

The Doctrines of Grace

A Brief Survey of Calvinism

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The Doctrine of Total Depravity (T.U.L.I.P. = “Total Depravity”)

One of the most common objections against belief in a god, and the God of the Bible in specific, is the pervasive nature of sin and suffering in the world. The challenge of evil is often touted as the single greatest attack against theism that exists in philosophical thought. After all, how could there be an all loving God who has the power to stop suffering but does not?

Yet the Christian response is feeble at best unless it understands the nature of sin and suffering in relation to the fallen nature of humanity. Without the historical context of the fall and the theology of the fallen nature of man, it is impossible to give any honest response to this challenge.

This is the first study in our series on the doctrines of Calvinism (also called the Doctrines of Grace) and this doctrine, Total Depravity, sets the stage for what is to follow. Total Depravity is the universal condition that man finds himself in since the fall in the garden and thus any talk of salvation must find its genesis in the garden as well.

The Doctrine Defined:

“The total or whole person is corrupted by sin. No vestigial ‘island of righteousness’ escapes the influence of the fall. Sin reaches into every aspect of our lives, finding no shelter of isolated virtue.” –R.C. Sproul in Grace Unknown

“Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.” –The Westminster Confession 22.1-2 (IX. 3)

Sin affects our body, our emotions, our ability to reason, our will, and even our very nature. We are born dead in our sins. We are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners.

The Doctrine Discussed:

Genesis 6:5 – *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

Psalms 51:5 *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

Romans 5:9-23 (Highlights)

v10-12 – “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless, no one does good, not even one.”

v18 – “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

v23 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 7:18 – *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”*

Romans 8:5-8 – *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

Ephesians 2:1-5 – *“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, - by grace you have been saved...”*

Components:

1. Sin “in Adam” as our Representative Head (Legal Guilt)

- Adam was our covenant head before God. Because Adam sinned, all of humanity was cast out of the garden. Adam and his progeny were now required to make offerings to God. (Note: Abel’s offering was acceptable because he offered a sacrifice of atonement with the blood that was shed, while Cain offered a fellowship offering without previously making the required atonement to do so.)
- The first genealogy after Adam is focused on “and he died.” This is the only genealogy that focus on the year of death rather than the number of years that were lived.
- **Romans 5:12-21** Notice that the sinful condition and the punishment of death that follows from Adam are attributed to all of humanity. Paul repeats this fact five times in just 9 verses (v15, 16, 17, 18, 19).

2. Sin “in the flesh” and our Total Inability (Natural Pollution)

- God has us dead to rights. Even if we weren’t covenant law breakers in Adam, the corruption that came from his sin upon human nature, we would still be born sinners and would commit sins our entire lives.
- Because every part of us is corrupted by sin, then the Bible is completely accurate in stating that we are “dead” in our trespasses (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13).
 - i. Notice these are the former states of the believer. They were by “nature” vessels of God’s wrath, but now are by nature sons of the Most High God.
- Remember in **Romans 5:7-8** that Paul tells us that the mind set on the flesh is not able to follow the law of God nor please God.
 - i. Notice that they are not able to. These “cannot” do not refer to the lack of permission but are rather terms that mean lack of ability. A teen may tell a friend “I cannot go out tonight,” to mean that they do not have permission. Or they can tell a friend, “I cannot ace my SATs” speaking of ability. These passages speak of ability.
- Jesus says in **John 6:44**, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,” and again in **6:65**, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”
 - i. These are “universal negatives.” They exclude everyone.
 - ii. This verse (“draws him,” gk. *ελκω* ‘*elko*’) is commonly used to show that God “woos” people to him; that he does not force people to believe but rather sweetly courts them to himself. But this word is better translated as “compel” or “drag.” It is used in Acts 16:19 in regards to Paul and Silas being dragged into the marketplace to the authorities. It is also used in James 2:6 of the rich who oppress and “drag” the poor into court. Neither of these would work with “woo” as the translation. It is also used in other Greek texts to refer to drawing water from a well. But even there, water is completely passive to the will of the drawer.

- iii. We can also wonder why the crowd would have been so offended, to the point that most of his own disciples would leave him, if he was merely stating that God woos us to him in a non-intrusive, non-sovereign manner.

Historical Discussion:

The major debate, before the modern resurgence, was the Pelagian controversy between Pelagius and Augustine in the 4th and 5th centuries. Pelagianism has been condemned at more church councils than that of Arianism, the denial of the deity of Christ. It was first condemned at the Synod of Carthage in 418 and was still condemned at the council of Trent in the 16th century with its “*Decretum de Peccato Originali*.”

Pelagius stated that Adam was merely a bad influence on his progeny and thus by working really hard humanity could achieve perfection in this life because sin is merely a sickness, and not a spiritually dead condition.

Augustine recognized that Pelagius was merely preaching a version of works righteousness and affirmed the traditional understanding that Adam plunged humanity into a legal death in the covenantal sense before God, but also had corrupted the very nature of humanity. His focus was on the will. Augustine claimed that the human will was still free but it was not liberated. Our will still functions freely but it can only act freely according to the nature that is attached to it. Thus, a human dead in sin is spiritually unable to be righteous before God because the will is in bondage to the corrupted flesh that is “hostile to God.” But when God regenerates us, the will is now in bondage to a regenerated nature and can freely choose Christ from its own nature. This is one aspect of what scripture speaks of when it says that we were in bondage to sin but are now slaves of righteousness.

“Therefore good men, and above all others Augustine, have laboured on this point to show that we are corrupted not by acquired wickedness but that we bring innate depravity from our mother’s womb.” – John Calvin, *Inst. II, i, 5*

Augustine’s formulations:

Man before the Fall: Adam had the ability to sin (*posse peccare*) and the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*). He did not possess the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*) nor the inability not to sin (*non posse non peccare*).

Man after the Fall: We are unable to live without sinning. Augustine’s double negative *non posse non peccare* means that we cannot not sin, i.e. we are only able to sin.

The Doctrine Debated:

1. ***People are basically good.*** The reformers never said that people could not conform outwardly to the will and law of God. They called this “civil virtue.” Yet they said that “a deed that outwardly conforms to God’s law but proceeds from a heart alienated from God is not deemed by God a good deed” (Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 120). Jonathan Edwards called acts of civil virtue “enlightened self-interest.”
2. ***It is unfair that God would impute the guilt of one man, to the entire race.*** Within the system of covenants this should be seen as a moot point. Within a covenant the one representative for the whole set is required. The one Scapegoat to remove the sins of all Israel. We must remember this is only one side of the coin as well. If we reject that the sin of the one head can be imputed to the many, then we must also object to the righteousness and obedience of the one man Jesus being imputed for the salvation of the many.

Final Thoughts:

“Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ. Moreover, it is unclean all the time that it remains without this regeneration. And because it is unclean, it is actively sinful.” –Tertullian, c. 210

“Adam was the first man who fell.. and he conferred on us also what he did, whether of good or of evil. For he was chief of all who were born from him. As a result, we die through his means. For he, receding from the divine, became an outcast from the Word.” –Commodianus, c. 240

“The gospel is the gospel of salvation, and salvation is, first of all, salvation from sin in its guilt, defilement and power.” - John Murray, “Some Necessary Emphases in Preaching”

The Canons of Dordt (1618-19), Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine:

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature: Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption: Man brought forth children of the same nature as himself after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt he brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam to all his descendants-- except for Christ alone--not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of his perverted nature.

Article 3: Total Inability: Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

The Doctrine of Unconditional Election (T.U.L.I.P. – “Unconditional Election”)

Unconditional does not mean without reason, but rather without any condition found in the object itself. There is nothing meritorious about it. Yet this does not mean the chooser does not have their reasons, no matter how unknowable.

Word of warning from John Calvin:

- “The discussion of predestination – a subject of itself rather intricate – is made very perplexed, and therefore dangerous, by human curiosity, which no barriers can restrain from wandering into forbidden labyrinths, and from soaring beyond its sphere, as if determined to leave none of the Divine secrets unscrutinized or unexplored... First, then, let them remember that when they inquire into predestination, they penetrate into the inmost recesses of divine wisdom, where the careless and confident intruder will obtain no satisfaction to his curiosity... For we know that when we have exceeded the limits of the word, we shall get into a devious and irksome course, in which errors, slips, and falls, will be inevitable. Let us then, in the first place bear in mind, that to desire any more knowledge of predestination than that which is unfolded in the word of God, indicates as great folly as to wish to walk through impassible roads, or to see in the dark. Nor let us be ashamed to be ignorant of some things relative to a subject in which there is a kind of learned ignorance.” – Institutes, Ch. 21, sec. 1, 2.

We are also attempting to speak of Calvinism from an unbiased platform with open exchange of ideas, but also to allow first and foremost Scripture, and secondly, the Historic creeds and confessions to inform our understanding of the working of God in our salvation.

We discussed last week our **Total Depravity** before God in our sin (both in Adam and in our own flesh), and our **Spiritual Inability** by which we are unable to bring out our own salvation (Pelagianism), or even to will the conditions in which salvation can come (Semi-Pelagianism).

Due to the controversial nature of this doctrine and the innumerable rabbit trails that can be taken into predestination, sovereignty, human freedom and liberty of will, reprobation, God’s foreknowledge, and many others, this week we will look primarily at the Scripture’s in a Biblical Theological approach and not so much in a Systematic Theological approach, with the exception of some needed definitions at the beginning. At the end of this hand out there are several creedal and confessional statements as well as some references for further study. Just remember, with a topic like this, this study will be **FAR** from exhaustive.

The Doctrine Defined:

“...that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be recipients of special grace and eternal salvation. More briefly it may be said to be God eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ.” – Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology. p114.

“...the existence of an eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any difference or desert in men themselves separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death.” –Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination. p83.

“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined to everlasting life, and others are foreordained to everlasting death.

“These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or decreased.

“Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Whereby they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted or sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

“The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.” –Westminster Confession, Ch. III, secs. III-VII.

The Doctrines Discussed:

Election:

Jeremiah 1:5	Matthew 22:14	John 6:65
John 13:18	John 15:16	John 17:9
Acts 13:48	Romans 5:8	
Romans 8:28-30 (Does “all” mean “all” or does “all” mean “some”?)		
Romans 9:10-23 (notice the divine passive of those who are “created” for destruction.)		
Romans 11:5	1 Corinthians 1:28-29	Ephesians 1:4-5, 11
Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9	1 Peter 2:9	

Reprobation:

(Note: This has been called a harder doctrine than the doctrine of hell. It can be comprised of *preterition*, *condemnation*, or *both*.)

Proverbs 16:4	Isaiah 6:9-10 (Quoted SIX times in the NT)
Romans 9:10-23	Romans 11:7 1 Peter 2:8
Jude 4	Revelation 13:8

The Doctrine Debated:

1. God desires that all would be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9)

The common reformed answer to this question is to remind us that God has a secret and a revealed will (Deut. 29:29). So while God commands humanity what is inline with the moral nature of God (righteousness is not just “goodness” but the action that brings God the most glory so he commands all humanity to perfection) and this is his revealed will. Yet God also has a secret will in which he works all things together for His purposes, and this includes the eternal destinies of all people. (Gen. 50:20; James 4:15)

We can see the perfect expression of the contrast of the two wills in Jesus statement in Matthew 11:25-26: *“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for **such was your gracious will.**”* See that the gospel, even though God desires all to believe and not perish, is still revealed to some and actively hidden by God from others, for the MAXIMAL amount of glory to God.

(See Piper’s [The Justification of God](#) and “Are The Two Wills of God” in [Still Sovereign](#), ed. by Schreiner and Ware)

2. For God to choose some and not others is unfair.

This assumes that sinful humans have some right and claim on salvation. God would only be unjust if this were the case. If we understand total depravity correctly, then we know that no human has a right to salvation or is owed any grace from the Lord. This is why it is called GRACE (unmerited favor). We must be honest and say that God would have been entirely just to leave ALL of humanity in its sin and condemn the whole race to hell. Did the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 deserve to be raised? Did Lazarus deserve to be raised in John 12? The fact that God saves any should be a testimony to his graciousness and his glory.

Remember also that God did not provide salvation for any of the angels who fell. He left them all to their eternal condemnation as was absolutely just in doing so. Would we say that God is unjust in not redeeming the demons?

Finally, this is the same objection that Paul receives in Romans 9 when he presents this same fact. Should we then ignore that Paul taught this doctrine in the same manner as the reformed faith and received the same objections? Paul's answer, in essence, is "who are you, an unjust man, to question the absolute just God?" We thus confuse how we are to act in human affairs in which we treat all people equally, and God's affairs with people in which he has no obligation to treat humans in any other way than he so chooses.

3. God chooses based on his prescient grace (his foreknowledge).

Spurgeon once said that if God had not unconditionally elected him before the foundations of the world, he never would have. Our understanding of total depravity will again help us to dismiss this objection. If we know that we are dead in our sins and spiritually unable to cause our own salvation, then we would know that there is no future faith to see. If God had not regenerated me, I would have never had a faith in the future to be seen.

This would also cause a redundancy. It is like placing a bet after the winning game. "I bet on the one who has already won." What is the point in electing those who have already chosen for themselves? Those who claim that because foreknowledge precedes predestination in Romans 8:39 set up a strawman, for who else could God predestine but those who he foreknew? The question is WHAT does God foreknow?

We also know that when God's "foreknowledge" is spoken of in connection with salvation, it is always foreknowledge of the person and not of the facts about the person. When Paul says "those whom he *foreknew*," he could have easily meant, "those whom he *long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself*," (see also Jeremiah 1:5 in which God's foreknowledge of Jeremiah was in a loving and elective sense).

This would also transform our faith, which is shown in Eph. 2:8-9 as a gift, into something that is meritorious within ourselves. Once we do this, we now deny the gospel that we are saved by grace alone.

4. God's election and reprobation prevents human freewill.

We again must remember that our human will is enslaved to sin by the fall. We are *non posse non peccare* (not able to not sin; all we do is sin). If this is the case then we are placing our human will above the sovereignty of God. It should give us pause when we begin to diminish an attribute of God in order to bolster a faculty of man.

We also must remember that the biblical concept of the human will is that it is bound to our nature. If we are dead in our sins, then our will is bound to that nature and thus we willingly reject Christ, even though God has allowed us to remain in our sin. The reprobate, though predestined by God, willingly denies the Lord (John 8:43-44; Acts 2:23) While the believer, who has been regenerated by God into a new creation, has a will that is bound to the new creation and so the faith that it is now free to believe with is both a gift from God by regeneration, but also is freely chosen with the regenerated will (Romans 8:5-8). Thus faith is a prerequisite of salvation, but not of election.

Thus both choices, to believe or not to believe, are both totally determined by the will of God before all of eternity, while simultaneously made in a free manner.

Final Comments:

"There can be no election without its opposite, reprobation." –John Calvin, Institutes, book III., ch. 23

"Like every truth about God, the doctrine of election involves mystery, and it sometimes stirs controversy. But in Scripture it is a pastoral doctrine, helping Christians to see how great is the grace that saves them, and moving them to respond with humility, confidence, and praise... we do know that we believe now only because we were chosen, and we know that as believers we can rely on God to finish the good work He has begun." – R.C. Sproul, study note on p1630 of the Reformation Study Bible

"As such it is a source of rich comfort for all believers. Their final salvation does not depend on their uncertain obedience, but has its guarantee in the unchangeable purpose of God." –Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p114.

The Canons of the Council of Orange (529 AD)

CANON 3. If anyone says that the grace of God can be conferred *as a result of human prayer*, but that it is not grace itself which makes us pray to God, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah, or the Apostle who says the same thing, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me" (Rom 10:20, quoting Isa. 65:1).

CANON 4. If anyone maintains that *God awaits our will to be cleansed from sin, but does not confess that even our will to be cleansed comes to us through the infusion and working of the Holy Spirit*, he resists the Holy Spirit himself who says through Solomon, "The will is prepared by the Lord" (Prov. 8:35, LXX), and the salutary word of the Apostle, "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

CANON 5. If anyone says that not only the increase of faith but also its beginning and the very desire for faith, by which we believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and comes to the regeneration of holy baptism -- if anyone says that this belongs to us by nature and not by a gift of grace, that is, *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will and turning it from unbelief to faith and from godlessness to godliness*, it is proof that he is opposed to the teaching of the Apostles, for blessed Paul says, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). And again, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). For those who state that the faith by which we believe in God is natural make all who are separated from the Church of Christ by definition in some measure believers.

CANON 6. If anyone says that God has mercy upon us when, apart from his grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labor, pray, watch, study, seek, ask, or knock, *but does not confess that it is by the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us that we have the faith, the will, or the strength to do all these things as we ought*; or if anyone makes *the assistance of grace depend on the humility or obedience of man and does not agree that it is a gift of grace itself that we are obedient and humble*, he contradicts the Apostle who says, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7), and, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

CANON 7. If anyone affirms that we can form any right opinion or make any right choice which relates to the salvation of eternal life, as is expedient for us, or that we can be saved, that is, *assent to the preaching of the gospel through our natural powers without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who makes all men gladly assent to and believe in the truth*, he is led astray by a heretical spirit, and does not understand the voice of God who says in the Gospel, "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and the word of the Apostle, "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

CANON 8. If anyone maintains that some are able to come to the grace of baptism by mercy but others *through free will*, which has manifestly been corrupted in all those who have been born after the transgression of the first man, it is proof that he has no place in the true faith. For he denies that the free will of all men has been weakened through the sin of the first man, or at least holds that it has been affected in such a way that they have still the ability to seek the mystery of eternal salvation by themselves without the revelation of God. The Lord himself shows how contradictory this is by declaring that no one is able to come to him "unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44), as he also says to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17), and as the Apostle says, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Canons of Dordt (1618-19) The First Main Point of Doctrine

Article 6: God's Eternal Decision: The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decision. For all his works are known to God from eternity (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just

judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us his act--unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just--of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decision of election and reprobation revealed in God's Word. This decision the wicked, impure, and unstable distort to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.

Article 7: Election: Election [or choosing] is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following: Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, he chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. He did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation. And so he decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through his Word and Spirit. In other words, he decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of his Son, to glorify them. God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of his glorious grace. As Scripture says, God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified (Rom. 8:30).

Article 8: A Single Decision of Election: This election is not of many kinds; it is one and the same election for all who were to be saved in the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which he chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which he prepared in advance for us to walk in.

Article 9: Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith: This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of each of the benefits of salvation. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, He chose us (not because we were, but) so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

Article 10: Election Based on God's Good Pleasure: But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve his choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves his adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as his own possession. As Scripture says, When the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad..., she (Rebecca) was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:11-13). Also, All who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

Article 11: Election Unchangeable: Just as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can his chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced.

Article 15: Reprobation: Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election-- those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision: to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgment), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice. And this is the decision of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

Article 18: The Proper Attitude Toward Election and Reprobation: To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, Who are you, O man, to talk back to God? (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, Have I no right to do what I want with my own? (Matt. 20:15). We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

Excursus: The Atonement – Accomplished or Offered

“The extent of the atonement is to be understood in the light of the intent of the atonement.”

What does the Bible say that Atonement is:

Atonement Accomplishes Propitiation: *The Turning Away of Wrath*

1. We are Objects of God’s Wrath:
 - a. Romans 1:18
 - b. Romans 5:9
 - c. Galatians 3:10
 - d. Ephesians 2:2
 - e. Romans 5:10/11:28
 - i. “Enemies of God” in the passive voice, that is we are the objects who are recipients of God’s holy displeasure
 - ii. Contrast with 5:9 where we are beloved by God – not lovers of God but passive recipients of God’s love.
2. 1 John 2:2
 - a. Why do you need an advocate?
 - b. Notice that Jesus is the “atoning sacrifice”
 - i. The day of Atonement in Israel – Lev 16
 - ii. John the Baptist explicitly references this in John 1:29
3. Romans 3:24-25
 - a. propitiation” is literally “mercy seat” – the lid of the ark of the covenant.
 - b. Satisfaction made to pay for the sins sinned against God
 - c. Jesus is not provisionally sacrificial
 - i. Jesus **IS** the sacrifice that propitiated God for his people
4. Jesus uses the term “propitiate” in Luke 18:9-14
 - a. ”God, be **propitiated** toward me.”
 - i. The anger of God would be turned away from him
5. Colossians 1:19-23
 - a. Notice that God has made peace (is propitiated) by the bloodshed on the cross. It didn’t make peace POSSIBLE, it made peace ACTUAL.
6. Hebrews 2:17-18
 - a. Jesus is the **actual** propitiation for the sins of the people
 - i. Remember that this is set in the context of Jesus being shown to be BETTER than all the shadows of the OT
 1. Jesus is a BETTER priest – doesn’t need to atone for himself
 2. Jesus is a BETTER prophet – he doesn’t speak for God, but as God
 3. Jesus is a BETTER sacrifice – he is the perfect spotless lamb
7. Hebrews 9:28
 - a. Jesus is the actual sin offering that bears our sin away from us.
8. 1 John 4:10
 - a. The purpose of sending Jesus was to be an **actual** propitiation for sin.
9. Romans 5:6-10
 - a. Jesus is our substitute and justifies us by his blood
 - b. The blood is what **actually** saves us from the wrath of God.
 - c. Where the blood is shed, the wrath is satisfied.

- d. On the cross we were reconciled to God.

Atonement Accomplishes Reckoning: *Counting Our Sins As Christ's And His Righteousness As Ours*

1. God is punishing sins/imputing righteousness
 - a. Isaiah 53:6
 - i. Our sin is laid on Jesus – he becomes the sin bearer
 - b. 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - i. Jesus is bearing the full anger of God against sin

Atonement Accomplishes Redemption: *Set Free From Bondage*

1. Romans 3:24-25
 - a. We have been (past tense) redeemed by Christ's death.
2. 1st century slave culture
 - a. The term “redeem/redemption” would unquestionably have meant a payment of a price to set a captive/slave free and a transfer of ownership/granting of freedom.
 - b. It is not an offer, it is a business deal.
 - i. A signed contract is an executed contract.
 - ii. Once Christ pays for your redemption, you belong to him!
 - c. Galatians 3:13
 - i. We are redeemed from bondage to the law by Christ's substitution.
 - d. Ephesians 1:7
 - i. The redemption of his blood IS the forgiveness of sins.
 - ii. FAITH does not save us. Christ does!
 - iii. Faith is simply the means that God uses to gift it to us.
 - e. Titus 2:14
 - i. The blood of Jesus actually secures redemption
 - ii. Titus refers to the redemption of “us”
 1. This is clearly a reference to the church as opposed to all who it is offered to in v11.
 - a. See discussion of “all” and the offer of the gospel in the next section on Limited Atonement

Atonement Accomplishes Substitution/Ransom: *Christ died for us/in our place*

1. Matthew 1:21
 - a. He will save/ransom his people
 - i. He did not make salvation possible but actually saved his people.
2. Ephesians 5
 - a. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church – in giving his life up for her.
 - b. Should husbands then offer their sacrificial love to all women or to one particular woman?
3. Galatians 2:20
 - a. Jesus gave himself up for *me/you* particularly because he loved *me/you* specifically. It is not a general love of all humanity, but that he loved *me/you* in specific and was willing to die for us.
4. Galatians 1:3-4
 - a. Ransomed/delivered from the bondage in sin.
 - i. When did this occur?
 1. When he gave himself up on the cross.
5. Mark 10:45
 - a. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many.

- b. Ransom is the exchange of one person/price to set free another.
- 6. Acts 20:28
 - a. Paul to the Ephesian elders.
 - b. Christ “purchased” (ransomed) with his blood when he died.

Atonement Was Jesus’ Purpose: *Jesus Came for His People*

- 1. John 10:11-16; 22-30
 - a. Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for *his* sheep
 - i. The Jews didn’t believe. Why?
 - 1. Because they are not his sheep.
 - 2. He didn’t lay down his life for them.
- 2. John 17:9
 - a. Who does Jesus intercede for?
 - b. Petition and sacrifice were the two responsibilities of the priest for their people specifically.
 - i. They have the same scope and referent.

Atonement Accomplished an Actual Result: *Summary*

- 1. Did Christ’s death actually redeem people – or did it make salvation only possible?
- 2. What was ACCOMPLISHED on the cross? Does Jesus obtain the redemption that he set out to achieve?
- 3. God sent Christ to *accomplish* the redemption of his people – to *actually* save them.
- 4. All of these passages show that the atonement is effectual for a specific people.

THE BASIS FOR OUR ASSURANCE – God guarantees our salvation because *he* has accomplished it!

“The sin of Adam did not make the condemnation of all men merely possible; it was the ground of their actual condemnation. So the righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual salvation of those for whom He wrought.”

~ **Charles Hodge**

DOUBLE PAYMENT IS UNBIBLICAL:
Augustus Toplady (18th century)

"From whence this fear and unbelief,
Since God my Father, put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
Can he, the righteous judge of men,
Condemn me for that debt of sin,
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?"

"Complete atonement Thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid,
Whate'er Thy people owed;
How, then, can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood."

"If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured

The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine."

"Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest:
The merits of thy Great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty:
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee."

The Doctrine of Particular Redemption

(T.U.L.I.P. = “Limited Atonement”)

The fundamental question that this doctrine seeks to address is whether Christ died to make atonement for the whole of humanity, or if he died to atone for the elect alone. In this lesson we will be attempting to probe some of the decrees of God, which he made before creation began and thus we must again be aware that not all of our questions will be answered. Let us also keep in mind the two doctrines of Calvinism that we have studied previously.

Total Depravity: We know that we are not just metaphorically “dead in our sins” but are actually and totally dead in our sins in regard to God and righteousness. We can not make ourselves innocent in God’s court any more than we could in a human court. This declaration of innocence can only come from the judge or those courts who has the authority to do so. We cannot even expect that any amount of begging before the gavel will sway the heart of the judge. This is what we mean when we say that we cannot gain our own salvation, nor can we till the soil so to speak to make the conditions required for salvation.

Unconditional Election: Due to our spiritual inability, salvation can only come through and by an act of God. God chooses us before the foundations of the world, not due to anything in us or any unforeseen faith (for indeed there would be none if God did not previously elect to regenerate us), but is based solely on the secret will and good pleasure of God. We know that all whom God has elected, he will also justify by the blood of Jesus.

It is here that we come to the doctrine at hand. Does the blood of Jesus redeem the whole world or does he redeem the elect alone? In other, and admittedly more pointed words, did Jesus die to make salvation for all men possible or to make salvation for the elect actual?

Let us begin, as usual, with some definitions of the doctrine itself.

The Doctrine Defined:

“Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.” – The Westminster Confession, Ch. III, IV.

“For it was entirely the free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son’s costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation.” – The Canons of Dort, Pt. II, Art. VIII.

“Christ died for the purpose of saving the elect, and the elect only... He died for the purpose of saving only those whom He actually applies the benefits of His redemptive work.” – Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p384.

The Doctrine Discussed:

Once again, due to the controversial nature of and history of division over this doctrine, I will attempt, to a degree, to limit our discussion to the explicit passages in Scripture much more than the brut theology of it. While much systematic theology must be employed to draw connections between passages, the discussion will begin primarily with Biblical support rather than systematics. We will begin with the Biblical basis for the doctrine and then move into some of the theological necessities of it.

John 10:11, 15: We notice that in these two passages that Christ lays his life down for “his sheep.” He does not say that he lays down his life for all the sheep in the world also. In fact, he compares his own personal relationship with the Father to his relationship to the Sheep. It is not a universal but a particular. Notice that even going into v16 that Jesus has sheep that are not of the fold of Israel but still does not make a universal statement concerning all sheep.

Acts 20:28: We see again that is this one flock, the church, that God obtained by the blood of Christ on the cross. The overseers are to watch over the church and not over every person in their community.

Romans 5:8-10: Notice that it is “while we were still sinners” that Christ died for us. Here, as he does throughout Romans, Paul uses the 1st person plural to be inclusive of believers only and not the whole world. For if these “us” and “we” pronouns meant he entire race, then verse 10 would be utterly obscured in the light of the rest of New Testament teaching. It is clear that the connection to v8 and v10 is the justification found in v9. Thus when Christ died for us “while we were still sinners” and “enemies,” he necessarily gave us redemption which can do nothing else by bring us salvation. In other words, the logic of this passage is that who ever Christ died for will be saved. Yet considering we have a doctrine of reprobation, rejection, and finally hell, v10 would be contrary to all scripture if we posited that Christ died for all humanity and not just the elect in v9. In this case we only have two options. Either Christ did not die to atone for all people and some are condemned to hell, or all are saved and the passages on hell should be deleted from our Bibles.

Ephesians 5:25: Here we are told that Husband’s are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church, expressed with his death on the cross for her. Again, the logic of this requires the limited reading. For if Christ gave himself up for all humanity but then simply bound himself to those who believed, Paul would actually be mandating polygamy. Husbands then should pursue all women and wed all the ones who accept his offer. For if Christ’s death was not exclusive, then neither ought be the husband’s. Yet the logic of Paul is that husbands should love their wife exclusively and sacrificially in the same way that Christ loved and died exclusively and sacrificially for the Church and the church alone.

John Owen’s formulation:

John Owen gave this several proposition argument in support of Limited Atonement:

1. The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:
 - a. All the sins of all men,
 - b. All the sins of some men, or,
 - c. Some of the sins of all men.
2. In which case it may be said:
 - a. If the last be true (c), all men have some sins to answer for, and so, none are saved.
 - b. That if the second be true (b), then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.
 - c. But if the first be the case (a), why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?
3. You answer, “because of *unbelief*.”
 - a. I ask then, is this *unbelief* a sin, or is it not?
 - i. If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or he did not.
 1. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died?
 2. If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!

Quite easily Owen showed that Jesus either died for the elect only, or else we run into the equally unacceptable conclusions that all are saved or none are saved.

The purposes of God:

We may also add the question: What was God's purpose in sending Christ to die on the cross? The two answers given to this question are either that Christ died to make salvation possible for all, or to make salvation actual for some. This will by necessity be brief and thus I will merely note several of the points that can be made under this line of argumentation.

- The doctrine of the sovereignty of God requires that whatever God decrees or determines to occur will, without fail, come to pass and no one will, by disobedience or sin, be able to frustrate these plans.
 - Since this is the case, if God determined to atone for all men, all would be saved. However, since all believe that only some are saved, in both Reformed and Arminian thought, then this must be what God had decreed, and thus these can be the only ones whom God had determined to save.
- In relation to this, we see that the work of Christ was in fact finished on the cross and does not await any further ratification of future faith to make what was only possible on the cross, actual by faith.
 - Rather we see that our salvation was completed and accomplished, according to the names that were written in the Book of Life before the foundations of the world, on the cross at Calvary. Our salvation was obtained then, and not now.
 - In addition to this, to those who say that the atonement only made salvation possible and is activated by a future faith, we must assert that the Bible clearly shows that not only was salvation accomplished on the cross but also all means to that salvation. Thus Christ purchased not only our salvation, but our faith, repentance, and all other effects of the work of the Spirit at regeneration. The atonement secures the fulfillment of the requirements of salvation, which we have already shown we are incapable of, as well as salvation itself (Rom. 2:4; Gal. 3:13-14; Eph. 1:3-4; 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:5-6).
 - If we hold to the Arminian view of Atonement, then Christ did not secure salvation for any in attempting to make it available to all; a concept completely foreign to the historical victory in Christ found in the pages of Scripture.
- As we have seen, Scripture repeatedly qualifies who it is that Christ died for.
 - Christ died for his sheep, his church, his people, and the elect. These are shown repeatedly to be the only ones who receive the blessings of the cross. (See verses above as well as Matt. 1:21 and Rom. 8:32-35).
- The intercession of Christ as High Priest and his sacrifice are simply two aspects of the same work of the atonement.
 - So why would Christ limit his intercession to those who would believe, both in his time, and in the times to come, (Jn. 17:9) if in fact he would be sacrificing for all humanity on the cross?

Does God require double payment?

This was already addressed by Owen's argument, but if God did in fact die for the sins of the whole world, why is it that some people are cast in to hell? If the debt has been paid, what else is left to pay and what punishment has held back when Christ "became a curse for us" to "redeem us from the curse of the law," (Gal. 3:13)? This would seem entirely unjust on the part of God. Not in the same manner as the unfair objection to the previous doctrine of election, but because this is the only means to

salvation that God himself has provided. And if even his own system of salvation requires double payment, then God would be breaking his own essence of justice.

The Doctrine Debated:

1. There are verses that state that Christ died *for* “the whole world,” “all men,” and that some whom Christ died for failed to obtain salvation.

This answer will take some work. Get ready...

First we must state that when we say Christ died “for” the world, several options can be meant and in various passages may be employed differently. “For” may mean “in the place of” which would uphold the idea that the atonement was a penal substitution where Christ took on the punishment that was due to us. In this manner Christ died for the elect.

We may also say that “for” can mean “to/toward” in that Christ died for the purpose of offering salvation all. We will address the possibility of giving a genuine gospel presentation under this doctrine later, but here let us be satisfied to understand that this is a possible rendering of “for” (the dative case) in the Greek.

Let us now look to the meaning of “the whole world.” This again can have several meanings. First, it can mean the whole of creation. This would encompass more than the world of humanity. This manner can also be upheld even by those of us who hold to the doctrine of Particular Redemption. Yet this would not be in a manner of atonement or redemption in the salvific sense, but rather in the eschatological sense. It is entirely Biblical to see the resurrection of both the godly and the wicked, as well as creation itself in the new heavens and the new earth, found in the resurrection of Christ. Yet we would be hard pressed to call this “atonement” for trees on my street have never sinned and yet they will be redeemed in the last days. It is in this same manner that common grace is also dispensed on the cross to all of creation to uphold and sustain it until the return of Christ. Yet none of this would require us to say that Christ died to atone for the sins of all humanity. We must however state honestly that the death of Christ, while only atoning for the elect, was multifaceted in its purposes for all of creation.

The “whole world” commonly means something like “all the nations” in scripture as well. A Prime example of this would be Romans 11:12 where “world” cannot possibly mean all people since it explicitly excludes Israel. Thus, “world” is used in the New Testament to draw attention to the inclusivity of the gospel to the vast array of gentile nations as opposed to the particularism of the Old Testament election of Israel. We see this meaning in such passages as Matt. 24:14, Mark 16:16, Rom. 1:5 and 10:18 as well as most likely many others (Jn 1:29; 6:33,51; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Jn. 2:2, etc.). Thus when Christ died for the whole world, he died for the salvation of the elect from all the nations. This is not “all” without exclusion, but “all” without distinction.

Next is the idea of “all men.” This again is largely determined by the semantic meaning of “all.” If we read this as all without exception, that is that it includes every human of all time, then we again are stuck with the conclusion that either all are ultimately saved or none are saved. Yet if read it as all without distinction, then we run into no such problem. That is, if we read “all men” to mean “all kinds of men without distinction” (that is, God does not favor one nationality over another), then we wind up again with the New Testament concept that God has elected some to be saved from all nations, tribes, and tongues; a fact heavily attested to in Scripture.

We also see in many passages that “all men” can simply refer to all the men in a certain subgroup that the writer is dealing with. We see this clearly in Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 where “all men” can only mean those who are saved (the category that the author has been dealing with in that particular context.) If we take it to mean all men universally, we make Paul say much more than he intends in those passages.

Finally we have the passages that seem to suggest that Christ did in fact die for some who would not obtain salvation. Some of these are more easily explained than others. The first two are found in Romans 14:15 and 1 Corinthians 8:11 where the Christian Pharisee is shown to cause the weaker brother to

stumble to destruction. Here however Romans 14:4 shows that this is not an actual possibility but that God will uphold them even if they stumble. These passages are clearly “a supposition, for the sake of argument, of something that does not and cannot happen,” (Shedd, The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles. p447). This is a common rhetorical device used to prove a point as is employed frequently throughout scripture, most commonly in Paul but we also find it in Hebrews 6 in regards to the possibility of losing salvation (something that is impossible but assumed to prove a point).

We then find passages such as 2 Peter 2:1 and Hebrews 10:29 where false teachers seem to lose their salvation. Here again, a common rhetorical device is at work where they are judged according to their own assumed profession without making any judgment on whether or not their profession is correct or not. It is clear that these false teachers are not in fact genuine believers but are heretics like those found commonly denounced in 2 Peter, the epistles of John and Jude. So they are merely being judged based on their own profession and not an actual state of salvation.

2. Doesn't 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 teach that God was reconciling the *WORLD* to himself?

Remember at this time Paul and the apostles are expanding the promises of God and redemption from Israel out to the Gentiles. This passage then does not mean that the whole world (as in every single person) has been reconciled, lest we choose to hold to a kind of universalism or else accuse God of demanding double payment – an all sufficient payment from Christ but then a demand for us to also pay our own debt. Rather this verse is referring to the fact that God has sheep from other flocks than Israel; that salvation is not just the Jews. Paul is quite right when he states that God is reconciling the world (all peoples) to himself because he is referring to Jews, gentiles, Romans, Greeks and so forth.

3. If we do not believe that Christ in fact died for everyone, it makes sincere evangelism impossible.

First we must always assert that the gospel proclamation is the main function of the church to all nations. No one should presume to know who the elect are and thus limit the evangelistic efforts of the local body. Yet we should not assume the evangelism is more than what it is shown to be in scripture. It is not an offer of universal salvation, but rather an offer of salvation “to whomever believes,” (Jn 3:16). Thus our universal offer of the gospel is always conditioned, though implicitly, that only the elect will receive it by faith. (“Faith comes by hearing.”)

We must also remember that the offer of salvation to all who we encounter does not consist of a declaration that Christ died for the sins of all, but rather consists of:

- a. an exposition on the atoning work of Christ in regards to sin and sufficient for salvation of *all who believe*,
- b. a description of the nature of faith and repentance that Christ requires, and
- c. a declaration of the salvation that will be given to all *who repent and believe by faith*.

It is not the duty of the preacher to harmonize the secret and the revealed will of God. The revealed will is that all are morally obligated to believe (as this is a righteous act and God's universal law is only on what is good and righteous) and thus we are responsible for this, knowing however, that God will achieve his secret will of who will believe and who will not. Dr. Shedd says, “God may properly call upon the non-elect to do a thing that God delights in simply because He delights in it. The Divine desire is not altered by the Divine decree of preterition.” (Shedd, Dogmatic Theology. p484.)

Finally, the universal offer of salvation eliminates the excuse that the reprobate was not given the opportunity to believe. Thus it is the duty of the faithful preacher to eliminate every vestige of this excuse that he is given the opportunity to.

4. Some will come knocking on the door of salvation and be turned away because “there is no redemption for them at the inn.”

This objection is actually quite simple to respond to. It is a red herring used to make the doctrine of Particular Redemption seem unfair or cold. We know that any who come to Jesus will not be turned away. Any who come to Christ will be accepted and saved. Yet Jesus states explicitly in John 6:37, 44, 65 that the only ones who come to him are brought to him by the Father. The demographic of people who come to Christ, apart from the sovereign, unconditional election of God, and are turned away, then is an empty category. This will never happen. We must remember that before regeneration we are dead in our sins and thus we cannot come to God on our own. This objection then is simply a smoky cloud with no real substance meant simply to make an irrational tug at our sense of fair play.

5. Christ's death was sufficient for all, not just for the elect.

This again is simply a false objection. First, even the most staunch of Calvinist claims that the sufficiency of Christ was enough to cover the whole world. No one is arguing that the death of Christ was only sufficient for the elect. Calvinist simply claim that it was only designed for and carried out on behalf of the elect.

Why is the death of Christ infinitely sufficient? Because the death of a perfect sacrifice is all that God has required to bring salvation to his people. Notice that regardless of the population of Israel, there was only required the one scapegoat on the day of atonement. God did not require a second when Israel doubled in size. Thus the sufficiency of the atonement is a question about the quality of the sacrifice and not the quantity of its recipients. We see that the lamb was sufficient for all but only efficient for the year. This has to do with the nature of the lamb and the priest. This is attested to throughout the book of Hebrews. The Priest had to make atonement for himself and because of this, had to make atonement year in and year out. But now that the perfect sacrifice has come, there is no more need because it was efficient for all time. Yet in the same way that the lamb was only efficient for Israel (and indeed only the remnant, the Israel within Israel), and not for all the nations, so too the sacrifice of Christ is good only for the True Israel, the Israel of God which is the Church whom He has purchased with the blood of Christ (Gal 6:16; Eph. 5:25).

Final Thoughts:

“Now, here are two coherent interpretations of the biblical gospel, which stand in evident opposition to each other. The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God Who enables man to save himself. One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly. The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, those who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man's salvation is secured by any of them. The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man; one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as man's own contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory of saving believers to God, the other divides the praise between God, Who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man, who by believing operated it.” - J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay” in John Owen's The Death of Death in the Death of Christ. p4.

“If faith is necessary to the atonement, then Christ's work was indeed a mere potentiality. In itself it saves no one. It merely makes salvation possible. Theoretically we must ask the obvious question, What would have happened to the work of Christ if nobody believed? That had to be a theoretical possibility. In this case, Christ would have died in vain. He would have been a potential savior of all, but an actual savior of none.” – R.C. Sproul, Grace Unknown. p167.

The Doctrine of Effectual Calling (Or Internal Calling)

(T.U.L.I.P. = “Irresistible Grace”)

It would be entirely fair to call the doctrine of Total Depravity the initial condition or state of affairs into which the doctrines of grace act upon; Unconditional Election and Limited Atonement the means by which the doctrines of grace act upon that initial state of affairs; and now Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints as the logical outcomes or guaranteed effects of the doctrines of grace. That is to say, that Total depravity describes the conditions in which fallen man placed himself after the fall and thus is the universal situation in which all humanity has been in ever since. The situation of every human is one of mortality due to the working of the first sin in the garden, and only verified with every further sin of individual man. This is the background, the stage for the drama of redemption. If man is to have a relationship with God it cannot be a movement from earth toward heaven, but, as Jacob’s ladder illustrates, it must be provided for us from heaven and be brought down to us. Thus God first chooses His elect and then provides the proper means and ends of salvation (regeneration and atonement). Thus the doctrines of Unconditional Election and Limited Atonement must necessarily be wholly works of God and are the active means by which God overcomes the fallen condition of man.

The next two doctrines then, are logical out-workings of the first three doctrines. If God sovereignly elects those who will be saved, and provides the atonement for them himself, then none who have been elected could possibly resist these two absolute actions of God. Thus the grace of God, given to His elect is irresistible. Then, if his grace is irresistible and conversion occurs, this salvation will be seen through to the end or else God’s election and atonement may possibly be in vain. Therefore no saint who has been elected by God will fail to receive the future glory promised to those who are saved. Yet this is not by our own will or power, but is again the active work of God. God *causes us* to persevere. This is not the disputed doctrine of eternal security, but is the work of God in saving, sanctifying and glorifying his children. Let us not confuse this doctrine with a concept of secure salvation through works. We were not saved by works, nor will we be glorified by them. Glorification, like salvation, is wholly a work of God, as we will see in these last two lessons.

We then see that these next two doctrines are the logical byproducts of the first three. In this study we will be looking at the first of the byproducts: Irresistible Grace. Involved with this discussion, we will necessarily speak to other doctrines such as regeneration and effectual calling, and will visit with old friends like sovereignty, election, reprobation, and freewill. Due to this fact, that so many doctrines are involved in this one doctrine of Calvinism, this study will be, like the others, necessarily broad.

The Doctrine Defined:

“All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace sand salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.” – Westminster Confession, Ch. X, sec. I.

“Monergistic regeneration is exclusively a divine act. Man does not have the creative power God has. To quicken a person who is spiritually dead is something on God can do. A corpse cannot revive itself. It cannot even assist in the effort. It can only respond after receiving new life. Not only can it respond then, it most certainly will respond. In regeneration the soul of man is utterly passive until it has been made alive, it offers no help in reviving itself...” –R.C. Sproul, Grace Unknown, p184.

While these definitions are helpful, the core of this doctrine is simply that God's sovereign decision to elect and finally to save those whom he has elected, is assured to come to pass and cannot be thwarted by human sin, angelic rebellion, or any other force in nature. No man who has been elected by God can resist the saving grace that God has for him. We will again begin with the scripture references to this doctrine and to the others that help to inform us on it, and then move on to some of the theological nuances and supports for it. Finally we will deal with some of the objections to this doctrine, though the ones put forth are rather weak if the previous three doctrines have been ably presented and accepted.

The Doctrine Discussed

Ezekiel 36:24-28 – We see in this passage the active nature of the work of God at regeneration and conversion and the total passivity of man. Here it is God who:

chooses us – “I will take you...”

removes us – “from the nations... and bring you into your own land...”

washes us – “I will sprinkle water on you...”

cleanses us – “and you shall be clean...”

regenerates us – “I will give you a new heart... I will remove your heart of stone from your flesh and

give you a heart of flesh...”

saves/converts us – “I will put my Spirit within you...”

sanctifies us – “and *cause* you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

adopts us – “you shall be my people and I will be your God.”

Notice the absolute passivity on the part of man. This is clearly stated in the fact that even our obedience to what God commands is only done by the enabling if God where he *causes* us to comply with his statutes and rules. Contrary to how many evangelical preachers express their gospel, this verse clearly shows that we do not choose God, repent, believe or progress in sanctification by our own will or power and we definitely are not responsible for our regeneration.

What this passage also helps us to understand is that Irresistible Grace and monergistic regeneration is not only a New Testament teaching. God has always been the one responsible for the whole of salvation throughout the entire history of the world. No person has ever ascended to God, but God has always been the one responsible for descending to us in order to bring salvation to men.

John 16:8-10 – Notice in this passage that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world concerning its sin. It would do great violence to the text to say that somehow men are convicted concerning their sin on their own accord and then seek the Spirit. No person has ever felt the need for their own salvation, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 16:14 – Here is an explicit example that Lydia only received salvation after God had regenerated her heart so that she would receive the gospel and be saved. This divine illumination is always required for salvation. (see also Jer. 13:23; Jn. 6:44-45; Rom. 9:16).

Romans 8:29-30 – We return again to the golden chain of salvation. We must remember that each link is a guaranteed result for the entire previous set. That is to say, we could logically place the modifier “all” in front of each classification to get the meaning of this passage. There is not one person from one category that is not represented in the next.

All who are elected will be called, all who are called will be justified, all who are justified will be glorified. There will never be one who has been elected by God who will not reach the point of glorification nor will anyone reach glorification who was not present in the initial election. Once God has elected someone, there can be no hindrance in that persons progression from election to glorification. We

cannot decide to give up halfway through this progression nor will God remove us from it because we have sinned. In order for this verse to stand, each new link must be absolutely and sovereignly administered to the individual otherwise any of the links may fail.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 – The reason that this verse is used here is not because of what Paul explicitly states, but rather for what he implicitly assumes. The truth that is spiritually discerned is not only the further doctrines that one learns after salvation, but also the requirements for salvation itself. In this context what is foolishness to those in the flesh is Christ crucified, the basis for our salvation. It can be put into this formulation:

1. The salvation God provides can only be discerned by those who are possessed by the Spirit.
2. No person is possessed by the Spirit before their conversion.
3. Therefore, if God had not regenerated us and given his Spirit prior to conversion, no one would have been saved.

We see that Paul already assumes that the Spirit is necessary before anyone can even believe in Christ crucified. No one who is dead in their sin and living in the flesh can come to the spiritual understanding all on their own. Thus in this passage we have a clear teaching on the reformed view of regeneration.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – We have seen this before, but it bears reminding here. In the Greek, the syntax requires that the phrase “and this is not your own doing,” necessarily refers back to the entire condition that preceded it, namely, “for by grace you have been saved through faith.” It would not be a true statement to say that what is not of ourselves is the salvation by grace but that the faith is of our own doing. Even the faith in this work of salvation is a work of God. As the Westminster Confession stated, we are “made willing by his grace.”

Phil 1:29; 2:13 – These two passages in Philippians show us that not only is salvation a gracious gift of God, but also that our belief is a gift of God as well.

James 1:18/1 Peter 1:23, 25 – These passages help us to see that this effectual calling and regeneration is inextricably connected to the proclamation of the gospel to the individual. This is the point where the general gospel call, which is to be given to everyone, is made effectual by the Holy Spirit. Because of this we can say that no one is converted by looking at a majestic sunrise or a masterpiece of artistic ability, nor hearing a moving song, or experiencing a traumatic life experience. They are not converted by a healing, but rather it is always in conjunction with the proclaimed word of the gospel that the Spirit regenerates and enables the person to believe. For someone to be saved by the gospel without being confronted with it would be an absurdity of the worst kind. It would be on par with claiming to enjoy the taste of strawberries though never having had one cross the lips. The dry bones only came to life when Ezekiel spoke the words of God over them (Ez. 37) and not by some subjective experience of their own.

The Passivity of Birth

Salvation is often called a “new birth.” A believer is said to be “born again.” These are not terms that reformed theologians coined in order to make our doctrines work. These are the very words of Scripture and of Jesus himself. (See Jesus’ statements to Nicodemus in John 3). These terms are not accidental or vague. Jesus did not mean then in some cryptic or archaic sense. He meant that there must be an actual and real, although spiritual, rebirth. We are dead in our sins and thus we must be born again to live. This language is very telling in our understanding of this doctrine, for which of us was active at

our first birth? Who has ever said, “Please mother and father, if it wouldn’t be too much trouble, would you mind doing your conjugal duty in order that I might be conceived. And then nine months or so later, we will sit down and discuss the terms of my birth so that I can participate in the decision of when and where I will be brought into the world.” This has never happened. And our second birth is no different. It is not a synergetic work but rather, as R.C. Sproul pointed out, it is a monergetic work whereby God alone acts in our regeneration and rebirth.

This can also be seen in the resurrection of Lazarus. Jesus decided to raise Lazarus from the dead and there was nothing at all that Lazarus could do to help or hinder the process. He was entirely passive. He reeked of death and was not even conscious of the events until Jesus called him from the tomb.

Argument from Creation - 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

We see that the decree to create the universe was an unarguably irresistible act. God created *ex nihilo*, that is, “out of nothing.” There was nothing in existence to resist, if that would have even been possible had there be something in existence. God spoke and creation leapt into existence. This was a sovereign decree of God. It is also by no accident that Scripture speaks of our salvation as a new creation. In fact, this very point seems to be what Paul is driving at in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 where he explicitly compares God’s decree to create in Genesis 1 and His decree to create us anew at salvation. God’s irresistible decree to “let the light shine out of the darkness” at creation is just as sovereignly decreed when he shines in our hearts. Just as the uncreated cosmos could not reject its own creation, we cannot reject our own recreation. This saving grace is irresistible.

The Sovereignty of God

This has been discussed throughout these past several sections, but let us now state it again explicitly, though briefly.

If we accept that God is sovereign, and that God has elected those who will be saved, it would be an absolute absurdity to say that some could resist this election. We would be denying the sovereignty of God in order to maintain the absolute nature of the human will. The danger of this must be restated here. We must remember that only one will is absolutely sovereign and that is God’s. We either maintain this, or we maintain that the human will is sovereign over God. If the human will can reject what God has sovereignly decreed then God has either not decreed it, or else God is not sovereign. Either case is a rejection of the clear teaching of Scripture.

Because of this absolute sovereignty of God, it would be beneficial if we even began to think of grace as something that is by nature irresistible, rather than something that can be resistible or irresistible. We should think of it as water, where to call some grace irresistible would be as redundant as calling some water wet. As water is by nature powerful wet stuff, we should learn to see grace as, by nature, irresistible stuff. We can think of grace in this scenario like the weather. We do not choose the weather, the weather simply happens to us. Here grace happens to us. We cannot choose anything else. If rain happens to us, we get wet. If effectual grace happens to us, we get regenerated. They both are effective forces. They accomplish what it is in their nature to do. Thus, we are entirely unable to reject it if God has decreed it upon us.

The Doctrine Debated

1. If God’s grace is irresistible, then human freedom is eliminated.

I believe that this was ably answered in the previous doctrine of election and in the brief paragraph above on the sovereignty of God. Here we must decide whether we want to maintain our own philosophical understanding of the will which we force onto the pages of Scripture, or if we want to hold the view of the human will that is presented by God. I would urge us to maintain a high view of God, even if it means we will hold a low view of the human will (though I do not think this is the case). It seems to me that the absolute sovereignty of God and the free nature of the will are entirely compatible if

we are willing to simply modify how we discuss human freedom. For an extensive book length treatment of this, see John Feinberg's [The Many Faces of Evil](#).

There is an interesting old Jewish proverb that states: "Take the bitter tree and plant it in the garden of Eden and water it with the waters there; and let the angel Gabriel be the gardener and the tree will still bear bitter fruit." If we accept the Total Depravity that is pervasive in all of us, then we will be unable to assert that our human will can somehow achieve any thing other than the wages of sin.

2. There are passages in Scripture that seem to support the resistibility of God's grace.

In response to this line of argumentation, let us first state a logical disagreement with this objection. If the Arminians are correct in their assertion that God is earnestly seeking to save all humanity, we would be forced to believe that God is a failure on the most drastic scale. For every person who believes and receives salvation in accordance with the Arminian construal, dozens do not. For surely even if God is not sovereign, he is atleast omniscient and should rightly know the proper manner in which he could save all people. The slippery slope of this line of reasoning is astronomically terrifying. To follow this through we lose not only God's sovereignty and omnipotence, but also his omniscience. A doctrine then which is meant to show the omnipotence of the Almighty, shows only the futile striving of the Almost Mighty.

Second, the Holy Spirit who would, under this model, be sent to woo the human heart could strive and struggle with the hearts of the majority of the world for their entire lives, and not accomplish what he was sent in the world to do. Thus even the "working" of the Spirit in the human heart would be of no avail. Thus we could see God saying the very thing that we ought to speak, "Not my will but yours be done." God would be of the same camp as Darius who desired to save Daniel but was entirely unable to and could only pace his throne room with anticipation (Dan. 6).

Thirdly, as we stated previously in our discussion of Particular Redemption, if we hold that man can accept or reject the work of Jesus on the cross, we necessarily deny the actual salvation of the cross. By holding this, the Arminians implicitly state that the work of salvation, contrary to the very words of Jesus, was not finished on the cross, but rather awaits the catalyst of our faith. We thus add to salvation in order for it to actually save. Contrary to this, we must remember that the gospel is not good advice which urges and woos us to believe, but is good news that Christ actually has accomplished our salvation on our behalf. Jesus does not merely open the door to a potential salvation, but is rather the very real savior of the church.

Finally, we must remember that God frequently expresses his revealed will but does not express his secret will. That is, these passages do not imply that just because we ought, that we can. God communicates what is morally right, which is the action that brings him the most glory, but does not assume that all humanity is able to be obedient to it. Unlike Arminius, Wesley and others, ought does not imply can.

3. We are told that if we believe we will be born again.

This is also held in the doctrinal statements of many churches today. Many churches confuse the reality of regeneration with what we observe after conversion and thus they believe that our faith is the causal power that leads to regeneration. We commonly hear that statements such as "if you repent and believe then you will be born again" even though this form of evangelism is never seen in the Scripture. This sort of thought has even been formalized in our modern creedal statements. For example, the Evangelical Free Church's doctrinal position, which has been ratified by hundreds of churches, states,

We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons who *through saving faith* in Jesus Christ *have been regenerated* by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ of which he is the Head. (paragraph 8)

It is shocking how many churches and denominations have strayed so far into this vein of thought without grasping the horrifying ramifications that it leads us to. We must understand that regeneration is

not to be confused with what we observe after repentance. We should see in Scripture that regeneration is always shown to be a work of God that leads to the gift of faith through which God saves us. Thus “when you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ” (Col. 2:13). Jesus tells us that regeneration is not something we can observe after our conversion because it is not something that can be observed in the first place (Jn 3:8).

Grudem urges us to be very Biblical in even our evangelistic wording. We should always say “believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” This does not imply regeneration between the two steps, but rather assumes regeneration as a precondition to the belief in Jesus Christ. The consistent pattern in Scripture is to preach the gospel and when someone comes to faith to assume that God had regenerated them in order that they may believe (Acts 13:48).

Final Thoughts

“Sinful man stands in need, not of inducements or assistance to save himself, but precisely of saving; and Jesus Christ has come not to advise, or urge, or woo, or help him save himself, but to save him.” –George Whitfield

“As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation. Christ would have then died in vain... Common reason tells us that if a man is so fallen so to be at enmity with God, that enmity must be removed before he can have any desire to do God’s will. If a sinner is to desire redemption through Jesus Christ, he must receive a new disposition. He must be born again from above (John 3:3).” –Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination. p163.

The Canons of Dordt (1618-19), Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine:

Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God: The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to man, as though one distinguishes himself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity he chose his own in Christ, so within time he effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion: Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work: And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration: In this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs; meanwhile, they rest content with knowing and experiencing that by this grace of God they do believe with the heart and love their Savior.

Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith: In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent--the act of believing--from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in

the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself.

The Doctrine of The Preservation of the Saints (T.U.L.I.P. = “Perseverance of the Saints”)

We now come to the final doctrine in our study of the Calvinistic system. This is the final logical outcome of the system and the one which carries possibly the most benefit for the believer’s faith this side of heaven. Until this point, the doctrines have all dealt with what God has done before or at our conversion. We cannot feel our election, we do not see our regeneration, we did not decide on the means for our atonement or that we would be included, and we were born totally depraved. We have been utterly uninvolved in the doctrines thus far outside of our reactions of praise for the glorious method by which God brought us back into relationship with himself.

While it would be incorrect to say that this final doctrine is not also entirely a work of God, it is one which we can observe, which we can feel, and which we participate in, though not in the same manner that God does. The doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints can be more adequately called the Preservation of the Saints due to the active role of God in preserving us, thus causing us to persevere. Yet just as God does not effectually call us by eliminating our ability to will, neither does he preserve us apart from our will. As we will see, God preserves us in and through our faith in order that we will persevere.

The Doctrine Defined

“Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion. It is because God never forsakes His work that believers continue to stand to the very end.” –Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology. p546.

“They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end, and be eternally saved.” – The Westminster Confession, Ch. 17, sec. 1.

“The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly again.” – Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p788.

The Doctrine Discussed

For many people, the thought that a believer can lose their salvation and be ultimately cast into hell is of the deepest concern. It seems that our inability to completely do away with sin can so entangle some that they begin to worry why they have not received the victory over sin which they hear promised from their pulpits. Indeed, those who hold to the Arminian system will by no doubt reinforce this feeling by their explicit approval of the ability to lose our salvation if we fall away from the faith, even though they may not go so far as to say our day to day sins are the cause.

We are hammered by passages that seem to indicate that if we sin we are not born again, that the Spirit can have nothing to do with the flesh and that some may have in fact apostatized in the pages of Scripture. Yet as we shall see, these passages are not as strong as some would claim them to be. In fact we will see that they are quite vague and should be interpreted by the abundant and clear passages that explicitly state that once someone has been elected, God will see it through to glorification, and there is nothing that can disrupt this eternal decree of God. Let us first explore several of the passages that explicitly affirm this doctrine.

John 10:27-28 - This passage is one of the clearest on the topic. We see in this passage the flock of Christ which hears his voice and follows him. It should be noted that this flock is the same flock which Jesus

laid down his life for explicitly just a few verses earlier in v15. These are the saints who were given to Christ by God (unconditional election), who alone Christ died for (particular redemption), and who Christ gives eternal life to (irresistible grace). And now we finally see also that the elect will never perish and no one can snatch them from the hand of God. This is as clear a passage as could be hoped for to support any doctrine.

Yet even though this verse is entirely compelling in the English translation, the Greek is even *more* emphatic. While in English double negations are to be avoided, they are quite acceptable in Greek. While our English versions may say that “they will never perish,” this translates the Greek *ou mē* plus the subjunctive verb which would be better translated “they will never, I repeat, will never ever perish,” or in common vernacular, “it ain’t gonna happen!” We have all seen movies where the young man who is training to be a master of martial arts finally snatches the stone from his master’s hand. Here in this case, this is not a possible outcome. No one can snatch us from the hands of the omnipotent God.

While this may be addressed later in the objections, it should be stated here that some Arminians will agree that no one can snatch us from God’s hand but that we can remove our selves from His hand. Yet this is a precarious interpretation of the term “no one” which is a universal category which involves all of humanity, including ourselves. This is a clear passage that once we are elected by God and placed in the loving hands of the Good Shepherd, we can never fall away.

Romans 6:23 and 11:29 as a syllogism - We can see when we pair these verses together that they make a very simple syllogism that is almost impossible to deny because of the explicit nature of the two statements. We can formulate the logical syllogism as follows:

P1) Eternal life by Christ Jesus our Lord is God’s free gift, (Rom. 6:23)

P2) God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable, (Rom. 11:29)

C1) Therefore the gift of eternal life is irrevocable.

No argument could possibly be simpler. In fact this is one of the major points that Paul is attempting to drive home in Romans 9-11, that God’s promises are never taken back. It may seem that God has taken back his promise for Israel, but Paul shows that Israel had simply took what was a promise to the Remnant (the Israel within Israel) and applied it to the entire nation. Thus the promises stand as they always had. Here too, the promises of God for salvation to his elect are irrevocable. And since we are not responsible for who is elect and who is not elect, we are incapable to make the same category confusion that the Israelites were capable of.

Romans 8:30 – Once again we come to a familiar passage. If you have kept up with the previous studies, you should be able to state this argument from memory already. We know that in each move, the entire populous from the previous category is carried over. There is no one who is left out. So the elect who are present in the initial predestination will be there in their entirety when we reach the final step of glorification. In fact, Paul is so assured of this that he can speak of our glorification as already being something that we possess now.

Ephesians 1:13-14 – Here we see that once we believe in the gospel of our salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit which here is called a seal but the word which better illustrates the full scope of this seal is the word translated as “guarantee.” The Spirit is given to us as a down payment that guarantees our entrance into eternal life. The Spirit is the first installment of the realization of the salvation that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. He holds onto it until we die or Jesus returns at which time “we acquire possession of it.” This final outcome is assured. Paul does not say “if we acquire possession of it contingent on how we live,” but rather states the plain all out truth of the matter.

Philippians 1:6 – This is a common verse used to support this doctrine and for good reason. The explanation is simple because the verse is so obvious. God, who began the good work in us, will finish that very work. The work of salvation, from beginning to end, is one continuous work of God and thus it is certain to be completed. Nothing can thwart the plan of God or interfere with his sovereign decree to save the elect.

1 Peter 1:3-5 – This passage again is so clear that little is needed to be said to explain it. Not only is the inheritance clearly something that cannot be lost or decayed (it is incorruptible and unfading) but also the heir is protected by God. The inheritance is kept in heaven for us, and we ourselves are guarded by God's power through our faith. We are told that we are "guarded" by the power of God. Here the word "guarded" (*phroureō*) means both "protected from attack" and "kept from escaping." We use the word "guard" in both meanings in English as well. Imagine that there is an international criminal who is both bent on escape and in danger of assassination. His guard does not perform one side of his task and not the other. He not only guards from outward attacks, but also from escape. While we should not think that the Christian is bent on escape from the saving grace of God, we should at the very least recognize that God would not allow it even if we tried.

This faith is not the faith which so easily comes and goes in our lives, but the faith unto salvation which was itself a gift of God to us at our regeneration. It is impossible to conceive of anything that could undo this redemptive work of God in regeneration as we will see shortly.

While there are many other passages that address this subject, it appears to me that the weight of these passages is so strong that there is not many others that could be used to make the Scriptural case any stronger than it already is. Yet like the others, this doctrine also has much weight given to it from the inferences that it makes or the false inferences that it rejects. Here now we will look at some of the inferential arguments for our perseverance.

Election guarantees perseverance:

We must remember that election does not mean that God chose us to show his kindness to in a special way in an attempt to woo us so that we may believe, but rather it is an election unto salvation. God chose us in order to atone for us so that he can regenerate us and redeem us. It would be a travesty to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to say that God elects us, regenerates us, and redeems us simply to let us fall to the way side of our own sins. If a person holds that position, they are in contradiction to the clear teaching of Paul in Romans 8:30 which shows that no one drops off between each step of salvation.

The Covenant of Redemption guarantees perseverance:

While this will be notably brief, Berkhof makes the case that in the Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son in eternity past, in which God gave His people to His Son as the reward for the Son's obedience and death, the Father made a promise to the Son and if the outcome of this promise does not come about, then the Father would be a liar; a position unthinkable to any student of Scripture. Although this argument is recognizably limited to those who ascribe to the theological covenants adhered to in Covenant theology (which I do).

The Priesthood of Christ guarantees perseverance:

One of the major functions of the priesthood of Christ, as we have discussed before, is the intercessory prayer that he offers on behalf of his people. Not only does his atoning work remain the perfect foundation for our justification, but also He makes constant intercession on behalf of his people before the throne of God. We see in Scripture that the intercession of Christ is perfect and pleasing and thus entirely efficacious (Jn. 11:42; Heb. 7:25) and thus to say that a believer who is covered by the blood of Christ and is under the constant intercession of his Savior should fall under condemnation again is to say that Christ fails to be the perfect priest that Scripture calls him.

Our mystical union with Christ guarantees perseverance:

When we are united with Christ, we become one with him and are partakers and coheirs with him in his inheritance and become partakers of his Spirit. In essence we share in the life of Christ and thus we live because He lives. To say that a part of the life of Christ could fall away and be rejected by God is a position that is not maintained in Scripture. In Romans 6:9 we are told that Jesus died once and will never die again. So then if we are alive *in Christ* we can never die again.

At regeneration we are given the gift of eternal life:

This formulation is quite simple. We are given eternal life. If we fall away the life we were given is not eternal. So by the very nature of the gift, we must live eternally and so we can never fully or finally fall from grace. Erickson states, "If salvation could be lost, regeneration would have to be reversed. But can this be? Can spiritual death actually come to someone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, that is, who has already been given eternal life? This must be impossible, for eternal life is by definition everlasting" (Erickson, Systematic Theology, 2nd ed., p1000).

We are told that we can be assured of our salvation in this life:

It is clear in Scripture that Christians are capable of being assured of our salvation in Christ Jesus. In fact, when there is less than full assurance this is shown to be doubt and the Christian is exhorted to overcome it with faith. We see in passages like Hebrews 3:14, 6:11, 10:22, and 2 Peter 1:10 that we can be assured of our salvation, something which would be entirely impossible if we are capable of rejecting our salvation and falling from grace.

In other passages we are told that God enables us to stand firm in the face of judgment (Rom. 14:4), does not give us more than we can bear and always provides our way out (1 Cor. 10:13), and that God guards us *until* the final day (2 Tim. 2:12).

The death of Christ atones for all the sins of the elect:

We saw previously that John Owen proved that Jesus died for *all* the sins of the elect, even the sins of unbelief that occur before and after salvation. If this is the case, then even the sins that occur during back sliding are covered by the blood of Jesus. It would be unconscionable to say that Jesus died for the sins of the elect up to salvation but not the ones after. To hold this is to go back to servitude to the law by which we maintain our sanctification. This is precisely what Paul and the other New Testament authors rail against repeatedly. We are not only saved by grace but are sanctified and eventually glorified by grace as well. If we are responsible for achieving our salvation after conversion we are no better off than if we had been responsible before hand.

Ultimately the rejection of the perseverance of the saints will run into the same problem as the denial of most of these doctrines, and that is that if it is not true, then salvation is based on the will of man rather than on the grace of God. If Christ died to save us, but we can throw it away even after we receive it the first time, then we are the ultimate arbiter of our salvation. We receive eternal life based on the state of our will the second at which we die. If I fear and deny Christ in my heart the instant of death I will be condemned for that sin. Thus the cross is again only an offer of salvation and the sovereign will of God bows its knee to us.

We will see that there are some objections to this formulation. It is commonly said that this doctrine can lead to a licentious lifestyle where we could wonder why we shouldn't live like the dickens once we know that Christ atoned for us. But I would wonder if anyone who has truly been converted by grace could ever maintain this for long, if even at all.

The Doctrine Debated

1. There are scripture passages that claim that we can lose our salvation.

It is conceded that at first glance there are several passages that seem to point to the possibility that a genuine believer may fall into such deep apostasy that they will fall from grace and lose their salvation. Examples such as the warnings in Matthew 24:12, Colossians 1:23, 1 John 2:6 and the several passages in Hebrews such as 2:1, 3:13 and 6:4-6, are commonly the passages cited in an attempt to prove that a genuine believer can lose their salvation.

Before going into details about several of these passages, a general rule of hermeneutics should be introduced and kept in mind throughout all of these passages. This rule is the Analogy of Faith or Rule of Faith in which Scripture is allowed, and indeed must, interpret Scripture. The explicit must take precedent over those passages which are ambiguous or difficult to interpret. As we have seen, there are many passages in the Bible which explicitly and emphatically state that a believer cannot lose their salvation, and these passages that will now be used to combat that idea are much less clear.

One way to answer this objection is to point out the ambiguity of the language used that is assumed to mean a loss of salvation. For example, in the Matthew 24:12 passage which speaks of the “love of many” that will “grow cold,” it is unclear that this even means salvation at all. While it is followed up in the next verse by the statement that “the one who endures to the end will be saved” the eschatological nature of this passage seems to suggest, or at the very least, leave open the possibility that this may refer to a physical salvation through a time of great tribulation. It also is possible that the love which grows cold, even if it does refer to a spiritual reality, does not warrant the notion that this must be a loss of salvation. We can see that this is in fact not the case in several of the Lord’s addresses to the seven churches of Revelation. We see that Ephesus had forgotten its first love (2:4) and that Laodicea had grown lukewarm (3:16) and even though God warns that he will spit them out of his mouth, we should not assume that this means a loss of salvation for this is still the bride and body of Christ, of whom will be granted the right to sit with Christ on the Father’s throne (3:21). This is also true of the case in Hebrews 2:1 which warns us not to drift away from what we have heard. To claim that this drifting away should be interpreted as all out apostasy seems rash at best.

Another example is in Colossians 1:23 where the conditional phrase “if indeed you continue in the faith” is used. While the Arminian would point to this and state that this proves that Paul has in mind the possibility that a Christian may lose their salvation if they do not persevere, it seems that this is not the most likely interpretation. We see in 1:21-22, which immediately precede this conditional, that we were once alienated and possessed a mind hostile to God, only doing evil deeds which means that we do not possess those traits now but rather the opposite because we have been “reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.” It seems that the conditional can then be interpreted two different ways without even veering into the Arminian difficulty. First we could say that Paul may have in mind eternal rewards. For although we have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ, Paul still wishes to present us as “holy and blameless and above reproach” before God, something that would be quite difficult to do if we did not remain stable and steadfast. This does not seem to require us to posit a loss of salvation in this text. A second interpretation is simply that Paul’s conditional is actually used as a proof for the reconciliation. It is possible that Paul is not saying that we have the possibility to fail, but rather that because we *do* in fact remain steadfast and stable in our salvation until the end, which does not mean that we cannot have times of backsliding or doubt but rather simply are Christians our entire lives to the end, prove who is and who is not truly a part of the elect. It seems to me that either of these interpretations better fit the context and the grammar of this verse rather than assuming too quickly that the conditional statement must mean we can lose our salvation.

Berkhof makes an excellent point in this line of reasoning as well. His main premise is that these warnings are urges for the Christian to remain focused on their participation in our sanctification. He states that simply because there is a warning of God to remain moral, for in essence it is morally right to do what gives God glory, in this case to not falter in our faith, it does not demand us to read these

warnings to mean that God will revoke his calling upon us; something which as shown above, would explicitly deny Scripture. Rather, Berkhof says, “they do not prove that any of the believers exhorted will not persevere, but only that God uses moral means for the accomplishment of moral ends” (Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p549).

Erickson also adds one final possibility to this. He states that even if passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 were stating that a believer could fall away, the combination of John 10 and Hebrews 6:9 show that they cant. So the apostasy is what is called an impossible possibility. It is logically possible, but is impossible to ever actualize. Although the possibility of falling away is logically real, the grace of God prevents it from occurring. We could say this very thing about salvation in general. While it was logically possible that all humanity would be lost because of sin, God, by his grace chose some to be saved and thus made the possibility impossible. We should not think of this as God making this impossible by removing the option for us. Rather, God effectually “uses every possible means of grace, including the warnings contained in Scripture, to motivate us to remain committed to him” (Erickson, Systematic Theology, 2nd ed., p1005).

2. There are scripture passages that give examples of people who have apostatized.

A common answer to this objection is that many of the passages are unclear on who the subject is who is falling from grace. The Hebrews passages in specific are notoriously difficult for this. It is unclear of whether this is even talking about a believer or if it is using the common form of argumentation where it assumes the premise of the opponent and then follows a *reductio ad absurdum* to its logical absurd end to prove it false. Hebrews 6:4-6 is probably an example of this form of argumentation, as well as 2 Peter 2:1 and 2:19-22. In these passages and here in Hebrews 6, it seems that the author is assuming the premise of his opponent, that they are in fact Christians, and then showing the absurdity that would come about from the combination of their supposed profession and their lifestyle. His point is that this person, who professes to be a Christian, if he falls away cannot be restored to repentance. Rather than being a statement about if a true believer could fall away, this is much more likely an indictment on false believers who want all the benefits of the church life without the cross. This is abundantly clear if we understand that the invisible church, the true church as God sees it, is not the same but is contained within the visible church, which are those who profess to believe. This is the point of Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30. This is also clearly seen in the life of Israel where “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6).

We can also see that the subject is most likely not true believers because in v9 the author starts his contrast from “those” and “them” to “you” and “your.” In fact, he explicitly says, “though we speak in this way, *yet in your case*, beloved, we feel sure of better things - things that belong to salvation.” The author obviously considers his readers to not be of the same group as those who could possibly lose their salvation.

We can see in the story of the rich man and Lazarus that the family of Lazarus would not believe even if someone rose from the dead to warn them, if they did not already believe in the writings of Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29-31). The brothers of Lazarus were unbelievers regardless of what the message was. This seems to be the point also made here in Hebrews. The abundance of qualifications, rather than showing that these men were believers, are used to show that they have been involved in a true and thriving church and yet still do not believe. If they did not believe the gospel, even though they were immersed in the true teachings of the church, they will never find salvation. This seems to be the emphasis on the fact that they cannot be restored to repentance. Though they may have had an outward repentance, they cannot be brought to an inward one because there is no where else for them to go but the church.

In other cases such as 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; 4:10; and 2 Peter 2:1-2, as well as the Hebrews passage above as we have shown, may list people by name who have fallen away, but in all these cases it is not clear that these people ever were true believers. It seems most probable that rather than being used as warnings to true believers to guard their souls from falling away, they are used as

warnings for true believers to watch out for those who sneak into the church through false profession. This seems to be the major impetus of these warnings. In fact, this is explicitly taught in 1 John 2:19 where the false teachers are proved as such by the very fact that they do fall away: "They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." For John, and most likely all the Biblical authors, even if they assume the position of their opponent simply to prove them false, it is the fact that they have fallen away from the faith that proves that they never possessed it.

One final passage should be addressed in brief. 2 Peter 1:10 states, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure..." This passage is commonly used to show that we must put effort in to keep our calling and our election. Yet this twists the meaning and in fact the very wording of the passage. We are not told to be diligent to keep our calling and election effective, but to make ourselves sure of them. In other words, we are to work, in cooperation with the Spirit, to live a life where we can be absolutely assured of our election because we see the outcome of it in our present lives. This is indeed in line with the context of the passage which just previously stated: "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8). And then is immediately followed by, "for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be *richly provided for you* an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1:10b-11). Because we know that we are not saved by our works, the connection between these two verses cannot be that of cause and effect. Our effectiveness for Christ cannot be the cause of our entrance into heaven. Yet it can be that of the condition of our entrance. We can enter more *richly* into heaven in regards to the severity of our judgment and in regards to our eternal rewards. Now to what degree these will vary and indeed the very nature of eternal rewards is highly suspect, but here we should not see this as a statement about a believer finally falling from grace.

We may also ask what affect we could have on election since election took place in the eternal decrees of God before creation. It seems strange to say that we are able to affect what has been decreed in eternity past.

3. To hold this doctrine leads to immorality within the church.

This is a poor argument against the doctrine of perseverance. While the Bible does tell us that God preserves us and causes us to persevere so that his sovereignty in election is upheld, it also asserts that we persevere precisely through our faith and our obedience. The idea that God would cause us to persevere regardless of our lifestyle is absurd and as shown before, it is not likely that a true believer could even hold this to be true for very long, if at all. Berkhof points out the absurdity that a doctrine which states that God causes us to persevere *in righteousness* could be used to validate sin. It would be like trying to use a flashlight to find a pitch black corner of a cave. The instant the light is used, the object it is seeking is abolished. To persevere in holiness destroys any chance of our seeking out sin. "It would seem that the certainty of the success in the active striving for sanctification would be the best possible stimulus to ever greater exertion," (Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p548).

In fact, we again know that we are holding to the doctrines that Paul had taught because this is the very objection that he received in Romans 6:1. We should respond to him in saying that rather than our salvation being a spring board to sin, it should be a spring board to love and good works. We know that salvation brings the fruit of the Spirit and not the wages of sin (Eph. 5).

4. "I know a person who rejected the faith they had held for so long."

This again is actually rather simple to answer but will not be popular at all. We do not like people telling us that our personal experiences were not real. Yet in this case the Bible is very clear that those who deny the faith never had the faith. As we saw above, the parable of the wheat and the tares shows that there is a mixing in the visible church of true believers and those who make false professions, and that in 1 John 2 he shows us that we can sometimes know who is a tare when they do fall away this side of heaven.

Although we should also take heed of Jesus' words to those who come to him saying "Lord, Lord" in Matthew 7:21-23. We see that Jesus does not say "I knew you once but you turned your back and now I reject you." What he says is, "I *never* knew you." They had never been truly regenerated, so they are not believers who have fallen from grace, but were never believers in the first place.

Final Thoughts:

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, no powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." – The Apostle Paul, Romans 8:38-39

"If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved." – Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p182.

Canons of the Council of Orange (529 AD)

CANON 9. Concerning the succor of God. It is a mark of divine favor when we are of a right purpose and keep our feet from hypocrisy and unrighteousness; for as often as we do good, God is at work in us and with us, in order that we may do so.

CANON 10. Concerning the succor of God. The succor of God is to be ever sought by the regenerate and converted also, so that they may be able to come to a successful end or persevere in good works.

CANON 18. That grace is not preceded by merit. Recompense is due to good works if they are performed; but grace, to which we have no claim, precedes them, to enable them to be done.

CANON 19. That a man can be saved only when God shows mercy. Human nature, even though it remained in that sound state in which it was created, could be no means save itself, without the assistance of the Creator; hence since man cannot safeguard his salvation without the grace of God, which is a gift, how will he be able to restore what he has lost without the grace of God?

The Canons of Dort (1618-19), Fifth Main Point of Doctrine:

Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation: So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen, since his plan cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.

Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation: Concerning this preservation of those chosen to salvation and concerning the perseverance of true believers in faith, believers themselves can and do become assured in accordance with the measure of their faith, by which they firmly believe that they are and always will remain true and living members of the church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance: Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which he has very plentifully revealed in his Word for our comfort, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs (Rom. 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. And if God's chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness: Neither does the renewed confidence of perseverance produce immorality or lack of concern for godliness in those put back on their feet after a fall, but it produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the Lord which he prepared in advance. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may maintain the assurance of their perseverance, lest, by their abuse of his fatherly goodness, the face of the gracious God (for the godly, looking upon his face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death) turn away from them again, with the result that they fall into greater anguish of spirit.

Article 14: God's Use of Means in Perseverance: And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments.

Recommended Readings:

Berkof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*.

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Gibson, David, and Jonathan Gibson, . *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*.

Horton, Michael. *For Calvinism*.

—. *God of Promise*.

Jr., James M. Hamilton. *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgement*.

Jr., R.C. Sproul. *After Darkness, Light*.

Morris, Leon. *The Atonement*.

Murray, John. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

Owen, John. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Edited by J.I. Packer.

Piper, John. *Does God Desire All To Be Saved?*

—. *Five Points: Toward A Deeper Experience of God's Grace*.

Sproul, R.C. *Grace Unknown*.

Spurgeon, C.H. *A Defense of Calvinism*.

Steele, David N, Curtis C Thomas, and S Lance Quinn, . *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended and Documented*.