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The Bible And Christianity Explained

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## NAVIGATING PREDESTINATION



## AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE

### DEFINING - ACCEPTING - APPLYING TWO CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS

When ship captains navigate through various waterways, they use charts to plot their course. These charts show where distinct red and green floating buoys are placed in the water to mark safe passageways.



The red and green buoys are always separated from each other and placed on opposite sides of the channel. In order to navigate safely, ship captains must always keep both buoys in sight and steer between them in order to remain in the safe, deep water.



The Bible is God's navigation chart for our lives. It presents 'spiritual buoys' to us that are separate and opposite from one another; the buoys of 'Predestination' and our 'Moral Freedom of Choice'. God's spiritual buoys, when properly understood, allow us to know that we are in 'safe water', and to recognize the direction we must take in order to navigate successfully toward eternal life. We can understand God's spiritual buoys when we:

1) **Define** each truth biblically; seeing it in its 'true colors'.

2) **Accept** the contradiction in these truths (their separateness and oppositeness) by acknowledging that we are not able to reconcile them with each other in our own minds.

3) **Apply** these truths to our lives in the way that God instructs us to.

### **DEFINING PREDESTINATION**

The Bible's teaching on predestination is that God has pre-planned and predestined the entire history of the universe, including the lives of all of its inhabitants, for the single purpose of revealing His own glory. The glory that God is revealing is twofold; firstly His creative glory, seen in the universe, in our planet and solar system, and in all of the spiritual and biological life both here and throughout the universe. Secondly, God is revealing the glory of His character; seen in the wisdom, righteousness, justice and love He demonstrates in His dealings both with men and with angels.

**God's right to predestine all things is also referred to by many Christians as the 'SOVEREIGNTY' of God.**

Just as a king is sovereign over his kingdom, and can do whatever he pleases with it, so God is also sovereign over the universe.

While the truth of predestination and God's sovereignty is found throughout the Bible, it is most clearly set forth and defined by the apostle Paul in the ninth chapter of Romans. Paul echoes an Old Testament proverb when he declares that God predestines people to their ultimate ends without any thought about their own personal moral character. In fact, God predestines the moral choices that people and angels will make:

**The Lord has made all for Himself; yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.  
Proverbs 16:4**

**And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls), it was said unto her "The elder shall serve the younger". As it is written "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated". What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness**

with God? God forbid. For He said to Moses "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion". So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God Who shows mercy. For the scripture said unto Pharaoh "Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth". Therefore He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens. Romans 9:10-18

Theologians refer to this idea, that God predestines some beings to choose righteousness and others to choose evil, as 'double predestination'. Many people, when they are confronted with Biblical predestination, immediately reject it as unfair and unjust. The apostle Paul anticipated this objection, and answered it:

You will say then unto me 'Why does God find fault? For who has resisted His will?' Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it "Why have you made me thus?" Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory? Romans 9:19-23

Paul made no excuses for predestination. He did not apologize or offer rationalizations. He simply said 'God is the Creator! Who do you think you are?' Paul's reasoning was simple. He said that when we, as men or angels, are compared to the Creator of the universe, we are of no more significance or value than clay in the hand of a potter.

Paul's message was that, while it cannot be said of any other being, it can rightly be said of God that He is so glorious and terrible in His greatness that it is only right that the entire universe, and everyone in it, should exist for no other purpose than to make it possible for Him to reveal His own glory.

## **GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE; HE IS THE REASON FOR THE UNIVERSE.**

God's glory as King of the universe was discovered by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, long ago. Nebuchadnezzar had been proud and arrogant, and God had warned him that if he continued in his pride, he would be humbled. In fulfillment of the warning, God caused Nebuchadnezzar to lose his mind and crawl around on the ground, eating grass like an animal. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to sanity, this is what he said:

And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me. And I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored Him who lives for ever; Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and He does according to

His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can restrain His hand, or say unto Him 'What are You doing?'. Daniel 4:34,35

The second thing that we need to understand about predestination is that it originates with God the Father.

### **God the Father is the only Predestinator.**

We find this truth presented in multiple places in the Bible. Both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit cooperate with the Father in bringing His plans to fulfillment, but predestination itself originates with the Father.

All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. John 6:37

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. 1 Peter 1:2

The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for You have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created". Revelation 4:10-11

The third thing that we need to understand about predestination is that the Father predestined all things before He began creating.

### **Predestination occurred in eternity past, before time or the world began.**

Predestination is separate and detached from the world in which we live. It is not something that God is doing in the 'here-and-now'. Predestination is not something that God is 'making up as He goes along'. There is a disconnect between God's choices in eternity past, and the carrying out of His plan in our present universe.

It is important that we recognize this separation between the past and the present. Time itself is a created thing, woven into the fabric of our material universe. Time is subject to the laws of physics, and can be bent and shaped, stretched or shortened, just like any other created thing. But predestination was completed before any created thing came into existence.

Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me meat, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink." Matthew 25:34-36

Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Acts 15:18

According as He has chosen us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to

adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. Ephesians 1:4-5

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. 2 Thessalonians 2:13

God has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. 2 Timothy 1:9

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised before the world began; but has in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior. Titus 1:1-3

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude 4

## **DEFINING MORAL FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

The Bible tells us that we live in an open-ended moral universe, and that its ultimate endpoint will be determined by the free moral choices that God, men and angels make in their relationships with each other. Furthermore the Bible tells us that not only men and angels, but God Himself is bound by the requirements of righteousness, truth, fairness and justice in determining what the ultimate outcome of the world will be.

**THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS; THAT GOD JUDGES MEN AND ANGELS BASED ONLY UPON WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVED OBEYED THE LAW.**

In Acts 17:31, the apostle Paul told the people of Athens that a day is coming when God is going to judge the world "in righteousness". Moral righteousness will be the standard by which God Himself is measured, and by which He will measure all other beings.

Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. Genesis 26:5

And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us. Deuteronomy 6:24-25

According to thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth. Thy right hand is full of righteousness. Psalm 48:10

Think not that I (Jesus) am come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, 'Until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, until all is fulfilled'. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

Then Peter opened his mouth and said "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that fears Him, and works righteousness, is accepted with Him". Acts 10:34-35

Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the Law. Romans 3:31

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:1-4

For He (the Father) has made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie. Revelation 22:14-15

## **THE SECOND PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT IS TRUTHFULNESS; THAT GOD JUDGES MEN AND ANGELS BASED ONLY UPON WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE OF THEM.**

The Bible tells us that God is going to judge the world in complete truthfulness, and in accordance with what each one of us has freely and knowingly chosen to do. It is important here to clarify the underlying principle of God's justice. It is the principle of 'subjectivism'; that God judges people based strictly upon what is actually, subjectively true of them. God only judges men and angels based upon what they have freely thought, said or done. In other words, God will judge the world according to our 'works' or 'deeds'. He never judges upon any other basis.

He (God) is the Rock. His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment. A God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is He. Deuteronomy 32:4

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord. For He comes, for He comes to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth. Psalm 96:11-13

But when John the Baptist saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits consistent with repentance. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. Matthew 3:7,8,10

Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not every one that says unto Me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:20,21

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whosoever you are that judges. For wherein you judge another, you condemn thyself; for you that judge do the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And think you this, O man that judges them which do such things, and do the same, that you shalt escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But after your hardness and impenitent heart you treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But glory, honor and peace to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God. Romans 2:1-11

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

Little children, let no man deceive you. He who does what is right is righteous, even as He (God) is righteous. 1 John 3:7

And he that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. Revelation 2:26

And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. Revelation 20:11-12

And, behold, I come quickly. And My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. Revelation 22:12

**THE THIRD PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT IS FAIRNESS. THE ONE WHO WILL JUDGE MANKIND WILL BE A MAN HIMSELF; A RIGHTEOUS MAN WHO SO LOVED US THAT HE ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE TREATED AS A CRIMINAL IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BE SAVED.**

I suppose it goes without saying that God's judgment, based upon both righteousness and truth, will be just and fair as well. But this point needs to be stressed. Not only will God's judgment be fulfilled in perfect righteousness, truth and justice, but it will be pronounced by Someone who has 'walked in our shoes'. The One who will sit upon the Great White Throne will be Someone who left His heavenly glory behind, coming to earth as the 'Son of Man'. As a human being He obediently endured all of the moral trials and temptations that any human being can experience, and then subjected Himself to a Roman criminal execution in order to make forgiveness and righteousness possible for rebellious people.

It will be in the context of the Son of God's moral obedience and patient loving kindness that people will come before Jesus to be judged. It will be a dreadful thing to come before the One who died for us, only to be condemned because we refused to acknowledge our sins and embrace His grace and mercy.

**For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son.  
John 5:22**

**In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:16**

**Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not a thing to be clung to, to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11**

## **CONTRADICTING GOD'S DEFINITIONS**

In the two preceding sections above I have described two important truths in God's word; God the Father's sovereign predestination of all things before time began, and the complete moral freedom and accountability of God, men and angels in this present world. In explaining predestination, I referred to what I would call the 'wellspring' of truth concerning predestination; Paul's explanation of it in Romans chapter 9. I have not, however, mentioned the 'wellspring' of truth concerning the moral accountability of mankind, and of mankind's first rebellion and declaration of war against God in the Garden of Eden. That 'wellspring', like the first one, is found in Paul's epistle to the church in Rome; in Romans chapter 5.



**Beginning in Romans 1:18, Paul described the root of all human sin; a refusal to acknowledge, love and honor God. In chapters 2 and 3 he proceeded to describe the universality of human sinfulness, without exception:**

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shown it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.**

**Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections. For even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.**

**And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness. Full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity. Whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Romans 1:18-32**

**Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whosoever you are that judges. For wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you that judge do the same things. Romans 2:1**

**As it is written "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understands. There is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable. There is none that does good; no, not one. Romans 3:10-12 (Paul quoting Psalm 14:1-3)**

**Then in Romans 3:23 and 5:12, Paul traced mankind's universal sinfulness to one act that we all committed in the past; Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden: ...for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23**

**...by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12**

In both of the verses above, when Paul wrote that we have 'all sinned', he used the simple, active past tense form of the Greek verb 'sin', indicating an action that has been performed in the past. If the original Greek words in Paul's letter are to be taken literally, then we must understand him to say that each and every one of us was present within Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that each one of us personally, consciously and individually chose to commit the same act of disobedience that Adam himself was committing. How was this possible? A union existed between Adam and the many members of the human race, such that Adam's thoughts and actions were simultaneously the individual and personal thoughts and actions of every member of the human race.

I have explained this connection with Adam in my web pages titled **Death and the Judgment of God**, and **The Truth About Original Sin**. And I have explained the similar union between the last Adam (Jesus Christ) and His people in my web page titled **God's Forgiveness**. The simple and correct explanation is that the human race was created in the image of God. Just as three eternal Persons are united as one God, so also the many billions of the human race were united as one man; Adam.

When the divinely inspired apostle wrote that we all sinned in the Garden of Eden, he meant exactly what he said. He was describing a union between Adam and the rest of mankind that might be described as a TRINITARIAN UNION; one that combines the simultaneous 'oneness' and individuality present among the Persons of the Trinity.

I have now presented the two most important passages in God's word regarding the sovereignty of God in predestination, and the free moral choice and accountability of man, bestowed upon us by God in the Garden of Eden. Both of these passages are found in Paul's epistle to the Romans; a part of the Bible that many have referred to as 'the Constitution of the Christian faith'.

The problem is that, from the early days of the Christian church, some teachers have turned these two truths against each other. They have mixed these truths, using one to nullify the other. In the process they have contradicted God's word, and have destroyed these truths at their scriptural 'wellsprings'. Where the Bible talks about man's choices, these false teachers have said that it's really about God's choices. And where the Bible talks about God's choices, they say that it's really about man's choices.

In order to understand this fundamental attack upon God's word, we must first consider what happened to Adam himself in Eden. When Adam disobeyed God, he brought two things upon himself:

- 1) The penalty or punishment for sin, which is death.
- 2) The power of Sin over himself, which was a bondage or enslavement to the spirit of Sin which had entered and taken ownership of his body.

It is universally agreed (within the Christian church) that when Adam sinned, God responded directly and personally to him based upon the principle of 'subjectivism'. God judged Adam based upon what was actually, subjectively true of him. Adam sinned, and God's judgment came upon him as the direct and just consequence of his

actions. But in contradiction to this basic principle of truth and justice, and to God's explicit statement in the book of Romans that each one of us sinned in Eden, a man named Augustine introduced a different explanation of our relationship with Adam. Augustine denied that each of us also sinned in Eden, and instead taught that God, in His sovereignty, chose to create Adam in such a way that the power that Sin had gained over Adam would be passed down to each of us biologically; through physical reproduction. Augustine taught that we inherit Adam's moral weakness, without actually sinning ourselves.

This idea has come to be known as 'hereditary depravity'. Because the only One who could have set up this transference of Adam's moral bondage to the rest of us was God, we are compelled to believe that our depravity flows out of God's choices, rather than our own. In actuality Augustine was contradicting God's word, denying our real personal presence in Eden, and placing the blame for our moral bondage upon God. He was using the sovereignty of God to contradict biblical truth, to absolve the human race of its sins, and to impugn God's holiness, justice, righteousness and truth.

Augustine's doctrine of inherited depravity became the cornerstone of Roman Catholicism, and remains so to this day. When the Protestant Reformation began, rather than reject Rome's choice to blame our moral condition upon God, Reformation theologians embraced it. Then they proceeded to 'double down' on Rome's error by taking God's responsibility for mankind's problems to a whole new level. The Reformers taught that God, again in His sovereignty, chose to appoint Adam as the representative for all mankind. Then, after Adam sinned, God simply charged or 'imputed' Adam's sin to each and every one of us, because God had 'sovereignly' authorized Adam to 'vote' in our place.

**Not content with Rome's claim that God sovereignly caused us to inherit the power that Sin had gained over Adam, the Reformers insisted that God has also caused us to inherit the penalty for Adam's sin.**

Hence Reformed doctrine has compounded Rome's error. According to Reformed theologians, God has not only brought about our moral enslavement, but He has also falsely accused every one of us of committing Adam's crime, even though He knows that this is not true. In short, Reformed Protestants have been calling God a liar for 500 years, attributing all of mankind's immorality, pain, suffering and death throughout our history to a false charge brought against us by God. This is what has come from failing to keep the sovereignty of God and the moral freedom and responsibility of man separate from each other in our thinking and handling of God's word. This is a fundamental error that the apostle John warned about:

**If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His word is not in us.**  
1 John 1:10

This is what reformed theologians have done; they have made God a liar. They deny that God judges the world based upon what is actually, literally true of us. One of their favorite words is 'imputation'. The word means 'to charge somebody with some moral

status'. Their claim is that God, in His sovereignty, can impute sin or righteousness to anybody that He pleases. This is not how imputation works, however.

In a court of law 1) accusations are made in law suits or criminal proceedings. Then there is a 2) discovery phase, where the truth is sought through witnesses and evidence. Thirdly, 3) a conclusion is reached by a judge or a jury about what the truth actually is. And then finally, there is the 4) official 'imputation' phase. A judge or jury officially imputes to the defendant the truth that has been discovered about him. If he has been good, then innocence is imputed to him, and he is set free. If he has done wrong then guilt is imputed to him, and the appropriate fine or punishment is imposed.

The point is that 'imputation' is a very important legal and ethical concept. Reformed theologians claim that God imputed Adam's sin to us, and that He can also 'impute' the righteousness of Christ to us as well, all without any correspondence to what is actually true. Their entire theology takes the sovereignty of God and uses it as a weapon to destroy God's claim in His word that all His ways are righteousness, truth and justice. They teach that all mankind is condemned based upon the imputed sin of Adam, and that Christians are saved based upon the imputed righteousness of Christ. Their entire explanation of God's relationship with us is based in some alternate reality or 'spiritual fiction' that is completely disconnected from the real world. Their 'imputed righteousness' contradicts another statement by the apostle John:

**Little children, let no man deceive you. He who does what is right is righteous, even as God Himself is righteous. 1 John 1:10**

I once heard a Reformed Baptist pastor say that it was appropriate that God made Adam our representative, because Adam was a perfect man. He reasoned that if Adam couldn't 'pass the test' in Eden, then none of us would have passed it either. And thus it was supposedly appropriate and gracious on God's part to impute Adam's sin to all of us, because otherwise God would not have been able to impute the righteousness of Christ to us either, and the grace of God would not have been possible for any of us.

But there is a fatal flaw in this reasoning. To sin or not to sin is a personal choice. It is not affected in any way by how strong or intelligent a person is. A person with a low IQ can listen to his conscience and choose to do what is right, while a great genius might choose to rebel against God and sink to the lowest wickedness. Satan himself, originally one of the most glorious of God's archangels, is the best example of this truth. Sin does not find its origins in what we are, but in who we are.

It is for this very reason that Reformed Theology's 'Federal' or 'Representative headship of Adam' is an unacceptable doctrine; because morality is not transferable! It is a denial of our unique and individual roles, as human beings in relationships with God, to choose how we will approach that relationship. It is important that we not be deceived by Reformed Theology's big words, long traditions and elaborate explanations. When all is said and done, it simply portrays God as a liar. It contradicts God's word, it contradicts His Law (teaching that God bears 'false witness' about people), and it contradicts the testimony of our conscience.

Some might ask 'What about places in the Bible where God says that He visits the sins of fathers upon their children?' They might refer to passages such as Numbers chapter 14:

**The Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.**

**Numbers 14:18, Exodus 20:5 and 34:7, Deuteronomy 5:9**

It is true that, in some cases, God does curse later generations for the sins of their fathers. The tribe or clan of Amalek is an example. After God had delivered Moses and the people of Israel out of Egypt by supernaturally destroying the Egyptian dynasty, and then by parting the Red Sea while drowning the armies of Pharaoh, the Amalekites attacked the militarily unprepared and inexperienced people of Israel immediately. They sought to accomplish what Pharaoh had been unable to do; to directly oppose God and destroy His people (Exodus 17:8-16). As a result God swore, in fierce anger, that He would wage never-ending war against Amalek:

**And the Lord said unto Moses "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua. For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven". And Moses built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi, for he said "Because the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation". Numbers 17:14-16**

400 years later God instructed the first king of Israel, Saul, to attack the Amalekites and to destroy both them and everything that they owned, because of Amalek's attack upon Israel 400 years earlier (1 Samuel 15:1-3). Saul's failure to fully obey God's instruction led to the loss of his kingship. However what needs to be observed here, and throughout the Bible, is that God always makes a clear distinction between whether people are suffering because of their parents' sins, or because of their own sins. He is not careless in pronouncing His judgments.

The people of Israel, however, did become careless in their description of God's judgments. They had focused upon the fact that God occasionally visits the parents' sins upon the children, and made it the primary characteristic of God's ways, just as Reformed theologians have done. God rebuked them for it. In the 18th chapter of Ezekiel God clearly spelled out the primary characteristic of His justice:

**The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying "What mean you, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?' As I live" says the Lord God, "you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sins, it shall die."**

**"Yet you say 'Why? Does not the son bear the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. Ezekiel 18:1-4,19-20 (see also Jeremiah 31:29-30)**

It is absolutely true that in the course of history some people have been so 'over-the-top' in their wickedness that God has been compelled to allow the consequences of their sins to spill over upon their offspring. But whenever He has done this, God has always been absolutely clear about whose sin was the root of the problem. He has never allowed confusion to arise regarding the ultimate basis of His judgment. And He has also made it clear that those offspring who reject their parents' ways and pursue righteousness will find acceptance and blessing from Him. Thus there is no precedent from the Old Testament for the Reformed concept of imputing Adam's sin to others. In the case of the Amalekites, they suffered as a consequence of the sins of their fathers. In the case of humanity, death has come upon all "because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Another passage from the Bible should be mentioned here. In John chapter 9, the Lord Jesus and His disciples encountered a man who had been born blind. The disciples immediately asked Jesus a question about the man, and I believe that their question suggests further questions that we should consider:

And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day. The night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world". When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle. He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is by interpretation 'Sent'.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came back seeing. John 9:1-7

The disciples' question suggests two further questions that we might ask:

- 1) Had Jesus and the disciples already engaged in past discussions about the distinction between suffering because of one's own sins, or the sins of one's parents?
- 2) Had Jesus and the disciples discussed the idea that a person can sin before he is born?

I don't think we can answer either of these questions with certainty from the gospels. We have no record of Jesus and His disciples discussing these issues before. It is noteworthy, however, that Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for thinking that the man's blindness might have been caused by his parents. Nor did He rebuke them for thinking that the man himself might have sinned before he was born. And we should recognize that the Lord was not denying that the man or his parents had ever sinned before his birth. He was simply saying that, in this particular case, the man's blindness did not stem from his own sins or the sins of his parents. Rather, his blindness had been foreordained by God the Father so that the glory of His Son might be revealed to the world. The Lord Jesus lifted this particular man's blindness out of the realm of moral accountability, and placed it within the realm of the sovereignty of God.

My point here is this: it was reasonable for the disciples to ask whether or not the man's blindness was caused by a sin which he committed before he was born, even if they had never discussed the idea with the Lord Jesus before. The idea of sinning before our bodies are first conceived in the womb is deeply woven both into the Bible's claims about the universal sinfulness of humanity, and into our own thoughts about

the cause of death as well. And this idea is inherent in Paul's claim, in Romans 5:12, that just as death came upon Adam as a direct consequence of his own sin, so also death has come upon every other member of the human race as a direct consequence of their disobedience as well.

I have studied many commentaries on the book of Romans. All of the honest commentators acknowledge that, if we are to take Paul's words in Romans 3:23 and 5:12 literally (that 'all have sinned'), then we must understand him to say that each and every single member of the human race was personally and consciously present in Eden, within Adam, and individually committing the same sin that he was. The problem is that all of these commentators then go on to say things like 'Since this makes no sense', or 'Since we know that this is not true, we must come up with another explanation of Paul's words'. That explanation has been the imputation or inheritance of Adam's sin, as opposed to the simple, ethical justice conveyed in Paul's original words.

An unscriptural handling of Paul's words let's mankind off of the hook and blames everything upon God. It lets people live at ease and expect that, if God is fair and just, He will give them a second, future chance to get things 'right' with Him; rather than realizing that, if Paul's words are correct, we are receiving our second chance right now!

The Bible says that our sin, and God's judgment upon it, are already clearly perceived by us (Romans 1:18). It warns us that our continuing existence on this earth is uncertain, and that we are only one breath or heartbeat away from a second judgment and death that awaits those who have chosen to continue in disobedience. One message gives false comfort, telling people to relax and indulge their desires. The other brings terror, telling them to cast away their pride and worldly pleasures, and to seek God while they still have an opportunity to obtain His mercy.

**Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Isaiah 55:6**

**When you go with your adversary (God's Law) to the judge, as you are on the way give diligence that you may be delivered from him. Lest he drag you before the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer cast you into prison. I tell you that you shall not depart from there until you have paid the very last penny. Luke 12:58-59**

This ends my discussion of how people use the sovereignty of God to nullify the moral accountability and free choice of mankind. Now for the flip-side of this mishandling of God's word. Many Protestant theologians have used a similar tactic regarding the doctrine of predestination. While Paul declared that God the Father has chosen our eternal destinies without any thought about who we are or what we might choose to do in the future (Romans 9:11-16), many people teach that God first looked forward into history, saw that all of humanity would choose to sin, and then simply chose to predestine some sinners for mercy, while leaving others to receive what they deserve.

This is called 'infralapsarian predestination'. 'Infra' means 'after', and 'lapse' means to fall or 'sin'. 'Infralapsarian' means that, within God's mind, predestination follows mankind's universal rebellion. By putting man's choices ahead of God's choices,

infralapsarian teachers take away the 'offensiveness' of biblical predestination and election. The correct view, by the way, is 'supralapsarian'. 'Supra' means before the lapse (or fall) of man, and means that God the Father predestined all things without any thought whatsoever regarding anyone's personal character or future choices.

Those who embrace both of these 'crippled' versions, of predestination and our moral accountability, are caught in an embarrassing contradiction. If the universal sin of all mankind is only imputed or inherited, then infralapsarian predestination means that God looked ahead to a universal sin that never really occurred, or that He Himself caused. But if the universal sin of mankind is real, then hereditary depravity and God's false imputation of Adam's sin make no sense.

Those who use God's sovereignty and man's moral freedom to nullify each other are choosing to mix the 'reds' and 'greens' of God's word together, resulting in a **sickly brown color**. When God's spiritual buoys are **painted brown**, they become much harder to see; especially at night and in the turbulent, muddy waters associated with the storms of life. In addition, because all such buoys are the same color, people are left unable to determine the direction that they are traveling in; toward God or away from Him. As a result, people who choose to mix God's sovereignty and man's moral accountability end up spiritually shipwrecked.

It is this 'gutting' of the Bible, at its most fundamental level, that has left Christianity powerless in today's world; unable to accurately explain death, to proclaim the truth about a wicked and justly condemned human race, or to make what Jesus did on the cross relevant and powerful in the eyes of the world. Calvinists and Arminians like to argue about who is orthodox and who is not, but this is empty talk. They, along with Rome, both embrace the fundamental error of blaming God for our circumstances.

Old-Earth and Young-Earth creationists both claim that they handle the creation account in the book of Genesis faithfully, maintaining that Adam was a real historical person. But they both deny the most important thing that God tells us about Eden; that every single one of us was present there as well, and that when Adam sinned each one of us was also consciously and simultaneously performing the exact same act that he was. Without an understanding of this truth, regardless of the relative merits of a Young-earth or Old-earth view, it is impossible to do justice to the book of Genesis or to accurately understand our relationship with God. If Eden is not real to us because we know that we ourselves were there, then it is not biblically real to us at all.

## **INTRUSIONS INTO THE UNSEEN**

Just prior to his death at the age of 120, after he had led the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years, Moses reviewed the Laws of God and wrote them down one last time for the Israelites, prior to their entrance into the promised land of Canaan. In Deuteronomy chapter 29, Moses made an important statement about mankind's relationship with God:

**The secret things belong unto the Lord our God. But those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law.  
Deuteronomy 29:29**



In this verse, Moses was drawing a sharp distinction between a realm of the 'unseen' that is reserved for God alone, and the realm of 'visible' things that belong to us. Moses was separating a 'secret' realm, defined by God's choices, from the 'visible' realm defined by our own moral freedom of choice.

I would suggest to my reader that the error of all those whom I have just described in the preceding section (who use God's sovereignty to nullify man's responsibility, and who use mankind's responsibility to nullify God's sovereignty), is that they have failed to maintain this separation between God's realm, and our own. God the Father operates sovereignly behind the scenes, unseen by us, to fulfill His choices. But we live in a world where we are truly free to choose whether we will obey God's Law or not. Moses was saying we must focus upon the morally defined world in which we live, and the moral freedom and power of choice that mankind has always had from the very beginning.

The apostle Paul echoed the thoughts of Moses in his second epistle to Timothy:

**Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, "The Lord knows them that are His", and "Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity". 2 Timothy 2:19**

I discuss this statement of Paul below, in my section titled '**Application: Paul's Instructions**'. Here I will simply point out that the word 'knows', in the original Greek, was written in the past tense. Paul was pointing out that God has known, from eternity past, all those who will be His in His future kingdom. But Paul was saying that we, as human beings, must focus upon our own power over these matters by exercising our moral freedom of choice and 'departing from iniquity' now, in this present visible world.

I believe that the apostle Paul has also described those who ignore the instructions of Moses, and mishandle the sovereignty of God, in his letter to the church in Colosse:

**Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels; intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Colossians 2:18-19**

It might be helpful to list the errors that Paul describes here. I will address them in order:

- 1) Voluntary (false) humility
- 2) Worshiping of angels
- 3) Intrusion into the unseen
- 4) Vainly puffed up
- 5) Not holding on to the Head (Christ)

1) One of the key characteristics of Calvinism and Protestant Reformed Theology is their insistence upon 'humility' before a Sovereign God. This is a fundamental ramrod

of their theology; that God is so terrible and awesome in His sovereignty, that none may question Him. Our mouths must simply be stopped (closed) before such a God. The 'sovereignty of God' is Calvinism's simple and intimidating three-word answer to all challenges, and Calvinists love to portray themselves as humbly bowing before God's majesty. In the process they fulfill the words of Isaiah and the Lord Jesus:

**This people draws near to Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.  
Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8**

2) The key to understanding the word 'angels' in this passage is to realize that Paul is not talking about heavenly angels. He is talking about 'human angels'. In the original Greek, the word translated 'angel' simply means messenger. It can be a spiritual being sent by God from heaven (this is how we usually think about angels). But it can also be a human messenger sent from God. An example of this is seen in the seven human angels of the seven churches, held in Christ's right hand in Revelation 1:16,20. The primary meaning of the word 'angel' is 'message' or 'messenger'. This is why we find the word incorporated into the Greek word for 'evangelism' and 'evangelist'. It is because both of these words focus upon someone who brings God's message.

The way that mishandlers of God's sovereignty worship angels is in their worship of various prominent 'messengers' in the history of the church. I would consider Augustine to be one of the first of God's messengers who has been so 'worshiped'. Augustine is revered within the Roman Catholic church as one of the 'doctors of the church', and Rome's fundamental theology is built upon Augustine's doctrine of hereditary depravity.

Both Martin Luther and John Calvin came out of Roman Catholicism, and had a great reverence for Augustine. Both of them took Augustinian 'truths' about the sovereignty of God and hereditary depravity as their theological starting points. This worshiping of 'messengers' has simply continued on from there. We now see it in a body of theology that proudly calls itself 'Calvinism'; in other words the worship of John Calvin. This is a worship embraced by many despite that fact that Calvin, for all of his biblical scholarship, ruled the church in Geneva like a tyrant, and had a man put to death for his beliefs about the doctrine of the Trinity.

This same worshiping of 'angels' can be seen in the words 'Lutheran', 'Wesleyan', 'Arminian', and 'Mennonite' among others. It is also seen in the Calvinistic reverence for Whitefield, Edwards, Spurgeon and the Puritans. It represents a willingness to put God's messengers above God's message. It is a practice that the apostle Paul rebuked when he found out that Christians in Corinth were saying 'I am of Paul!, I am Apollos!, I am of Peter!' (1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:4-11):

**Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Corinthians 1:13**

3) The key words in this verse are "intruding into those things which he has not seen". This is what Augustine, Rome and Calvinistic Protestants have done. They have built their theologies upon the sovereign activity of God which they cannot see; taking liberties with God's word that God Himself clearly warns against. At the same time they

ignore the morally defined world that they can see, and are living in. The first fruit of this is their denial that God's imposition of death upon every one of us is a manifestation of His just wrath toward our very real individual sins in Eden (Romans 1:18, 3:23, 5:12); a judgment rendered 'according to our deeds'.

4) In following a theological course focused upon what God is supposedly doing, while ignoring the 'moral cause and effect' world in which we live, and which God has commanded us to focus upon (Deuteronomy 29:29, 2 Timothy 2:19), they have become vainly (worthlessly) puffed up in their fleshly (unspiritual) minds. They have become completely unprofitable, both to God and to men. And because they have allowed themselves to be beguiled by an unscriptural emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, they have lost rewards that they might have had from God. Whether Paul is referring to rewards that distinguish one Christian's service for God from another's, or the reward of eternal life itself, is a discussion for another time and place.

5) In this fifth point, the apostle Paul does not describe another erroneous thing that Calvinists have done, but the thing that they have not done. As I have already pointed out, that which connects mankind with Adam is not the sovereign will of God, but a real TRINITARIAN UNION; one in which people are both 'one' with Adam, and yet individually free to make their own choices. It is this real connection between mankind and Adam, and a similar potential union between sinners and the 'last Adam', Jesus Christ, that represents the foundation of Biblical truth.

It is a Trinitarian union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection which sinners can choose for themselves by repentantly judging their sins and believing the Gospel. And out of that union with Christ, as the Head of His body (the church), comes life, strength and fruitfulness:

**And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God.  
Colossians 2:19**

It is this dynamic, vital 'Headship' of Christ in union with His church that is the great truth of Christianity; not the false and lifeless 'Federal' or 'Representative' headship that Calvinists and Reformed theologians propose. Paul pointed to the Christian's vital union with Christ as the means of our justification and the ongoing spiritual life of individual Christians and the church at large. Because Reformed theology has rejected this vital union, and has substituted a lifeless fiction in its place, it has cut itself off from the life of Christ:

**But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. 1 Corinthians 4:19**

**Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. From such turn away.  
1 Timothy 3:5**

Calvinists are quick to point out the fruitfulness of various people in the Calvinistic tradition; people such as Whitefield, Edwards and Spurgeon. But there are Calvinists, and then there are Calvinists. Because the doctrine of predestination and election is an

essential part of the Bible and Christianity, many who have experienced election have called themselves Calvinists. It is not always easy to distinguish men who have not left their 'first love' for moral truth about sin and the cross, from those whose who have. This distinction, between Calvinistic 'tares and the wheat' (Matthew 13:24-30), will have to be made by God at the judgment seat of Christ. What we need to recognize now is the clear warning about false doctrine that God gives to us in His word.

## **ACCEPTANCE: A NAVIGATIONAL MODEL**

How can we handle these two contradictory ideas intellectually? Aren't these ideas mutually exclusive? The answer is 'Yes, in our human minds, one concept does nullify the other!' There is no way around it, and I don't believe that any person who denies this is being realistic. But the fact that these truths oppose each other in our minds, intellectually, does not mean that we cannot find a way to accept their oppositeness and turn it to our advantage.

It is interesting to us, as intellectual creatures, to ponder these apparent mysteries in the word of God. For some of us they are like a puzzle, and we want to wrestle with them until we figure them out. We believe that the human mind can penetrate any enigma, and so we seek to unravel this mystery with our brains. We want to believe that, like today's physicists who seek a 'unified theory' that explains both the large and the small aspects of our universe, we can discover a theory that makes both God's sovereignty and our moral freedom agree. But the bottom line in any attempt to reconcile predestination and freedom of choice is this: we must keep them separate.

Our choice boils down to this: either accepting God's word at face value and believing what He says, or trusting our own intellects. The secret lies in acknowledging our limitations. Just as God expected Adam and Eve to believe Him when He told them that they could not achieve righteousness through a knowledge of right and wrong, He also expects us to believe Him when He says that predestination and moral freedom are both fully true, and are not in conflict with one another. It's a simple question; 'Are we going to take Him at His word or not?'

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. Proverbs 3:5-7**

We must think like the captain of a ship. A captain does not second-guess those who placed the buoys and made the charts.



He does not struggle with the fact that the red and green buoys are always widely separated and opposite from one another. Instead, he rejoices in the fact that their oppositeness allows him to navigate safely. He accepts these different 'truths' just as they are, not struggling with the fact that valid information is coming at him from

opposite directions. He appreciates the wisdom that allows 'contradictory' reference points to keep him in the safe deep water at all times.



A ship captain is at ease when his position forces him to turn his head from side to side to see the closest buoys. He knows that if he can only see one buoy color and it's straight ahead, it means that he is sideways in the channel. And if he sees two buoys in alignment (agreement) with each other, he is terrified because it means that he is outside of the channel.



### A DANGEROUS POSITION, OUTSIDE OF THE CHANNEL

This is the danger in trying to make predestination and freedom of choice agree with each other, or in preferring one truth over the other. The Christian must accept predestination and moral freedom as they are presented in God's word, and stop wrestling with them. These two doctrines are both fully, completely and independently true. We must embrace their separateness and learn how to steer between them.

The great Chartmaker is telling us to accept His buoys as they are, and respect them both as we navigate through life. Ship captains don't say 'I am a red buoy man' (a Calvinist) or 'I am a green buoy man' (an Arminian). Who would want to sail with such a navigator? Properly trained captains value both buoys, and embrace their 'separateness' as a God-given blessing that defines a safe course for themselves, their cargo and their passengers.

Another analogy may be helpful here. These two doctrines, Predestination and Freedom of Choice, are like the two rails of a train track. Trains cannot run on one rail. Equal weight must be placed upon both rails, and a precise separation between the two rails must always be carefully maintained in order for trains to operate. When people place more weight (emphasis) upon one rail than the other, change the distance between the rails, or otherwise tamper with the Biblical foundations of Predestination and Freedom of Choice, their lives can become de-railed.



I once heard a pastor say that Predestination and Freedom of Choice are simply two sides of the same coin; that whatever God has predestined people to do, they will fulfill by exercising their free moral choice. There is truth in this analogy. And in terms of the ship navigation concept that I have used, I think it would place single buoys, painted green on one side and red on the other, down the middle of the channel. I suppose that such a navigational system might be workable to some extent.



But while this metaphor of a single coin is attractive, I fear that it is dangerous, because it encourages us to believe that these two concepts can somehow be reconciled; that their inherent contradiction can be resolved. The idea of mixing or uniting very different ideas is called 'Syncretism'. Syncretism may have its valid uses at times, but when we are talking about predestination and freedom of choice, I suspect that syncretism may have been the concept that led Augustine and the Reformers to destroy these two precious truths by mixing them, rather than simply accepting their distinctness, along with the intellectual tension and frustration that comes with that.

We all want peace, including peace of mind, but I think that God would have us accept the conflict between these two truths, and accept our inability to reconcile them. He knows that it is only as we resign ourselves to their separateness and oppositeness, and stop wrestling with them, that we can truly find rest and peace in between them. It is not the person who believes that he can untie this theological 'Gordian Knot' who will succeed, but the man who throws his hands up in despair, knowing that God tied it and He alone knows the secret to its unraveling.

When we look down the length of a river, or down the length of a railroad track, the two sides do appear to come together on the horizon. But we must not be deceived by this. In actual experience, as we travel along, we find that they never come together; they are perpetually separate. The great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, had this to say about predestination and moral freedom of choice:

**"The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one Book of the Bible, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired word, that "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God Who shows mercy". I see, in one place, God in providence presiding over all, and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions, in a great measure, to his own free-will.**

Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act that there was no control of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so over-rules all things that man is not free enough to be

responsible, I should be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other.

If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is foreordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth does spring."

Spurgeon did an excellent job of summarizing the intellectual dilemma of predestination and our freedom of choice. But I would go a step further than the great Spurgeon. I would suggest that predestination and our moral freedom do not meet near God's throne, but upon it; in the Person of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. I explain this in the next section below, where I liken the roles of the Father and the Son to the leaders in a corporation.

## **ACCEPTANCE: A BUSINESS MODEL**

As we struggle with the apparent contradiction between predestination and freedom of choice, one of the things that we need to remember is that God does not simply predestine everything from high above us. He is also fully engaged in this world in which we live, and has subjected Himself to the same moral requirements of righteousness, truth and justice that we ourselves must obey. God is both a 'Predestinator' and a 'Player' in this world that He has made.

In order to understand this, we must recognize the distinct roles that God the Father and God the Son play in predestination, creation and the moral government of the universe. I would suggest that their relationship might be likened to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a corporation, and the Chairman of the Board.

As the divine 'Chairman of the Board', God the Father established a purpose or 'agenda' for the universe; the full revelation of the glory of God. But the revelation of that glory would require a subordinate and obedient 'Chief Executive Officer' with Whom He might cooperate. A Counterpart to the Father who would not only be a part of the divine 'management team', but Who would then create a moral universe and openly display all of the glorious personal attributes of God, such as righteousness, holiness, goodness and love, by interacting with the inhabitants of the universe as One who is just as fully bound by the moral absolutes of truth, righteousness, justice and free choice as we are.

It is in the Son's capacity, not only as a member of the Trinity who embraced the Father's plans before the foundation of the world, but also as 'the Lord of glory' who created our world, that we see the simultaneous roles of both a sovereign God and a morally perfect God combined. The key to appreciating these distinct roles is to realize that predestination was settled in the mind of God in eternity past, and will be

celebrated in eternity future; but that right now our lives are defined by the 'moral present'. It is through the role of the Son of God that the sovereignty of God and moral freedom of choice have been perfectly realized in these three phases of time.

God's moral efforts in establishing the outcome of history are largely completed. All of the divine moral perfections have been revealed in Christ, and it now only remains for Him to complete His evangelism of the world and His subjection of Satan for a Millennium, before eternity future will begin. But it still remains for men living now to make moral choices about what they will do in response to the truths about God that have been revealed to them.

Jesus Christ has fulfilled all righteousness in both His relationship with us as our Creator, as well as in His role as a Man who came into the world to become one of us. He was tempted in every way as we are, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And through His work, as both the Son of God and the 'Son of Man', He has established the government of God forever:

**For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom; to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9:6-7**

In His humility, obedience and self-sacrifice for the sins of humanity, the Son of God has completely manifested all of the glorious personal attributes of the Trinity. He has shown us that God is not only the sovereign Creator of the universe, but also is so loving and merciful that He would make Himself a 'nobody', and pour Himself out unto death (Isaiah 53:12), in order to make salvation possible for us:

**Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not something to be clung to, to be equal with God. But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11**

It is not as though the Son of God has done all of the work here on earth, while the Father has remained seated in heaven above. The outworking of the Father's plan has required the full engagement of all three Persons of the Trinity. The Lord Jesus revealed this in a conversation with His fellow Jews:

**Therefore the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them "My Father is working until now, and I am working". Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He**



not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. John 5:16-18

Rather, the fulfillment of the Father's plans have come through a unity of the Father and the Son; a unity maintained through the Father's ongoing pursuit of His goals, and the Son's willingness to obediently endure every possible moral temptation and challenge in order to see the Father's perfect plan executed. It was through the united effort of a sovereign Father and His humble, obedient, submissive Son that the most evil efforts of the great archangel, Satan, have been defeated, and a world in which both predestination and moral accountability has been established. Within that world the way of salvation is one of honoring and obeying the Son. It is through the morally accountable and finished work of the Son that the Father has chosen to reveal Himself to the world, and to provide the only just way of reconciliation with Himself that is possible:

Thomas said to Him "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said unto him "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. And from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him "Lord, show us the Father and it will be sufficient for us." Jesus said unto him "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. So how can you say 'Show us the Father?'" John 14:5-9

Jesus answered and said to him "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. John 14:5-9

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, born first before creation. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself. By Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:15-20

For in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead (Trinity) bodily. Colossians 2:9

In Revelation chapter 5 we see a glorious picture of this dynamic cooperation between the Father and the Son. We are shown a scroll in the Father's right hand, containing all of His wonderful plans, and the question is asked 'Who is worthy to open this scroll?'

And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne (the Father) a scroll written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice "Who is worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open

the scroll, neither to look at it. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the scroll, neither to look at it. Revelation 5:1-4

We are then given the answer to the angel's question. It is the Son of God who, as the morally spotless and self-sacrificing Lamb of God, has prevailed to bring all of the Father's predestined purposes to their glorious completion:

And one of the elders said unto me "Weep not! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll, and to loose its seven seals". And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.

And when He had taken the scroll, the four creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song, saying "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals. For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And have made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth".  
Revelation 5:5-10

It is in the Person and work of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and through His obedient self-sacrificing cooperation with the Father, that a predestined universe and a morally free, contingent and open-ended universe are both realities. It was the Son who first created us in Eden, and commanded us not to learn the difference between right and wrong. It was the Son Who instructed Noah to build an ark. It was the Son who established God's covenant with Abraham, and led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the Son who came into the world as a man and walked among us as the 'Lamb of God'. And it is the Son who will sit upon a great white throne to judge the enemies of God while He establishes the kingdom of His Father forever:

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. John 5:22-23

But unto the Son He says "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity. Therefore God, even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows. Hebrews 1:8-9, Psalm 45:6-7

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God. And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. Revelation 20:11-12

## **ACCEPTANCE: RED & GREEN TOGETHER**

It can be helpful to consider examples from the Bible where the two concepts of predestination and moral freedom appear side by side. They are each found separately and individually throughout the Bible. But when both concepts appear in the same verse or passage, it can be uniquely instructive.

Below are several Bible verses that present predestination and our moral responsibility operating simultaneously. The message is always the same; what God the Father has predestined in eternity past, free moral agents will do in the present.

Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of my Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; For I was hungry and you gave Me meat, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink....**"  
Matthew 25:34-36

All that **the Father gives Me shall come to Me....** John 6:37

I have manifested Your name unto **the men which You gave to Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me; and they have kept Your word.**  
John 17:6

Him (Jesus), **being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.** Acts 2:23

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.** Acts 13:48-49

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

According as **He has chosen us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.** Ephesians 1:4-5

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has **from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.** 2 Thessalonians 2:13

God has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.** 2 Timothy 1:9

To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ....** 1 Peter 1:1-2

Therefore, to you who believe, He (Jesus) is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, **being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.** 1 Peter 2:7-8

For there are certain men crept in unawares, **who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.** Jude 4

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and **they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.** Revelation 17:14

## **ACCEPTANCE NOT FOUND IN CALVINISM OR ARMINIANISM**

Within the history of Protestantism there have historically been two schools of thought regarding these concepts of God's predestination, and our own moral accountability and freedom of choice. Each 'school' has been named after men who were famous for choosing to emphasize one of these two concepts over the other.

Those who have emphasized predestination and the sovereignty of God have come to be known as 'Calvinists' (named after John Calvin). Those who have emphasized mankind's accountability and freedom of choice have been referred to as 'Arminians' (named after Jacobus Arminius). Personally I believe that this doctrinal separation and division has come about because, when faced with the contradiction between predestination and freedom of choice, some people have concluded that they must choose one truth over the other.

I have already pointed out the weakness of taking such a one-sided approach to God's word. In the 'Navigation' section above, I have likened it to a Captain saying 'I am a red buoy man!', or 'I am a green buoy man!'. Nobody in their right mind would want to sail with such a captain. I would also liken it to putting on colored glasses. Calvinists see the world through the red glasses of God's sovereignty, and are blind to Arminian truth. Arminians put on green glasses, and are blind to Calvinistic truth.

From a practical stand point, I believe that the Arminian is in a safer place because, as I point out in my following sections on 'Application', God commands us to focus upon our moral accountability and freedom of choice, and to forget about what He may have predestined before time, or how it is all going to work out in the end. God's interaction with us in our present lives is centered around whether we are obeying His Law or not. It is this issue that we human beings need to pay attention to, and it is only in the context of our moral freedom and accountability in this world that any of us can come to know God or go to heaven.

Because they exclude important truth and are unbalanced, both Calvinists and Arminians fail to present the 'whole counsel of God' to men (Acts 20:27). This is a very important matter, because the choice is really between God's 'whole counsel', or 'no counsel'. As human beings we like to argue and be partisan, taking different positions on different things. Some Christians rejoice in the possibility that God's word is so 'complex' that it challenges us to struggle intellectually and leads to differences of

opinion; it offers the opportunity for each of us to 'weigh in' with our own ideas. But God does not want us wrestling with His word. He wants us to first seek righteousness, and then to strive for Christian harmony and unity in obedience to His word.

I would like to address Calvinism first. When I refer to Calvinism, I am referring to a broad portion of Protestant theology that is also sometimes referred to as 'Reformed Theology' and 'Covenant Theology'. What they all share are the 'five points' of Calvinism. These five points are associated with the acronym 'TULIP':

### **T- TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN**

For the Calvinist God's sovereign choice, that we should inherit both the penalty and the power of Adam's sin, has left mankind so spiritually crippled as to be totally incapable of responding to the preaching of the gospel. Calvinists do not claim that non-Christians are incapable of moral or spiritual insight, but rather that they do not possess the 'necessary spiritual capacity' that would make them capable of responding to Jesus' command to 'repent and believe the Gospel'.

What we are talking about here is the biblical 'Order of Salvation'. The bible clearly teaches that a person must repent concerning their sinfulness and believe the Gospel before they can be regenerated or 'born again'. But Calvinists teach that one must be born again before they can repent and believe. They teach this falsehood, 'putting the cart before the horse', because they are obsessed with the sovereign activity of God (which they cannot see), and are wilfully blind to our world of free moral choices (which we can see). Not only does the Calvinist blame God for our sin problem, but he claims that God is glorified by the fact that nobody can embrace His offer of grace without His help. One of their proof texts for this is found in Ephesians 2:

**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:1-10**

According to the Calvinist, this passage informs us that a sinner is 'dead in trespasses and sins' before God gives him the ability to repent and believe. But what Calvinists fail to recognize is that Paul is describing what happens to a person after they have repented and believed. Paul is describing the second of the three stages of regeneration: 1) crucifixion, 2) burial and 3) resurrection.

A repentant sinner is united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, in the process of regeneration, there is a point where the repentant sinner is dead and buried in his trespasses and sins, before being resurrected to newness of life in Christ. It is this death, burial and resurrection with Christ that is symbolized in the Christian ritual of baptism under water, before being raised up (resurrected) out of the water to a new life. Sinners always came to John the Baptist repentantly confessing their sins, before his baptism was then performed.

This is just one example of how Calvinists twist God's word in order to support their focus upon the sovereignty of God, and to play down the moral realities of God's salvation. It is a monstrous subversion of the biblical doctrine of regeneration. Below are three more passages that describe this 'death and burial' that the sinner experiences 'in his sins' after repentance and faith.

Know you not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of Sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Romans 6:3-6

In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Colossians 2:11-13

Who (Jesus) His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes you were healed. 1 Peter 2:24

I could present much more scriptural support for what I am saying. And it's important to recognize that this idea of the total depravity of man is not unique to Calvinists. It flows out of the theology of Augustine, and I believe that Luther also gave expression to this idea of the powerlessness of sinners to repent and believe, in his book on "The Bondage of the Will". But what is important to stress here is that every person who has ever truly been born again and entered into the grace of God knows that what I am saying is true.

Does the Spirit of God powerfully awaken people to their spiritual peril, convicting them of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8), driving them to seek God in salvation? Absolutely! BUT THIS IS NOT REGENERATION! And it is a sowing of confusion about this distinction that constitutes the sinfulness of the Calvinistic handling of regeneration. It is an attack upon God's order of salvation; nothing less. God, through His word and the work of the Holy Spirit, confronts sinners with their very real personal sins, and their real ability to judge themselves and to flee the wrath of a righteous God. They are commanded to embrace their moral responsibility and to

repent and believe the Gospel. To teach anything else is to subvert evangelism and promote darkness:

When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life (not life unto repentance). Acts 11:18

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But after your hardness and impenitent heart you treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds. Romans 2:4-6

Repentance and faith have only ever happened in the context of our real, personal moral responsibility and freedom of choice. Every person who has ever been truly converted knows this. This is what makes Calvinistic soteriology (the study of salvation) so objectionable; it is something that Calvinists proclaim when they know better. God's response to their falsehood is found in Revelation:

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Revelation 3:3

## U- UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

It is an indisputable fact that God the Father has unconditionally elected some people to be saved, and others to be damned. This is biblical predestination, pure and simple. This election occurred in eternity past, before time and creation began, and without any regard to the subjective characters or personalities of the people being chosen. In making this claim, supralapsarian Calvinists are correct. But Calvinists only present one half of the truth. And by failing to supply the other half, they reject the whole counsel of God.

We live outside of heaven, in a moral universe, and God's election, while true, is not something that we should dwell upon. We have no way of knowing who might be chosen, and who might not. And while election is unconditional, salvation is not! God comes to us in a moral world and confronts us with our very real and black sins, and commands us to join Him in condemning our sinfulness and embracing the salvation that He offers. The outcome of that interaction depends upon our choices and our willingness to be truthful. Calvinists reject this balanced message, and fail to tell people that their eternal destinies rest in their own hands.

## L- LIMITED ATONEMENT

One of the Calvinistic doctrines that stirs the most controversy is 'Limited Atonement'; the idea that Jesus did not die for all mankind, but only for those elected by God. Given the phrase 'limited atonement', one might think that the essence of the idea is that Jesus' suffering was in direct proportion to the number of people that He was dying for. If more had been elected, He would have had to suffer more; if less, then less suffering would have been required. This is not what Calvinists believe, however.

Calvinists believe that Jesus' death has the potential to save all men, but was only originally intended to atone for the elect, and thus will only be effective for the elect. The Calvinist mistake is clear. They have chosen to unnecessarily superimpose the doctrine of election upon the doctrine of the atonement, without biblical warrant. The Bible nowhere limits the saving power of Jesus' shed blood. In fact it proclaims that it is potentially saving for all of mankind, and that God desires that all people be saved:

I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 1 Timothy 2:1-6

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2

In the mind of anyone who has ever experienced the saving grace of Christ, the phrase 'limited atonement' cannot sit easily. This is why many Calvinists reject this doctrine, and refer to themselves as 'four point' Calvinists. No one who has ever truly seen his own sin, with its filthiness, shame and guilt, could ever describe Christ's death on their behalf as 'limited'. The book of Revelation tells us that the angels and saints of God will spend eternity marveling over it.

Many Calvinists however, in their misdirected eagerness to emphasize the sovereignty of God, have managed to limit what happened at the cross. While they refer to Calvinism as 'the doctrines of grace', speak of their 'sovereign grace' churches, and proclaim that 'Calvinism is the Gospel', they manage to turn amazing grace into something less.

## I- IRRESISTABLE GRACE

With this doctrine Calvinists teach that if God has chosen to save someone, that person is certain to come to repentance and faith; that what the Father has predestined in the past, is certain to be fulfilled in the present. This doctrine, like Unconditional Election, is also true. In fact it is simply a repetition of Unconditional Election, with the additional point added that God's electing purposes are always carried out.

Again, Calvinists swim around in their own little thoughts about things that they cannot see, and give no thought to a desperate humanity in the throes of death, and wanting to know how they can escape it.

The doctrine of irresistible grace has little value. It helps no one come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. If anything, it tempts sinners to be lax in applying themselves to the 'means of God's grace' (prayer and reading the scriptures), and tempts Christians to believe that they can sit upon their hands and do nothing,



because God is certain to save everyone that He ever intended to save. This is an attitude that God absolutely condemns, warning Calvinists that they are going to be judged on the basis of their evangelism, or lack thereof:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.  
Ezekiel 3:17-21

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Acts 20:26-27

With their perverted emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, Calvinists neglect the whole counsel of God. Therefore they are in a very dangerous place in their relationship with Him.

### **PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**

Calvinists teach that if God has chosen someone to be eternally saved, then after being born-again and becoming a Christian, that person will certainly continue or 'persevere' in obedient faith until he or she goes to heaven. This, again, is true; and like 'Irresistible Grace', it is simply an extension of the doctrine of Unconditional Election. But also, like Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace, it is a useless half-truth.

Calvinists take pride in the fact that they emphasize the necessity of perseverance, but then teach that anyone who has ever experienced God's election and effectual call to salvation will be certain to persevere. This is altogether false.

The Bible is full of powerful warnings about the dreadfulness of having entered into God's grace, only to fail to enter into heaven. The failure of the Israelites, who were graciously delivered by God from death and bondage in Egypt, only to be cursed and forbidden by Him to enter the promised land, stands as one of God's clearest warnings to Christians in the New Testament.

Most Calvinists do not handle the 'necessity of perseverance' biblically. They go beyond telling Christians that perseverance is a necessity, to telling them that it is also a certainty. They deny the doctrine of apostasy, and totally neglect the exhortation of the apostle Peter:

**And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure (certain). For if you do these things, you shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-11**

**The sixth chapter of John is one of the favorite passages of the Bible for Calvinists. There are a number of verses from that chapter that they like to quote in support of Calvinism, and their insistence that anyone who has been born again is certain to be saved:**

**All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me. And him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father's will Who has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one who sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life. And I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:37-40**

**No man can come to Me, except the Father Who has sent Me draw him. And I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets "And they shall be all taught of God". Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto Me. John 6:44-45**

**It is important to recognize that Jesus is not talking here only about people who have been predestined to repent, believe and be born again. He is talking about people who have also been predestined to continue abiding in Him after conversion; to overcome, and to persevere in obedience until death. These are those whom the Father has given to Jesus. Calvinists presume to believe that if a person has been born again, then it is certain that they will also persevere unto eternal life. This is untrue.**

**I myself experienced a profound conversion to Christianity, and was caused by God to know that He had predestined my conversion and that I was one of His 'elect'. In the light of His amazing and sovereign grace I proceeded to become increasingly careless about sin. Five years after my conversion God brought me up short, sensibly withdrawing Himself from me. Terrified, I was compelled to reexamine the basis of my relationship with Him. I read another portion of John chapter 6 that shook me to my very foundations. I read the warning that Jesus gave to His disciples regarding how much confidence they should place in being called and chosen by Him:**

**And Jesus said "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of my Father". From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve "Will you also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered him "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are that Christ, the Son of**

the living God". Jesus answered them "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon, for he it was that would betray Him, being one of the twelve. John 6:65-71

After understanding that passage, my entire focus changed from what God was intending above, to what I was choosing to do down here upon earth. Jesus was warning His disciples that it is one thing to be called and chosen, and it is another thing to be faithful:

**These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.** Revelation 17:14

There have been many Christians who have had profound conversion experiences, and who have been given a clear understanding that God chose and predestined them to enter into His grace. But the erroneous conclusion that some have reached is that being called and chosen represents a promise that they cannot lose their salvation, or that they are certain to persevere obediently until the end of their lives. The Bible does not teach this. Although it is both an 'amazing grace' and a 'sovereign grace', the Christian must never forget that God's salvation is also a 'teaching grace':

**For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.** Titus 2:11-12

This is where the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints goes astray. I will say it again; it is a half-truth. It is certain that all those whom the Father has predestined to be born again and to persevere in obedience and enter heaven will do so. But to know who those people are is God's business. It is not revealed to us. It is our business to 'work out' our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Calvinists who teach 'Once Saved, Always Saved' trifle with the sovereignty of God, and put a stumbling block before the feet of God's people. They are destroyers who ignore the warning that God gave to Ezekiel (quoted above), and the approach to these issues exemplified by the apostle Paul:

**To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.** Colossians 1:27-28

Born-again Christians can only get to heaven if they persist in the attitude toward sin that brought them into the kingdom of God in the first place. Rather than telling Christians that they are certain to persevere, Calvinists should be stressing the abhorrent, deceitful and deadly nature of sin, and the disastrous consequences of again falling into it (see also [The Necessity of Christian Perseverance](#)).

**It is one thing to teach that God has elected some to persevere; this is true and is rooted in God's immutable decree in eternity past. It is another to teach that everyone who has experienced election will persevere. This represents a betrayal of God and His people.**

Arminians, rather than use God's sovereignty to nullify human responsibility as the Calvinists do, have instead used human responsibility to nullify God's sovereignty. They have sought to achieve this goal by defining the Father's foreknowledge of all things as His ability to look into the future and see what people and angels will want to do.

More specifically, they teach that God's foreknowledge has not only enabled Him to see that all mankind will choose to rebel against Him, but also to look beyond that rebellion to know which sinners will be willing to repent of their sins and believe the gospel. Then God simply predestines these people to hear the gospel at some point in their lives, so that they can make the good choice that He already knew they would make. In other words, predestination simply means insuring that certain people will have the opportunity to make the choice to repent, believe and be saved that they might not have been able to make otherwise.

This attempt to redefine predestination makes the same mistake that infralapsarian predestination makes; putting the choices of man ahead of the choices of God. In fact, this approach doubles down on the infralapsarian error. God is not only limited to predestination from among a group of people who will have already chosen to sin, but is further limited to a subset of sinners who will be willing to repent of their sin. I might add that this perspective allows room for human pride. It says that certain people were predestined to salvation because God foresaw a 'positive' in their character ahead of time.

Paul's teaching on predestination describes God's choices as being made without any reference whatsoever to the character or choices of the persons whom he is predestinating. People who attempt to re-define predestination in this way do so because they object to the idea that God would predestine anyone to damnation. Such an idea seems unjust to them. But their objection to this concept of predestination proves that it is the biblical one; it is the very objection that Paul says we will have:

**You will say then to me "Why does God yet find fault? For who has resisted His will?"  
Romans 9:19**

We can accept biblical predestination or reject it, but God does not allow us the option of redefining it. In response to our objections He simply says 'I am God! And that is all that you need to know!'

**Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him who formed it "Why have you made me thus?" Does not the Potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor? Romans 9:20-21**

When we choose to define God's foreknowledge as His ability to foresee the future, rather than His knowledge of a future that He has already predestined, we run into a logical contradiction. If God is wise enough to foresee all of the possible choices that persons will make in the future, then isn't His choice to create some persons rather than others predestination anyway? Isn't He still the original 'Determiner' of all things?

We must ask ourselves whether or not God is truly omniscient (all-knowing). Is He able to foresee all of the contingencies and possible consequences of His creative actions? If so, then how can His choice to create the universe and its inhabitants in a certain way be anything other than a predestination of the events that follow? It seems to me that God's foreknowledge and supralapsarian predestination are the same thing.

## **APPLICATION: PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS**

In the wisdom of God, He has chosen the apostle Paul to provide us with the clearest declarations of both mankind's moral freedom of choice, and God's predestination of all things. Thus it seems logical that God might also use Paul to teach us how to handle these seemingly contradictory truths. Paul did that in 2 Timothy 2:19-21. In verse 19 Paul reminded Timothy of the two great truths of our relationship with God. Paul wrote that the foundation of God's kingdom has two great sayings inscribed on it:

**Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, "The Lord knows them that are His", and "Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity". 2 Timothy 2:19**

The phrase "The Lord knows them that are his," is a poor translation of Paul's original Greek words. Paul wrote the word 'know' in the past tense. A better translation might be 'the Lord has known (from eternity past) those who are His'. Paul was talking about predestination. He meant that God knew who His people would be before He began creating the universe, and that He predestined those people to receive eternal life. Paul went on to tell Timothy how we should respond to these two inscriptions:

**But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these (sins), he shall be a vessel unto honor; sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. 2 Timothy 2:20-21**

In this passage Paul used the same word, 'vessels', that he used in his explanation of predestination in Romans 9:21-23. Paul was again describing God as a Potter using clay, predestining some 'vessels' (people) for honorable uses, and some for dishonorable (some for eternal life and some for eternal destruction). But Paul went on to say that we have control over these things from our position as human beings. We can determine our fate, eternal life or destruction, by purging ourselves of sin and thus making ourselves 'vessels' that God can use for 'honorable' purposes.

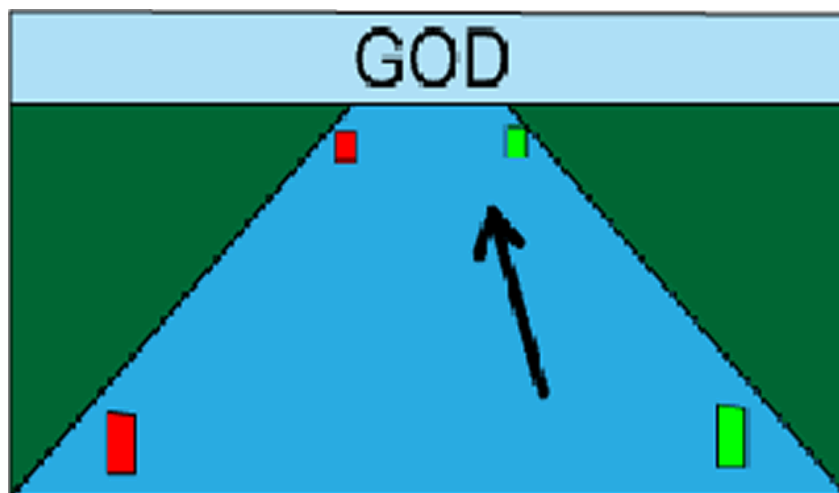
Paul was saying that the predestining choices that God the Father has made in eternity past, are fulfilled through the moral choices that we, as free agents, make in the 'here and now' of our everyday lives. It is important for us to appreciate the power that we

have over predestination. Paul is saying that we have complete control over our eternal destinies.

**The secret lies in assuming moral responsibility for ourselves,  
and obeying God's Law.**

Paul's instructions can be carried over to the ship-navigation model that I have used in this web page. The red and green buoys not only allow a ship captain to know where the deep water is, but also to know which direction he is traveling in. So at night or in a fog, if the captain is only able to see one buoy, he can determine by its color exactly where he is and which direction he is heading in. Shipping channels, like public roads, are two-lane highways. Captains are expected to stay on the right side of the channel in order to avoid oncoming traffic.

For the purposes of this illustration, the way to God is the one where the green buoys are kept close at hand and on our right side. The green buoys of moral accountability are to be our primary point of reference. It is fine to understand, intellectually, that our lives are defined by both predestination and moral freedom. But from a practical everyday standpoint, the only way to move toward God is to focus upon the 'green' truth of our moral freedom and accountability.





## **APPLICATION: MORAL LOGIC**

Though we cannot reconcile predestination and freedom of choice in our minds intellectually, this does not mean that we do not already know how we are supposed to handle them practically in our everyday lives. There is a 'moral logic' that is common to humanity, and that tells every one of us that the only sane and right thing for any of us to do is to assume full responsibility for ourselves at all times. Let me present a hypothetical example.

Suppose a Christian father is sitting on the front porch of his home and his little three year old child is playing in the front yard. And let's suppose that this child begins to wander toward a street that is busy with car traffic. Given what he knows about God's predestination and man's moral accountability, this father might consider two hypothetical choices. He could trust his child's fate to the sovereignty of God, and say 'Whatever God wills to happen, will happen', or he can get up and rush over to his child, keeping him from the street while warning him of its dangers. What do you think God would expect this father to do? Wouldn't such a father, if he wasted one minute in thinking about predestination and allowed his child to wander into the street, be guilty of heinous murder?

Most of the world's parents, Christian or not, have already considered such scenarios in their minds and have known from the very beginning that they would leap instantaneously, upon the slightest threat of danger, to protect their child. Even parents who do not care about their children will often do the right thing anyway, because they know that they may be held accountable by their fellow man for negligence toward their child.

The conclusion that we must reach is this: to allow God's sovereignty to influence our thinking and decisions in everyday life can be grossly immoral, destructive and shameful. Regardless of what God may or may not be doing in heaven above, we must focus upon our moral responsibility and freedom to choose here below. This is the essence of what Paul was saying to Timothy in the section above.

**SALVATION IS OBTAINED BY IGNORING WHAT GOD MAY BE CHOOSING  
IN HEAVEN ABOVE, AND BY CONCENTRATING PRIMARILY UPON OUR  
OWN CHOICES HERE BELOW.**

Let me provide another hypothetical example, just to reinforce this idea. Suppose I am driving down the road in my car at a good speed, and I suddenly decide to take my hands off of the steering wheel because I believe that 'God is in control'; that if He wants me to come to a safe stop, I will; but if not, then...'so be it!'.

Most of us would first wonder whether or not such a person is insane, for putting his own life in jeopardy. But if that person was not insane, we would immediately charge him with criminality for putting the lives and property of other people at risk.

**IT IS A UNIVERSAL NORM, WELL UNDERSTOOD BY ALL OF HUMANITY,  
THAT WE MUST NOT LIVE OUR LIVES FATALISTICALLY.**

**WE MUST GRASP THE MORAL STEERING WHEEL OF OUR LIVES,  
AND ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR OURSELVES.**

It is in these examples that we see how God expects us to think, and what He expects us to do in response to the doctrine of predestination. Predestination is true, and God wants us to know it. This is why He has put this information in His word. But predestination is the Father's business. It is too 'high' for us, in a 'secret' realm that belongs to God alone:

**"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts". Isaiah 55:8-9**

There have been non-Christians throughout history who have initially rejected Christianity altogether because of its message on predestination. Nevertheless God has been able to save many of them, because after rejecting Christianity they chose to embrace their own moral accountability and to live their lives as responsibly as they could. In that context they have come to know God, because this is the ground where God meets us; in the realm of morality and choice. This is where He wants us to live. This is the only way that anyone has ever has come to know Jesus in a saving way (or to continue in a right relationship with Him).

At the same time there have been people who have accepted the validity of predestination, but who have then mishandled it. There have been both Christians and non-Christians who have decided that, since predestination is true and life is supposedly a 'fixed game', there is no point in exerting themselves. I believe that Jesus' 'Parable of the Talents' provides us with a picture of such people, who use God's sovereign 'hardness' as an excuse to bury their 'talent' of moral opportunity in the ground.



**A 'talent' was a measure of weight, like a pound or a kilogram. Jesus could have been referring to a 'talent' of gold or silver. His message was this: a choice to 'opt out' of our freedom of choice because God is 'hard', is a profoundly evil choice:**

**For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling into a far country, who called His own servants and delivered unto them His goods. And unto one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his ability. And straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his Lord's money.**

**After a long time the Lord of those servants came and reckoned with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying "Lord, You delivered unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more". His Lord said unto him "Well done, you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your Lord". He also that had received two talents came and said "Lord, You delivered unto me two talents. Behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said unto him "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of Your Lord".**

**Then he which had received the one talent came and said "Lord, I knew You, that You are a hard man, reaping where You have not sown, and gathering where You have not scattered. And I was afraid, and went and hid Your talent in the earth. Look, there You have what is Yours". His Lord answered and said unto him "You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not scattered. You ought therefore to have put My money with the bankers, and then at My coming I could have received My own with interest. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him who has ten talents. For unto every one who has shall more be given, and he shall have abundance. But from him that has not shall be taken away even that which he has. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Matthew 25:14-30**

**When I first became a Christian, I allowed the fact that I was one of 'God's elect' to puff me up, and I assumed that I could not lose my salvation. I knew that I might be chastened by God, but for five years I thought that my name could not be blotted out of God's 'Book of Life'. How wrong I was.**

**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life. But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Revelation 3:5**

**If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. Revelation 22:19**

**God brought me back down to earth. He showed me that there is only one way to be accepted by Him; by obeying His moral Law. He showed me that I was not part of some**

special group, but that I am simply a human being like everybody else, and that I will be judged by the same moral standard. He showed me that He is not a 'respector of persons' (Acts 10:34-35).

This is the one and only context within which God saves anybody. He is going to apply the same moral requirements to all of us. Yes, God the Father predestines, but He predestines people to choose moral obedience:

**According as He has chosen us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. Ephesians 1:4-5**

The simple fact is that God has given a 'moral talent' to every one of us. He expects us to take that 'talent' and obediently put it to work. It is imperative that we not allow God's 'sovereignty' to lead us to bury this 'talent' in the ground. We must put it to our Master's service. If there is one point that I hope my reader will take from this section on 'moral logic' it is this:

**FATALISM, WHETHER PRACTICED BY CHRISTIANS OR NON-CHRISTIANS, IS ALWAYS FATAL!**

### **APPLICATION: JESUS THE EXAMPLE**

We see the culmination of the Lord Jesus' work, bringing the truths of predestination and moral freedom together, in His thinking in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). As He anticipated His approaching betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus didn't focus upon predestination, but upon His own choices. He did not say to Himself 'My crucifixion is predestined to happen, and therefore all will go well'. He knew that everything depended upon His own willingness to obediently fulfill the Father's plan.

Jesus first warned His disciples to be watchful and prayerful, and then followed His own advice by moving away to pray by Himself; revisiting a decision that He had already made many times before. It was a decision that He made when He first left heaven and came into the world as a human being. It was a decision that He repeated when He was baptized by John the Baptist, openly identifying Himself with mankind. It was a decision repeated many times throughout His ministry as He faced temptations, trials and frustrations that might have turned Him away from His mission to die for the sins of an unworthy human race.

In Gethsemane Jesus focused upon the immense cup of suffering that stood before Him, and the ramifications of His choice. He could have easily turned away from the cross, knowing that He didn't deserve it and that His Father would rescue Him, leaving us all to the judgment that we deserve. As He bore the weight of the world upon His shoulders, the Bible tells us that His sweat had blood in it (Luke 22:44):

**And He came out and went, as was His custom, to the mount of Olives (to the Garden of Gethsemane). And His disciples also followed Him. And when He was at the place, He said unto them "Pray that you enter not into temptation". And He was withdrawn**

from them about a stone's throw, and kneeled down and prayed saying "Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done". And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow. And He said unto them "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation". And while He yet spoke, behold a multitude. And he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him. Luke 22:39-47

The salvation of sinners truly did result from the Father's predestination of all things, but also and equally from the Son's willingness to make the Father's plan a reality. Jesus fulfilled that plan by embracing His freedom of choice while being sacrificed as the spotless Lamb of God. It is in the Garden of Gethsemane that we see not a contradiction between predestination and our moral freedom of choice, but predestination being fulfilled by choice:

All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father's will Who has sent me; that of all which He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. John 6:37-39

The Lord Jesus spoke often about the Father's predestination and election of certain people for eternal life. But He also spoke about our responsibility, and the guilt of choosing to reject the light of His words and commandments. It is in the example of Jesus that we see how we should handle predestination and moral responsibility in our own lives. While always presenting the truth and validity of predestination in His teaching, from a practical standpoint the Lord Jesus focused exclusively upon His own choices and responsibilities. We must do the same.

## **APPLICATION: ABRAHAM NAVIGATED**

Abraham is an excellent example of a person who understood both aspects of his relationship with God, and used that knowledge to his advantage. When Abraham was pleading with God for the safety of righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, including his nephew, Lot, he used a moral argument. He knew that God had promised to be a fair and righteous Judge:

That be far from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that the righteous should be as the wicked. That be far from You. **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?** Genesis 18:25

And yet in the same conversation Abraham humbled himself, remembering what he was; dust and ashes. He acknowledged that he was only 'clay speaking to the Potter', and repeatedly asked for permission to continue his plea:

"Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord; **I who am but dust and ashes.**" Genesis 18:27, 30-32

Abraham's prayer was answered, and he became known as 'the friend of God'. Abraham knew that God's unconditional predestination of all things, and His commitment to absolute righteousness, truth and justice were both true. Abraham didn't necessarily understand how they could both be true, but he believed that they were and approached his relationship with God accordingly.

It is important that we recognize each of these two truths wherever we find them in the Bible, and that we allow them to remain the separate, distinct and opposite truths that they are. It is important that we not attempt to reconcile, combine, or mix them, or allow them to adulterate or diminish each other in any way. Nor should we emphasize one truth over the other. They must both be appreciated and incorporated into our worldview if we wish to properly understand our relationship with God.

## **APPLICATION: OUR FIRST LOVE**

It is undeniable that there have been many 'Calvinists' and 'Arminians' who have been holy and fruitful servants of God. John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards come to mind; leaders in the Great Awakening revival that occurred in England and the American colonies in the 1700's. Many claim that it was Calvinism or Arminianism that made these men great. But was it their commitment to doctrinal distinctions that made them effective, or was it something else? I believe that it was something else; something that they all had in common. It was something that the Lord Jesus pointed to in His message to the church at Ephesus:

**Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things says He that holds the seven stars in His right hand; Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. "I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil. And you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars. And have born (through difficulties), and have patience, and for My name's sake have labored, and have not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works. Or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your lampstand out of its place, except you repent. Revelation 2:1-5**

In this passage we see a local church that had many great characteristics; characteristics that every church should seek to emulate. And yet the Lord Jesus said that they had one great fault, and that if they did not correct that fault, He would remove their church (lampstand) from its place in Ephesus. What could this great fault be? Jesus said that they had 'left their first love'.

What is a Christian's first love? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and the gracious salvation accomplished through the blood of His cross. Christians on earth should be focused, first and foremost, upon the truth that absorbs the thoughts of Christians in heaven:

**And they sang a new song, saying "You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof. For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And have made us unto our God kings and priests. And we shall reign on the earth". Revelation 5:9-10**

In short, for the faithful Christian 'To live is Christ' (Philippians 1:21), and all other things pale in relative significance. For the Calvinist or Arminian who has not left his first love, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and pointing people to Him is his first priority, and Calvinism or Arminianism takes a distant second place in his affections. His attitude is that of the apostle Paul:

**For I determined not to have anything known by you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:2**

This has been true of all of the great Christians in history. It is for this reason that their 'lampstands' continue to burn brightly in their writings to this day, while others have seen their lampstands grow dim, or be removed altogether. We must not only proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That is not enough. Beyond that, we must proclaim His crucifixion as necessary to atone for real sins.

**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23**

**And according to the Law almost all things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission (of sin). Hebrews 9:22**

When today's Reformed (Calvinistic) Baptists are asked about great men who have shared their traditions, they often point to Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon is supposedly the perfect example of a 'Reformed Baptist', and Calvinistic Baptists use Spurgeon constantly to add lustre to their position. Spurgeon was indeed a Baptist who embraced Calvinism. One must remember, however, where Spurgeon began life, and where he ended up.

Spurgeon was steeped in Calvinism from his youth. Both his father and his grandfather were Calvinistic Congregational preachers. The fourth word in Spurgeon's vocabulary, after 'mama', 'daddy' and 'Jesus', was 'Calvin'. Spurgeon was saturated in the Bible and Puritan theology from the moment he began to read. He was a well-trained Calvinistic preacher before he became a Christian! But in his early teens Spurgeon realized that he had not yet come to a saving knowledge of Christ. He was increasingly aware of his own sinfulness, and troubled by it.

At the age of 15, after he had begun to visit every church in his part of England in a quest to be saved, God providentially brought him into a little Arminian Methodist church, where a common layman (who happened to be substituting for the pastor on that Sunday) addressed Spurgeon directly from the pulpit and told him what he needed to do; look directly to Jesus Himself. On that day Spurgeon became a Christian. What had not happened after 15 years of the most intense Calvinistic upbringing, God brought to pass instantaneously in a little primitive, Arminian Methodist church.

The powerful truth in that experience was not lost on Spurgeon; that it is not Calvinism or any other systematic theology that can save a person, but only a direct, personal encounter with Christ Himself.

To the praise of His grace, God put Spurgeon on a path to a lively evangelism. The English-speaking world has been blessed by it ever since. For the rest of his life, although he remained a Calvinist, Jesus was always Spurgeon's first love. Everything else paled in relative significance for Spurgeon. He pointed people to Christ alone as the way of salvation, and strove constantly to direct people's attention toward Him.

**This is the key to understanding Spurgeon: Spurgeon was a Calvinist who became a Christian. The sad fact is that many who justify themselves by pointing to Spurgeon are Christians who have become Calvinists.**

By God's grace Spurgeon moved from a lifeless Calvinism to a lively, subjective, experiential Christianity. Sadly, I fear that many of today's Reformed Baptists have moved in the opposite direction; from a lively, experiential Christianity to a lifeless Calvinism.

A story is told about Spurgeon that sums up his ministry very simply. While his congregation was building a new church (the Metropolitan Tabernacle), Spurgeon preached at the Crystal Palace in London. Before he began preaching there, he came to familiarize himself with the building's acoustics. Spurgeon stood in the pulpit in the empty hall and shouted out the words of John the Baptist:

**"Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world". (John 1:29)**

Reportedly, unknown to Spurgeon, there was a laborer working in some distant part of the building, who heard Spurgeon's loud proclamation, became convicted in his heart about his need for the Savior, and ultimately came to repentance and faith. Because Spurgeon's choice of words reflected his 'first love', even in that brief moment God used him to save a man's soul.

Calvinists who quote Spurgeon, and claim him as one of their own, need to ask themselves if they are moving in the same direction that Spurgeon traveled. Are they moving from Calvinistic roots toward a lively evangelical Christianity, or have they moved away from lively evangelical roots toward a barren Calvinism. It does us no good to walk in Spurgeon's footsteps, if we are traveling in the opposite direction that Spurgeon traveled.

I have seen pastors and Christians who have taught many false doctrines, and yet God has honored and used them because they were in love with Jesus, emphasized holiness and a clear moral conscience, and faithfully brought people to the foot of the cross. And I have seen Christians who were initially deeply in love with Jesus and had effective evangelical ministries, but who turned from Christ to Calvinism in the name of 'sound doctrine', and have had their lampstands dimmed or snuffed out.

Doctrine is important, but it is only one half of what defines Christianity. In Revelation chapter 14 we are told that the patience or perseverance of the saints is defined by two things; sound doctrine and moral obedience:

**Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12**

A Calvinist may possess some portion of sound doctrine, but without the spiritual 'saltiness' of keeping God's commandments (Matthew 5:13) he can have no real connection with Christ as a branch with the Vine (John 15).

Genuine Christianity is not only theological. It is moral and experiential; the experience of bringing forth the fruits of righteousness through the Holy Spirit. But such practical holiness is impossible for anyone who focuses exclusively upon a divine sovereignty that he cannot see, while ignoring the moral responsibility that he can see, and that God tells us will be the sole basis of our eternal destinies when He judges us 'according to our works'.

Spurgeon became a Christian by acknowledging his accountability; I fear that many Calvinists are people who have departed from the faith by turning away from human responsibility and freedom of choice. Yes, Spurgeon taught Calvinism throughout his life. But Spurgeon did one thing above all others; he pointed to the Savior and urged people to confess their sins and come to Him.

Spurgeon could not help but love Calvinism; it was 'mother's milk' to him. In addition, he knew that he himself had experienced election, and that predestination must be a part of any well-rounded theology. But Spurgeon always verbally 'spanked' those who let Calvinism get in the way of evangelism.

My view of Reformed Baptists is this; 'You shall know them by their fruits' (Matthew 7:16,20). If Reformed Baptists are not bringing forth Spurgeon's evangelical fruits, they are not qualified to call him one of their own. They are merely using him as a cloak for their disobedience, adding him to their 'heap of teachers'.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:3-5

## **APPLICATION: STANDING UP**

Often when evangelicals try to share the gospel with unbelievers, one of the questions that the unbeliever will ask is 'Why is there so much evil, suffering and death in the world?' The Christian's answer should be that both Lucifer and the human race have chosen to disobey God and bring evil into His universe, with all of the just consequences of that choice. This is a correct and biblical answer, and a good starting point for any further discussion about sin.

The unbeliever's next question is often 'Isn't God all-knowing? Couldn't He foresee that sin was going to happen, and that suffering would follow? Couldn't He have prevented it?' The Christian's answer to that question should be that God not only foresaw that sin would happen, but that God the Father also predestined it to happen, for the single purpose of having an opportunity to display His own glory. This is also a correct answer.

Rather than duck the question about God's foreknowledge, the Christian should be able to stand up and meet it head on, knowing and understanding that both of his answers are true, that both answers honor God, and that God will honor him for saying these things.

This is the only way to meet these challenging questions. Sometimes they are asked in genuine curiosity, and sometimes out of animosity. Sometimes they come from within the church, and sometimes from outside of it. Regardless of the circumstances, there is no other biblical way to respond. God's word is 'the sword of the Spirit' (Ephesians 6:17), and is His appointed means for handling these issues:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

But having answered these two questions, the Christian must also be able to answer the question 'How, then, should we live?' And the answer is that, while both the sovereignty of God and the moral freedom and responsibility of man are fully true, our responsibility is to focus upon the realm in which we live, and upon those things which we can see and over which we have power. We must embrace the Law of God that defines both ourselves and our world; a Law that is not only written for us in the Bible, but is also written upon every human heart:

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God. But those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law. Deuteronomy 29:29

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. Ecclesiastes 12:13

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32

For when the Gentiles, who do not have the Law (Moses' 10 commandments found in the Bible), do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, not having the Law, are a Law unto themselves. They show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:14-16

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God 2 Corinthians 7:1

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14



This emphasis by God, upon our responsibility to obey His Law, reveals the 'black and white' contrast between Calvinism and the Bible. God says that we are, and always have been free moral agents, and will be judged according to the choices that we make. Calvinism says that we are not free moral agents. It says that God has falsely accused and enslaved us, and that we cannot repent and believe the Gospel unless He enables us to do so. This unscriptural folly flows out of the Calvinist's decision to obsess upon the realm of God's sovereignty which he cannot see, while ignoring the realm of free moral choice and just consequences that he can see; the 'real world' in which he lives and in which he is commanded to 'work out his salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12). And thus the Calvinist is being cheated or 'beguiled' out of God's reward for obedience; eternal life (Colossians 2:18-19).

Calvinism is an attack upon the foundation of God's government. It is an attack upon evangelism, and turns God's 'order of salvation' upon its head. With their neglect of our moral ability and responsibility as human beings, Calvinists lose their 'moral saltiness'. And when Christians lose their saltiness, they are in danger of being 'cast out' eternally:

You (Christians) are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost its savor, what can it be salted with? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot by men. **Matthew 5:13**

Calvinism is not only unscriptural, but is an attack against the scriptures. This is because Calvinists both add to God's word, and take things away from it as well. God gives a dire warning about this behavior:

For I testify to every man that hears the prophecy of this book: If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. **Revelation 22:18-19**

One might argue that these warnings apply to one's handling of the book of Revelation alone. But there is no doctrine in the rest of the Bible that is not richly repeated in Revelation. To attack the foundations of God's word, is to attack it in Revelation as well. For many Christians, I fear, Calvinism will lead to their disqualification to be citizens in the eternal kingdom of God. It will bring them to know the unspeakable horror of seeing where their names were once written in God's 'Book of Life', only to have been erased:

But I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. **1 Corinthians 9:27**

He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels. **Revelation 3:5**

All of these great dangers hang over the heads of 'Calvinists' because they have chosen to 'intrude' into things that they cannot see, while choosing to neglect the morally defined world that they can see, and which God instructs them to give their utmost attention to. Hence, at the judgment seat of Christ, although they considered themselves to be 'wise master builders', it will be found that they built with wood, hay and stubble at best (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

This, then, must be our only answer to the question 'How should we live?'. We must live a life of genuine holiness through God's grace, and with His help and instruction. Christians must both proclaim this truth with their words, and demonstrate this truth through their lives. And we must show that, in order to achieve righteousness, we must come to the One who is our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6); not an empty imputed righteousness, but righteous thoughts and acts that flow out of a fear of God and a vital Trinitarian union with Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is now seated at the right hand of His Father in heaven and is able, as God's great High Priest, to intercede with the Father upon the behalf of any and all who choose to obey Him:

**Though he was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all those who obey Him; called by God to be a high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Hebrews 5:8-10**

Jesus is the Lord God. It is He who, while submitting to His Father's sovereign eternal purposes, created the universe and the moral laws that are its foundation. In the process, as the Creator, He submitted Himself to the same moral absolutes of righteousness, truth and justice that govern all of us. And it is now He who, in the wake of our rebellion and moral failure, has entered our world as a man and has graciously made an open and transparent way of reconciliation with His Father possible; a way that fulfills all righteousness:

**Jesus said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father, but by Me". John 14:6**

**To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. Romans 3:26**

The question is not only 'How should we live?', but 'Through Whom can we live?' And the answer is 'through Jesus Christ'.