. E. Proverbs // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 466-467. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 5, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., v. 6, p. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Murphy, p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Noted in Keil and Delitzsch, v. 6, p. 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 6, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Murphy, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Garrett, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 6, p. 243; Murphy, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Murphy, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Keil and Delitzsch, v. 7, p. 438; Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 7, p. 438 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 968. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 7, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., v. 8, p. 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, v. 7, p. 604. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Craigie P. C. Jeremiah 1–25 // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – С. 360. Craigie also notes the disjunctive accent in the Hebrew text, which better corresonds to the translation “if.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 8, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., v. 8, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Huey F. B. Jeremiah, Lamentations // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993. – P. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 10, p. 479. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 735. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Williamson H. G. M. Ezra, Nehemiah // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Keil and Delitzsch, v. 10, p. 497. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Noted in Smith R. L. Micah–Malachi // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Smith, p. 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Noted in Murphy, p. 153, Dunn J. D. G. Romans 9–16 // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas: Word, 1998. – P. 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Boyd G. A. Response to William Lane Craig // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. W. Four Views on Divine Providence. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011, Kindle Edition, 2406-2411. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Hagner D. A. Matthew 1-13 // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Blomberg C. Matthew // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, electronic edition Logos Library System, 2001. – P. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Morris L. The Gospel Аccording to Matthew // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W. B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992. – P. 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Blomberg, p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Polhill J. B. Acts // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995. – P. 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Peterson D. G. The Acts of the Apostles // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2009. – P. 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 991. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Polhill, p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Peterson, p. 399–400. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Pekota D. B. The Saving Work of Christ // Horton C. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2007. – P. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Arndt, et. al., p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., p. 879. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Polhill, p. 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Noted in Carson D. A. How long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil. – 2nd ed. –Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Dunn, p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Michaels J. R. 1 Peter // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Davids P. H. The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006. – P. 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Bauckham R. J. 2 Peter, Jude // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Davids, p. 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Carson D. A. Editor’s Preface in The Letter to the Hebrews // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2010. – P. 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. George T. Galatians // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. – P. 314; Longenecker R. N. Galatians // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 180; Bruce F. F. The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text // New International Greek Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. The conjunction ὅτι (*hoti*) is most likely used here not for clarification, i.e., to show by what means God chose the Thessalonians, but rather to indicate cause, i.e., how Paul knew that God elected them (Wanamaker C. A. The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text // New International Greek Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990. – P. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Green thinks that the Thessalonians reception of the Good News (v. 6) also resulted from God choosing them. Yet, the conjunction καί (*kai*) that introduces this verse does not necessarily continue the sense of causation from verse 5 (Green G. L. The Letters to the Thessalonians // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W. B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002. – P. 97). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Green, p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Wanamaker, p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Green comments that this contrast is shown in the text by the conjunction δε (*de*), which introduces verse 13 (Green, p. 325) [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Green, p. 325 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Martin D. M. 1, 2 Thessalonians // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995. – P. 251-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Green, p. 325-326. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Arndt, et. al., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Martin, p. 267; Green, p. 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Martin, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Martin, p. 267; Green, p. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Green, p. 338; Wanamaker, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Wanamaker, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Carson D. A. Editor’s Preface in The First Letter to the Corinthians // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010. – P. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Dunn, p. 548. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Morris L. The Epistle to the Romans // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W. B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. – P. 359, 364; Dunn, p. 546, 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Dunn, p. 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Mounce R. H. Romans // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. – P. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Morris, p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Dunn, p. 567. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Morris, p. 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid., p. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Arndt, et. al., p. 873. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Morris, p. 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Dunn, p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Mounce, p. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Arndt, et. al., p. 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Lincoln A. T. Ephesians // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1990. – P. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. It is notable that except for Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 8:29-30, Paul used the word προορίζω (*prooridzo*) only one more time, in 1 Corinthians 2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Mounce W. D. Pastoral Epistles // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2000. – P. 481-482. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Possibly, this contrasts with Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:23: “I never knew you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The Greek text of verse 40 reads, τετύφλωκεν αὐτῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἐπώρωσεν αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν, i.е., “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.” Carson correctly claims that the conjunction ἵνα (*hina*), introducing the following phrase, “so that they will not see with their eyes,” reflects result, not goal. He supports his interpretation, appealing to the phrase in verse 39: “For this reason they could not believe” (Carson, p. 447). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Borchert G. L. John 1–11 // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996. – P. 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Borchert, p. 340–341. Beasley-Murray also notes this (Beasley-Murray G. R. John // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas: Word, 2002. – P. 174). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Зубков О. Студенческий реферат. Евангельская теологическая семинария. – Киев, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Carson D. A. The Gospel according to John // The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W. B. Eerdmans, 1991. – P. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Borchert also mentions this (Borchert, p. 268). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Borchert, p. 268; Carson, p. 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ярмолик А. Предопределение: Арминианский взгляд на некоторые ключевые стихи // Студенческий реферат. Евангельская теологическая семинария. – Киев, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. McGrath A. E. Christian Theology: An Introduction. – 4th ed. – Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Hart makes an interesting comment here that God already manifest His righteousness and wrath on the cross of Calvary. Therefore, there was no need to do so by punishing the non-elect (Hart D. B. Providence and Causality: The Divine Innocence // Murphy F. A., Ziegler P. G. The Providence of God. – London; New York: T.T. Clark, 2009. – P. 48-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Craig W. L. God Directs All Things on Behalf of a Molinist View of Providence // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. W. Four Views on Divine Providence. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Kindle Edition. Many of the following points come from this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Craig W. L. God Directs All Things, 1759-1761. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Craig W. L. Response to Gregory A. Boyd // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. W. Four Views on Divine Providence. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 4677-4679. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
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111. Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1937. – P. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Lane T. A Concise History of Christian Thought. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Boyd, Craig, Helseth, Highfield, Jowers. Introduction, Kindle Edition, 163-165, 175-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Berkhof, p. 136. Also see McGrath, p. 380-381. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
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116. Boyd, Craig, Helseth, Highfield, Jowers. Introduction, Kindle Edition, 200-201; Rafferty O. P. Roman Catholic Response // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein, S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle edition, 2890-2893. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Rafferty, Kindle edition, 2890-2893. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Boyd, Craig, Helseth, Highfield, Jowers. Introduction, Kindle Edition, 202-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Lane, p. 183-185. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Some Calvinists, called “occasionalists,” express the relationship between the primary cause (God) and the secondary causes differently. God remains the primary cause, but the secondary causes are “occasions,” in which God acts (noted in Craig, God Directs All Things, p. 83-84). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Boyd, Craig, Helseth, Highfield, Jowers. Introduction, Kindle Edition, 169-173; Helm P. The Providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993. – P. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Webster J. On the Theology of Providence // Murphy F. A., Ziegler P. G. The Providence of God. – London; New York: T.T. Clark, 2009. – P. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Helseth P. K. God Causes All Things // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. W. Four Views on Divine Providence. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 453-454, 542-545, 638-669. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
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131. Craig W. L. Response to Paul Kjoss Helseth, 980-983. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Ibid., 985-987. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Ibid., 832-833. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
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138. Nash, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Boyd, God Limits His Freedom, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
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161. *Institutes of the Christian religion*, 1.18.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Ibid., 1.18.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Helm, p. 167, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Ibid., p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Noted in Hart, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
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170. Ibid., p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Pink, p. 16 (parentheses not in original). [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
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175. Craig, Response to Ron Highfield, Kindle Edition, 3402-3405 [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Boyd, God Limits His Control, Kindle Edition, 3770-3775, 4043-4044. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
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183. The following passages support the idea of total depravity: Jn 6:44; Acts 16:14; Rom 7:18; 2 Cor 4:3-6; 1 Cor 2:14; Rom 1:21; Tit 1:15; Jer 17:9; Eph 4:18-19; Jn 15:5; Isa 64:6; Jn 3:20 (Ботнари Е. Рецензия на книгу «Regeneration and Conversion», автором В. Э. Бест. – Киев: Евангельская теологическая семинария, 2005; Mueller, p. 343). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Mueller, p. 346-347. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Ботнари. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
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187. Ibid., p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Mueller, p. 596. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
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190. Muller R. Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice, p. 266. Noted in Helseth, God Causes All Things, Kindle Edition, 664-669. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
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192. Mueller, p. 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Pekota, p. 411-412; Thiessen, p. 386-387. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Thiessen, p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Pekota, p. 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. See Rom 11:20-22; Jn 15:2, 6; Lk 9:62; 1 Cor 9:27; Gal 5:4; 1 Tim 4:1; 1 Tim 1:19; 2 Tim 2:12; Matt 7:21-23; Matt 24:13; Rev 3:5; Ezek 18:24; Lk 8:13-15; Lk 12:45-46; Matt 18:21-22; 1 Cor 10:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Mueller, p. 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Shedd W., Thayer G., Gomes A. W. Dogmatic Theology. – 3rd ed. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003. – P. 772. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Best, p. 5-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Shedd responds to this point by arguing that Peter’s words, “as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:39), indicates that repentance is possible only for those whom God regenerates at the moment of their call to salvation (Shedd, p. 772). Yet, this argument in no way overturns the clear order presented by Peter here of repentance and faith prior to receiving the Spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Новик П. Студенческий реферат. Евангельская теологическая семинария. – Киев, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Mueller, p. 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Highfield, God Controls by Liberating, p. 154-157. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Calvin, *Institutes,* 1.18.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-205)