Calvinism, Arminianism or Something Else?

By Bruce Hartman

This (amateur) thesis will attempt to unwind and resolve the issues around the doctrines of Calvinism, Arminianism, and other related doctrines.

There are numerous semantics involved in the discussion. Depending on how one defines the terms, it can completely change the final conclusion. The goal of this thesis is to:

- Define the terms involved.
- Explore and note when and how different proponents use terms.
- Exhaustively list everything the Bible says on the subject.
- Analyze every (plausible) interpretation of a Bible passage.
- Give (and clearly mark) my take on those interpretations.
- Explore the philosophical issues with various views. Some would consider this unworthy of doing - a Biblical analysis is good enough. I disagree. While there are pitfalls, I think philosophical analysis is an essential tool in getting to the truth of scripture. Another way of looking at this is using all of scripture and tying everything together.

In this paper, I use the terms Calvinist and non-Calvinist, as opposed to Reformed and Arminian. The reason I do that is because there are those who believe in the tenets of Calvinism who are not Reformed, and those who don't agree with all of Calvinist theology who are not Arminian. However, even though that is true, my definition of Calvinism will be the Reformed view, and thus, for the purposes of this paper, I use the definitions interchangeably.

1. Terms and Definitions

- Arminianism: a Christian doctrine that emphasizes free will, conditional election, and the possibility of salvation being lost, while preserving God's sovereignty. Its key beliefs are Free Will, Conditional Election, Universal Atonement, and Conditional Preservation. This view is more common in Methodist, Pentecostal, and most Baptist churches. For the purposes of this paper, most of the time, Arminianist means someone who doesn't adhere to Calvinism (as opposed to someone who holds to the teachings of Jacob Arminius).
- Atonement: Jesus Christ's death on the cross reconciled humans with God.

- Compatibilist free will (or compatibilism): argues that the ability to act according to one's own desires and motivations, without external coercion, constitutes free will, regardless of whether every action is ultimately caused by prior events; it allows for moral responsibility despite a deterministic universe.
- Corporate Election: The idea that God chooses in Christ a people whom he destined to be holy and blameless in his sight.
- Decretal (or secret, or efficacious) Will: God's will for something to happen or be a certain way. It's God's all-encompassing divine purpose. An example would be speaking the universe into existence.
- Double predestination: The belief that God positively chooses to damn all of humanity that He doesn't predestine to save.
- Effectual Call: Term defined in chapter 10 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's understood as God's sovereign drawing of a sinner to salvation. It so overwhelms his natural inclination to rebel that he willingly places faith in Jesus Christ.
- Efficacy: The power to produce a desired effect.
- Election: God choosing a particular person or group of people to a particular task or relationship, especially eternal life - it can be conditional or unconditional.
- Eisegesis: The interpretation of a passage based on one's subjective experience - reading into a passage.
- Exegesis: the critical interpretation of the biblical text to discover its intended meaning. To do this, you need to consider the original language, vocabulary, grammar, culture, among other things.
- Foreknowledge: The awareness of something before it happens or exists.
- Golden Chain of Redemption: A theological concept, primarily based on Romans 8:29-30 in the Bible, which describes the sequence of God's actions in saving people, including foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification, where each step is seen as an unbreakable link in a chain, signifying that God is fully in control of the salvation process from beginning to end.
- Irresistible Grace: The fourth point of the five points of Calvinism. It's the view that God brings his Elect to salvation through an internal call, which they are powerless to resist.
- Jacob Arminius: Was a professor in Holland at a Calvinist seminary who began to question things that Calvinism affirmed.
- John Calvin: A French theologian, pastor, and reformer who was a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation. His teachings, known as Calvinism, are a system of Christian theology that emphasizes predestination, the sovereignty of God, and the importance of scripture.

- Justification: The act of God declaring a person righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption): The third point of the five points of Calvinism. The view that Jesus Christ died only for the sins of the Elect, according to John Calvin. The idea is that Jesus' work is always effective.
- Limited Negative: A common Hebraic figure of speech to emphasize a point. It's constructed like "Not A, but B", but actually means "Not only A, but also B". It becomes recognizable when it would be absurd or contradictory to take an absolute-sounding statement in its absolute sense. One of many examples is "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life." (John 6:27). It would be absurd to claim that we are to never labor for food.
- Meticulous providence: The ultimate sufficient cause of everything that happens. The one who ordains everything.
- Monergism: A Christian theological doctrine that states that the Holy Spirit is the sole agent of regeneration. The human will has no inclination to holiness until regenerated.
- Omnipotence: An agency or force of unlimited power.
- Original Sin: This is not the same as Total Depravity. Inherited from Adam as a result of the fall, it's the tendency to sin that is innate to all humans. This term was first articulated by Augustine.
- Outward Call: The call to salvation is extended to everyone who hears the message and can be resisted. It will not bring sinners to Christ because men by nature are dead in sin.
- Pelagianism: Position that holds that the fall did not taint human nature and that humans by divine grace have free will to achieve human perfection. (For more information, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagianism).
- Perseverance of the Saints: The fifth point of the five points of Calvinism. The view that the Elect cannot lose their salvation, since it's solely God's work in the first place.
- Predestination: The divine foreordaining of all that will happen, especially with regard to the salvation of some and not others.
- Prescriptive Will (or preceptive will): Describes God's will for how people should live, as revealed in Scripture. The Ten Commandments are an example.
- Prevenient Grace: A non-Calvinist doctrine that says that the grace of God precedes and enables a person to respond to the gospel and choose to follow Christ.
- Providence: The doctrine of God's active and continuous care, guidance, and governance over all creation, ensuring His will and purposes are accomplished.

- Regeneration: Being born again and coming spiritually alive.
- Reformed theology: Calvinism is a subset of a Reformed theology. Reformed theology refers to the theological conclusions flowing out of the Protestant Reformation. It's a rejection of the Roman Catholic teaching on the nature of justification and the place of individual saving faith.
- Remonstrance of 1610: A theological document that outlined the differences between Dutch Protestants and the stricter Calvinist beliefs of the time. The document was a plea for greater theological tolerance. The Remonstrants became persuaded of conditional preservation of the saints, and of the possibility of apostasy
- Retrobate: Rejected, condemned, or abandoned. It's used to describe people who have fallen away from God's grace and are no longer considered elect.
- Sanctification: The process (over time) of being set apart for God's use, or made holy.
- Sovereignty: supreme power or authority, free of external control.
- Synergism: The belief that God's grace and the human response work together in a "cooperation" or "synergy". Before Augustine, it was almost universally endorsed. Later, it came to be reflected in the so-called Semi-Pelagian position and the Semi-Augustinian stance affirmed by the Second Council of Orange (529).
- Total Depravity: The first point of the five points of Calvinism - also known as Total Inability. It's the view that sinfulness pervades all areas of life and human existence and that humanity is dead in their sins. It leaves humanity with the inability to respond to God. This means that God must choose who He wants to save and that all the work is up to God.
- TULIP: An acronym that stands for the five points of Calvinism. It was first defined by the Council of Dort.
- The two wills of God: In Calvinist theology, refers to the distinction between God's revealed will (what God commands or desires humans to do) and God's secret (or decretive) will (God's ultimate, sovereign decree).
- Unconditional Election: The second point of the five points of Calvinism. Since humanity is totally depraved, God makes the choice from the beginning who will be saved (the elect). This choice is not based on anything within the chosen and is not based on foreknowledge of any attribute of the chosen humans. Those not chosen will be damned to hell, which is the just destiny of all humans without God's intervention.
- Unconditional Security (or Eternal Security): The belief that once a person is saved, they can never lose their salvation - "once saved, always saved".

- Universality: The universal scope of God's sovereignty and plan, applying to all people and creation.
- Westminster Confession of Faith: written to unify Christian (protestant) sects in England and reform the Church of England. It is a systematic exposition of Calvinist theology.

2. Basics of Calvinism

TULIP:

2.1. Total Depravity (or Total Inability)

When Calvinists speak of man as being totally depraved, they mean that man's nature is corrupt, perverse, and sinful throughout. The adjective "total" does not mean that each sinner is as totally or completely corrupt in his actions and thoughts as it is possible for him to be. Instead, the word "total" is used to indicate that the whole of man's being has been affected by sin. The corruption extends to every part of man, his body and soul; sin has affected all (the totality) of man's faculties - his mind, his will, etc.

As a result of this inborn corruption, the natural man is totally unable to do anything spiritually good; thus, Calvinists speak of man's "total inability." The inability intended by this terminology is spiritual inability; it means that the sinner is so spiritually bankrupt that he can do nothing pertaining to his salvation. The natural man is enslaved to sin; he is a child of Satan, rebellious toward God, blind to truth, corrupt, and unable to save himself or to prepare himself for salvation.

2.2. Unconditional Election

The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of his undeserved favor. These, and these only, he purposed to save. God could have chosen to save all men (for he had the power and authority to do so) or he could have chosen to save none (for he was under no obligation to show mercy to any) - but he did neither. Instead, he chose to save some and to exclude others. His eternal choice of particular sinners for salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on his own good pleasure and sovereign will. Thus, election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do, but resulted entirely from God's self-determined purpose.

Those who were not chosen for salvation were passed by and left to their own evil devices and choices. It is not within the creature's jurisdiction to call into question the justice of the creator for not choosing everyone for salvation. It is enough to know that the judge of the earth has done right. It should, however, be kept in mind that if God had not graciously chosen a people for himself and sovereignly determined to provide salvation for them and apply it to them, none would be saved. The fact that he did this for some, to the exclusion of others, is in no way unfair to the latter group, unless of course one maintains that God was under obligation to provide salvation for sinners - a position which the Bible utterly rejects.

The act of election itself saved no one; what it did was to mark out certain individuals for salvation. Consequently, the doctrine of election must not be divorced from the doctrines of human guilt, redemption, and regeneration, or else it will be distorted and misrepresented. In other words, if the Father's act of election is to be kept in its proper biblical balance and correctly understood, it must be related to the redeeming work of the Son, who gave himself to save the elect, and to the renewing work of the Spirit, who brings the elect to faith in Christ.

2.3. Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption)

Historical or mainline Calvinism has consistently maintained that Christ's redeeming work was definite in design and accomplishment - that it was intended to render complete satisfaction for certain specified sinners, and that it actually secured salvation for these individuals and for no one else. The salvation which Christ earned for his people includes everything involved in bringing them into a right relationship with God, including the gifts of faith and repentance. Christ did not die simply to make it possible for God to pardon sinners. Neither does God leave it up to sinners to decide whether or not Christ's work will be effective. On the contrary, all for whom Christ sacrificed himself will be saved infallibly. Redemption, therefore, was designed to bring to pass God's purpose of election.

All Calvinists agree that Christ's obedience and suffering were of infinite value, and that if God had so willed, the satisfaction rendered by Christ would have saved every member of the human race. It would have required no more obedience nor any greater suffering for Christ to have secured salvation for every man, woman, and child who ever lived than it did for him to secure salvation for the elect only. But he came into the world to represent and save only those given to him by the Father. Thus, Christ's saving work was limited in that it was designed to save some and not others, but it was not limited in value, for it was of infinite worth and would have secured salvation for everyone if this had been God's intention.

The Arminians also place a limitation on the atoning work of Christ, but one of a much different nature. They hold that Christ's saving work was designed to make possible the salvation of all men on the condition that they believe, but that Christ's death in itself did not actually secure or guarantee salvation for anyone.

Since not all men will be saved as the result of Christ's redeeming work, a limitation must be admitted. Either the atonement was limited in that it was designed to secure salvation for certain sinners, but not for others, or it was limited in that it was not intended to secure salvation for any, but was designed only to make it possible for God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe. In other words, one must limit its design either in extent (it was not intended for all) or in effectiveness (it did not secure salvation for any). As Boettner so aptly observes, for the Calvinist, the atonement "is like a narrow bridge which goes all the way across the stream; for the Arminian it is like a great wide bridge that goes only half-way across."

2.4. Irresistible Grace (or the Efficacious Call of the Spirit)

Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners, but is issued to the elect only. The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in his work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit's call and of God's grace in saving sinners as being "efficacious," "invincible," or "irresistible." The grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused; it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ.

2.5. The Perseverance of the Saints (or the Security of Believers)

The elect are not only redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit, but also kept in faith by the almighty power of God. All those who are spiritually united to Christ through regeneration are eternally secure in him. Nothing can separate them from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. They have been predestined to eternal glory and are therefore assured of heaven.

3. Arminianism

The Five Articles of Remonstrance or the Remonstrance were theological propositions advanced in 1610 by followers of Jacobus Arminius who had died in 1609, in disagreement with interpretations of the teaching of John Calvin then current in the Dutch Reformed Church. Those who supported them were called "Remonstrants".

Article 1 – Conditional election
This article rejects the concept that election into Christ is unconditional. Rather, this article asserts that election is conditional upon faith in Christ, and that God elects to salvation those He knows beforehand will have faith in Him.

Article 2 – Unlimited atonement
This article rejects the concept of limited atonement, which asserts that Christ only died for those God chooses to be saved. This article asserts that Christ died for all, but that salvation is limited to those who believe in Christ.

Article 3 – Total depravity
This article affirms the total depravity of man, that man is unable to do the will of God, and cannot save himself, unless free will is being enabled by the prevenient grace of God.

Article 4 – Prevenient grace and resistible grace
This article rejects the idea that justifying grace is irresistible. It asserts that once God's prevenient grace has enabled a man to believe, man can resist God's grace by exercising his free will.

Article 5 – Conditional preservation of the saints
This article, rather than outright rejecting the notion of perseverance of the saints, argues that it may be conditional upon the believer remaining in Christ. The writers explicitly stated that they were not sure on this point, and that further study was needed.

4. A Hybrid Approach

(by Brent Barnett at http://www.relevantbibleteaching.com/site/cpage.asp?cpage_id=140010258&sec_id=140001239)
So, as you can see, in my view, neither camp is totally right, though the Arminians are more often right. Yet I have a great problem with their view on eternal security as they overemphasize the work and responsibility of man and underemphasize the keeping power of Christ. I have hinted at my views and referenced Scriptures in my comments, but let me now list my views on this with the associated Scriptures:

1. Man Is Totally Depraved and Unable to Respond in Faith Until God Awakens His Spirit By His Grace to Choose to Respond in Faith

Romans 3:10-12, 23
“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;
as it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Clearly, we have no inherent goodness, or righteousness. The ability to choose is there, and the desire and insight to choose rightly is available (see Romans 1:32). What is not is the actual choosing and the conviction unto repentance which requires a work of God’s grace to change a heart and rebirth a spirit.

Jeremiah 17:9
“The heart is more deceitful than all else
And is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?”

We are broken and filled with deception to the deepest end possible.

Ephesians 2:4-6
“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Sinful man is dead and unable to awaken himself out of sin, but when the grace of God awakens his spirit, he is able to respond in faith and repent unto salvation, being thus made alive in Christ.

Isaiah 30:15
“For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, ‘In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength.’ But you were not willing.”

Repentance, an act of the will, is a necessary response to God's call. Man does play a role in his salvation (Luke 13:5, John 3:16). The issue for which we are held to account is whether or not we are willing to respond in faith and repent.

2. Election/Predestination and Free Will/Human Responsibility Are Both At Work in Salvation and Sanctification

Psalm 139:16
"Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them."

God ordained our entire lives before we were even conceived. All of our steps are known by Him, even designed by Him.

Acts 4:27-28
"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

Clearly, the apostles believed in predetermination and God's sovereignty over all events. Yet they believed in faith, prayer, and change.

Ephesians 1:10b-12
"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

We must choose to hope in Christ if we want to receive an inheritance. What we will discover is that, though we were responsible for our choosing Christ, He had chosen us long ago.

John 1:12-13
"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

We must choose to receive Christ, but ultimately we are born of the will of God, not of man.

Philippians 2:12-13
“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Even in our sanctification, we are responsible to work it out, yet ultimately it is God at work in us enabling us to work it out. There is a mysterious balance of God’s divine decree and our willful participation in His plan. A deviation to either extreme will lead us into unbalanced theology and potentially dangerous thinking.

3. The Atonement Is Unlimited In Terms of Availability But Limited In Terms of Its Effect

John 12:32
“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”

When Christ died on the cross, His call was to all men to be saved, even those who crucified Him (which ultimately is all of us because of our sin).

Luke 19:10
“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The call of Christ is to all people, for He came to seek and save all who were lost, not just some.

2 Peter 3:9
“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

God wants all people to respond in faith, but He is not going to force them to do so. His mercy is great, even to us as we testify to His grace.

1 John 2:2
“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

I don’t know what could be clearer than this. Christ’s sacrifice is available to all, but they must still receive it. Simply back up a couple verses to 1 John 1:9 which tells those unsure of their faith to confess their sins and trust Christ Who is faithful and just to

forgive their sin and cleanse them from all unrighteousness. All can be saved, but not all will be saved because of man's own love for his sin.

4. The Draw of the Spirit Is Resistible, But God Remains Sovereign

Matthew 22:14
"For many are called, but few are chosen."

The obvious truth from this verse is that some reject the call, and are therefore obviously not chosen. In other words, those who are not chosen choose not to be chosen.

Mark 3:29
"But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Man is able to resist the draw of God, and it is the only sin that won't be forgiven him.

Proverbs 21:1
"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Though we make choices, let us not forget Who is ultimately in control of all things to His glory.

5. The Saved Are Secure Not In Their Perfect Faithfulness But in Their Faithful Savior

James 3:2
"For we all stumble in many ways."

Even Christians still sin.

1 Timothy 1:18-20
"This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme."

Some even make shipwreck of their faith to the extent that they have to be put out of the church and turned over to Satan until they are destroyed by their sin, such that their souls can be preserved (1 Corinthians 5:5).

2 Timothy 2:13
“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

Our hope and joy is that God won’t fail us, for Christ is always faithful to us to finish the work He began (Philippians 1:6) and to perfect our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Romans 8:38-39
“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing, including our own backsliding, can separate us from the love that God has for His children. Just like the father of the prodigal son always loved his rebellious son, so too will God love even a hardened child of His. He will, however, discipline him, and his sin will cost him eternal rewards.

John 10:27-28
“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

Those who are saved will never perish, no matter what because true believers are secure in God’s hand. They will persevere in the Biblical sense because of God’s faithfulness, even when they are not faithful. Of course, persistent and consistent faithlessness and a life characterized by the world and sin is indeed indicative that a person was never reborn in the first place.

Final Thoughts

In doing this study, I arrived at some conclusions about the whole debate between Calvinists and Arminians. First, the debate will never end because neither side is right. Second, there is an alternative viewpoint which I have laid out. Third, we cause division and destruction when we let man-made doctrinal systems dictate our interpretation of the Bible. Both systems are convoluted enough to really distort our ability to understand Scripture, if we adhere to their basic assumptions. Fourth, I believe Calvinism puts too much emphasis on God’s sovereignty while Arminianism puts too

much emphasis on the ability and work of man. One camp would tend to gloat in its election while the other would fear that another sin would send them to hell with no chance at redemption. One might try to manipulate a conversion while another would be reluctant to even persuade the sinner. One might be preoccupied with fate and another with shaping their own destiny irrespective of seeking God's will. The reality is that either extreme creates dangers for practical Christian living.

We are not victims of blind fate; neither are we able to do anything unless God wills it. We must acknowledge God's sovereignty and omniscience and the free will of man. We must accept the tensions that such a position creates. May God make us those who rest in His providence and who are adamant about doing all that we can by His strength and grace to make a difference in this world.

5. Molinism

https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/molinism-and-divine-election says:

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Let's talk about Paul's doctrine of election in Romans 9. Typically, as a result of Reformed theology, we have a tendency to read Paul as narrowing down the scope of God's election to the very select few, and those not so chosen can't complain if God in His sovereignty overlooks them. I think this is a fundamental misreading of the chapter which makes very little sense in the context of Paul's letter.

Earlier in his letter Paul addresses the question of what advantage there is to Jewish identity if one fails to live up to the demands of the law (2. 17-3.21). He says that although being Jewish has great advantages in being the recipients of God's revelatory oracles, nevertheless being Jewish gives you no automatic claim to God's salvation. Instead, Paul asserts the radical and shocking claim that "He is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is of the heart, spiritual and not literal" (2. 28-29).

Paul held that "no human being will be justified in God's sight by works of the law" (3.20); rather "we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (3. 29). That includes Gentiles as well as Jews. "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one" (3. 29-30).

Do you realize what that meant to Paul's Jewish contemporaries? Gentile "dogs" who have faith in Christ may actually be more Jewish than ethnic Jews and go into the Kingdom while God's chosen people are shut out! Unthinkable! Scandalous!

Paul goes on to support his view by appeal to the example of none less than Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Abraham, Paul explains, was pronounced righteous by God before he received circumcision. "The purpose," says Paul, "was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised [i.e., the Gentiles] and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised [note the qualification!] but also follow the example of faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (4.11-12).

Molinism and Romans 9 – God’s election is broadened to include Gentiles

This is explosive teaching. Paul begins chapter 9 by expressing his profound sorrow that ethnic Jews have missed God's salvation by rejecting their Messiah [= Christ]. But he says it's not as though God's word had failed. Rather, as we have already seen, "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants" (9. 6-7). Being ethnically Jewish is not enough; rather one must be a child of the promise—and that, as we've seen, may include Gentiles and exclude Jews.

The problematic, then, with which Paul is wrestling is how God's chosen people the Jews could fail to obtain the promise of salvation while Gentiles, who were regarded by Jews as unclean and execrable, could find salvation instead. Paul's answer is that God is sovereign: He can save whomever He wants, and no one can gain say God. He has the freedom to have mercy upon whomever He wills, even upon execrable Gentiles, and no one can complain of injustice on God's part.

So—and this is the crucial point—who is it that God has chosen to save? The answer is: those who have faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul writes in Galatians (which is a sort of abbreviated Romans), "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3. 7). Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter: God has sovereignly chosen to save all those who trust in Christ Jesus for salvation.

That's why Paul can go on in Romans 10 to say, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For 'everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'" (10. 12-13).

Reformed theology can make no sense at all of this wonderful, universal call to salvation. Whosoever will may come.

Paul's burden, then, in Romans 9 is not to narrow the scope of God's election but to broaden it. He wants to take in all who have faith in Christ Jesus regardless of their ethnicity. Election, then, is first and foremost a corporate notion: God has chosen for Himself a people, a corporate entity, and it is up to us by our response of faith whether or not we choose to be members of that corporate group destined to salvation.

Molinism and Romans 9 – Those who reject Christ freely choose to do so

Of course, given God's total providence over the affairs of men, this is not the whole story. But Molinism makes good sense of the rest. John 6. 65 means that apart from God's grace no one can come to God on his own. But there's no suggestion there that those who refused to believe in Christ did not do so of their own free will. God knows in exactly what circumstances people will freely respond to His grace and places people in circumstances in which each one receives sufficient grace for salvation if only that person will avail himself of it. But God knows who will respond and who won't. So again the fault does not lie with God that some persons freely resist God's grace and every effort to save them; rather they like Israel fail to attain salvation because they refuse to have faith.
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6. Analysis of Related Bible Verses

You will notice below that in my comments, if the Bible verses seem to support a particular theory, I tend to give arguments against that theory. So, you will find that if Arminianists use certain verses to disprove Calvinism, my arguments will tend to favor Calvinism. If Calvinists use a verse to prove Calvinism, I will attempt to argue against that. In every case, do not assume that I have an opinion based on my response. Instead, please recognize that I am in all cases attempting to bring up the strongest counter-arguments to whatever is being said about the passages.

6.1. Genesis 1:27 - 30

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the

birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

(Bruce) The key phrase for this topic is that God created all humans in His image. This is true of both those who are in Him and those who are not. Because of this, there is a general capability to reflect His values. It’s the reason that we see fruit in unbelievers. It’s important to acknowledge what we were before the Fall, and who we still are.

6.2. Genesis 2:16 - 17 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

(Bruce) For this topic, it’s important to understand what the Fall did and did not do to us. Did it make us Totally Depraved / Totally Unable? The reality of the Fall is that we gained a sin nature from it. Does that sin nature keep us from ever being able to desire God to rescue us without God’s direct intervention?

6.3. 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.

(Bruce) People who follow the Calvinist teachings believe that this is generally true of everyone at all times. People who disagree with Calvinism believe that this is a polemic on the people of that time, and that is why God brought the flood. In this case, it seems to me that it’s more likely that this is a comment on the people of that time.

6.4. Genesis 8:21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

(Bruce) This is seemingly a good proof text for total depravity. Non-Calvinists would argue that this is describing man’s sin nature, but it shouldn’t be taken as total depravity. I can see it either way. It says the Intention of man’s heart is evil. That could mean that man could never choose to follow God. This gets more complicated (in my opinion) when you bring the cross into the picture. Did Christ’s death and resurrection do

anything to human's ability to choose Christ's redemption? Does Total Depravity mean that humans would not even have a desire for God to rescue them? This will be examined further.

6.5. Genesis 25:23

And the Lord said to her,
"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger."

(Bruce) Non-Calvinists address the difference between the two nations (Esau and Jacob) as choosing one nation to be the forebearer of the Messiah, Jesus. No one disputes that God will sometimes do things like this for His ultimate purposes. The question is how often God does this?

The one thing one cannot do with this example of the two nations (Jacob and Esau) is say, "See, God chooses some people over another!" This is an example of what God does to bring about His ultimate will (in this case, bringing Jesus Christ into the world). In a sense, the people involved are unimportant. In the case of Jacob and Esau's individual salvation, it's possible that we will see Esau in "heaven", and that we won't see Jacob.

6.6. Genesis 45:5 - 8, 50:20

And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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God used their crime for his purposes, purposes they could not have anticipated. Here Joseph sounds forth the overarching theological conviction of the Joseph Novel: God's

purposes are not thwarted by human sin, but rather advanced by it through his good graces. The hand of God is seen, not only in clearly miraculous interventions and revelations, but also in the working out of divine purpose through human agency, frail and broken as it is. Joseph knows it to be true: "You sold me..." but "God sent me..."

God's providence has directed everything, even the misdeeds of the brothers. It underscores the true purpose of the entire account of Joseph: God is the subject of the story, and he is moving all things to the end and goal that he has decreed. That goal is the preservation of a "remnant," or seed on the earth.

Joseph simply believes that God even uses the sinfulness of humans to bring about his good purposes for the world. This theological concept is no stranger to the rest of Scripture (see Prov 16:1; 20:24; Ps 37:23; Jer 10:23). As Proverbs 16:9 says, "The heart of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps." There is no stronger statement regarding the true meaning of the sovereignty of God in Scripture than what Joseph says here to his brothers.
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(Bruce) The purpose of Joseph's brothers was to get rid of Joseph forever. God used this event to save all of Israel - present and future. Did God put it in the brother's hearts to do what they did, or did He just use circumstances that He foreknew, but did not set up? Is God the instigator of evil, or does He just use whatever comes up and weaves it into His plan?

6.7. Exodus 4:10 - 12

> But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." 11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Some Christians, hoping apparently to limit God's liability, effectively absolve God of responsibility for what goes on in the world. If a child is born blind, it is a result of a prenatal infection or genetic defect; God had nothing to do with it. If religious zealots bring down buildings and kill thousands, God was not involved. The problem with this is that it effectively limits God's power and sovereignty. What if an infection was the proximate cause of a baby's being born blind? Couldn't God have saved the child if he

had wanted to? Couldn't God have stopped the mass-murderers? God cannot be almighty and all-knowing and also be absolved of responsibility for what happens in the world.

God's response in Exod 4:11 is striking: he takes full responsibility for the suffering that people experience. He makes some blind, some deaf, and some mute. The text does not deny that there are proximate causes to such things (injuries, infections, etc.; the ancients knew nothing about viruses and bacteria, but they certainly knew that accidents and injuries could make a person blind or lame). Furthermore, the issue of human sin is never raised in God's response. This passage is not at all concerned with proximate causes - human sin, like disease or injury, is really just another proximate cause. This text is focused on the ultimate cause, God, and does not shrink from affirming that God is in control of all that happens. Of course, the question of theodicy is very large, and merely asserting that God takes responsibility for all that happens in the world does not resolve all the issues. This topic is explored much more fully in Job. D. Garrett, A Commentary on Exodus (Kregel 2014), 215-16.
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(Bruce) This passage strongly supports the Calvinist contention that God is the cause of everything both good and bad. One response is that in this passage, God is saying that because He created everything, He has the power to overcome Moses' weak speech. God is claiming responsibility for birth defects and the effects of the Fall, but the question is, did He actively make babies, choosing which birth defects to give them? Or did He allow it to happen in His creation, making Him responsible in that way?

Calvinists insist that God is sovereign over every act and happenstance. I agree that God is completely sovereign. However, I take issue with the insistence on a particular definition of sovereignty. I don't see a problem with the fact that God can be totally sovereign and allow for things to happen outside His direct control (because He decides to allow things to happen). Calvinists would insist that this is an oxymoron. I think it's possible that when God takes responsibility for everything that happens, it is because He allows things to happen. I also think that there is a difference between God making something happen and allowing something to happen.

On the other hand, God has complete foreknowledge, and can follow the chain of cause and effect. One could possibly argue that since God created everything, all cause and effect can be derived from His creation event. However, quantum physics teaches us that at least at the micro level, certain particles are in multiple states; and it isn't until one interacts with the particle, that it enters a state. In other words, it's possible that

God could have created everything, or some things, to have multiple potential states, all for His own glory and pleasure.

6.8. Exodus 4:21, 7:3 - 5

21 And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, 4 Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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Pharaoh's heart was particularly important because the Egyptians believed it was the all-controlling factor in both history and society. It was further held that the hearts of the gods Ra and Horus were sovereign over everything. Because Pharaoh is the incarnation of those two gods, his heart was thought to be sovereign over creation.

Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart to demonstrate that only the God of the Hebrews is the Sovereign of the universe. J. Currid, Exodus: Chapters 1-18 (EP 2000), 113-14.

By indicating that he would control Pharaoh's resistance to the exodus, God assured Moses that he was totally in control of Pharaoh in every way, able to make him resist as long as necessary even during a buildup of increasingly painful plagues and then make him give up and let the Israelites go at the moment of God's choosing (which was already the essential message of 3:19-20).

His purpose in preventing Pharaoh from giving in too easily and too early was, as will be seen in subsequent parts of the narrative, to allow himself fully to demonstrate his sovereignty over Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the land of Egypt itself, and the gods in which Pharaoh and the Egyptians trusted. D. Stuart, Exodus (B&H 2006), 146-47.

The significance of this pattern lies in the observation that even when Pharaoh is subject of the hardening, or when the subject is unmentioned, these statements describe a resulting condition traceable to a previous hardening action caused by God

(cf 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15[19]; 9:7, 35). Therefore these statements cannot refer to Pharaoh independently hardening his heart, as many commentators argue. This is not to say that the reality of Pharaoh's volitional decisions and accountability should be overlooked or ignored; the concern of this study is about the ultimate cause of the hardening.

It is never stated in Exod 4-14 that Yahweh hardens Pharaoh in judgment because of any prior reason or condition residing in him. Rather, as stated in the exegetical conclusion, the only purpose or reason given for the hardening is that it would glorify Yahweh. Therefore, the divine hardening of Pharaoh was unconditional.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/ot-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy/ex-421-how-could-god-harden-pharaohs-heart/ says:
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How could God harden Pharaoh's heart?
CLAIM: God says that he would harden Pharaoh's heart four times (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 14:4, 17), and six verses claim that he does harden his heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). Even though God hardens his heart, he then holds Pharaoh responsible for his actions. Critics argue that this is not fair or just.

RESPONSE: A number of observations can be made.

First, originally, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Before God hardened Pharaoh's heart, the text says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 7:13; 8:15, 19; 8:32; 9:7, 34-35). God wasn't changing a good man into a bad man. Pharaoh already was a homicidal, tyrannical dictator.

Second, foreknowledge does not imply determinism. God predicted what he would do from the beginning (Ex. 4:21), but this does not imply determinism.

God's first action is in Exodus 9:12, where he gives Pharaoh the resolve to carry out what he has made up his mind to do (see end note for Pharaoh's hardening).[i] God does harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27), but this is in accordance with Pharaoh's original desire. Put another way, God gave Pharaoh the strength to carry out his own desire. Forster and Marston write, "As for Pharaoh, God has 'caused him to stand'—by giving him the courage to carry out his evil inclinations. The wicked desire was already in Pharaoh; the Lord's action simply gave him courage to carry it out… When any normal person would have given in because of fear, Pharaoh received supernatural strength to continue with his evil path of rebellion."

Third, the term “hardens” means “strengthened.” The term “hardened” (chazaq) literally means “to strengthen.” As Forster and Marston demonstrate, this term in the Piel form is always translated as “harden” in Exodus 4:21-14:17. However, after the Exodus, this term is almost never translated harden! It is rendered “encourage,” “repair,” “maintain,” or “strengthen.”

Consider a man who wants to kill his boss, but he doesn’t have the courage. He reaches for the whiskey bottle. Without the alcohol, he wouldn’t have the courage to kill his boss, but this “liquid courage” gives him the ability to carry out the thing that he wants to do. In the same way, God gave Pharaoh the strength to do what he had set his mind on doing.

Fourth, God’s purpose for hardening Pharaoh was to show mercy on the Jews. His purpose was to show mercy on the Jews and spread his name to the whole world (Rom. 9:17). We need to remember that Pharaoh was a cruel dictator—not a pleasant politician. Egypt had killed the firstborn Jewish babies (Ex. 1:22), and they had placed the Jews under 400 years of slavery. By using Pharaoh like a pawn in his plan to rescue the Jews, God was not simply fair; he was being extraordinarily considerate to the Jewish people.
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(Bruce) Was this a special case? Or, does God take charge of every heart - either hardening them or preparing them to receive His salvation? Whichever the final answer, the story of Pharaoh doesn’t prove either. It very well could mean that this was a special case of God to bring Israel out of Egypt. Furthermore, I agree with one of the above commentators that this could have been God already strengthening the resolve that Pharoah already had.

6.9. Exodus 33:19 . . . And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

(Bruce) The context of this is that Moses is asking God that His presence will go with the people into the Promised Land. Moses then asks God to show him His Glory as a sign, which God agrees to do. Calvinists use this verse to prove limited atonement and unconditional election. But, this is not the context of this verse. God is having mercy by honoring Moses’ request to accompany them, even though they are disobedient and hard hearted. This is not about their salvation. I think it’s entirely reasonable to think

they were not all saved (or even many of them). If that is the case, it's clear that God being gracious doesn't have to be associated with salvation.

6.10. Deuteronomy 4:29 - 31

> But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. 31 For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

(Bruce) This is in the context of God's warning to Moses about what will happen if Israel doesn't follow God (they get exiled). If at that time, they seek Him in exile, God will rescue them. I think that the Calvinist viewpoint on this would see this as an example of God's sovereignty. When the elect wander away, God will still keep them, but put them into a position in which they will repent. Notice that vs 30 says that "you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice".

I think the Arminian viewpoint would point out the words in vs 29, "if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul". God's restoration and rescue is based on our response. It doesn't say that they will search Him with all their heart, but says "if".

I agree that God sovereignly cares for His people, and will punish His people if they fall away to bring them back. I also agree that them coming back is based on their response. The question is whether their response is determined or not. By determined, I mean that their response is 100% driven by God. I agree that their response is known by God from the beginning. If their response is already known, wouldn't it make sense that God would focus His correction on those He knows will repent? Or, is it that He gives everyone in Israel at the time the same amount of correction so that no one is without excuse? I think that this passage doesn't really say anything conclusive about the five points of Calvinism (or Arminianism for that matter).

6.11. Deuteronomy 7:6 - 13

> "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a

mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. 11 You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. 12 “And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. 13 He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you.

And,

Deuteronomy 14:2 For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

(Bruce) Calvinist teaching would refer to this as God choosing people who have no merit (Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace). Non-Calvinists would agree that God chose Israel as a people, just as He chose the Church as a people. However, they limit God’s choosing to a people group, and not individuals. Furthermore, the people of Israel, who He chose, presumably all were not saved because of their unbelief. Also, God is promising material blessings if Israel listens to and follows Him. Of course, all the symbolism of His blessing and the Promised Land points to the salvation that Jesus provided.

6.12. Deuteronomy 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

(Bruce) This is a major Calvinist proof text. I think the Arminian response is to say that once again, this is concerning a people group and not individuals. Certainly, not every descendant of Israel was regenerated, only those who chose to believe.

Also, everyone agrees that our hearts tend to love ourselves above God - which is unacceptable to God. Therefore, He needs to circumcise (regenerate) our hearts for us

to love Him. The question is, in what circumstances does God circumcise us? Can we have some kind of initial desire to be with God before He circumcises our hearts?

6.13. Judges 9:23 - 24

And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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In v23 we see God directly intervening by sending a spirit to stir up hostility between Abimelech and Shechem...This incident is just one of several in which God employs the services of an evil spirit to expedite judgment upon sinners (1 Sam 16:14; 18:10; 19:10; 1 Chron 21:1 [cf. 2 Sam 24:1]). The expression "evil spirit" need not mean that the spirit was itself demonic or evil. The Hebrew term can refer to moral evil, but it can also refer to disaster, harm, or calamity in a non-moral sense. If the word is given the latter sense here, the expression may simply mean that the spirit was sent to bring harm and calamity upon the objects of God's anger.

Even if the spirit is viewed as demonic in nature, this need not impugn the goodness of God himself, for the OT makes it clear that he will on occasion resort to deceit when judging sinners. In this case, the demonic spirit would be an instrument or agent of divine retribution. R. Chisholm, A Commentary on Judges and Ruth (Kregel 2013), 316-17.
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(Bruce) I think this verse points to the Calvinist teaching that God is sovereign over everything, including evil. Many Arminianists misunderstand and claim that Calvinists say that God is the instigator, or cause of evil. This isn't true. The actual Calvinist doctrine of how God uses evil for His good purposes is rather complex. But in the end, properly understood, both Calvinists and most Arminianists agree. God has a plan and will make use of evil to fulfill it.

I thought the above article explained this Bible passage well. In a special case, God directly intervened to bring about His plan. My question is how often, how much, and how necessary is it for God to intervene on a day to day basis? At this moment, I think no one has the answer to that.

6.14. 1 Samuel 2:22 - 25
Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 23 And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. 24 No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. 25 If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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A sobering statement is contained in 2:25b. The wording should be carefully noticed (see note on 2:25). It does not say that Eli's sons had become so hardened in their sinful ways that the Lord decided to put them to death, but rather that Eli's sons did not listen to him because the Lord was already planning to put them to death. In other words, the resistance of Hophni and Phinehas to Eli's call to repentance was not the reason for God's judgment but was the result of his prior judgment. J. Vannoy, 1-2 Samuel (Tyndale 2009), 59.
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(Bruce) On the surface, this passage seems to support the notion that God is in charge of whether people repent or not (monergism). I think that interpretation is only one possibility. I think that it is reasonable to state that God knew (foreknew) the condition of their hearts and judged them. God judged them because He foreknew that they would not listen. However, it also may be true that because their sin was so public before the people, and was leading the people astray, God sealed their doom and directly intervened so that they would not repent.

The conclusion is that there are a couple of interpretations here that don't necessarily lead to God being the sole cause of whether every person is to repent or not repent.

6.15. 1 Samuel 16:10 And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.”

(Bruce) We know that God's sovereignty included that David would be king and be an ancestor of Jesus. God has a plan and will do certain things unilaterally to bring it about. I think everyone agrees with that. However, we can’t use this particular passage

as a proof text that God unilaterally chooses His elect, or that God unilaterally chooses everything.

6.16. 1 Samuel 18:10 The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand.

(Bruce) See Judges 9:23 - 24. There are several places in the Bible where a harmful (evil?) spirit is sent from God. I don't know whether this indicates God is actively ordering demons around to do bad things for Him, or if this indicates that God is permitting this to happen for His purposes (and the Bible's author is stating that permitting is the same as sending). In my mind, it gets complex. I think that a philosophical point could be made that permissiveness from an all-powerful being implies (indirect) action. My opinion is that there is a difference between a general (who directly orders things) and a judo master (who uses happenstances to accomplish His own will).

This point, I think, gets at what I suspect is a semantic argument. Everyone (almost) would agree that God is the only all-knowing and all-powerful One. Just that fact may imply that God is ultimately in control of everything. The semantic argument is whether it's possible for God to not be ultimately responsible in any given situation, since He knows all and can always intervene. If God knows everything and does not intervene, is He in control and does He bear full responsibility? Is there a difference between direct action and "letting" things happen when you know the outcome? There's a difference between ordering a child to run on a wet surface and allowing them to do it, knowing the outcome. In one case the adult is responsible. In the other case, it gets murky.

6.17. 2 Samuel 17:14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The Lord answered David's prayer (cf. 2 Sam 15:31). The narrator's description of Ahithophel's advice as "good," in contradistinction to Hushai's characterization of it as "not good" (17:7), reminds the reader that Absalom is a victim of divine deception.

But in the end the Lord is manipulating the minds of Absalom and his men, causing them to prefer the desperate, inferior plan offered by Hushai, because he has already determined to bring disaster upon Absalom (17:14). This is reminiscent of the account of Eli's sons, who rejected their father's warning because the Lord had by that time decided to kill them (1 Sam 2:25; see as well 1 Kings 12:15).
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(Bruce) See 1 Samuel 2:22 - 25. God can certainly confuse the council of people in cases to accomplish his will (in this case, preserving David). The question is does He always actively darken the minds of the non-elect? I think that all sides can safely say “No”. Total Depravity says that the mind of man is already dark. God doesn’t have to intervene at all to keep a person’s mind dark. Non-Calvinists don’t believe in Total Inability and would say that God would never keep anyone away from Him (Calvinists wouldn’t say that God keeps people away, He just leaves them be).

6.18. 2 Samuel 24:1, 10 Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” 10 But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/ says:
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In 2 Sam 24:1 we read: "the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah."

But in 1 Chron 20:1 we read: "Then Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel."

These are both inspired passages but, to us, they both cannot be correct: either God tempted David or Satan tempted David - who was it? Remarkably, to the Hebrew mind, they are both correct because God is omnipotent, nothing happens without Him at least allowing it to happen. So, while Satan did the tempting of David, God is said to have "caused" the problem because He did not prevent it.
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(Bruce) This is interesting. God “incited” David to disobey Him, and later David said he acted foolishly and sinned. I think David was correct in saying he did sin and act foolishly. If that’s true, what does it mean that God incited him to do it? I think it probably

meant that God allowed Satan to tempt David. Allowing temptation doesn't mean acting. God never tempts anyone, Satan does. However, God allows Satan to tempt people. I think this is an enlightening passage showing how God, Satan and people work. God is never guilty of sin or temptation, but does allow evil and "inciting" to happen. When evil does happen, God can use it for His purposes.

6.19. 1 Kings 8:46 - 50 (and 2 Chronicles 6:36 - 39 - almost the exact same words)
46 "If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, 47 yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,' 48 if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, 49 then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause 50 and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them

(Bruce) This is how God treats His elected people. God will seem to abandon those who rebel against Him so that they have a chance to repent. When they do, He immediately restores them. Everyone agrees here. I would like to point out that it seems like God is leaving the choice of whether to repent up to them. Calvinists would agree that everyone has the option to repent, but they are totally unable to do so without God actively changing their hearts.

6.20. 2 Chronicles 18:19 - 22
And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. 20 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' 21 And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' 22 Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster concerning you."

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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Micaiah's two oracles were designed to seal Ahab's fate. While prophets usually warned to encourage repentance, occasionally their role was to insure destruction (see Isa 6:9-1). Jesus spoke in parables for a similar reason (Lk 8:9-10). R. Pratt, 1 and 2 Chronicles (Mentor 1998), 326.

The ethical and theological implications of trickery have not been the focus of this paper. Yet obviously such matters naturally attend the archetype of the trickster and the art of trickery. Particularly troublesome are those passages where God himself is said to be involved in the situation. Most instances fit the category of ruse de guerre. Thus God caused the Aramaean soldiers to hear what seemed to them the clamor of a great host coming upon them and fled in panic (2 Kgs 7:6-7). At the Lord's direction Absalom and his advisors were deceived into following advice that would ultimately lead to their defeat (2 Sam 17:14) and Ahab is deceived into following the counsel of his false prophets to his own destruction (1 Kgs 22:19-23).-
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(Bruce) See 2 Samuel 17:14 and 1 Samuel 2:22 - 25. There is no doubt that God uses deceit for His purposes. This is kind of troublesome (and won't be addressed here - it has been addressed elsewhere), but I think that has little bearing on the matter at hand. Both sides agree that God does do things to bring about His will.

6.21. Psalm 22:27 - 29

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.
28 For kingship belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.
29 All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.

(Bruce) Both sides agree that God rules over the nations both now and later. I suspect that any disagreement on this point goes back to the semantic argument I mentioned in 1 Samuel 18:10. Is God actively controlling everything? Some would say "Yes", because of His perfect knowledge and perfect plan - notwithstanding how much God has to actively control things. Others would agree that God has perfect knowledge and has a perfect plan, but since He doesn't have to actively control very much to bring His plan

about, would claim that God expects His imagers to also exercise their own control over things. Both sides, I think, agree that people make choices. One side would say that because those choices can always be superseded by God's plan, it is God and God alone who is sovereign. The other side would counter that since people often make choices that counter God's spoken will, God is ceding sovereignty to them, and is by choice not in control (in that situation). Calvinists counter this with the two wills of God concept. God's spoken will states that something should happen, but His secret (or decretive) will for carrying out His plan drives the apparent choice of the person. Non-Calvinists agree that all of God's plans / will are not apparent to us; however, God doesn't have two wills that counter each other.

6.22. Psalm 33:10 -15

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.
12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
13 The Lord looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
14 from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
15 he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.

(Bruce) See Psalm 22:27 - 29. Both sides agree that a nation's plans can never thwart God's ultimate plan. What is disagreed upon is how often does God intervene in a nation's plans and how this carries over to personal salvation. (See semantic argument comments in Psalm 22:27 - 29).

6.23. Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6.24. Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

(Bruce) Both sides agree that we have a sin nature and that this estranges us from God. The disagreement lies in how far we take this. Is this describing total depravity, or just a sin nature?

6.25. Psalm 65:4 Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! . . .

(Bruce) This is a proof text that God does the choosing of who will dwell with Him, and that humans have no say. Certainly, this is generally true of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. It's difficult to come up with any counter-arguments to the idea portrayed in this verse that God chooses people. Perhaps, one could say that this is about the nation of Israel (predestination as a group)? Or, perhaps one could say that God chooses those He foreknows, but those He foreknew are still those who have voluntarily responded to His invitation. In my opinion, this verse puts to rest the concept that God puts out a general invitation, and then random people reply to that invitation. It certainly looks like God chooses (however, there still is an argument as to what criteria, if any, God uses to choose us). One caveat: The Psalms are poems, given to hyperbole, illusion, etc. How much should we make doctrine based on pieces of poems - not to say that these are not divinely inspired. It's just that we need to read them as to how they are intended.

6.26. Psalm 66:3 - 4

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.
4All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.

(Bruce) I think this verse is used as a proof-text for Irresistible Grace. However, I look at it as a judgement day where the nations stand before God. Even Satan will bow down then.

6.27. Psalm 115:3

Our God is in the heavens;
he does all that he pleases.

(Bruce) I think everyone agrees with this. What people disagree with is the extent of how much of His sovereignty God grants to man, and the extent that pleases Him.

6.28. Psalm 115:16

The heavens are the Lord's heavens,
but the earth he has given to the children of man.

(Bruce) Both sides agree that man has been given stewardship over the earth. I think non-Calvinists would use this passage to show that God has indeed given control (sovereignty) of the earth over to man - and that would include enabling them to make salvific decisions without coercion.

6.29. Psalm 139:13 - 17

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Psalm 139:16 has a complex history of translation that varies considerably between versions. The original King James Version (KJV) translated it this way:

“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

In this and other translations, the Hebrew is translated to mean that all the intricate parts of our bodies are accounted for and formed in the womb by God’s design, a plan in place even before conception.

In the International Standard Version (ISV), the focus is also on God’s intimate and sovereign design of pregnancy:

“Your eyes looked upon my embryo, and everything was recorded in your book. The days scheduled for my formation were inscribed, even though not one of them had come yet.”

The ERV is another contemporary translation that strives for faithful accuracy to the original Hebrew and Greek, in clear, easy-to-understand English. The same verse is translated this way from the Hebrew:

“You could see my body grow each passing day. You listed all my parts, and not one of them was missing.”

The JPS (Jewish Publication Society) translation of the original Hebrew is consistent with these translations:

“Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; they were all recorded in your book. In due time they were formed to the very last one of them.”

One reason translations of verse 16 vary in meaning is that the original Hebrew text is unusually sparse and not in a typical structural order. Ironically, even Calvin himself acknowledged that the order of verse 16 is unclear, and that the most likely meaning is not pre-ordained number of days of each person’s life, but the formation of the human body: “…the other is the more natural meaning, that the different parts of the human body are formed in a succession of time.”
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https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Furthermore, it is stated that these days of the Psalmist's life have been formed before there were any of them...If we understand his language aright, he is saying that the days of his life were actually formed before even one of them had come into existence. All his life, the details of each day, had been written down in the book of God, before any of these days had actually occurred.

Not only does God know all things, but God has also foreordained all things. In other words, the Psalmist has brought us head on with the doctrine of predestination. His life he regards not as a chance happening, but as a life already planned by God even before he himself was born. All the days that David would live and all the events of each day had been written down in God's book before David himself had come into existence.

David's life is not determined by David; he is not the master of his fate nor the captain of his soul, nor, for that matter, is any man. Before David appeared upon the earth, the days of his life had been determined by God Himself. Indeed, all that occurs had been foreordained of God. God has a plan and hence there are no surprises for Him. He knows what the future will bring forth, for He Himself has determined the future. David was to live a life that had been predetermined for him.

David does not rebel at this thought and neither should we. The contemplation of this profound doctrine leads him to an utterance of the preciousness of God's thoughts. He is willing that it should be as set forth here. He is content that God has determined in advance his life, predestined the course of events for him. As a devout believer in the Lord he knows that whatever God does is right.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God foreknows everything (poetically, it's all written down). If I understand the above article correctly, the author is saying that everything is not only foreknown, but fore-ordained. From what I see, the part of the passage that may lead someone to this conclusion would be in verse 16 "the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." I think one could easily counter by saying that this does not mean that every detail of a person's day is predetermined. Verse 17 goes on to say, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!". That may lead one to think that by pointing out God's thoughts, this further proves that this passage is about foreknowledge and not fore-ordination.

Another possibility is that this is yet another semantic argument (see Psalm 22:27 - 29). If God has perfect foreknowledge and doesn't actively prevent something, He is still preventing it by His inaction. God is still in control, even though He allows someone else to make a decision.

6.30. Psalm 135:4
For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God chose Israel, just like He chose His bride. This passage does not state that God chooses individuals.

6.31. Psalm 145:18 - 20
The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.
20 The Lord preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

(Bruce) This passage can easily be about those who are already saved, and doesn't mention how people get saved.

6.32. Proverbs 16:4
The Lord has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

(Bruce) One could interpret this as God makes the wicked to be wicked for the purpose He stamped upon them. I think that you could also say that God has a purpose for everything He made - which would not say that God fore-ordained who would be righteous and who would be evil.

6.33. Proverbs 16:9
The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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This verse actually disproves Calvinism, because it says that humans actually plan their own course. This demonstrates that people are created in the image of God, and are able to use their minds and free will. God is sovereign and can ultimately establish those steps, or allow them to stumble. Instead of accepting the plain meaning of the biblical text, Calvinists read irresistible forced control of people onto passages such as this.
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(Bruce) I disagree with the above comment. This verse could be saying that man tries to plan his way, but it's useless because God establishes his steps. I think that it's possible that there could be both going on. Man chooses which way to go, but everything is subject to God's override.

6.34. Proverbs 16:33
The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the Lord.

(Bruce) The lot was a practice in ancient times to seek God's will. I think this verse is telling us that if we seek Him, He will guide us. I don't think it's a good verse to use for meticulous providence.

6.35. Proverbs 19:21
Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The manifold images developed in the human thinking organ are one thing, but what finally transpires as a reality is another. God can make them successful or cancel them (2 Sam 15:30-17:14) or bring about the reverse of what people intended (cf. Gen 45:4-8; 50:20; Exod 1:8-12,20; Job 23:13; Ps 2:1-6; Prov 20:24; 27:1; Is 45:9; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 23:11-15). Even the best human plans and efforts cannot stand before him if he does not will it (Prov 21:30-31; cf. Ps 33:11; Is 7:7; 14:24; 46:10).
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(Bruce) I think the above statement, "Even the best human plans and efforts cannot stand before him if he does not will it", is what I think is one key point in this argument. A Calvinist would say if God does not will it. A non-Calvinist would say if God does not allow it. I think there is a distinction here. But, this verse doesn't shed light on which it is.

Both sides agree that God's plan stands and cannot be interfered with by humans. Is every minute detail determined by God? Both sides agree that all minute details are fore-known by God. The non-Calvinist would claim that God allows humans to make choices that He did not will (but did allow).

6.36. Proverbs 20:9 Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"?

(Bruce) This is talking about our sin nature, and not necessarily going so far as addressing total depravity.

6.37. Proverbs 20:24
A man's steps are from the Lord;
how then can man understand his way?

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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If even a strong and powerful man cannot determine his steps, how can any human being discern the way his steps take? The similarity between from the Lord and "to the Lord" (see vv22-23) identifies the just God as the ultimate author of the steps (see 16:9), a metaphor for every decision and activity of a man (geber; referring to the male in his strength; see 6:34).

The parallel to "step," his way (see 1:15), moves from his individual decision to his entire direction and the destiny with which he acts. People do not understand their ways because God makes the actual direction and destiny of their free actions subservient to his plan.
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(Bruce) Both sides agree that our plans are subservient to His plan. There may or may not be disagreement about how often this occurs and whether it always occurs in salvation decisions.

6.38. Proverbs 21:1 - 2
The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;
he turns it wherever he will.
2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but the Lord weighs the heart.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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God's inscrutable mastery extends to kings, the most powerful of human beings, and to the heart, their most free member. The Lord rules even the most free and powerful human beings (see 16:14-15; 19:12; 20:2).

Here the anthropomorphism teaches that God steers the king's heart according to the Lord's good pleasure. The metaphor is a channel of water...Farmers in Mesopotamia and Egypt divert the water by putting up dams and other obstructions in the stream's flow to direct the water to their fields and gardens. The Lord is the Farmer; the king's heart is the flexible channel.
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(Bruce) I think that everyone agrees that the more central a figure is to God’s plan, the more God will intervene with that person. We can see that many times with how God

deals with foreign kings that had interactions with Israel. God's plan is supreme, and He will bring it about.

6.39. Proverbs 21:29 - 30
A wicked man puts on a bold face,
but the upright gives thought to his ways.
30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel
can avail against the Lord.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Verse 30 protects against misinterpreting v29b to mean that a human being, even the upright, has the power to consummate his journey independently from the Lord. The Lord has the final word in realizing the goal. Everything in this proverb stops at the divine name.

By the triple anaphoric hammer blows "there is no," the proverb drives home the vast and unbridgeable guilt between the best of human wisdom and the Lord's sovereignty.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that man's plans cannot interfere with God's sovereign plan. What things do God allow? Everything that doesn't affect His plan? How much or little of our free decisions run into God's plan? Is it possible that one given person is free to make all of their own decisions because nothing they do is involved in God's plan?

6.40. Ecclesiastes 7:29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.
6.41. Ecclesiastes 9:3 . . . the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

(Bruce) I.E. The fall of man and the gain of our sin nature.

6.42. Isaiah 1:18 - 20
"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
19 If you are willing and obedient,

you shall eat the good of the land;
20 but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

(Bruce) A Calvinist would claim that the rebellious path is what we all will choose left to our own devices. A non-Calvinist would point to God's desire that we should reason together. Surely God wouldn't lay out two paths if one of them was impossible? Calvinists would point back to the two wills of God concept.

6.43. Isaiah 6:9 - 13

And he said, "Go, and say to this people:
"'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'
10 Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed."
11 Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"
And he said:
"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is a desolate waste,
12 and the Lord removes people far away,
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
13 And though a tenth remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak,
whose stump remains
when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump.

(Bruce) Reformed theology teaches that this passage and the passage about God hardening Pharoah's heart are about God's sovereignty and how He is in charge. While there is no doubt that God is in charge (ultimately), I think this passage and the one

concerning Pharoah is more complex. I think that this passage, and the Pharaoh passage, is not talking about God controlling people, but about what happens to people when you tell them the truth. Reformed theology would agree and teach that unregenerate people cannot hear the truth or respond to it. I'm not so sure this phenomenon is limited to non-believers. I think that most people can't handle the truth - that hearing the truth will actually cause us to wander further from the truth. Our ears become more deaf and our eyes become more blind after hearing the truth. And how long will this last? Until God brings us to our end and we are laid waste before Him. Then and only then will we remember and hear the truth.

One of God's richest blessings to those of us that are saved is to keep us cognizant of our own wretched state. It's only when we are desperate and feeling our exile here on earth can we hear what He's trying to teach us. So, is this passage about God sovereignly controlling our ability to hear Him? Yes and No. It's much more than that.

6.44. Isaiah 14:24 - 27

The Lord of hosts has sworn:
"As I have planned,
so shall it be,
and as I have purposed,
so shall it stand,
25 that I will break the Assyrian in my land,
and on my mountains trample him underfoot;
and his yoke shall depart from them,
and his burden from their shoulder."

26 This is the purpose that is purposed
concerning the whole earth,
and this is the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.
27 For the Lord of hosts has purposed,
and who will annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
and who will turn it back?

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The claim is made that there is a direct connection between God's plans and purposes and what actually will happen...This contrasts with man's inability to carry out his plans (8:10; cf. 46:10; Ps 33:9-11; Prov 19:21).

The final two verses extrapolate the principles in 14:24-25 and apply them to God's plans for the whole world...the comparison suggests that God makes sovereign plans not only for specific events related to the future of Assyria, but also for every nation on earth...There is no other way for things to happen in this world, no second choices, no alternative plans but God's plans. No one can resist the hand of God, and no one can turn God's hand away from doing his will.

The prophetic word here enunciates an important general principle that has been demonstrated so strikingly in the downfall of Assyria: God is sovereign over human history (v26). All nations will have to submit to his judgment. This important theological principle will be seen in relation to other nations-both small and great-in the oracles that follow. God is not like a man who makes plans and finds he has no power to put them into effect. Perfect wisdom and absolute power find their unity in God.
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(Bruce) All sides agree that God’s plans will trump everything else. The question is how encompassing are God's plans? Is it possible that a particular nation is completely free to do what it wants because it has no intersection with God’s plan? Both sides agree that God uses free-will choices to accomplish His plan. Is it correct to say that God is the originator of free-will actions (that are within His plan), or is it more correct to say that God uses things that are not His desire or will in His ultimate plan?

6.45. Isaiah 25:6 - 8

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
7 And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
8 He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.

(Bruce) There is a long and complex discussion (external to this paper) of whether all faces are Israel, or God's church, or both. Either way, God has chosen a people whom He will redeem. It's unclear in this passage whether He has chosen each individual member of this group, or merely the group itself. Do individuals have the ability to opt in or opt out of the chosen group? Certainly the power to do so requires what Jesus did on the cross. Does the cross provide the ability to choose? Or is there another act of God required that irresistibly calls people to His side?

6.46. Isaiah 30:15 - 16

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,
"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."
But you were unwilling, 16 and you said,
"No! We will flee upon horses";
therefore you shall flee away;
and, "We will ride upon swift steeds";
therefore your pursuers shall be swift.

(Bruce) Non-Calvinists would claim that the passage "you said, 'No! We will flee…'" clearly points to the ability of every human to resist God's call. Calvinists would point out that God provides pursuers for those that resist. These pursuers will either bring the elect home, or punish the non-elect. Calvinists promote a concept of two calls: God's effective call and His general call.

6.47. Isaiah 43:1

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.

(Bruce) This passage refers to all Israel, and not necessarily to individuals. There are similar passages that are true for His church.

6.48. Isaiah 45:7

I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create calamity;
I am the Lord, who does all these things.

(Bruce) This passage shows that God is the author of evil. This gets complicated. We can think of it this way, though: God created Satan, even though God knew everything Satan was going to do. God didn't need to do that, yet He did. Is everything that Satan does "God's will", or God's responsibility? I don't think it's necessary to claim that. I think one can argue that even though God knowingly created agents that do evil, it doesn't mean that those agents "had" to do those evil things. What does action with foreknowledge mean?

6.49. Isaiah 45:23 - 25

By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.'
24 "Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength;
to him shall come and be ashamed
all who were incensed against him.
25 In the Lord all the offspring of Israel
shall be justified and shall glory."

(Bruce) The offspring of Israel mean those who have been justified by God (His elect).

6.50. Isaiah 46:10 - 11

declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose,'
11 calling a bird of prey from the east,
the man of my counsel from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
I have purposed, and I will do it.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Here the three participles make a direct link between predictive prophecy (declaring the outcome at the start) and divine intervention in history (calling from the east a bird of prey)...As several commentators (e.g. Young) have noted, the three participles move from general to particular to specific. In the first instance, God tells in general what will

happen in the future. He can do so because the future is fully shaped by his own plans and wishes.

This thought is summed in the ringing affirmations of the final bicolon of v11...The repetition serves to emphasize the unshakable connection between promise and the performance, between divine talk and divine action...This parallelism underlines again that the reason God can tell what is going to happen is that what happens is only an outworking of his eternal purposes.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has a plan and that there's nothing that can block that plan. The question is how much God's plan encompasses. Concerning foreknowledge, everything of course. Concerning things that people have no say or control over, probably not everything. For example, you probably had some control over what you had for breakfast (at least in our modern society).

6.51. Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

(Bruce) We have all sinned, and that guilt was laid on Jesus. It does say that everyone's iniquity was laid on Jesus. That sounds like everyone's sins have been forgiven. Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 12:31: "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.". This means that Jesus cleared the way for everyone to come to Him. But, this alone is not sufficient for salvation. On our side, we need to appropriate His salvation by committing ourselves to Him. This appropriation is what is being discussed. Do we need to be regenerated separately from what Christ did on the cross for us to be able to appropriate His salvation? Or, did what Jesus do on the cross save everyone, allowing people to opt-out if they chose? Will we always opt-out unless God provides a separate act? Or, is what Calvinists claim is true, that Jesus only died for the elect, chosen by God from before the beginning of the world.

6.52. Isaiah 53:12
Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

(Bruce) As opposed to the last passage, this says that Jesus bore the sin of many. The word “many” is translated from the Hebrew word “rabbim” which means many or multitude. Isaiah says “all” in the previous passage. Why didn’t he say “all” here? It’s possible he’s just being poetic, and that he’s using the word “multitude”, when “all” is also true.

6.53. Isaiah 54:10

For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,”
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

(Bruce) Who is God talking to here? It’s pretty clear that it’s Israel. But, except for the remnant, Israel apostatized. Did God have compassion, love, and keep His covenant with the ones who were not saved? God kept His covenant with Israel by sending Jesus the savior to open the way to God. Whether each person entered His covenant is another matter. I think Calvinists would claim that God made His covenant only with the Elect, and no one else. Non-Calvinists would claim that God made His covenant with all of Israel (and all the world), and that it’s up to each individual whether s/he will appropriate that covenant.

6.54. Isaiah 55: 1 - 3

“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
3 Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

(Bruce) It's verses like these that makes me doubt total depravity / total inability. Why would God make this kind of invitation if He knows we have no ability to respond? Or, is this an example of His invitation to those whom He has regenerated? I think Calvinists would say this is an example of God's general call. But why make a general call to those who have no ability to respond? It just doesn't make sense to me. Do things need to make sense to me to be true? Absolutely not! However, if things don't make sense to me, I'm probably not going to call it true, unless the Bible is crystal clear and (almost) all good people agree that it is what the Bible is saying.

I suppose that this passage could not be salvific, but a message only to the Elect - that we should eat His food and drink His drink. Also, notice that, as opposed to the previous passage, God makes His covenant only with those who respond to Him.

6.55. Isaiah 55:8 - 11

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that anything God declares will come true, and that God has an unbreakable plan. People disagree on how much His plan controls our free choices. Some people would go so far as to claim that His plan is constructed from our free choices.

6.56. Isaiah 63:15, 17

Look down from heaven and see,
from your holy and beautiful habitation.
Where are your zeal and your might?
The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion

are held back from me.
17 O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.

(Bruce) See Isaiah 6:9 - 13. So, I think this language is very suggestive and something we need to be aware of concerning other passages. The author is asking God why He is making us wander from His ways and hardening our hearts. I think that sometimes God doesn't intervene when we wander from His ways, but He never forces us to wander. This language is suggesting that by God allowing us to wander, God is the cause of our wandering. And, there are several passages in the Bible that suggest this same phenomenon.

I chalk this up to poetic imagery and license. If we don't realize what the author is doing, we will make theological errors. I think the author is poetically asking God why He would allow this, and putting forth a philosophical conundrum/mystery of how God can allow something and not be responsible. This is kind of the crux of the whole paper: Does God control everything, or does God control everything through what He allows? If God has the power to stop something, but doesn't choose to do so, is He responsible? Can we say that He made a sovereign choice in the matter? If He gives us sovereignty to rule the earth and we mess it up, is God responsible?

6.57. Isaiah 64:6 - 8
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
7 There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
8 But now, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that without the cross, we have no way to Him. Furthermore, the effects of Jesus' actions on the cross apply since the beginning of the world.

Isaiah is lamenting that no one calls upon God's name or takes hold. I'm reminded that Elijah had a very similar complaint. In that case, God replied that He reserved a remnant that still held onto Him. So, is Isaiah putting forth an accurate statement of total depravity, or is he poetically complaining that he sees no remnant?

Isaiah goes on to say that we are the clay and the work of God's hand. No one disagrees that God shapes us - especially those of the remnant. How much free rein do we get? How much of our free will does God intercept? For example, a parent shapes a child by teaching and disciplining them - turning them into the kind of person the parent desires. Is this an entirely accurate model of what God does with us, or is he more "thorough" with us?

6.58. Isaiah 65:1 - 3

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"
to a nation that was not called by my name.
2 I spread out my hands all the day
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;
3 a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and making offerings on bricks;

(Bruce) Why does God complain about rebellious people if He is in control of whether they are rebellious or not. I suppose one could say that God is simply stating the state of everyone (totally depraved) and how much He's saddened by it. But, it seems like God expects people to not be rebellious. Calvinists would point to God's general call versus His specific call.

6.59. Isaiah 66:3-4

. . . These have chosen their own ways,
and their soul delights in their abominations;
4 I also will choose harsh treatment for them
and bring their fears upon them,
because when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, they did not listen;

but they did what was evil in my eyes
and chose that in which I did not delight."

(Bruce) Calvinists would say that this is an example of God's general call to people to repent (as opposed to His secret or effective call that all of His Elect receive positively). However (Calvinism continues), God does expect all who hear His general call (which is everyone) are expected to respond positively - even though God knows it's impossible that they will do so. God will punish those who do not respond, because He is good and just, and that's what we all deserve.

The disagreement for non-Calvinists is that people do have the ability to respond positively to God - and that is exactly why they are expected to.

6.60. Jeremiah 7:22 - 28

For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' 24 But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. 25 From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. 26 Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

27 "So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 And you shall say to them, 'This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

(Bruce) Once again, it seems like God expected them to obey Him. Why the expectation if they were totally unable? Did God call them but fail? Is this describing only God's general call?

6.61. Jeremiah 17:9 - 10

The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?
10 "I the Lord search the heart
and test the mind,

to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds."

(Bruce) This describes our fallen nature, but doesn't necessarily describe total depravity. Vs 10 gives no indication whether people can pass God's test.

6.62. Jeremiah 10:23
I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself,
that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

See Proverbs 16:9

(Bruce) This describes God's providence. This is a Calvinist "golden bullet" verse.

The context of this verse is: It is too late for Judah to repent. They had many chances, but it's clear that they will not. God has put the wheels in motion. Babylon is going to invade and conquer them, and Judah can do nothing about it.

The question is, is Jeremiah describing the inability of man to walk his own path at that time, or is he making a universal principle? It looks to me that this very well could be a universal principle. And if it is, how are we to explain this? Should we say that man never directs his own steps ever? Or can we make a more modest claim that man is not alone in directing his steps, but that God oversees everything and can override anything? For God to direct everything down a general path that He has determined (i.e. His ultimate plan for humanity), how many of a man's steps does He need to be personally involved in? Is it possible that God, to bring about His ultimate plan, can directly affect very few of man's steps?

Another point is that this section appears to be poetry. Poetry is designed to evoke feelings and mental images. With that in mind, how are we to take one line in an overall poem. Did the readers of that day understand something differently than us? How much should we develop doctrine from one line of a poem, as opposed to the entire picture the poem paints?

To take a non-Calvinist position, one must deal with this verse. You can't ignore it.

6.63. Jeremiah 18:1 - 10
The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." 3 So I went down to the

potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.
5 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 6 “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. 9 And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Unlike the Calvinistic interpretation that some individual people are vessels of destruction hated by their Creator from birth, Paul’s point is that God can redeem and reshape a vessel (a person or nation) that seems hardened and useless, if they will simply humble themselves and repent

God in His mercy looks for people and nations who are willing to humble themselves in faith, and He will turn their lives around. Their destiny is not unconditionally and arbitrarily predetermined. Nations, and the individuals who make up nations, are free to choose God or not, and He will have mercy on them or not.
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(Bruce) The potter and clay analogy that appears a few places in the Bible strikes a chord with Calvinists. In this passage, it seems that God is saying that He can shape any nation according to its response to Him. It doesn’t seem to say that God controlled that response. Once again, it seems like God expects and rewards a positive response to Himself. It’s possible that this is God’s outward call in play, but it seems a stretch to view it that way.

6.64. Jeremiah 29:10 - 14
“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you

seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

(Bruce) One could ask how could God restore Israel in exactly 70 years without being in control of their repentance? It is true that God has the power to influence events so that free-will agents will react in a particular way. The question I have is does God always influence events, or sometimes?

6.65. Jeremiah 32:35 They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

(Bruce) I think this is a major anti-Calvinist proof text. It didn't even enter God's mind that Judah did these things. How can that be if God is in control of everything? I don't even see a two wills argument that can be made here.

Certain Calvinists would say that God decreed it, but did not enter His mind to command it.

6.66. Jeremiah 32:40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

(Bruce) This is an example of God making an everlasting covenant with a people group. Individuals in Israel certainly did turn away from God. There's debate about whether it's possible for Christ followers to turn away from God. There's been many examples of people who have appeared to do just that. I think we don't know anything about people's hearts to make a judgement about them.

6.67. Lamentations 3:37 - 39
Who has spoken and it came to pass,
unless the Lord has commanded it?
38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
that good and bad come?
39 Why should a living man complain,
a man, about the punishment of his sins?

(Bruce) This passage seems to support the concept of meticulous providence. However, we must remember that this passage is part of a larger poem. An author of poetry is trying to use language to bring about an overall feeling. When examining poetry, we should attempt to feel the emotions and see the imagery of what the author is trying to project, and not examine the exact truthiness of an individual section. So, am I saying that Biblical authors of poetry are putting non-truths into their poetry to evoke a certain response? No. What I'm saying is that Biblical authors of poetry use hyperbole and imagery to communicate something. That would include making statements about God that would give us a feel for how great God is. In this case, is the author trying to communicate that God commands everything, or is the author putting in a statement to communicate his awe of how great God is? Poets use hyperbole in their poetry all the time. We have to recognize this or we will create incorrect theology based on poetry.

6.68. Ezekiel 11:17 - 21

> Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' 18 And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 21 But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord God."

(Bruce) This is a prophecy about when Israel returned from exile. It was true that they had one heart and obeyed God - at least in that generation. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, their hearts became hardened again. This is also a prophecy about the far future. Jesus will come back and do all these things for those of us who cling to Him.

6.69. Ezekiel 14:9 And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.

See 2 Samuel 24:1, 10

(Bruce) Once again, I think this verse is enlightening, showing the relationship between someone doing evil, God's role in that, and God's expectation of people. In 2 Samuel

24:1, 10, I thought that https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/ had a great answer for this and other verses which seem to indicate that God does evil. God is ultimately in charge, and thus takes responsibility for everything He allows - even though He did not desire it or directly cause it.

6.70. Ezekiel 18:30 - 32

> "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

https://evangelicalarminians.org/5-biblical-texts-that-calvinists-cant-wiggle-out-of/ says:
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Calvinists assert that God does whatever He pleases. They also assert that what God does is causally determine all things. They also assert that God has determined man to fall into sin and then to withhold atonement and saving grace from multitudes. Why? The answer is "For His good pleasure".

God explicitly said that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, yet Calvinists assert that everything God does is done for His good pleasure, and one of the things He does is cause the death of the wicked!

Some Calvinists realize the predicament the Ezekiel text puts them in, so they'll say that while God would like to save all people, He doesn't because He needs to damn the wicked in order to fully glorify Himself. Richard Bushey of ThereforeGodExists.com put it this way: "it may be the case that God has more than one set of desires. Perhaps he wants all people to be saved, but he has a greater desire in mind. This would resemble human psyche quite a bit as well. Just as a man might want to lose weight and get in shape, he also wants to spend more time with his family, and there are just not enough hours in the day. People often have conflicting desires. It is logically possible for God to want everybody to be saved, but have a greater desire that his justice and his wrath are put on display for the sake of his glorification."

But there are two major problems with this proposal. First of all, even if God did need to display His wrath against sin for the sake of His glorification, why would He need the damned to accomplish that? Wasn't Jesus on the cross a display of God's wrath against sin? Didn't the naked bloody Christ show the world just how much God despises sin and

inequity? I think the Calvinist would certainly say yes to those questions. But then, why would it be necessary to irresistibly damn people to Hell? It wouldn't be because He needs someone to punish "so that his justice and his wrath are put on display for the sake of his glorification." for Jesus' crucifixion would have accomplished that. And if God takes displeasure at the death of the wicked and doesn't care about libertarian free will, why doesn't he irresistibly save everyone? Perhaps God wants everyone saved but wants people to come to Him freely? But then, that's Arminianism, not Calvinism, and we can't have that.

Secondly, this proposal entails that God has a desire for something sinful. Apologist and philosopher Tim Stratton explains that "If God cannot have both of His desires, then it seems that He is not omnipotent, UNLESS, God's glory and universal salvation are logically incompatible. This is like stating that God's glory and his desire for all to be saved are on the same logically fallacious level as triangles with four corners and married bachelors. That is to say, a man might have the competing desires to be married and to be a bachelor but it is logically impossible to be a married bachelor. Therefore, he must choose one of the two options since these two concepts are mutually exclusive.

The idea that God's glory and universal salvation are logically contradictory is far from obvious. ….. Moreover … If God's glory and universal salvation are logically contradictory, why would God desire anything at all – even a little bit – that would logically negate His glory altogether? This does not seem like the kind of thing an omniscient or perfectly good God would have a desire for."
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(Bruce) There is a lot of scripture like this that shows God pleading with people to repent and live. I don't understand why God would bother if we have total inability. Calvinists explain that this is due to the two calls of God.

6.71. Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

(Bruce) Calvinists would say that God doesn't take "pleasure" in the death of the wicked - yet, the death of the wicked is both good and glorifies God. I confess that I don't understand the two wills of God concept. God is pleading that the wicked turn to Him, yet His secret (or decretive) will is that they don't?

6.72. Ezekiel 28:22 - 23

and say, Thus says the Lord God:
“Behold, I am against you, O Sidon,
and I will manifest my glory in your midst.
And they shall know that I am the Lord
when I execute judgments in her
and manifest my holiness in her;
23 for I will send pestilence into her,
and blood into her streets;
and the slain shall fall in her midst,
by the sword that is against her on every side.
Then they will know that I am the Lord.

(Bruce) This passage supports the view that God’s judgement of the wicked brings Him glory, and makes Him known. This probably doesn’t support the idea that God decreed that the Sidonians were wicked.

6.73. Ezekiel 36:24 - 32

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules] 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. 30 I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

(Bruce) This prophecy has a dual (at least) fulfillment: One in the return of the exiles, the second in what Jesus did (on the cross and at Pentecost). Both are talking about a group of people - Israel in the first fulfillment, and Christians in the second. There’s nothing here in this passage about unconditional election for individuals.

6.74. Daniel 4:35

all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, “What have you done?

(Bruce) This is what Nebuchadnezzar says after God caused him to live like an animal and after he recovered. We all agree that God can cause things to happen whenever He wants to. But, how often does He do this? If God lets us suffer the natural consequences of our poor actions, does that mean He is directly acting, or did He put in place natural laws and doesn’t interfere beyond that in most cases? The fact that some people receive consequences of various severity or none at all, did God pre-determine the severity, or is it random (but still fore-known)?

6.75. Hosea 9:15

Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal;
there I began to hate them.
Because of the wickedness of their deeds
I will drive them out of my house.
I will love them no more;
all their princes are rebels.

(Bruce) This sounds like God can both hate the sin and the sinner. But, we have to keep in mind what “hate” means in Jewish society. In today’s terms, we think of hate as an emotion. In that time, hate can mean leaving or abandoning. The above could be read as “there I began to leave them”. As evidence of this interpretation, see Luke 14:25, where Jesus told the people to hate their mothers and fathers. If you understand that it means leave them, the verse makes perfect sense. If you understand it to mean take an attitude of deep anger and disdain, the verse makes no sense whatsoever.

6.76. Amos 3:1 - 8

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:
2 “You only have I known
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

3 “Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?
4 Does a lion roar in the forest,
when he has no prey?
Does a young lion cry out from his den,
if he has taken nothing?
5 Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?
Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?
6 Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?
Does disaster come to a city,
unless the Lord has done it?
7 “For the Lord God does nothing
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.
8 The lion has roared;
who will not fear?
The Lord God has spoken;
who can but prophesy?”

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God does things in this world. He judges the nations. How often does he judge nations? How often does he leave people and nations to their own devices? Or is that judgement when God leaves people alone?

6.77. Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that Jesus reserves a people for Himself. This doesn’t address how people become His.

6.78. Matthew 5:45, 6:26 For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 26Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

(Bruce) These verses are used by Reformed (Calvinist) theologians to show God’s meticulous providence. I’ll talk more about this in a response summary section at the

end. For now, I will say that it is possible that God expends effort in each act of rain, and the sun rising, and feeding a bird. However, I think that it's extremely likely that these verses, and many others, are anthropomorphising this phenomenon. God certainly created the world in general, and put the systems in place for the sun to rise and birds to be fed. Furthermore, God is aware of the needs of each bird and whether they found food that day - and takes pleasure in each creature finding comfort and filling their needs. However, I think that Calvinist theologians and fans in general are most likely mistaken in taking poetic verses or phrases too literally. The Bible is chock full of anthropomorphism and poetry. It is overall a literary work. In everything one reads in the Bible, we need to make an effort to understand the meaning and feeling behind what the author is trying to say. Missing the important point that the Bible is first and foremost a great literary work will lead us to strange interpretations of what Biblical authors are trying to communicate. We cannot ignore an author's illusions, figurative language, metaphors, personification, hyperbole and symbolism. We consider all of this in great literary works. We need to consider these things for the greatest literary work, the Bible, and read it through a literary lens.

6.79. Matthew 6:9 - 13
Pray then like this:
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

https://learn.ligonier.org/devotionals/your-will-be-done says:
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The Lord's hidden, or decretive will, contains his secret decrees and foreordains all things. It is this will that results in the final manifestation of His mercy and justice, and thus brings Him His sovereign glory. This will can never be thwarted. This does not mean God is happy with every single event that occurs, for He hates sin. But the Lord is utterly transcendent, and from His perspective, His decrees paint a wonderful, God-glorifying picture even if we cannot yet see the entire, beautiful tapestry weaved by

His hidden will. Mysteriously, God's sovereignty over evil will further exalt and glorify Him on that final day.

On the other hand, the Lord's revealed, or preceptive will, is clearly found in Scripture and contains those things in which He delights or hates insofar as they conform to His standards. This will can be violated and can therefore incur God's displeasure.

When Jesus prays for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, He is asking for men to follow God's preceptive will, by the Spirit's grace, like the angels and saints in heaven. Praying for God's will to be done is to ask for people everywhere to love His law.
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(Bruce) The part of the passage that is in focus for our discussion is: "your will be done as it is in heaven". Jesus is saying that we should ask for God's will to be done on earth, because it is not always being done here. The Reformed response is to say that Jesus is asking that we should ask that God's preceptive will should match His decretive will, as it is done in heaven. I have to say, this sounds like a stretch to me. To deal with this passage and others like it, Reformed theology had to come up with the "two wills of God" concept to marry the proposal that God's will is always done, and that God's commands aren't always obeyed. Some reformers claim that God's decretive will is universal - that is, God's decretive will is in every event and action. This gets at the question of how God is sovereign. For God to be sovereign, does He have to control what Joe had for breakfast?

This passage seems to indicate that we need to ask God to bring His order to more things on this earth, and that God chooses not to involve Himself in at least some decisions. When God chooses not to involve Himself, that leads to chaos. God's order vs chaos is a major theme in the Bible.

6.80. Matthew 7:16 - 19

> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

(Bruce) Calvinists would claim that we are all diseased trees. God needs to remake us for us to bear fruit. Non-Calvinists agree with this, but claim that God will remake

anyone who has a desire to respond. Calvinists claim that because we are diseased trees, we will never have a desire to respond.

6.81. Matthew 11:25 - 29 (and Luke 10:21)

> At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/matthew/mt-1127-does-this-support-calvinism/ says:

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Calvinists claim that this passage supports the doctrine of irresistible grace. Is this true?

RESPONSE: This isn’t the case. In fact, in the following verse, Jesus says, “Come to Me, all who are weary” (Mt. 11:28). If verse 27 refers to irresistible grace, then this would imply universalism, which is surely false.

Matthew just recorded a dozen verses describing the hardness of the people’s hearts. Later in this same chapter, Jesus makes the call for “all” who are weary to come to him. So Jesus makes a universal call for people to find him, but only some will take him up on that offer.

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(Bruce) v 27 is a major proof text for Calvinism. Jesus chooses whom to reveal the Father. However, the question is who does Jesus reveal the Father to? It’s possible in this context that He reveals the Father to whoever puts their faith in Him.

V 28 - 29 sounds like a universal invitation. I think the Calvinistic response is that Jesus/God does make universal (or general) calls to unresponsive humanity. Calvinists claim that no one will respond except those whom Jesus has chosen to reveal Himself/God.

6.82. Matthew 12:30 -32

> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. 31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

(Bruce) Mark 3:28 - 30 puts it this way: “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Why does it say that every sin (except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) will be forgiven? Does this mean that Jesus’ act on the cross forgave all people their sins? It certainly sounds like it! If that is true, does that mean that Jesus saved everyone on the cross, except those committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? If this is true, it goes directly against the teachings of Calvinism - unless one would say that everyone commits blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because of total depravity.

This could also be saying that Jesus’ forgiveness paves the way for us to be saved, but does not describe the additional step(s) (i.e. appropriation) that we need to be saved.

6.83. Matthew 12:33 - 35 (and Luke 6:43 - 45)

> “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

John Frames Introduction to Systematic Theology says:
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Over and above those inferences, Scripture teaches directly that God brings about our free decisions. God does not merely foreordain what happens to us, but also foreordains what we choose to do. The root of human decision is the heart.

Thornbushes cannot bear figs, because that would be contrary to its very nature. So the heart is the center of human life, our fundamental nature and character. And the heart is under God’s control.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that for our hearts to become good, God needs to intervene. Yet all humans still have evil in their hearts. This makes me think that Jesus is not talking about good and bad people, but He is speaking about why people are all bad. We cannot be good, any of us, because our tree has been made corrupt. Jesus gives us a new spirit and sanctifies us, but the rest of our tree is still bad. Christ's redeemed people have a war going on in them between the seed that God planted in us and our corrupt hearts. God slowly takes ground in the war over the years, yet it won't be until we die (or He comes back) that He will make us a good tree.

It's possible that we are all missing the point. Perhaps this parable is only about how the heart drives our actions. The Pharisees had it backward (and many of us do too) and say that as long as we do good things, that's what matters. But Jesus says that we must come to Him to receive good hearts, otherwise all our actions are bad. (This may support another Reformed point that no action on its own can please God, but only actions coming from a sanctified heart).

6.84. Matthew 13:10 - 17 (and Luke 8:10)

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

"'"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."
15 For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'
16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Are those without eyes to see and ears to hear sovereignly and unchangeably decreed to be that way from the beginning of time? No, both Isaiah and Jesus declare why they are that way: “For this people’s heart has become calloused, they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.” Did God sovereignly shut their eyes? Again, no: “they have closed their eyes.” He “would heal them” if they would turn to Him. But they refuse His light again and again, so He turns away and leaves them in the darkness they desire.
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(Bruce) I think almost everyone agrees that people, left to their own devices, will close their eyes and ears to Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to Jesus - not only at the moment of salvation, but throughout our entire lives. Given this, does that mean that no one will even desire to be saved unless God opens their hearts? I agree that God needs to open our hearts to see Him. But, does God need to act to open our hearts to even desire to reunite with Him? Or, does that desire live within all of us, and we have to squelch that desire through an act of will on our own?

6.85. Matthew 16:15 - 17
He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

(Bruce) I think that everyone agrees that the Holy Spirit must open our hearts to see who Jesus is. Furthermore, everyone agrees that the Holy Spirit prepares people’s hearts before they give their lives over to Christ. The question is does the Holy Spirit have some sort of criteria before He decides to work on someone’s hearts? Or, does the Holy Spirit at various times work on everyone’s hearts - and some respond or shut Him down? To put it in Calvinistic terms, does God’s general call ever change hearts? Or, is it only God’s specific call that irresistibly works on hearts?

6.86. Matthew 18:1 - 4
And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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In this passage, and countless others in the Bible, God presents a real choice to people, to humble themselves and follow Him, or don't and miss out on the fullness of life now and eternal life in Heaven. These passages make no sense when viewed through the lens of Calvinistic philosophy - that God has already scripted and ordained every action and choice. These passages never say, "The person I effectually and irresistibly humble is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." God calls, initiates, and provides His Spirit, but the responsibility is ours.
In the end, if we followed and obeyed Him, we will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:23). This doesn't diminish God receiving all the glory for the good in our lives, it only enhances it. Any true believer will fall on their knees at that moment, lift their hands in broken humility to Him, and give Him all the glory.

It should not be too difficult for us to grasp these two truths: 1) God is sovereign and omniscient, and 2) He gives all people real free choice that He sovereignly ordained us to have. 7a1 This is what the Bible consistently teaches from beginning to end. As humans we like things to neatly fit in one box or the other, but God doesn't fit into any human-made philosophical box.
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(Bruce) Like the above article says, God gives us choices. Calvinists agree with this. They would say that God's general call to repent and obey is always there. But, we will always choose to disobey, unless God has specifically called us into His elect. So, the Calvinist has an answer to the non-Calvinist argument, that Calvinism is wrong because God keeps commanding everyone to obey Him.

6.87. Matthew 18:12 - 14
What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

(Bruce) This highlights how God takes initiative with people's walks with Him. Everyone agrees that God does chase those whom He wants to save (or keep saved). What this passage doesn't explain is why God would chase this one sheep and why He would leave the ninety-nine. We are invited to speculate on what this means (and with all of

Jesus' parables, they are designed to evoke thought and can have several tendrils of meaning).

6.88. Matthew 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

(Bruce) This could sound like Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for many, but not all. However, Romans 5:18 says: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men." and 1 Timothy 2:6 says: "who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

Why does it say many here and all in other places? Calvinists would claim that the "all" in the other verses mean the elect. But, I think it's more likely that the "many" in this verse actually refers to all - sort of like saying Jesus gave His life for the multitudes.

6.89. Matthew 22:1 - 14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:

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Calvinism conflates the calling and election of God as two synonymous terms, but in Matthew 22:14, Jesus said: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” If God’s calling is effectual in the Calvinistic sense of total manipulative control, then why aren’t all who are called chosen? If “God so loved the world,” why doesn’t His total manipulative control make everyone love Him back?

To fit their systematic, Calvinists sometimes answer this and other logical disconnects by creating two different kinds of everything – two different types of calling, two different types of love. There is a general calling and an effectual calling, there is a general love and an effectual love, etc. The problem is the Bible doesn’t teach this anywhere. It is a human philosophy that has to be forced onto the pages of scripture to perpetuate itself.
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(Bruce) Calvinists would claim that the call in this parable is God’s general call, which none of us is capable of answering - although God expects us to answer. I admit that I don’t understand how if we have total inability, why God would expect us to answer His call (unless total inability is erased with the cross).

6.90. Matthew 23:37
“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

https://www.monergism.com/calvinism-fact-sheet says:
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Who, then, is “Jerusalem”? It is assumed by Arminian writers that “Jerusalem” represents individual Jews who are, therefore, capable of resisting the work and will of Christ. The context would not lead us to conclude that this is to be taken in a universal sense. Jesus is condemning the Jewish leaders, and it is to them that he refers here.

A vitally important point to make here is that the ones the Lord desired to gather are not the ones who were not willing! Jesus speaks to the leaders about their children that they, the leaders, would not allow him to gather. Jesus was not seeking to gather the leaders, but their children. This one consideration alone renders the passage useless for the Arminian seeking to establish freewillism. The Jewish leaders who were unwilling to allow those under their authority to hear the proclamation of the Christ.
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(Bruce) This is one of the Arminian Big Three passages. This verse talks about Jesus desiring to save the people of Jerusalem, but for the most part they were unwilling. I think that everyone agrees that God longs for all people to be saved. The Calvinist would say that this is God's outward will (vs His secret will).

6.91. Matthew 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has an elect group. The disagreement occurs with how people become His elect - through foreknowledge or foreordination.

6.92. Matthew 25:32 - 46
Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,[f] you did it to me.'
41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

(Bruce) This is not saying that good works will get one into the kingdom of God. It's saying that good works are a sign of one who is elect, and lack of good works are a sign

of one who is not elect. There's several passages addressing those who think they are saved, but are not because their lives don't reflect it.

6.93. Matthew 26:28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

(Bruce) See Matthew 20:28 for discussion of many vs all. It basically says that many probably means all, and shares Bible references to verses that say the same thing, but actually say "all".

6.94. Mark 2:16 - 17
And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

(Bruce) As far as this discussion goes, I think it's not a proof text for either side of the discussion. Jesus is clearly being tongue and cheek, because we are all sinners. Perhaps, we can only come to understand that we are sinners through God's regeneration.

6.95. Mark 3:28 - 30
"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— 30 for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

(Bruce) This is an interesting passage to me. It seems like it's saying that all sins for all humanity will be forgiven (except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit). Doesn't this mean that all people are saved (except for the above)? There's arguments for what committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is. I think, based on the context, it's disbelieving the Holy Spirit's revelation about Jesus (but am not quite sure, even though this is a widely held interpretation). If I am right, it sounds like this passage is saying that Jesus' act on the cross saves all humanity, and that some opt out through their unbelief/resistance. If that's right, this seems to be the opposite of Calvinism. Although, I suppose one could say that no one will believe except the ones that God elects.

Another thought is perhaps Jesus made a way for all humanity to reunite with God, however, we still have to appropriate His salvation. In other words, there is (at least) a two step process to salvation. The above just lists the first step.

6.96. Mark 13:20, 27 . . . But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees on the existence of the Elect. It clearly says here that God chose the elect. Non-Calvinists agree with this verse, and would say that God chooses those who choose Him..

6.97. Luke 7:29 - 30
(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, 30 but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

(Bruce) I'm not sure how many people would say that the baptism by John saved people (was a mark of the Elect). The opposite is true: Any elect person would have welcomed John's baptism. But, not every person that was baptized was saved. This isn't a proof text for either side of the discussion.

6.98. Luke 15:11 - 32
And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.
17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and

ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

(Bruce) This seems to be a fairly strong non-Calvinist proof text. Here we have a story of a father letting his son wander off. The father does nothing to chase him or convince him to stay. The son wanders off all on his own. After a time, the son, apparently all on his own, comes to his senses and returns to his father and repents. The father was watching for him, but didn’t do a thing to go get his son. The father declares that his son was dead and is now alive again - clearly a parallel to salvation. We shouldn’t use parables to define theology. On the other hand, we can use the main points of a parable to show us truth. It’s also possible that this parable is showing the path of the Elect, but that seems a little stretchy..

6.99. Luke 18:7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

(Bruce) Everyone agrees on the existence of the Elect, but disagree on what role (if any) the Elect has in becoming elect. Is the Elect the Elect merely because of foreknowledge?

6.100. Luke 19:9 - 10
And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

(Bruce) Jesus was trying to get through to the person who was judging, trying to make him see that there was no difference between him and the sinner. There's no point about election being made in the first part of this verse. I think that the second part of the verse is making a point about how one must realize that they are lost before Jesus will seek and save them. The Bible makes it clear that we are all lost. Why would Jesus say that He only came to save the lost? I think the point is that we need to come to the point in which we realize we are lost before we can come to Jesus.

If I'm right, this shows a criteria in which God chooses people or not. Not that this is necessarily non-Calvinistic. Calvinists don't claim that there is no criteria for one being elect. Rather, they claim that God is responsible for creating the necessary conditions that one would need. In other words, one is elect first, and only after shows the conditions that one is elect (in this case, recognizing he is lost and needs a savior).

6.101. John 1:7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

(Bruce) Many commentaries are saying this verse says "that all might believe through John". I interpret this saying "that all might believe through the light (Jesus)". Either way, this doesn't say anything about our subject. I suppose non-Calvinists would point to "that all might believe". But Calvinists would point out that this is just a general call.

6.102. John 1:9 - 13
The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

https://www.monergism.com/calvinism-fact-sheet says:
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One reason for the use of these expressions was to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jews alone. Such phrases as "the world," "all men," "all nations," and "every creature" were used by the New Testament writers to emphatically correct this mistake. These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without distinction (i.e., he died for Jews and Gentiles alike), but they are not intended to

indicate that Christ died for all men without exception (i.e., he did not die for the purpose of saving each and every lost sinner).
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(Bruce) This passage says that Jesus came into the world, but the world rejected Him. It then goes on to say that while this is generally true, there is a remnant who did believe in Him. The phrase, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”, seems to imply an order: First we receive Him and believe in His name, then God gives us the right to become His children. Calvinists say the opposite: God first makes us His children, and then we believe.

However, this passage goes on to say, “who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”. This supports what the Calvinist says - we are not born by the will of man, but only the will of God. What do we make of this? To me, it looks like it’s the part where we are reborn - that is what is the will of God. God’s intention from the beginning was to provide us a way to be reborn into His children. It doesn’t say whose will it is that one believes in the first place. In fact, by the addition of saying it’s only God’s will that we are reborn, but doesn’t say that it’s only God’s will that we believe, leads me to believe that it’s our decision to believe or not (something Calvinists may agree with, but put a stipulation that no one will believe).

I found it to be very interesting that the passage says, the world rejected Jesus . . . but, there are those who believe. If you just read the first part, total depravity would be undeniable.

6.103. John 1:29 . . . Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

(Bruce) Um., this doesn’t seem to fit Calvinism at all. Jesus took away the sins of everyone?!? Well, actually, Calvinism might agree that Jesus did take the sins away from everyone - it’s just not that everyone believes (everyone agrees with this). But, they would go on to say that it’s this belief part that we are not capable of.

I put forth a hypothesis earlier that Jesus did actually “save” everyone on the cross by forgiving all their sins, except for the one unforgivable sin - not believing in Him. If that’s really true, it’s really opt-out salvation. I suppose Calvinists might agree with this with the stipulation that everyone will opt-out except for those God specifically chooses.

6.104. John 3:3 - 8

> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit] 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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From the start, the Gospel [of John] speaks of those who "receive" Jesus as the Light and "believe in his name," those who are given "authority to become children of God" by virtue of having been born...of God" (1:12-13). Two chapters later Jesus tells Nicodemus, "unless someone is born from above [or "of water and Spirit"], he cannot see [or "enter"] the kingdom of God" (3:3,5). But what exactly is the relationship between being "born of God," or "born from above," and "receiving" or "believing in" Jesus? Which comes first? Is a person reborn because he or she believes, or does a person believe as a result of being reborn? Conventional wisdom assumes the former as a matter of course, and the word order of 1:12-13 seems on the face of it to support this. Yet those verses make no explicit causal connection either way between faith and rebirth, and as Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus runs its course, evidence for the opposite view begins to surface. "Receiving" Jesus' testimony is mentioned in 3:11, and "believing" is repeatedly urged in verses 12, 15, and 16. Finally, the stark alternative of "believing" or "not believing" in him is clearly set forth (v18), and then restated (in language reminiscent of 1:9-13) as either loving or hating the Light, either "coming to the Light" or refusing to come (vv19-21). The person who "hates the Light" does so because he "practices wicked things," and refuses to come "for fear his works will be exposed" (v20). By contrast, the person who "does the truth comes to the Light, so that his works will be revealed as works wrought in God" (v21).

In sharp distinction from the other three Gospels, in which Jesus says, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:27//Mt 9:13; also Lk 5:32), he does come to call, if not explicitly "the righteous," at least those who "do the truth"-as against those who "practice wicked things." Those who come to him in faith (that is, "come to the Light") demonstrate by so doing that they are already "doers of the truth," not by their own merits to be sure, but because their works have been "in God". They do not prove their faith by their works-at least not yet-but on the contrary prove their works by their faith.

To this extent, John's Gospel turns some versions of Reformation theology on their heads! It is not as radical as it sounds, however, for the point is simply that God is at work in a person's life before the person "receives" Jesus, or "believes," or "comes to the Light." This is evident in the account of the man born blind-the Gospel's classic case study on what it means to be "born of God"-where the point made is not that the man was a sinner who "believed" and was consequently reborn. On the contrary, Jesus insists, "Neither this man sinned nor his patents"-that is, his predicament was not the result of sin. Rather, the purpose of the healing was "that the works of God might be revealed in him" (9:3)-that is, God was already at work in his life, and his eventual confession of faith 9:38) would reveal that to be the case. He did not believe in order to be "born of God." He believed because he was "born of God." This interpretation is confirmed by Jesus' repeated insistence that "All that the Father gives me will come to me" (6:37), "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (6:44), and "no one can come to me unless it is given him from the Father" (6:65). The initiative in human salvation is God the Father's and his alone.

While it is true that John's Gospel centers on a call to decision, the hearer's decision cannot change but only reveal what has gone on before-the working of God the Father in those who will eventually become his children. Jesus can speak of "other sheep" whom, he says, "I have," even though they have not yet believed (10:16), and the Gospel writer can envision scattered "children of God"-born of God," therefore-who have yet to be gathered into one" (11:52). Perhaps the words of old Simeon in another Gospel put it best: Jesus in the Gospel of John comes "so that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed" (Lk 2:35). The accent is not on "conversion" (the words for "repent" and "repentance" never occur), or even the forgiveness of sins, but on revelation. The coming of Jesus into the world simply reveals who belongs-and who does not belong-to his Father, the God of Israel.

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(Bruce) This very important discussion with Nicodemus doesn’t reveal much on our topic. It doesn’t say how someone comes to the point of being born again.

6.105. John 3:16 - 21

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the

world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

(Bruce) This passage starts by talking about those who believe in Him and those who do not. It then mentions that everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come into the light. We all do wicked things, so do none of us come into the light on our own? Is coming into the light the same as believing? Perhaps this is a two part process: First believe and then you can come into the light. Otherwise, if coming into the light is the same step as believing, there's a case to be made for total inability. I think it's pretty clear that no one can come into the light on their own.

6.106. John 3:26 - 27 - And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

(Bruce) This is in the context of John's ministry. John is saying that everything that he has the privilege of doing to build the kingdom is given to him by God. This does not necessarily refer to John's salvation.

6.107. John 3:32 - 36
He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. 33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. 34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

(Bruce) The first part of this is just like John 1:9 - 13, where it says the world did not know him, yet to those who did know him . . .. Once again, "no one" in this case meant most of the Jews of that day - yet, there was a remnant that did receive His testimony. A couple more points should be made. First, "for he gives the Spirit without measure" should not be interpreted as he gives the Spirit to everyone. Secondly, "whoever does not obey" does not mean everyone in this case, even though we are all powerless to obey Him. The command is to believe Him. Non-Calvinists argue that this is the one thing we have the power to do. Calvinist argue that we cannot believe on our own.

6.108. John 4:42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that faith comes through hearing the word. I think Calvinists argue that hearing is impossible for us, unless God gifts us with ears to hear.

6.109. John 5:21 - 29
For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

(Bruce) I think Calvinists would zoom in on ‘the Son gives life to whom he will”. I think a reasonable response is that Jesus wills to give life to those who respond to Him with belief.

So much of this passage is amazing. One point is verse 25. All of the dead will hear Jesus’ voice, and those who really hear Him will live. It’s potentially difficult to understand this verse. However, there seems to be a matching pattern all over the Bible. One example is Matthew 13:14: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

Verse 29 is also interesting. It sounds like Jesus is saying that your works are what gets you eternal life. But, once again, there’s a pattern all over the Bible. We are saved by Jesus’ grace alone. Our work is to believe in Jesus. And, when we do, our hearts will be changed, and we will start bearing fruit for His kingdom. That’s the good we do, which we can only do if God lives within us.

6.110. John 5:37 - 40

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Jesus Himself affirms the order of salvation.

1) Scripture bears witness to Christ
2) We can come to Him, or refuse to
3) If we come to Him, we may have life

According to Jesus Christ's own words, we don't get life from pre-faith regeneration, then come to Him. We hear about Christ in the scriptures, come to Him in faith, and receive regeneration and new life.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that salvation comes from hearing the word and responding to it. Calvinists say that we don't have the ability to hear unless God does a work in us. It's interesting that v40 says that they refuse to come to Jesus. That means there was an invitation. But, everyone agrees that there is a general call. Calvinists believe that everyone will refuse a general call, unless a specific call is made, which will never be refused.

6.111. John 6:29 - 35

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." 30 So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." 35 Jesus said to

them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

(Bruce) The work, which grants us eternal life, is to believe in Jesus. This is a key scripture to keep in mind if one is to understand the rest of the Bible.

6.112. John 6:37 - 40, 44 - 47

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Calvinists argue that this passage teaches irresistible grace. The individual cannot refuse God's choice, therefore all those given to Christ will respond.

Arminians reply that "those given to me" in 37 are the same as those who "believe in him" in vs. 40. In other words, when God foresees that some will believe, he gives them to Christ. See that in vs. 45, those who "have heard and learned from the father" are the ones who "come to me."
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https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Both here and elsewhere in the Gospel tradition, Jesus responds to unbelief with an appeal to divine sovereignty and divine election. It is in this framework of sovereignty and election that Jesus holds out the universal-sounding declaration that "the person who comes to me I will never drive out." The words "never drive out" are just as emphatic and final as "never go hungry" or "never ever thirst" (v35). Yet they do not add up to universalism. There is no indiscriminate "Whosoever Will," as in the old Gospel song. Those who "come to Jesus" are those whom the Father gave him, and no one

else. In promising never to "drive out" those who come, Jesus is simply obeying the Father by accepting the Father's gift. He confirms a principle first laid down by John, that "A person cannot receive anything unless it is given him from heaven" (3:27). The corollary is that a person must receive that which is given from heaven, and this Jesus promises, emphatically, and without qualification, to do.

If he were now to reject those who came to him in genuine faith, he would not only be denying them salvation, but he would "lose" that which his Father wanted him to have. Their loss would be his as well.
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(Bruce) This is a major proof text for Calvinism. Let’s take a look at each part:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me”: The Father gives the Elect to Jesus. So far, in this passage, there’s no indication on how people become elect and what role (if any) they have in it.

“whoever comes to me I will never cast out”: Jesus will never cast out those who cling to Him. Can people leave on their own accord? So far, in this passage, there’s nothing that precludes that.

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day”: All that the Father has given Jesus is those whom He foreknew (at least) would be His elect. If God foreknows who will be in Jesus, Jesus will not cast any of them out, but will ensure their salvation. However, this all goes back to the question of how one becomes part of the elect and what role they play.

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”: I think this is the answer to the question, “how does one become elect?”. Here, it sounds like it’s saying that it’s up to each individual as to whether they will look on the Son and believe. However, it doesn’t explicitly state that. Do individuals have the ability to look on the Son, should they choose to? Does the cross provide that ability to everyone?

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”: This sounds like a strong case for Calvinism. But, does God draw everyone? John 12:32 says: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” That sounds like a strong case for non-Calvinism. Who are all people? Does that include the non-Elect?

“It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”: Does this put some context on what all means? It says all will be taught by God. And everyone who hears and learns from God comes to Him. Does all mean only the Elect? Or is this saying that God will teach everyone, but only a few learn? Everyone does agree that anyone who hears and learns from God comes to Him.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life”: This gets back to the question of how one comes to believe and what part they have.

6.113. John 6:44, 65 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 65And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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The Calvinist holds that these passages teach total depravity, unconditional election, and also imply limited atonement and double predestination.

The Arminian agrees that these passages teach total depravity. However, they argue that the father draws all men to Christ (Jn. 12:32; 16:8). They further hold that to assign the cause exclusively to the Father ignores vss. 29; 35; 40; and 47. To attribute the cause exclusively to the Father regardless of the response of the person, flies in the face of the stated will of the Father in vs. 40
Finally, with regard to limited atonement and double predestination, these positions depend on the earlier conclusion (unconditional election), and therefore beg the question.
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https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The words are a negative corollary to verses 37 ("All that the Father gives me will come to me") and 39 ("that of all he has given me I might not lose anything"), and an echo of John's caution to his disciples three chapters earlier, "A person cannot receive anything unless it is given him from heaven" (3:27)...Those who "come to me," Jesus says, do so because his Father "draws" them, and for no other reason. They are God's gift to Jesus, and Jesus is God's gift to them. Jesus is not so much inviting these Galilean "Jews" to "come to him" as providing the reader of the Gospel with an explanation why they would not and could not come.They do not come to Jesus because they are not "drawn" or

"dragged" to him. The verb is used literally of drawing a sword (18:10), or dragging a net full of fish into a boat (21:6) or onto shore (21:11). J. R. Michaels, The Gospel of John (Eerdmans 2010), 385-86.
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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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This is another common Calvinist proof text pulled out of context. For those who truly put their faith in God the Father, and listen to His voice, He will naturally draw them to His Son, Jesus. This is the plain meaning of John 6:44. Taken out of context, it would seem to support Calvinism's 4th point, 'Irresistible Grace'. But we need to back up to verse 41 for Jesus' audience - Jews that were not truly listening to God the Father anymore. And we need to continue reading through verse 47, where Jesus clearly tells these Jews that 1) all people who will listen are taught by God the Father, 2) everyone who truly listens to the Father comes to Jesus, and 3) whoever believes has eternal life.

V47 says Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. Jesus' conclusion of this passage, "whoever believes has eternal life", is an open invitation to all, not to the unconditionally preselected few. Those who have closed their ears to the Father will not be drawn to Jesus, while those with open ears and hearts to the Father will naturally be drawn to Jesus.

Who is drawn to Jesus? Later in John 12:32, Jesus tells us. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Christ draws all people through His death and resurrection, but some accept it and some reject it.

Throughout Scripture, granting is conditional based on a response of listening and learning what God reveals through creation, through a person's conscience, and through the Scriptures. Those who listen and learn from the Father are granted to come to the Son.

For instance, in Acts 11:18, the same word 'granted' is used:

"When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." This doesn't mean every Gentile is effectually caused to repent and have life.

Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

Why are some not granted the opportunity to come to Jesus? Because they suppress the truth by their own unrighteousness. It is not because of God's unconditional 'Sovereign Decree' that they don't come to Jesus, it is their own unrighteous choice to suppress the truth given to them.

Does God know who will choose Him? Yes. As John 6:64 indicates: "For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him." Just a few verses later, in John 6:70, Jesus says:

"Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him." Jesus knew Judas would choose evil, and Jesus chose Judas. Jesus was not the source of Judas' evil. Reiterating 1 John 2:16: "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—come not from the Father but from the world."

Rather than the simplistic, linear view of sovereignty, God can take the evil decisions of Judas and countless others who suppressed the truth by their own unrighteousness, and sovereignly bring about the most important event in human history – the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/john-acts/jn-644-65-does-this-passage-teach-that-jesus-will-only-draw-some-people-to-god-and-leave-others-for-judgment/ says:
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CLAIM: Calvinist interpreters understand this to refer to irresistible grace: that is, if the Father gives someone to the Son, then he will bring them to eternal life. The logic of their position is as follows:

(1) All that the Father gives to Jesus will definitely come to Jesus (v.37).

(2) If the Father gives people to Jesus, then Jesus will definitely raise them up on the last day (v.39). This resurrection must refer to eternal life.

(3) Therefore, if the Father gives someone (and not another), they will definitely get eternal life.

Calvinist Bruce Ware writes, “The point of Jesus saying what he does in verse 37 was so that the Jews who rejected Jesus would conclude that they have not been given to him. If they had been, they would have come. But their disbelief and hardness of heart are evidence that they have not been given to Jesus by the Father. In contrast, Jesus tells them, ‘Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me.’ Therefore, some specific ones are given to Jesus by the Father, and other specific ones are not.”
Michaels writes, “Those who ‘come to Jesus’ are those whom the Father gave him, and no one else.”

Furthermore, Calvinists note that Jesus said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him… No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (Jn. 6:44, 65). Calvinist interpreters argue that these passages support the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: Arminians typically respond with different interpretations:

OPTION #2: Those who “come” to Jesus and are “drawn” by the Father are those who “hear” and “learn” from the Father (v.45) and consequently choose to “believe” (v.40)
We will give a verse by verse exegesis of this view:

(6:37) “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me…” The “all” here is neuter and singular. It refers to the collective group of all believers. However, the second half of the verse refers to individual persons: “The one [masculine singular] who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” This second half of the verse shows how individuals become part of the “all.” They are responsible to “come” to Jesus through faith. Calvinist interpreters don’t believe that this is a universal call for all people to come to Christ, but rather it is a “universal-sounding declaration.”

Later in verse 45, we discover who will “come” to Christ. Jesus said, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (v.45). Thus when Jesus says that the Father will “give” people to the Son, this refers to those who were willing to “hear” and “learn” from the Father—not those who were unconditionally elected before the foundation of the world.

(6:38-39) For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

If someone is a true believer, Jesus promises not to lose them. However, faith is instrumental to this process. Later, Jesus said, “While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled” (Jn. 17:12). Clearly, Judas was “given” to Jesus, and yet, Judas perished. Why? Because God failed? Not at all! Judas was “given” to Jesus and even “chosen” by Jesus (Jn. 6:70), yet Judas refused to trust in Christ.

(6:40) For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

Calvinists typically emphasize verse 39 (“all that He has given Me I lose nothing”). However, note carefully what Jesus is saying here: It is God’s will for all people (“everyone”) to have exercise faith (“behold the Son and believe in Him”). God didn’t will who would have faith, but he willed that those who have faith “will have eternal life.”

(6:44) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

The Greek word for “draw” (helkō) was a term used of fisherman “drawing” their nets (c.f. Jn. 21:6, 11) or of Peter “drawing” his sword (Jn. 18:10). It was also used of men being forcibly dragged somewhere (Acts 21:30; Jas. 2:6).

However, this term is also used of drawing all men to Christ. In John 12, we read, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw (helkō) all men to Myself” (Jn. 12:32). Thus, if this is describing irresistible grace, then this would imply universalism! Later, John writes, “[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8). Clearly, we can ignore God’s drawing and conviction in our lives (cf. Lk. 7:30; Mt. 22:3; 23:37; Acts 7:51). Later in this chapter, Jesus said, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” (Jn. 6:70) Clearly the “choosing” cannot refer to unconditional election and irresistible grace, because Judas was “chosen” and yet he went to hell (Jn. 17:12).

How do Calvinists respond to this problem?
Option #1: All men refers to all types of men. John Chrysostom,[4] John Calvin,[5] D.A. Carson,[6] Leon Morris,[7] Merrill Tenney,[8] and Colin Kruse[9] state that “all men” in John 12:32 refers to all types of men (i.e. ethnicities), rather than simply all people on Earth. They point to the fact that there were “Greeks” in Jesus’ audience (Jn. 12:20), and these men wanted to come to Jesus (v.21). However, we fail to see any such distinction.

In John 12:31, Jesus said, “Judgment is upon this world [i.e. all people].” This universal judgment stands in contrast to his universal offer of salvation. Later Jesus said, “I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world” (Jn. 12:47).

Option #2: All men refers to all believers drawn by the Father from John 6:44. J. Ramsey Michael writes, “The point is not that every human being is ‘drawn,’ but that all those drawn by the Father are drawn by the Son.”[10] Again, this fails to do justice to the language: “all men” means everyone on Earth.

Arminians agree that no one would come to Christ unless God pursued, convicted, and pulled that person to Him first (through what is called prevenient grace). This is what Jesus is referring to when he says, “No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father” (Jn. 6:65). However, we disagree over the notion that this pulling is irresistible. In fact, in this passage, how exactly does the Father “draw” people to himself? Is this an irresistible and inward change of the heart? Not according to the text. Verse 45 tells us that God draws people because they “heard” and “learned” from Him. That is, God “draws” people through his revelation in the OT Scriptures.

(6:45) “It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.”

Jesus quotes Isaiah 54:13 (or possibly Jeremiah 31:34). Earlier, Jesus taught the religious leaders that they failed to recognize him because they didn’t listen to the Father through the reading of the OT Scriptures. Jesus said, “The Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form… You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life… If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (Jn. 5:37, 39-40, 46-47). The Father “draws” people in this passage according to the revelation he gives to humanity—not through some inward, irresistible change of heart.
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Grudem says:

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Effective Calling
Calling is an act, specifically of God the Father, for he is the one who predestines people “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

1 Peter 2:9, 1 Cor. 1:9, Acts 2:39, 1 Thes. 2:12, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Peter 1:3, Rom. 1:6 - 7, 1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 7:15, Col 3:15, Gal 5:13 Eph 1:18, 4:4, 1 Thes 4:7, 1 Peter 2:20 - 21, 3:9, 1 Tim. 6:12 all indicate that no powerless, merely human calling is in view.

This calling is rather a kind of “summons” from the King of the universe, and it has such power that it brings about the response that it asks for in people’s hearts. It’s an act of God that guarantees a response (Rom 8:30 - all who were called were also justified).

This powerful act of God is often referred to as effective calling. This is distinguished from the general gospel invitation that goes to all people and which some people reject. God’s effective call comes through the human preaching of the gospel. Many hear the gospel through an external calling. But in some cases the gospel call is made so effective by the working of the Holy Spirit in people’s hearts that they do respond - they have received the “effective calling”.

It is important that we not give the impression that people will be saved by the power of this call apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Although it is true that effective calling awakens and brings forth a response from us, we must always insist that this response still has to be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual person puts his or her trust in Christ.

Unless God works in people’s hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response.

In distinction from effective calling, which is entirely an act of God, we may talk about the gospel call, which comes through human speech. The gospel call (or external, or general call) is offered to all people, even those who do not accept it. However, this is not to diminish the importance of the gospel call - it is the means God has appointed through which effective calling will come.
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(Bruce) See Acts 11:18, Philippians 1:29, and 2 Timothy 2:25 - 26.

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”: This is repeated from the last passage. See John 6:37 - 40, 44 - 47. (I pointed to John 12:32 where Jesus says He will draw all people to Himself and ask the question of who all is the Father drawing)

This passage adds this: “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” This is probably the strongest proof text for Calvinism that I’ve run into so far. It is true that God must grant us the privilege of coming to Jesus. But, what is this saying?

Non-Calvinists agree that no one comes to Jesus unless God first pursues, convicts and pulls that person. This is called prevenient grace. But, they would say that this can be resisted.

6.114. John 6:48 - 51
I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

(Bruce) It sounds like anyone (as opposed to the Elect) is offered the bread, and if anyone eats it, they are saved. I would suppose Calvinism would answer this by saying that yes, the bread is offered to all - but no one will eat it except the elect.

6.115. John 6:70 Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.”

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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This becomes especially clear when Jesus says that He intentionally chose Judas, knowing his evil character and intentions. God did not create Judas to be evil, Judas chose that himself. By God's foreknowledge of Judas' evil thoughts and actions, Jesus chose him as one of the twelve to accomplish His purpose in the atonement.
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(Bruce) I have seen a lot of non-Calvinists use the fact that Judas was chosen too as a point against Calvinism. The problem here, at least, is that Jesus is clearly saying He chose them to be His disciples, not His elect.

6.116. John 7:17 If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

(Bruce) It sounds like there is a will component to knowing God. And, Calvinists agree with this. They would say that our wills are what is redeemed by God, and that unless God first regenerates us, we can never have the will to do God's will.

6.117. John 8:34 - 36, 38

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

(Bruce) I think this makes the Calvinist point: Everyone is a slave to sin until God makes them not a slave to sin. It requires the Son to set you free, otherwise we all have a common father, Satan. I think non-Calvinists would agree with this, but say that Jesus' act on the cross broke the chains of sin in everyone. It freed us up to make a decision on who our father is.

6.118. John 8:39 - 45

They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, 40 but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. 41 You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. 43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

(Bruce) Jesus is saying that they cannot hear His words because they are children of Satan. This is a point that Calvinists will bring up to prove total depravity. The argument is not whether we have ears to hear (because we don't naturally). The argument is when and why God gives us ears to hear. But, whether it is through foreknowledge or choosing on God's part, we do need God /Jesus to give us ears to hear before we can hear His message. Does prevenient grace come into play here?

6.119. John 9:3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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It touches upon God's manipulation of history to glorify his name. A good example would be Exod 9:16, cited in Rom 9:17, where God tells Pharaoh: "This is why I have spared you: to show you my power so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." R. Brown, The Gospel According to John I-XII (Doubleday 1977), 371-72.

In John's theology, people might not understand God's eternal purposes until they actually came to pass (cf. 2:22; 12:16; 13:7); in this case, the fulfillment that revealed the purpose arrived many years after the situation began. This principle would have made sense to John's contemporaries; for example, many sages believed that God had allowed Israel to endure troubles in the past so that God might redeem them for his glory.
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(Bruce) God does things on this earth to glorify Himself. There’s no question. Does God do this with every event? What does this say about God’s sovereignty? Although it seems like your average Calvinist thinks God takes more control of things in this world than your average non-Calvinist, I’m not sure this is pertinent to this discussion. Although, if God destines all activities, certainly He would destine each person’s salvation. On the other hand, there seems to be many instances in the Bible where God lets even His people go their own way when they rebel. Is He retaining control of them, or giving them over to chaos outside of His control?

6.120. John 9:37 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”

(Bruce) All agree that when we turn to Him, Jesus will (at least partially) open our eyes. If after we see, if we glorify ourselves, we will become blind.

6.121. John 10:3 - 6, 11
To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the

voice of strangers.” 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

and,

6.122. John 10:14 - 16

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that Jesus has a flock of sheep that He’s known before the beginning of the world. The disagreement is whether the sheep have any say in becoming His sheep.

6.123. John 10:26 - 30

but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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For emphasis, Jesus repeats himself: "But as for you, you do not believe," adding the reason for their unbelief, "because you do not belong to my sheep" (v26). Reintroducing the sheep metaphor, he revisits the parable of vv1-5 and the discourse of vv7-18. One might have expected rather, "You do not belong to my sheep because you do not believe," but the wording here is in keeping with the theology of the Gospel...Those who do not "believe" prove thereby that they are not Jesus' sheep. Behind it all is a strong accent on election: those who "believe" do so because they are already Jesus' sheep (see v16, "other sheep I have"), his gift from the Father.

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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that Jesus knows His sheep, and even cares for those who have not turned their lives over to Him yet. They are still His sheep, just not gathered yet. No one can take sheep away from Him. Can a sheep voluntarily leave? If they do, were they Jesus’ sheep in the first place?

6.124. John 12:31 - 32

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

(Bruce) This is a non-Calvinist proof text. Some people have claimed that all people means "all kinds of people".

This is from https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/7445/john-1232-what-who-does-the-all-refer-to:
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The Greek word for this is pantas, whose root is "pas". Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says of pas: "When used without the articles, it means, "every kind or variety." In this case, the word "all" in the verse has no article, so it means "all kinds of men", so it isn't talking about every single man (universalism), it just denotes a broad spectrum.
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Another kind of response could be that the cross is a general call to all people that they should repent. John 3:14 refers to Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. Whoever looked upon the serpent was healed. The call went out to everyone, but only some answered it.

6.125. John 12:37 - 40
Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,
38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:
"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"
39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,
40 "He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them."

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The writer goes a step beyond "they would not believe," adding, "Therefore they were unable to believe" (v39) on the basis of another text in Isaiah...This is clearly sufficient to explain why "they were unable to believe" (v39; compare 5:44; 8:43). Jesus had said

elsewhere that "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (6:44), or "unless it is given him from the Father" (6:65), and Isaiah's ancient words now put the judgment in even starker terms. Not only has God not "drawn" these people or "given" them faith, but he has "blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts" to make sure they would not repent and be healed! J. R. Michaels, The Gospel of John (Eerdmans 2010), 710.
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(Bruce) This is the crux of this discussion, I think. Does God harden people's hearts, or does He harden people's hearts who refuse to believe in Him (judicial hardening)? How much self-will does a person have when God softens or hardens their heart? By the way, this is a quote from Isaiah about Israel. How much can we apply this to general principles?

6.126. John 12:44 - 50

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

(Bruce) This looks like a non-Calvinist proof-text. A Calvinist agrees that this is true, but that we don't have the ability to believe in Him without His regeneration.

6.127. John 14:20 - 24

In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

(Bruce) This is speaking about the cause and effect of loving Jesus. Anyone who loves Jesus will keep His commandments automatically.

6.128. John 15:1 - 6

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

(Bruce) All Israel was a branch. Is every person a "branch in me", or just those who believe? On casual reading, it looks like it's just those who believe. If that is so, it breaks Calvinism. Of course, Israel is the example, and in Israel there were those who did believe and who didn't. Jesus was speaking to Israelites.

6.129. John 15:16 - You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Some Calvinists (and Augustine) have argued that this a proof text for unconditional election, emphasizing the irrelevance of human choice.

Arminians point out that the statement is made to the disciples with reference to their apostleship, not to their salvation.
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(Bruce) It is likely that Jesus was speaking to His disciples about choosing them as His apostles.

6.130. John 16:7 - 11

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

(Bruce) The relevant (to this topic) part of this passage is that the Holy Spirit came to convict the world. But this could be to bring the elect to repentance and judge the non-elect.

6.131. John 17:2, 6, 9 - 12, 20

since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

6 “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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In John 17:6-19, our Lord effectively prays for his disciples, those whom the Father has given him, but not for the world (vv9-10). In verses 20-26, Jesus then prays for all future believers, once again given to him by the Father (v24; cf. 6:37-44). This intercession is consistent with Jesus' teaching previously: he is the good shepherd who dies for the sheep (10:11,15); his sheep are given to him by his Father (10:29); his sheep receive eternal life due to his death; but not all people are his sheep (10:26-27). All of this is consistent with his office as a priest who offers himself for a particular people and intercedes for those same people. P. Gentry & S. Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant (Crossway 2012), 674-75.

But Judas is not an exception. Jesus didn't choose Judas for the same reason he chose the Eleven. Even before he chose him, Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. That's

why Jesus chose him. Judas had an instrumental role to play in the atonement (Jn 6:64,70-71; 13:10-11,18,21-22). Judas was excluded from rather than included in the sphere of soteriological election and protection. Christ's ability to keep everyone the Father entrusted to him didn't break down in the case of Judas; rather, Judas always had a different function and destiny. Cf. D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Eerdmans 1991), 291-2; 563-4.
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(Bruce) In this case, those that God gave Him are His disciples.

6.132. John 20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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. . . refutes Calvinism's backward and unbiblical order of salvation, where supernatural regeneration must occur before a person irresistibly responds to Christ.

1) God gives revelation through the scriptures "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"
2) A person responds "by believing…"
3) Then "…you may have life in His name."

"Life in His name" comes after hearing His truth and responding to it in faith.
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(Bruce) This does not refute, or prove that God must regenerate a person before they believe.

6.133. Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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God's "foreknowledge" (prognosis) means more than his ability to anticipate the future. It is another way of talking about his determination of events in advance, according to his own plan (cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2,20). Jesus came into the world to fulfill certain God-given roles, and those associated with him had their own roles to play in the drama of redemption.

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(Bruce) Is the fact that God, using His foreknowledge to place people in situations where He knows the outcome, determinism? I would say no. However, I can see where some would say yes. If that's the case, most of this discussion is about semantics. To me, determinism means that God directly controlled the will of all people for a certain outcome. If God "merely" uses foreknowledge, then God has the ability to choose times and places to place people in which an outcome is inevitable. Everyone agrees that if God determines to do something, there will never be a time that it won't happen. But how much does God determine to do something? Does He use a minimal touch to bring about His plan? Or is it required that He touches everything?

6.134. Acts 4:27 - 28

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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The word boule ("purpose, plan, will") appears again (cf. 2:23), together with the verb proorisen ("decided beforehand," a compound of the verb used in 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26,31), now with the expression "your power" (cheir, "hand"; cf. 4:30; 11:21; 13:11) added to stress God's sovereignty in all these events. Once in each chapter of Acts so far, Peter has expressed the confidence that God is able to carry out his purpose even through rebellious human beings who do not accept his revealed will (1:16-20; 2:23-36; 3:13-15).

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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:

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Dozens of Old Testament prophetic passages about the crucifixion also confirm God's foreknowledge and will for the crucifixion to occur. There's no question that God foreknows and plans unique things to occur out of His love. He is sovereign, existing outside of time, having foreknowledge of the evil choices of people, and can work all things together to bring about His purpose.

Why would the word "foreknowledge" be included in the passage if it's not an important element? Otherwise it would just be God programming robots to accomplish His purpose.

Throughout the entire Bible. God expresses anger or heartbreak over the evil done by people. This would be irrational on God's part if God has decreed all evil actions by people - He would be angry at Himself for His own decrees.

But Calvinism teaches that God has decreed all things, so in Calvinism it's actually God's SECRET will that there is this disgusting sexual immorality in the Corinthian church. Thus Calvinists constantly have to split God's will, God's love, and other aspects of God's character into different categories to make their philosophy fit Scripture.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God will cause things to happen in important times in history to accomplish His plans. The discussion is whether God does this all the time, or very rarely.

6.135. Acts 5:31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

(Bruce) One might mention that not all of Israel repented, so the idea that God gives repentance irresistibly is out. However, this could be saying that God gave these gifts to His elect of Israel.

6.136. Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

(Bruce) Calvinists would say that people can resist the Holy Spirit (in fact, they would say that we always do if God doesn’t regenerate us first). Some non-Calvinists misrepresent the Calvinist viewpoint by saying that they say the Holy Spirit is irresistible.

6.137. Acts 9:10 - 19
Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my

name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened.

(Bruce) I think that everyone agrees that there are certain key figures in the Bible that God either forces them into the kingdom, or hardens their hearts. It looks like Paul did not come to Jesus out of his own free choice. Are these examples the norm?

6.138. Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

(Bruce) See John 6:44, 65, Philippians 1:29, and 2 Timothy 2:25 - 26. One interpretation of this is that God granted repentance to all of the Gentiles, even though all of them will not take Him up on His offer. Another would say that this is all kinds of Gentiles, not all. We probably shouldn't put any extra meaning on this verse other than that God included (some) Gentiles in His kingdom.

6.139. Acts 13:39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

(Bruce) How do people come to believe?

6.140. Acts 13:48 - And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The present verse is as unqualified a statement of absolute predestination-"the eternal purpose of God" (Calvin]-as is found anywhere in the NT. Those believed who were appointed (the passive implies, by God) to do so. The rest, one infers, did not believe, did not receive eternal life, and were thus appointed to death. The positive statement implies the negative.

It is God who "assigns" people to the group of people who inherit eternal life. The idea of being "assigned to a certain classification" may echo the OT concept of being recorded in the 'book of life," in which God's people are listed.
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https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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The Calvinists argue that this verse teaches unconditional election, because it would have been easy to say "as many as believed were appointed eternal life" but the reverse is stated.

The Arminians point out that the participle translated "were appointed to" (tetagmenoi) is in the middle-passive voice. This means that the same form is used in Greek to designate both the middle voice and the passive voice. The NASB has translated it in the passive voice. However, if it is translated in the middle voice, the passage would read ". . .as many as set themselves to eternal life believed" (cf I Cor. 16:15 where the same participle is translated in the middle voice).
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/john-acts/acts-1348-does-this-passage-teach-that-only-some-are-appointed-for-eternal-life/ says:
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CLAIM: Luke records, “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Does this passage imply that some are appointed to eternal life and others are appointed to hell?

RESPONSE: There are two ways of understanding this passage from an Arminian perspective:

OPTION #1. This passage should be translated in the middle voice—not the passive voice
Jack Cottrell argues that this passage should be translated in the middle voice (“set themselves to eternal life”), not the passive voice (“had been appointed to eternal life”). The original Greek is unclear. It is difficult to tell (apart from the context) whether this is passive or middle voice.

The context indicates that Luke intended the middle voice in verse 48. Earlier, Luke writes, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you

repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (v.46). Here, Luke is purposefully contrasting the Jewish people's response to that of the Gentiles. In both cases, these clauses should be translated in the middle voice. These Jewish people rejected the message in the same way that the Gentiles accepted it.

OPTION #2. This refers to Gentiles who were "enrolled" by being people who feared the Lord. Remember, the book of Acts is a transition period from the Old to the New Covenant. Many Gentiles believed in the God of the OT. These are sometimes called "God-fearers" or "God-fearing proselytes" (Acts 13:43). Since they hadn't heard about Christ yet, they were "appointed" or "enrolled" to come to faith because they already were followers of Yahweh.
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(Bruce) This is a major Calvinist proof-text. The Greek word for appoint is "tasso". Non-Calvinists respond to this in a few ways: 1. This word is not used in the same way by Luke elsewhere in his writings. 2. If Luke wanted to communicate God's appointing of people to His kingdom ahead of time, Luke would have used a different word. 3. God sees people appointed through His foreknowledge.

6.141. Acts 16:14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

(Bruce) There's a few places in the New Testament that talk about God having to open our eyes / heart / ears to be able to see and hear. In this case, Lydia was already a worshiper of God. When and why does God open our hearts to the Gospel?

6.142. Acts 16:29 - 31
And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Even the order of how people are saved through faith is backward in Calvinism. 10 The Bible says that by faith anyone can believe to become saved and regenerated. Calvinism teaches that all flesh is wicked, people are corpse-like dead, and supernatural

regeneration must occur first to even hear the gospel and have faith. They use the analogy of the raising of Lazarus from the dead to illustrate this, though the biblical text doesn't equate this story with regeneration.

Ephesians 2:1 does say "And you were dead in your offenses and sin." Jesus also told Christians in the church at Sardis: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." (Revelation 3:1). Deadness in biblical analogy generally means separated from God's life-giving Spirit, and therefore not bearing fruit (for instance the vine and branches analogy in John 15:1-8). But it does not mean total inability to hear and respond, or how could the church at Sardis hear Jesus speaking to them if they were "dead"? The Bible has many examples of people who have the ability to listen, but who choose to harden their own hearts over time and refuse to hear His voice.
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(Bruce) The guard is reacting to a miracle that he just saw. God brought about that miracle. There's nothing here to indicate how God has prepared the guard's heart ahead of time.

6.143. Acts 17:26 - 28

> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for
> "'In him we live and move and have our being';
> as even some of your own poets have said,
> "'For we are indeed his offspring.'

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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God "determined" not only the existence of human beings but also the conditions of their existence.
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(Bruce) This is a good Monlinist proof text. Molinism states that through His middle knowledge, God places everyone in a place and time that they will respond to the Gospel. A couple of points on this passage: It says that God has determined the allotted periods and boundaries of nations. It doesn't mention anything about individual salvation. Secondly, this is what God did as a result of the Tower of Babel event. At that time, He determined the boundaries and periods at that time. After that, how much

self-determination did each nation have? When one nation invaded another, were they within or not within God's will and plan?

6.144. Acts 17:30 - 31
The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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This passage says that God "commands all people everywhere to repent," not a preselected few. And it says he has given assurance - the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 - to all. Each person can accept or reject the gift, but God's glory and love are demonstrated in His offering it to all unconditionally.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God commands all people to repent. Calvinists say this is His outward call. Because God commands we repent, we are guilty if we don't - even if we do have total inability to repent.

6.145. Acts 18:27 And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed

(Bruce) We do believe through His grace. Is this predestination, or can anyone believe through God's prevenient grace?

6.146. Romans 1:6 - 7
including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Bruce) Those of us who belong to Jesus were called by Him. Is everyone called, but only some respond? Or, are only those who respond called? It seems like this verse is saying the latter, but it's not conclusive. If we answered a phone call, we got called. If we refused to answer the phone, did we get called?

6.147. Romans 1:16 - 17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.

(Bruce) It’s not conclusive at all, but it appears that this is saying belief comes before salvation.

6.148. Romans 1:18 - 32

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:

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The Bible teaches that people are naturally depraved and sinful, but that we all have the ability to respond to God, first through His general revelation to all people. If people are totally depraved to the point we can't see or hear God's calling and revelation without supernatural regeneration, why does this scripture say that His eternal power and divine nature can be clearly observed by all people, who therefore have no excuse?
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(Bruce) All people have the witness of creation. God is clearly shown to all people. It looks like this passage is saying that some will reject this witness (and presumably, some will accept this witness). It's at this point of unbelief / unresponsiveness that God blinds these people. This passage is saying that we are expected to respond to God's witness in creation. Everyone agrees. Calvinists will say that no one has the ability to respond without first being regenerated.

6.149. Romans 2:4 - 16, 29

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.
6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking[a] and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.
12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.
29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

(Bruce) I would think that if God arbitrarily picks people to be saved, this would be the very definition of partiality. Here, it says that God shows no partiality, which would seem to indicate that there is a non-partial judgement based on our actions. The Calvinist would say that it's impossible for us to do good, but here it seems to outline a group who does good. Of course, in the next passage it says that no one is good. Furthermore, Calvinists would point to the law that is written on their hearts. They didn't write the law on their hearts themselves. This is God's regeneration.

6.150. Romans 3:9 - 31

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written:
"None is righteous, no, not one;
11 no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."
13 "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."
"The venom of asps is under their lips."
14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."
15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16 in their paths are ruin and misery,
17 and the way of peace they have not known."
18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."
19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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God is outside time, and sees the past, present and future at once. At the same time, the Bible is clear that He wants all people to be saved, and that He gives people free will. Some take His foreknowledge and election to refer to individuals, while others view His election as corporate (He chooses a people for Himself in Christ, just as He chose Israel). Either way, He doesn't arbitrarily or unconditionally elect people to eternal life or eternal torment. Scripture is clear that it is based on His foreknowledge, a knowledge that transcends time. He sets His love upon those who have a tender heart toward Him, who will humble themselves and freely come to Him like a child in faith.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that we are all under sin and cannot save ourselves. Vs 11 goes on to say that no one seeks for God. (This is a quote from Psalm 14:2 - 3). Non-Calvinists say this is true until God sends His Son to save us. Calvinists say this is proof of total depravity. Does our lack of initiative take away our ability to respond to God's initiative? Is Paul making this point in the context of following the Law? Look at what Paul talks about in the verses immediately after the quote. It certainly does seem like Paul is making a point about those under the Law and their inability to be justified under the Law. It is important to read Paul's writing in total. Any small part by itself will be misleading.

6.151. Romans 5:1 - 11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

(Bruce) This could either be saying that God died for all the ungodly, or only for those who He saved. There's nothing to indicate which.

6.152. Romans 5:12 12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

(Bruce) This passage is one of those that show that we are dead in our sins. Calvinists say that if we are dead, we are unable to respond to God at all unless He first gives us life. Everyone would agree that unless we are in Christ, we are dead in our sins. Whether we would ever want to be in Christ previous to regeneration is what is being discussed.

6.153. Romans 5:15 - 19
But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

https://evangelicalarminians.org/5-biblical-texts-that-calvinists-cant-wiggle-out-of/ says:
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Chapter 5 is the key passage in which Paul talks about original sin, and how the sinful nature has passed on to every person because Adam sinned, Adam got a sin nature,

and therefore, everyone born after Adam inherits that sin nature. Everyone sins, and therefore, everyone dies spiritually. Adam brought death to all people through that single act in the garden. Calvinists typically overlook the significance of verse 15, however. In this verse, Paul rhetorically asks if “the many” died through Adam’s trespass, how much more did God’s grace and gift overflow to “the many” by one man (i.e Jesus Christ)?

How many people did Adam bring death to? Verse 12 says “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned”. Paul said earlier in chapter 3 that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (6:23).

The Bible is pretty clear that “the many” who died by Adam’s trespass is every single human being to ever walk the Earth. Everyone has sinned. Everyone is affected by the curse our first father brought upon us. But then, Romans 5:15 goes on to say that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice will overflow to “the many”.

Who is “the many” spoken of here? All of humanity. Every single human being. The ones to whom God’s grace and gift go to are the same ones who are dying by the curse of Adam. Adam brought death to “the many”. Jesus brings life to “the many”. What this means is that Jesus died on the cross and offers saving grace to every single sinner, in contradiction to the Calvinist doctrine of Limited Atonement.

It does no good to render “the many” to only the elect, or to every type of people group. Why? Because the phrase “the many” is used twice in the same sentence, contrasting what Adam did to what Christ did. If “the many” means only a select group of people in the latter part of the verse, then what about the former part of the verse? Did Adam bring death to only “the elect” or to “all kinds” of people? And if one says that “the many” in the former part of the verse means every human being but that the phrase only means the elect in the latter part, then what you’re saying is that Paul is equivocating. You’re essentially saying that Paul is using the same phrase in the same sentence in two different ways.

I don’t see any way to accommodate this verse to the L in T.U.L.I.P. Jesus died for the same number of people who have sinned: everyone!

The same problem plagues the Calvinist once we get to verse 18: “Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.” Does “all people” mean “all types of people” in the latter, and literally all human beings in the former? Then Paul is equivocating. Does it

mean “all types of people” in both instances? Then Paul is saying only some in every group of people is affected by Adam’s sin. Does “all people” mean every human being in both instances? Then Limited Atonement is false.

One might object at this point that taking these 2 verses to mean all of humanity entails universalism (i.e the view that everyone will actually be saved), but that would be misguided. The universalist could only use this verse to argue for his view if he rips them out of context. In verse 16, Paul writes “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”. You see, the gift is offered to all, but only those who receive it benefit from it. Therefore, saying that Romans 5:15 and Romans 5:18 are referring to all humanity doesn’t at all lead to universalism.
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(Bruce) I think the above article makes good points. Vs 18, especially, is a good non-Calvinist proof text. I really don’t think one can get away with saying all doesn’t mean all people here. I think a good Calvinist response would be to say that yes, Jesus’ act on the cross opened the way for all men to come to God. However, we are still unable to respond to Jesus unless He regenerates us first.

Personally, I’ve put forth a hypothesis, based on this verse and others, that Jesus actually did save everyone on the cross, putting everyone in a default position of being justified before God. The only thing we have to do is believe, and avoid blaspheming the Holy Spirit with unbelief. This sounds extremely non-Calvinistic (and probably most Calvinists would object). However, this could still uphold the Calvinist position by claiming that we will all commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, unless God enables us not to. Furthermore, this hypothesis only goes as far as justification, and doesn’t say anything about appropriation.

6.154. Romans 6:3 - 8

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set

free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

(Bruce) This outlines the extreme transformation that occurs to those who come to Christ. When we describe what it takes to be in Christ, we need to keep this passage in mind.

6.155. Romans 8:1 - 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 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. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 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. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

(Bruce) v7 - 8 are Calvinist proof texts. I think everyone agrees that those who live in the flesh cannot submit to God. The flesh is hostile to God. Jesus both freed us from the flesh, yet, by our own disobedience, we still live according to the flesh in various areas in our lives. It won't be until we are finally glorified after we are dead, that we will finally be entirely free of the (unglorified) flesh. In those areas where we still live in the flesh, we do not and cannot submit to God. God works in us to sanctify us and brings us to a place where we will submit to Him in those areas. Yet, we will still have areas that God is working on until the day we die.

Looking at v7 - 8, it certainly describes our sin nature, and it describes why we cannot come to Jesus without His sacrifice. But given His sacrifice, I don't think this necessarily says we are totally depraved (that is, unable to respond to Jesus' sacrifice and general call).

6.156. Romans 8:28 - 30

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he

> might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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[Rom 8:28] The believers' love for God is ultimately due to God's purpose in calling them to salvation.

The text does not say that "some" of those called were justified. It fuses the called and justified together so that all those who are called receive the blessing of justification. If all those who are called are also justified, then calling must be effectual and must create faith, for "all" those who are called are justified, and justification cannot occur without faith (3:21-22,28; 5:1)...The foundational reason why all things work for believers good begins to emerge: God's unstoppable purpose in calling believers to salvation cannot be frustrated, and thus he employs all things to bring about the plan he had from the beginning in the lives of believers.

[Rom 8:29] The good realized is not due to fate, luck, or even the moral superiority of believers; it is to be ascribed to God's good and sovereign will, which has from eternity past to eternity future secured and guaranteed the good of those whom he has chosen. This is the significance of "the golden chain"...In each case God is the subject of the verbs...The good he has begun he will finish (Phil 1:6; cf. 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thes 5:24)

The object of the verb proegno is personal, "those whom" God set his affection on...not just facts about the world but specific persons.
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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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In this passage and others (Acts 2:23, 1 Peter 1:2, Psalm 139:4, Romans 11:2), God is said to have ‘foreknowledge‘, that he ‘foreknew’ (Greek: ‘proginōskō’) who will choose him. The meaning of this word is never ‘foreordained’ or ‘fore-decreed’, but always ‘foreknew’, as detailed scholarly analysis demonstrates.

Calvinists argue that God can only know what He ordains, which is a logical fallacy at the most basic level. Even we, who are created in His image, can know things that will happen, even if we don’t ordain them to.

Who are those “whom He foreknew” in these passages? The answer we can all agree upon is that they are His chosen, His ‘Elect’. However, these passages teach that God’s election is not ‘unconditional’ as Calvinists claim, but based on something that God ‘foreknows’ will happen.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-829-30-is-this-passage-teaching-predestination/ says:
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CLAIM: Calvinistic interpreters argue that Paul is teaching predestination and irresistible grace in this passage. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: A couple of observations can be made regarding this passage:

First, God’s predestination is based on his foreknowledge of who would freely choose him. The order of Romans 8:29 is essential to understanding it effectively. God chooses the one “whom he foreknew”—not the other way around. His election is based on those who he knew would freely choose him.

Second, this is plural, rather than singular. Paul writes, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined… 30And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” This is not referring to an individual believer; it is referring to the entire church of believers. This passage is not about me; it is about we. Therefore, it would be mistaken to interpret this passage as referring to individual salvation.

OBJECTION: Foreknowledge refers to knowing people—not actions
Calvinists retort that this passage refers to God’s knowing us—not what we will do. It is a Hebrew concept to refer to “knowing” someone in a personal or relational sense. Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes,

The text does not say that God foreknew what certain individuals might do, only that he foreknew them as individuals to whom he would extend the grace of salvation.

In this sense foreknowledge can only mean that God has fixed a special attention upon certain people or has loved them in a saving way… This is the way the word generally is used in the Old Testament.
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(Bruce) Calvinists call this passage the golden chain of redemption. According to this, God works in the following order: God foreknows, then God predestines, then God calls, then God justifies, then God glorifies. If you look at this passage as applying to an individual, you could draw the conclusions of individual predestination, limited atonement and irresistible grace.

Response #1: If God predestines people, He doesn't have to foreknow. That would be one step. Since there is a step one, step two would be God predestining people based on foreknowledge. Although God issues a call to everyone, those who He knew would respond, do. Those who respond, He justifies.

Response #2: Throughout this passage, Paul is talking about "us". If you look at this passage applying to "us", God first foreknows the group who will be in Him, and then predestines "us" to be in Him, once again based on His foreknowledge. Just as He knows we would, we respond to His call. When we do, He justifies us.

Even without the responses, I don't think this is a very powerful Calvinist proof-text. It doesn't really tell if a person's response to God's call is based on man or not. One could say the very word predestination means that God is making the choice ahead of time. This would be true if it wasn't paired with foreknowledge. If predestination is based on His foreknowledge, it opens the door for the concept that God left our response up to us.

6.157. Romans 8:33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has an elect that He justifies.

6.158. Romans 8:35 - 39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,
"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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Those who defend the view that believers may possibly forsake their salvation note that nothing is said here about the impossibility of believers separating themselves from Christ's love...[however], the objective of the text is to rule out that very eventuality. Affliction, persecution, famine, death, and so on are mentioned because these are the sorts of things that would cause a believer to renounce faith in Christ.
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(Bruce) This is a proof text supporting Perseverance of the Saints. The general non-Calvinist response to this is that individuals can walk away from Christ themselves.

6.159. Romans 9:4 - 33

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its

molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”
26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”
27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” 29 And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”
30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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[Rom 9:13]...I think that a corporate and salvation-historical interpretation of vv10-13 does not ultimately satisfy the data of the text.

First, Paul suggests that he is thinking of Jacob and Esau as individuals in vv10b-11a when he mentions their conception, birth, and "works"-language that is not easily applied to nations. Second, several of Paul's key words and phrases in this passage are words he generally uses elsewhere with reference to the attaining of salvation; and, significantly, they occur with this sense in texts closely related to this one: "election" These words are therefore difficult to apply to nations or peoples, for Paul clearly does

not believe that peoples or nations-not even Israel-are called and chosen by God for salvation in the sense Paul is using the word. Third, a description here of how God calls nations to participate in the historical manifestation of his salvific acts runs counter to Paul's purpose in this paragraph. In order to justify his assertion in v6b that not all those who belong to physical Israel belong also to spiritual Israel, and thus to vindicate God's faithfulness (v6a), he must show that the OT justifies a discrimination within physical Israel in terms of the enjoyment of salvation. An assertion in these verses to the effect that God has chosen Israel rather than Edom for a positive role in the unfolding of the plan of salvation would not contribute to this argument at all...The nations denoted by these names, we must remember, have come into existence in and through the individuals who first bore those names.

[Rom 9:18] First, structural and linguistic considerations show that v18 is closely related to vv22-23, where the "vessels of mercy, destined to glory" are contrasted with "vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction." As God's mercy leads to the enjoyment of glory, God's hardening brings wrath and destruction. Second, the word group "harden" is consistently used in Scripture to depict a spiritual condition that renders one unreceptive and disobedient to God and his word. Third, while the Greek word is a different one, most scholars recognize that Paul's references to Israel's "hardening" in Rom 11:7 and 25 are parallel to the hardening here. Yet the hardening in Rom 11 is a condition that excludes people from salvation. Fourth, it is even possible that the references to Pharaoh's hardening in Exodus carry implications for his own spiritual state and destiny.

[Rom 9:9] The present issue relates to the salvation of ethnic Israel, not merely to its historical destiny. The specific terms and phrases used in vv6-9 demonstrate that salvation is at issue. The phrase "children of God" (v8) is invariably soteriological in Paul (Rom 8:16,21; Phil 2:15), designating those who are in Christ. Similarly, "the children of the promise" refers to those who are the recipients of God's saving promises; it cannot be restricted to the temporal destiny of God's people. Finally, the word "call" in Paul has a soteriological cast, confirming that the subject relates to inclusion in the people of God.

Another controversy exists over whether the salvation promised here relates to individuals or groups. Many opt for the latter and exclude the former, because Paul focuses on the salvation promised to corporate Israel. I have argued at some length elsewhere that such a dichotomy is logically and exegetically flawed, since groups are always composed of individuals, and one cannot have the former without including the latter. At this juncture I should note that the selection of a remnant out of Israel implies

the selection of some individuals out of a larger group. Those who insist that corporate election alone is intended in chapters 9 and 11 are inconsistent when they revert to individual decisions of faith in chapter 10. The three chapters must be interpreted together, yielding the conclusion that both corporate and individual election are involved.

[Rom 9:11-12a] The wording underscores that God's promise to bless Jacob was both prior to and not based on any good works he did, and the exclusion of Esau should be estimated similarly: his evil works were not contemplated in advance as reason for exclusion...[Paul] counters the notion found in some texts that the free will of human beings is ultimate. Any attempt to explain the promise of Jacob on the basis of God's foresight of Jacob's good works turns the text upside down.

Nor is it convincing to say that the text isn't about predestination. Paul specifically says that human works are excluded "in order that God's electing purpose might prevail (v11) and contrasts "call" with "works" (v12), showing that God's election is the ground of Jacob's exclusion...It is telling that "faith" and "works'" are not contrasted here, but "works" and God's "calling". We have already seen that "calling" in Paul is effective: God's call creates what is desired.

If Paul desired to say that election and calling depend on human faith, he could have easily clarified this in the course of his argument. His failure to insert human faith as the decisive and ultimate basis for God's election indicates that God's call and election are prior to and the ground of human faith.

[Rom 4:12b-13] The choice of Jacob instead of Esau contradicts the notion that we have corporate over against individual election here, though there are certainly corporate implications as well. We must also beware of a rationalizing expedient that domesticates the text by exalting human freedom so that it fit neatly into our preconceptions.

[Rom 9:15] There is no basis for saying that what Paul says here [9:14] applies only to Israel. Paul has already proclaimed God's sovereignty in saving gentiles (8:28-30), and he turns to the same idea in 9:24-26).

[Rom 9:16] Human works were excluded previously as the basis of which God elects and calls (vv11-12). Verse 16 restates and clarifies this theme by indicating that human choice and effort are not the basis on which God's merciful promises is received.

[Rom 9:17-18] The very point of verse 19 is that mercy and hardening are antithetical, and no indication is given that those who are hardened receive God's mercy...It is a mistake to understand 11:26-32 as a promise that those hardened throughout history will have their hardening removed.

[Rom 9:19] If God shows mercy and hardens whomever he wills regardless of human effort or choice, then how can he possibly assign blame to human beings for their choices and actions? God's will determines whatever occurs, and thus he rather than human beings must be held responsible. The formulation of the question suggests that the interpretation of vv14-18 is on target, for the question would scarcely be raised this way if the previous verses taught that the ultimate factor in human destiny were human choices. The question emerges precisely because the destiny of human beings is attributed to the will of God. Nor does Paul in vv19-23 disagree with the idea that God's will is the ultimate cause of one's destiny. Paul could have easily clarified the situation if he wanted to assert that human beings could actually resist God's will. Is it not the case that Paul's answer to v20 is shocking? We expect a very different answer to that question. If human beings cannot ultimately resist God's will, then how should we interpret Paul's response to the complaint in v20? I have already shown that he does not deny the premise: no one can ultimately resist God's will. What he denies is the conclusion.

[Rom 9:22] Since "vessels of wrath" refers to eschatological judgment and "vessels of mercy" to eschatological glory, and since no evident adversative sense can be found between verses 21 and 22-23, it follows that the vessels for honor and dishonor most naturally denote the saved and the perishing, respectively.

The most important objection is that God would not make vessels in order to destroy them. Many scholars conclude from this parallel [Rom 2:4] that 9:22 means that God is patient because he is waiting for people to repent. That is hard to square with the evidence contained in v22. Those with whom he is patient are "vessels of wrath" heading for eschatological judgment in contrast to the "vessels of mercy" in v23, who will experience eschatological salvation. Nor is there any intimation that the vessels of wrath will later become vessels of mercy, since the text says that they are "prepared for destruction."

Finally, the participial phrase in v22 explains why God bears patiently with those who will experience his wrath. He wants "to show forth his anger and make known his power"...In Pharaoh's case God demonstrates his patience by not destroying Pharaoh immediately, even though he resisted God's command. By delaying his judgment on Pharaoh,

however, God magnified his name and exhibited more forcefully the greatness of his salvation and the terror of his judgment. God defers his immediate judgment of vessels of wrath so that he can unveil the full extent of his power and wrath on those who continually resist his offer of repentance.

In any case, one cannot by exegetical means rescue God from willing the fate of the vessels of wrath. This too was part of his plan, and thus double predestination cannot be averted.
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https://www.theologyproject.online/post/how-romans-9-11-and-romans-8-make-me-arminian says:
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(This is part 2 of this article, continued from Romans 11:20)

> Whatever we ultimately say about Romans 9–11, we must acknowledge that these chapters constitute a single coherent argument. And if Paul portrays individual election as conditional in chapter 11, then whatever he says about election in chapter 9 must be coherent with what he says in chapter 11. So, let's take another look at chapter 9.
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> The argument begins with God's promise to Abraham to give him a son. The focus of the text is the priority of God's promise to do something for Abraham that the man could not do for himself, namely give him a family. The promise is then traced through Abraham's family to Rebecca and her sons – Jacob and Esau. That brings us to Romans 9:11–12 where Paul asserts the unconditionality of election and substantiates it with a quote from Genesis 25:23, "The elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)." And this is an instance where the context of the Old Testament quotation is critical. In Genesis 25:23, God says this to Rebecca as Esau and Jacob struggle within her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." Here the choice of Jacob over Esau is explicitly construed with their representative function in view. The point of the choice has nothing to do with either man's individual election to salvation. Are we to conclude from this that Esau is burning in hell? That doesn't come up. What is said about Jacob and Esau has everything to do with the election and passing over of the groups, respectively, who will descend from them. If we interpret Paul's Old Testament quote in light of its original context, then we must conclude that unconditional election in Romans 9–11 is unconditional corporate election and not unconditional individual election.

It’s significant that the notion of corporate election shows up at the beginning of Paul’s argument in Romans 9–11 and suggests the subsequent parts of the argument should be read in light of that corporate dynamic. This suggestion is substantiated by the presence of corporate language as the argument progresses. Romans 9:25–26 highlights the possibility of movement from non-elect status into the elect community. That’s what is meant when those described as “not my people” people are made part of God’s beloved and chosen family. Someone might object by pointing to Pharaoh in 9:17. Is he not an individual elected to destruction? But Pharaoh doesn’t here function as the paradigmatic reprobate destined for damnation. Paul says nothing about Pharaoh’s eternal destiny. The point is that God used Pharaoh (who likely represents Egypt) as an instrument to vindicate his promises to the Patriarchs. This God keeps his promises to his people. Paul’s point is not to show us some unconditionally elect individuals in contrast to other unconditionally reprobate individuals. His point is to vindicate God’s faithfulness to his covenant people as the God who always keeps his promises. And God is not unjust to employ sinners in the amplification of his glory in keeping his word.

To summarize the argument to this point, Paul articulates two categories of election in Romans 9–11. One is unconditional corporate election to salvation, and the other is conditional individual election to salvation. The parts of Romans 9–11 that describe unconditional election are dealing with the group. The parts of Romans 9–11 that describe conditional election are dealing with the individual. This solves the apparent inconsistency and provides a framework for a coherent reading of the whole of Romans 9–11.

We’ve already seen that Paul’s unconditional language applies to groups, while his conditional language applies to individuals. So, if God will unconditionally glorify those he foreknows, then it suggests Paul is here thinking primarily of the group over the individual.

The question then becomes whether there is evidence in the immediate context to substantiate this claim. It turns out there is. Paul employs group designations in a variety of places in Romans 8. Consider, for one, his use of familial language. Sons (or children) of God is an expressly corporate designation (8:14, 16, 17, 19, 21). That Paul is thinking of the group when he uses that term is evident in the masculine “sons” (Greek huioi), which is an inclusive term describing the group of individuals, whether men or women, who are indwelt by the Spirit of God. That familial image is also prominent in Romans 8:28–30, which suggests those verses should be understood with a view to their corporate dimensions. The golden chain is about membership in "a

large family" (8:29). It is about the group of those who are foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. As we saw in Romans 11:17-25, individuals may move into that group on the condition of faith or out of it on the condition of unbelief.

Suffice it to say there are plenty of well-established reasons for thinking Paul's view of unconditional election is primarily a corporate category. That is not to disregard the individual reality of personal salvation; it is to put the conditionality of personal salvation in its proper context. God saves individuals, but he saves them as part of a group.

Let's dispense with the notion that Arminians can only be Arminians despite texts like Romans 8:28–30 and Romans 9–11. We Arminians are not engaged in efforts to sidestep or explain away those passages. To the contrary, our entire theological system is built on careful exegesis of these texts and confidence in their trustworthiness. That's why Romans 9–11 (and Romans 8) make me Arminian.

NB: You might be interested to know that the most extensive and detailed available exegesis of Romans 9 is written by an Arminian scholar. Take a look at Brian Abasciano's Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.1-9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis and Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.10-18: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis. Brian is currently finishing up a third volume that finishes out Romans 9:19-33. Three books, all on Romans 9, all written by an Arminian.
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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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To understand it correctly, the 9th chapter of Romans must be read in the context of the entire book of Romans, in the context of its Old Testament references, in the context of who Paul was referring to at each point, and in the context of various types of election that are seen in the Bible.

As referenced above in Romans 3, the major theme of the book of Romans contrasts the hopeless efforts of people to be saved through their works or religious heritage vs. God's heart for people to be saved by humble faith. The theme of faith as the only way to God is clear throughout the Bible. Hebrews 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please God."

But there is another major theme woven through Romans, of Paul's broken heart over Israel's overall rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Then Paul again weaves in the theme of salvation by works vs. salvation by faith. He contrasts those who like Abraham are true Jewish believers by humble faith in God ('children of the promise'), vs. Jews who rely on their cultural identity and legalistic, self-righteous works ('children of the flesh'). Romans 9:6-13.

Calvinists zoom in with colored lenses and read only the words "election", "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad", and "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." In so doing they have torn the words from their historical and biblical context.

Again, the word 'election' means 'choice'. Along with being chosen for salvation, there are a variety of things in the Bible for which people can be chosen or elected.

Election of a nation:

Deuteronomy 14:2

Election to service or leadership:

1 Samuel 16:10-13

Election to carry on a lineage:

Psalm 135:4

Paul in Romans, and the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 135, are referring to 'Jacob' and 'Esau' as chosen people groups of lineage, again making the same overarching contrast of Jacob's legacy of faith in God's promise vs. Esau's legacy of selfishness and preoccupation with the things of the world.

In Romans 9:12, Paul refers back to Genesis 25:23, when Rebekah asked God why the two children in her womb seemed to struggle with each other The passage in Genesis also speaks of election to serve and carry on a lineage ("the older shall serve the younger"), not being irresistibly chosen for individual salvation.

The Apostle Paul further clarifies his intended meanings in his letter to the Galatians, saying that in his references to historical Jewish individuals, he intends a higher layer

of meaning that these people and their stories “may be interpreted allegorically.”
Galatians 4:21-31:
“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,
‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be
more than those of the one who has a husband.’
"Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.’ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.”
Throughout Paul’s epistles, he similarly contrasts salvation by faith available to Jews, Gentiles, and all who will believe, vs. false salvation by ‘slavery’ to religious heritage and works.

Further, the term ‘hated’ used in verse 13 (“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”) doesn’t mean “unconditionally hated by their Creator before they were born.” In Luke 14:26, Jesus makes this apparently harsh statement: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Taken out of context, Jesus tells us to hate our parents and children and siblings.

Continuing on in Romans 9:14-18:

What is the “injustice on God’s part” Paul is referring to? That He has sovereignly and arbitrarily predestined some individuals for heaven and most for hell? Where in the text does it say that?

Paul’s style of writing in Romans and other epistles includes passages where he anticipates the questions that will arise from his statements. These objections are raised by an anticipated ‘objector’, the primary type of person that will question the

ideas presented. Calvinists assume the objector in Romans 9 is a person arguing against Calvinistic determinism of individuals to heaven or hell. But that's not who the objector is. The objector in Romans 9 is the same objector throughout Romans, especially seen back in Romans 3. It is a first-century Jew resentful that God appears to no longer esteem the Jews as His only chosen people, instead now pouring out His spirit on all who believe - even to prostitutes and tax collectors. From Romans 3:1-5: "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?"

By widening our lens, we see Paul's overall theme throughout Romans 9, his broken heart over Israel's overall rejection of Christ. God's chosen people were largely rejecting their Messiah, while Gentile sinners were coming to Jesus by the thousands in faith. How could God have mercy and compassion on these Gentile tax collectors and prostitutes while He has apparently hardened the hearts of His own chosen people? Does God arbitrarily harden some people's hearts so that they will never believe?

The theme of hardening culminates in a metaphor in the next passage.

Romans 9:19-29:

Again note the constant emphasis on the two groups being contrasted: Verse 25: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people." There is nothing about contrasting individuals sovereignly predestined for heaven vs. those predestined for hell. The text is contrasting God's original chosen people, Israel, who have become hardened and calloused, with the Gentiles who are coming to Him by faith, Paul's consistent thesis.

Paul's analogy to God as a Potter shaping vessels in this passage is a reference to Jeremiah 18:1-10. The passage would be very familiar to Paul's Jewish audience. Unlike the Calvinistic interpretation that some individual people are vessels of destruction hated by their Creator from birth, Paul's point is that God can redeem and reshape a vessel (a person or nation) that seems hardened and useless, if they will simply humble themselves and repent:

"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, 'Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter

does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.'"
Paul's reference to the passage in Jeremiah gives context to all of Romans 9. God in His mercy looks for people and nations who are willing to humble themselves in faith, and He will turn their lives around. Their destiny is not unconditionally and arbitrarily predetermined. Nations, and the individuals who make up nations, are free to choose God or not, and He will have mercy on them or not.

The perfect, holy God didn't mar the clay by sovereign decree. The clay, as a metaphor for Israel, was marred by its own sin and rebellion. As individuals we can also become marred, spoiled clay. But there is no sovereign decree about our destiny. Calvinists gloss over it, but the good news contained in the final verses of the passage in Jeremiah are unmistakably about our real choices as nations and individuals: "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."

Paul also clarified his symbolic use of 'vessels' in 2 Timothy 2:20-21:
"Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."
Consistent with the meaning of 'vessels' in Romans 9, Paul speaks of a person choosing to be a vessel for honorable use, rather than for dishonorable. There is no reference to vessels being decreed to be one or the other.

The concluding sentences of Romans 9 bring Paul's themes home, contrasting Jewish legalism vs. Gentile righteousness by faith. Romans 9:30-33:
"What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because

they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,
'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'"
Again, there is nothing in these concluding sentences of the chapter that point to unconditional salvation or damnation of individuals. Paul again makes it very clear in his conclusion that he is contrasting Gentiles who were coming to Christ in faith vs. Jews who were attempting to reach God through legalistic works.

Judicial Hardening

The Potter analogy doesn't end in Romans 9. Many Israelites had hardened their own hearts and become calloused to God; Jesus strongly denounced these Jews for their hardness of heart on many occasions. Why would He denounce those He had arbitrarily hardened before the foundation of the world? The meaning of the word 'harden' in these passages is 'to strengthen in one's resolve,' not hardening something that is otherwise pliable.

Like a parent who has to push their drug-addicted teen out of the house to fully 'give them over' to their own calloused lifestyle, there are times in the Bible when God shows tough love by giving people or nations over fully to their own callousness. Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus is the classic example that is referenced in Romans 9, but the Bible clearly says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart before and during God's judicial hardening of him.

In Paul's time, God had judiciously hardened the Israelites, giving them over to their own hardness for a time. But in Romans 11:11-12, Paul declares the triumphant and hopeful conclusion that the Jews will not be cut off forever: "Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!"

The text clearly says that these Israelites were judiciously hardened in their own stubbornness so that salvation would go beyond them into the whole world - "to make Israel envious." But they did not 'stumble' beyond recovery. Rather than a narrowing of who can be saved, God purposed this temporary hardening of His original chosen people to bring the gospel to the world. Individuals and nations can be chosen (elected) by God as instruments, to bring this good news to the world.

In contrast to the clear contextual meanings of Romans 8-11, John Calvin twisted these passages to mean that some individuals are, in Calvin's own words, "doomed from the womb":

Unlike the dark fatalism of Calvinist philosophy, the Bible teaches that God wants people to freely choose Him and have life. Ezekiel 33:11:
"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'"
Calvinism teaches that God glorifies himself by arbitrarily assigning people from birth to eternal torment in hell. The Bible says that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but gives people the real opportunity to choose life.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/romans-9-an-arminian-interpretation/ says:
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Romans 9 stands as the watershed passage used to support Calvinism. How do those from a Calvinistic view understand this passage? Likewise, how do non-Calvinists understand this chapter of Scripture? We hold to a moderately Arminian view, and will consider this passage verse by verse below.

Paul's hypothetical objector
Throughout this chapter, we see a hypothetical objector interacting with Paul. To understand Paul's argument in Romans 9, it is imperative to understand what Paul is writing against. Who is Paul's hypothetical objector in Romans 9, and what is this objector driving at?

We have a number of reasons to think that Paul's hypothetical objector throughout the book of Romans is a non-believing Jewish person. First, the context leading up to this point demonstrates a Jewish interlocutor (Rom. 3:1, 3, 5, 8, 31; 4:1-25; 6:1, etc.). Second, the context of Romans 9 deals with Israel—both at the beginning of the chapter (vv.1-5) and at the end (vv.24-33). Third, Paul repeatedly cites OT Scripture to make his argument in Romans 9, which would fit with a Jewish objector. Fourth, Romans 9-11 always refers to "Israel" as a nation. While elsewhere in Romans, Paul always refers to these groups as the "Jews." Paul's focus in Romans 9 is on the Jewish race. In fact, Paul doesn't mention "Gentiles" until verse 24.

If we do not understand this crucial point, Romans 9 will not make sense to us. We need to avoid utterly anachronistic interpretations that hold Paul is writing against a modern-day atheist or even an Arminian (!!). Paul's objector was been Jewish throughout the entire book of Romans, and so, his objector is still Jewish in this chapter. We need to realize what Paul is arguing against, in order to see what he is arguing for.

(9:1-2) I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.
Paul had been through tremendous suffering, but this suffering sounds worse than them all. What is causing Paul's nearly inconsolable suffering? Verse 3 tells us that he is grieved at his Jewish brothers who have rejected the glorious gospel of chapters 1-8. Indeed, after meditating on the love of God through Christ, Paul starts to think about his Jewish friends and family who have rejected this incredible gift. His meditation on the work of Christ made him want to be like Christ: sacrificing himself for the good of others…

(9:3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,
(9:3) Does Paul really want to go to hell, so that his Jewish friends could go to heaven?

From a 5-point Calvinistic perspective, Jesus (God) does not desire all of the Jews to be saved. Does this mean that Paul actually desires to do something that God himself does not desire to do? Leighton Flowers writes, "One has to assume that those interpreters believe Paul was more merciful and self-sacrificial than the Savior who inspired these very words. It is inexplicable, given Paul's Spirit-led appeal of self-sacrificial love, to promote a doctrine that teaches Jesus did not intend to sacrifice Himself for these hardened Jews."

Paul affirms that he is "telling the truth in Christ" and his words are "in the Holy Spirit." Of course, all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), but Paul goes out of his way to state that this desire to die for his Jewish brothers is "truth." Reformed theologian John Stott comments, "He knows that the human conscience is fallible and culturally conditioned, but he claims that his is illumined by the Spirit of truth himself." Therefore, we cannot write off this passage as referring to Paul's personal wish—contrary to God's desire. Both God and Paul desire all people to be saved.

(9:4-5) who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose

are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
Paul outlines all of the blessings which belong to the Jewish people: adoption,[3] glory, covenants, the Law, the Temple, the promises, the fathers, and even the Messiah. God has given all of these things to the Jewish people—yet they are actively rejecting their Messiah.

Paul already taught that the Jewish people had been "entrusted with the oracles [i.e. word] of God" (Rom. 3:2). They had been given these benefits, but because of unbelief and a system of works-based righteousness, they failed to come to faith in Jesus.

"Amen." The context is not shifting in verse 6. Rather, verse 6 is a continuation of Paul's thought in verses 1-5. Flowers writes, "Paul continues in the same line of reasoning despite the paragraph break and new title heading added by many modern translations. In fact, the conjunction de ('but' or 'moreover') which begins this sentence [verse 6] clearly confirms Paul's thought has not been broken from the previous verses."

(9:6) But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;
"It is not as though the word of God has failed." The Jews were entrusted with the word of God (Rom. 3:2), and they were God's original "chosen people." Had their "unbelief" thwarted God's promise? (Rom. 3:3)

Paul's audience must have wondered about this very problem: The Scriptures were Jewish, Jesus was Jewish, and the apostles were Jewish. All of the promises of verses 4-5 were given to the Jewish people. Why then were most people in the church Gentiles, rather than Jews? Did something go wrong? Did God's word fail? A Jewish reader would certainly wonder if God's word to the Jewish people had failed.

The Jewish people thought they were God's people because they were ethnically Jewish (cf. Rom. 2:17-3:9) and because they were ethically superior because of the Law. But, as Paul has already argued at length (Romans 1-4), ethnicity and ethics were not the way to God—even in the OT.[5] Paul teaches that ancestry doesn't make you one of God's people ("they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel").

The Jews of Paul's day thought that they were (1) saved by God and were (2) servants of God to spread his truth to others, because of their race and their righteousness. Paul is addressing both of these presuppositions in Romans 9—not just one or the other. Leighton Flowers writes,

Despite what some suggest, Paul does not appear to be answering the question, 'Since most Jews remain in unbelief, has the word of God failed in effectually saving the Jews?' Instead, he is more likely asking, 'Has God's Word failed since those chosen to carry it are standing in opposition to it?'

The question Paul is asking is this: If God has entrusted His Word to the Israelites (vv. 4-5) and the Israelites are standing in opposition to His Word (vv. 2-3), then has God's promise to deliver His Word through Israel failed (vs. 6)? Paul's answer is two-fold. Not every descendant of Israel is entrusted with the words of God, nor is everyone who is a child of God made a child on the basis that he or she is a natural descendent of Abraham.

"They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." This passage does not teach that the Church is the new Israel. Paul is separating ethnic Jews from spiritual Jews—not ethnic Jews from all other Christians.

As we stated above, the Jews of Paul's day thought that they were (1) saved by God and were (2) servants of God, because of their (1) race and their (2) righteousness. How does Paul support his case that God doesn't always choose to work through race or righteousness to save or serve the world? Since he is addressing a Jewish mindset, he appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) to argue his case. Follow allow with his various arguments from the Hebrew Bible…

Argument #1. Isaac and Ishmael
(9:7-8) Nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.
"Nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants." Paul's Jewish readers would think that they had a right to be children of God, because of their ethnicity. Paul uses the plural because he is referring to the nation of Israel—not individuals ("they" "descendants," literally "seed").

"Through Isaac your descendants will be named." Paul cites Genesis 21:12 to show that God's blessing didn't come through ethnicity. After all, Abraham also had another son, Ishmael. But God didn't choose to work through Ishmael. Ishmael could claim that he was Abraham's son, but God did not choose to work through him. While Paul's Jewish objector would argue that ethnicity was the basis for God's blessing, Paul demonstrates that God sovereignly chose Isaac—not Ishmael—to inherit his promise.

Paul's Jewish objector would have to concede this point: ancestry doesn't guarantee being a child of God. Flowers writes, "God never promised to save anyone on the basis of his or her nationality, so how could that promise have failed?"

Surely, Paul cannot be saying that Ishmael went to hell. God did not "hate" Ishmael before the foundation of the world. Indeed, God continued to bless Ishmael (Gen. 17:15-23). Furthermore, Abraham went on to have six more sons after Sarai died. Were all of these sons sent to hell? The text doesn't say, and surely this isn't Paul's point. Instead, his point is that Abraham's other sons were not a part of the promise to bring God's blessing to the world. Take Lot—Abraham's nephew—as an example. Lot was "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7), even though he wasn't chosen to take the promise out to others.

"It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God." The promise didn't come through Abraham's works, but through Abraham's faith in God's promise (cf. Gal. 4:21ff). Paul gives a commentary on this OT story in Galatians 4 which argues exactly this: Faith is the key to inheriting God's promises—not ethnic, Jewish ancestry.[9] The Bible is its best interpreter, and Galatians 4 interprets this same exact OT narrative to show that faith—not works—is God's method of operations.

Calvinistic interpretations
John Calvin: "Now this testimony is taken from Genesis 17:20, where the Lord gives an answer to Abraham, that he had heard his prayer for Ishmael, but that there would be another on whom the promised blessing would rest. It hence follows, that some men are by special privilege elected out of the chosen people, in whom the common adoption becomes efficacious and valid." (Romans 9, in loc.)

Calvin views this passage as referring to spiritual adoption by God's individual election, rather than seeing this as an affront to Jewish self-righteous and race.

(9:9) For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."
God promised to work through Sarah—not Hagar (citing Gen. 18:10). Ishmael could rant and rave all he wanted about being Abraham's ethnic descendant, but God had no obligation to work through Ishmael, because he "promised" to work through Sarah's offspring. God's word hadn't failed to Israel (v.6), because God never promised to work through Ishmael.

To review, Paul's Jewish objector would have to grant this point: God was under no obligation to choose or use Ishmael, because his promise was not based on ethnic ancestry. Once again, this reading fits with the view that neither race nor righteousness were God's plan for choosing people to be either saved or servants.

Argument #2. Jacob and Esau
(9:10) And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;
Paul's Jewish objector could probably understand why God wouldn't choose Ishmael. After all, he was born by a concubine, and God specifically said that "Sarah will have a son." But here, Paul intensifies his argument to show that God could have a purpose for one son and not another—even if they were twins in the same womb.

(9:11-13) For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
"God's purpose according to His choice… because of Him who calls." Calvinistic interpreters understand this to refer to unconditional election. They argue that God chose Jacob for heaven before he was even born. Others go even further deriving the idea of double predestination from this passage, because one unborn baby is "loved" while the other is "hated." But several problems confront the interpretation:

First, this interpretation ignores the context of these OT citations. Paul cites Genesis 25:23, which refers to nations—not individuals: "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger." In its original context, this passage refers to the offspring of Jacob and Esau—not the individuals themselves.

Later in verse 13, Paul cites Malachi 1:2-3, which also refers to nations—not individuals: "I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." This passage from Malachi occurs ~1,500 years after the birth of Jacob and Esau, and it clearly refers to the nations of Israel and Edom. Thus, the prediction (Gen. 25:23) and the fulfillment (Mal. 1:2-3) both refer to nations. Even Reformed theologian F.F. Bruce sees this clearly, when he writes, "The prophecy relates not to the individuals Esau and Jacob (for Esau never rendered service to Jacob) but to their descendants; it relates to the long periods during which the Edomites were in servitude to Israel or Judah."

Second, Esau (the individual) never served Jacob in his earthly life. If this OT citation is supposed to refer to individuals, then it was never fulfilled in the lives of Jacob or Esau.

Third, this passage refers to service—not salvation. Reformed interpreters focus on God's "purpose," "choice," and "call." Fair enough. But they go astray when they understand this to refer to God's unconditional election for effectual salvation. The passage clearly states that this refers to service—not salvation ("the older will serve the younger").

Fourth, unconditional election for these unborn boys does not fit within a Calvinistic view. Calvinists hold that all people (including babies) are born under the wrath of God (Eph. 2:1-3). We agree. But how then could God love Jacob while he was unborn? Even though Jacob came to faith later in life, this still wouldn't explain why God loved him in the womb, because God's love isn't issued until a person comes to faith in Christ (Jn. 5:24).

Fifth, this passage further stresses the point that Paul's Jewish objector could not base his salvation or service on his ancestry. Paul's Jewish objector is arguing that Israel deserves to be God's "chosen people," because of their race and righteousness. However, Esau (and the Edomites) could offer the same argument, because they were ethnic descendants of Isaac. But again, Paul is showing that ancestry is no guarantee. Even though Esau was the "firstborn," God didn't choose him. This interpretation fits with the original quandary of verses 4-5. The ethnically Jewish people thought that they had divine rights because of their ancestry, but God chose not to work through them. Flowers comments, "Esau was the more likely choice of the two brothers given his natural qualities as a hunter and his being the first-born. Jacob was the weaker, or lesser, of the two brothers and certainly not more deserving to carry out this noble purpose. The point is that God did not choose to save one of them and condemn the other prior to their birth, as some attempt to read into this text. Instead, He chose to make His power known through the weaker, less likely candidate (just like He did with young David, 1 Sam. 16:7)."[12]

While the Jewish people felt that they deserved to be the "chosen people" of God, God can choose the least likely and the least deserving to be saved or to be his servants—not based on race or righteousness. Paul's Jewish objector would agree that God had the right to choose Jacob's descendants (Israel) over Esau's descendants (Edom). But what if God now wanted to choose the Gentiles over the Jews because of his sovereign choice? Paul's argument from the Hebrew Scriptures perfectly refutes his Jewish objector's faulty argument!

Sixth, even if salvation is in view, it still wouldn't demonstrate unconditional election. Paul's Jewish objector would think that "works" would give him the right to be saved, but as Paul has already argued at length, "works" cannot earn salvation (Rom. 2:17-29). That is, Jacob didn't receive God's blessing from works-based righteousness… because he wasn't even born! Walls and Dongell write, "Paul is not sweeping every human response or choice or act of faith off the table as irrelevant in the matter of salvation. He is sweeping away the kind of narrow dedication to doing the law that Paul himself reported as part of his own pre-Christian past… God chose one lad over the other before either had a chance to engage the works of the law, making it clear that by such works, righteousness will not be attained." Under this view, Paul is using this example "as a representation of God's choice to save those under the covenant of faith rather than the covenant of law."

Regarding the language of how God "hated" Esau (or the Edomites), see comments on Romans 9:13.

Calvinistic interpretations
John Calvin: "As the blessing of the covenant separates the Israelitic nation from all other people, so the election of God makes a distinction between men in that nation, while he predestinates some to salvation, and others to eternal condemnation." (Romans 9, in loc.)

Calvin recognizes that Paul is referring to nations in the OT. Yet he seems to argue that the view of nations is illustrative of God's salvific choice of individuals. In other words, he forces a passage about nations to refer to individuals—the exact opposite of the original context.

John Stott: "If we were responsible for our own salvation, either in whole or even in part, we would be justified in singing our own praises and blowing our own trumpet in heaven. But such a thing is inconceivable."

Stott takes this passage to be about salvation, when the text clearly refers to service ("The older will serve the younger…").

(9:14) What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! Was God unjust to choose the Jewish people (i.e. Jacob), rather than the Edomites (i.e. Esau)? If God was "just" to choose the Israelites (rather than the Edomites), then he is also just in choosing the Gentiles (rather than the Israelites). If a Jewish person

considered this to be “injustice,” then they would be saying that God needed to apologize to the Edomites (!). Flowers writes, “Paul used their own Scripture to prove that a descendent of Abraham, or even Isaac: (1) might not be chosen for the noble purpose of bringing the Word of God, and (2) might be cursed if he stands in opposition to those who had been chosen to carry His Word.” Walls and Dongell write, “To identify God’s accusers in Romans 9:14 as Paul’s Jewish opponents, then, makes all the difference in interpreting the rest of this passage. The justice Jews were demanding from God was not equal treatment of all human beings (in the spirit of modern liberals or humanists who demand ‘fairness’ from God on their own terms); rather, they were demanding the guarantee of salvation to every individual Israelite.”

Calvinistic interpretations
John Stott: “To choose some for salvation and pass by others looks like a breach of elementary justice. Is it? What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Paul’s immediate retort is Not at all!”

Again, Stott understands this to refer to individual salvation. Yet, far from narrowing God’s election, Romans 9 teaches that God is broadening his election to include Gentiles—not just the nation of Israel. The “injustice” in the mind of Paul’s Jewish objector refers to God broadening his scope to include the Gentile in his service and salvation.

Argument #3. Moses
(9:15) For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”
Paul cites Exodus 33:19 to show that God is free to give grace however he sees fit. The context for Exodus 33 is God revealing himself (and his glory) to Moses. Why does Paul cite this passage?

First, both phrases speak of God’s love—not his justice. Witherington observes that “both phrases speak of mercy,” not judgment. God is free to show mercy on whomever he wants.

Second, this does not refer to salvation for Moses. In its original OT context, Exodus 33 is not about Moses going to heaven or hell. It is about Moses seeing the glory of God (Ex. 33:18).

Third, God gave these words to Moses in the midst of the Jewish people’s idolatry. Israel’s unfaithfulness with the Golden Calf (Ex. 32) did not stop God from bringing

about his promise. Flowers writes, “God can choose to show mercy even to idol worshippers if He wishes. When it comes to fulfilling His promises to bring the provision of salvation to the world, He does what is necessary through chosen Israelites, whether by hardening some or ‘mercying’ others. Therefore, fulfillment of the Potter’s promise to Israel does not rest on the effort or desires of unfaithful Israelite vessels (Rom. 3:1-8).”

The righteousness of a nation is not the basis of God’s election for salvation or for service. The Gentiles were far less righteous than the Jews, but God was able to show “mercy” on the Gentiles in the present—just as he had shown “mercy” to the Jewish people at the Golden Calf incident. It’s as if Paul is saying, “Don’t look down on the Gentiles for being idol worshippers… Your own people were idol worshippers too!”

Calvinistic interpretations
John Calvin: “Thus he assigns the highest reason for imparting grace, even his own voluntary purpose, and also intimates that he has designed his mercy peculiarly for some; for it is a way of speaking which excludes all outward causes, as when we claim to ourselves the free power of acting, we say, ‘I will do what I mean to do.’ The relative pronoun also expressly intimates that mercy is not to all indiscriminately. His freedom is taken away from God, when his election is bound to external causes.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

We agree that grace is not earned or based on the sinner’s works of righteousness. But why couldn’t it be based on “those who believe,” as Paul has already argued? (Rom. 3:21-31). Instead, Calvin states that God only gives grace to “some” and “not to all.” Again, we contend that Paul is not answering how an individual comes to saving faith, but how God chose to give out his generous mercy beyond the nation of Israel.

(9:16) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.
What does the “it” refer to? Calvinistic interpreters understand the “it” to refer to God’s unconditional election. In our understanding, the “it” refers to God’s choice to give salvation by grace—apart from a works-based righteousness or according to our ethnic race (“wills… runs”). Paul has been citing one OT passage after another to show that God chose people to carry out his word—even when they didn’t deserve it. Those who were chosen by God were unfaithful, but God still brought about his promise (Rom. 9:6). The “it” refers back to “‘God’s purpose of election,’ (vs. 11) which is to fulfill the promise of God (vs. 6) in bringing about the redemptive plan through an unconditionally chosen nation of woefully unfaithful individuals.”[21]

Calvinistic interpretations
John Stott: “Salvation does not… depend on man’s desire or effort, that is, on anything we want or strive for, but on God’s mercy.”[22]

John Calvin: “The salvation of those whom God is pleased to save, is thus ascribed to his mercy, that nothing may remain to the contrivance of man.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

Reformed theologians understand the “it” to refer to salvation. We contend that the context informs us that the “it” refers to God’s choice to pick his own servants, according to his sovereignty and not righteousness or race.

Argument #4. Pharaoh
(9:17-18) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.
Pharaoh had seen innumerable miracles, and he had spoken directly to God’s greatest prophet Moses. And yet, he still remained an unrepentant, infanticidal, slave owning dictator! Citing Exodus 9:16, Paul is asking, “Was it wrong of God to harden Pharaoh?”

Paul’s Jewish objector would surely answer, “No way! God righteously hardened Pharaoh! Pharaoh had incredible revelation from God, and he was totally and completely evil anyhow. Moreover, God used the hardening of Pharaoh to rescue the Jewish people and to spread his name to all Gentiles on Earth.”

Paul is lining up for the shot he is going to take later: If God was righteous in hardening a Gentile to save the Israelites, then why can’t God harden the Israelites to save the Gentiles? If God was righteous to judge Pharaoh for rejecting his miraculous revelations through Moses, then why can’t God harden the Israelites for rejecting the miraculous ministry of Jesus? Reformed interpreters focus on the fact that God hardened Pharaoh (an individual), but miss the fact that Paul is focusing on the consequence of that hardening: The salvation of the nation of Israel (a group). The purpose of this hardening is not said to be for Pharaoh’s damnation. God did judicially harden Pharaoh in order to judge him, but that is not Paul’s application. Paul’s focus on Pharaoh was for the purpose of broadening God’s mercy, so that his “name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.”

Do you see the connection? God hardened a man who was stubborn and unrepentant, so that he could reach the "whole earth." Like Pharaoh, the Jewish people had hardened themselves to the gospel (relying on race and self-righteousness). As a result, God hardened them further for a redemptive purpose—namely, reaching innumerable Gentiles. For a more robust treatment on the subject of "hardening," see comments on Romans 9:17-19.

Calvinistic interpretations
Leon Morris: "Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden anyone who had not first hardened himself."

John Stott: "That Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to humble himself is made plain in the story. So God's hardening of him was a judicial act, abandoning him to his own stubbornness, much as God's wrath against the ungodly is expressed by 'giving them over' to their own depravity (1:24, 26, 28)."[24]

John Stott: "The wonder is not that some are saved and others not, but that anybody is saved at all. For we deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment. If we receive what we deserve (which is judgment), or if we receive what we do not deserve (which is mercy), in neither case is God unjust. If therefore anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's."

We agree that no one deserves salvation; otherwise, it wouldn't be based on grace. However, we submit that individual salvation is not Paul's point. Instead, Paul is focusing on how God can use individuals in service—even if they refuse him. Even in the case of Pharaoh, God used this man's stubbornness to save the nation of Israel and spread his name to the whole earth.

John Calvin: "It seems good to God to illuminate some that they may be saved, and to blind others that they may perish: for we ought particularly to notice these words, to whom he wills, and, whom he wills: beyond this he allows us not to proceed." (Romans, in loc.)

Why would God need to "blind" people who have a total inability to come to him in the first place? As Flowers has pointed out, this is like putting a blindfold on a corpse!

John Calvin: "Paul teaches us, that the ruin of the wicked is not only foreseen by the Lord, but also ordained by his counsel and his will; and Solomon teaches as the same thing,—that not only the destruction of the wicked is foreknown, but that the wicked

themselves have been created for this very end—that they may perish. (Proverbs 16:4.).” (Romans, in loc.)

This is double-predestination. God doesn’t simply know people will reject him, but he ordains it and created them for this very purpose. This is surprisingly consistent for a Reformed reading of Romans 9—even though few Reformed readers will bite the bullet and say this as clearly as Calvin.

Argument #5. God’s Plan for the Nations
(9:19) You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”
Calvinists often claim that the objector is similar to an Arminian interpreter, who is asking how God can hold us responsible if we cannot resist his will. But Paul has already told us who the objector is: a hardened, unrepentant Jewish person. In Romans 3, Paul’s interlocutor is a Jewish person objecting to Paul’s message of grace: “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?” (Rom. 3:5-6). Paul’s Jewish objector is like Pharaoh—calloused and hardened. He has already hardened himself to a great degree by rejecting God’s miraculous working through Christ and the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Here, he tries to blame God for his hardened state, when in reality, he is the one responsible.

Calvinistic interpretations
John Calvin: “Thus then speak the ungodly in this passage, ‘What cause has he to be angry with us? Since he has formed us such as we are, since he leads us at his will where he pleases, what else does he in destroying us but punish his own work in us? For it is not in our power to contend with him; how much soever we may resist, he will yet have the upper hand. Then unjust will be his judgment, if he condemns us; and unrestrainable is the power which he now employs towards us.’” (Romans, in loc.)

(9:20) On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?
The clay and the potter illustration comes from the OT. Once again, this refers to God’s sovereignty over the nations. Jeremiah writes, “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. 7At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it… or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it” (Jer. 18:6-7, 9). Here, God tells the Jews not to be surprised if he decides to use one nation or another, because he is the Creator and they are merely the clay.

Likewise, Isaiah writes, “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’?” (Isa. 45:9) In this section of Isaiah, the Jews were surprised to hear God call the Persian King Cyrus his “anointed one” (Isa. 44:28-45:1). God tells Israel that he can choose to work through whomever he wants—even a wicked Gentile ruler like Cyrus. Paul’s reference to these OT passages continues to support the idea that God can save Gentiles to be his servants—regardless of their race or their righteousness.

Calvinistic interpretations
John Stott (citing Hodge): “It is nowhere suggested that God has the right to ‘create sinful beings in order to punish them’, but rather that he has the right to ‘deal with sinful beings according to his good pleasure’, either to pardon or to punish them.”[27]

F.F. Bruce: “God is not answerable to us for what he does. Yet he can be relied on to act in consistency with his character, which has been disclosed supremely in Christ. With such a God to trust, why should any of his people question his ways?”[28]

John Calvin: “The ungodly object and say, that men are exempted from blame, if the will of God holds the first place in their salvation, or in their perdition. Does Paul deny this? Nay, by his answer he confirms it, that is, that God determines concerning men, as it seems good to him, and that men, in vain and madly rise up to contend with God; for he assigns, by his own right, whatever lot he pleases to what he forms.” (Romans, in loc.)

John Calvin: “By his silence he reminds us, that a mystery which our minds cannot comprehend ought to be reverently adored, and that he thus checks the wantonness of human curiosity. Let us then know, that God does for no other reason refrain from speaking, but that he sees that we cannot contain his immense wisdom in our small measure; and thus regarding our weakness, he leads us to moderation and sobriety.” (Romans, in loc.)

Calvin appeals to a “mystery” as to why God is loving, and yet creates people for damnation. But why wouldn’t we rather appeal to a mystery regarding God’s foreknowledge and human freedom? For more on this, see our earlier article, “A Philosophical Defense of Arminianism.”

(9:21) Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Is this illustration referring to humanity's total inability from birth to respond in faith to the gospel? Not at all. In its OT context, the lump of clay was Israel as a nation. This is the consistent reading throughout Romans 9, and nothing has changed here. Walls and Dongell write, "Paul's reference to two different vessels being crafted from the 'same lump' (Rom 9:19-24) correspond to the two different subgroups making up the one nation of Israel: believing Jews and unbelieving Jews."[29]

Paul uses this illustration to refer to service—not salvation. The point is for "honorable use" or for "common use."

Paul's use of this illustration in 2 Timothy shows that we are not divinely determined to be one type of clay or the other. Elsewhere, Paul writes, "In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:20-21). According to Paul, an individual can choose to change whether or not he will be an honorable or dishonorable servant ("if anyone cleanses himself… he will be a vessel for honor"). Even Reformed authors see a parallel between these illustrations.

Calvinists often object to critics claiming that their view makes humans like "puppets" or "robots" in God's universe. However, they also appeal to Paul's analogy of a lump of clay to support their rejection of libertarian free will! But what is the qualitative difference between a "puppet," a "robot," or a lump of "clay"? Flowers writes, "Some Calvinists want to have their cake and eat it too on this point. If they are going to interpret these biblical analogies in such a way that removes mankind's responsibility in the process, then they cannot object to another analogy which draws the exact same conclusion. After all, what more or less responsibility does a puppet have in relation to the puppet master than a lump of clay has in relation to the Potter on Calvinism's interpretation? If one wishes to interpret Paul's analogy of the Potter and the clay literally to mean that man has no say in how he believes and responds, then own it. Do not object to other analogies that draw the exact same implications unless you are not willing to live with those implications."

The Purpose of God's Hardening
(9:22-23) What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory.

(9:22-23) Does God create people only to damn them?

Calvinistic interpretations
F.F. Bruce: “As has been pointed out earlier (2:4), the mercy and forbearance of God are intended to afford people time for repentance; if, instead, they harden their hearts yet more, as Pharaoh did after repeated respites, they are simply storing up an increasing weight of retribution for themselves against the day of requital.”

We applaud Bruce’s willingness to accept that this passage does not imply fatalism.

John Calvin: “He does not indeed give a reason for divine election, so as to assign a cause why this man is chosen and that man rejected; for it was not meet that the things contained in the secret counsel of God should be subjected to the judgment of men; and, besides, this mystery is inexplicable. He therefore keeps us from curiously examining those things which exceed human comprehension. He yet shows that, as far as God’s predestination manifests itself, it appears perfectly just.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

Again, Calvin appeals to a “mystery” here. And again, we simply ask why we would state that the harmony of God’s sovereignty and goodness are a mystery, rather than his foreknowledge of human freedom.

John Calvin: “They are also vessels of wrath, that is, made and formed for this end, that they may be examples of God’s vengeance and displeasure… But that he is silent as to the reason, why they are vessels appointed to destruction, is no matter of wonder. He indeed takes it as granted, according to what has been already said, that the reason is hid in the secret and inexplorable counsel of God; whose justice it behoves us rather to adore than to scrutinize.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

Again, this is double-predestination—a view that most Reformed authors will not adhere to, but one that seems to follow logically from a consistent Reformed reading of the text.

Argument #6. The prophets
Paul doesn’t offer much commentary on these citations from the prophets. He must think that the passages speak for themselves. It’s clear that the issue on Paul’s mind is the fact that God is saving Gentiles to be his servants—not based on their race or their righteousness. He cites multiple OT passages to confirm this.

(9:24) Even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.
God can allow certain groups to be hardened for the benefit of his plan in history. It's clear he has been thinking in terms of Jews and Gentiles throughout this entire chapter—not just believers and unbelievers. In fact, this is the first time in this chapter that Paul refers to the "Gentiles." Up until this point, he has been interacting with the unbelief of his Jewish brothers.

Calvinistic interpretations
Tim Keller holds that Paul digressed from his original question of Jewish election until verse 24.[33] In our view, Paul has been answering that question this entire time: God can decide to work through the Jewish people or the Gentiles.

(9:25) As He says also in Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' and her who was not beloved, 'beloved.'"
Citation of Hosea 2:23. This wasn't a permanent cutting off.

(9:26) "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God."
Citation of Hosea 1:10.

(9:27-28) Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly."
Citation of Isaiah 10:22-23. This relates back to verse 6 (i.e. God's word being fulfilled). Paul cites this passage to show that God could still "execute his word… thoroughly and quickly," even though many of the Jewish people were hardened to the truth.

(9:29) And just as Isaiah foretold, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, we would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah."
Citation of Isaiah 1:9.

Conclusion: Paul's commentary on Romans 9
Wouldn't it be nice if Paul gave us a commentary on Romans 9 to clear up any lingering confusion of what he just wrote? In fact, he did! Remarkably, very few interpreters read Paul's own commentary in verses 30 and following. Here Paul tells us why the nation of Israel largely forfeited salvation: They refused to believe!

(9:30) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;
Gentiles chose to believe in Jesus. We cannot be saved by attaining righteousness through works of the law (Rom. 3:10-20). But Paul writes that we can attain it by faith. Flowers writes, “This addresses the common misconception that being a child of Abraham guaranteed salvation (Rom. 9:7), or being outside natural Israel excluded one from salvation (Rom. 9:24).”[34]

“Attained righteousness.” This term (katalambano) means “to make something one’s own, win, attain” or “to gain control of someone through pursuit, catch up with, seize” (BDAG).

Calvinistic interpretations
John Calvin: “If any one imagines that they were justified, because they had by faith obtained the Spirit of regeneration, he departs far from the meaning of Paul; it would not indeed have been true, that they had attained what they sought not, except God had freely embraced them while they were straying and wandering, and had offered them righteousness, for which, being unknown, they could have had no desire. It must also be observed, that the Gentiles could not have obtained righteousness by faith, except God had anticipated their faith by his grace; for they followed it when they first by faith aspired to righteousness; and so faith itself is a portion of his favor.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

We agree that no one would be able to exercise faith unless God drew them through the Holy Spirit’s conviction.

(9:31-32) But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.
Why were so many Jewish people not elected? This isn’t complicated: They chose not to believe (v.32).

Calvinistic interpretations
John Stott: “The acceptance of the Gentiles is attributed to the sovereign mercy of God, and the rejection of Israel to their own rebellion.”

John Stott: “Antinomy is the right word to use, not contradiction.”

In Stott’s view, verses 6-29 show how people are saved, and verses 30-33 show how people are lost.

Thomas Schreiner: “Romans 9 teaches that God does elect individuals and groups unto salvation, and he determines who will exercise faith. Nevertheless, Rom 9:30-10:21 teaches us that those who do not exercise faith are responsible and should have done so. How can both of these be logically true? We cannot fully grasp the answer to this question, for as with other mysteries in Scripture we affirm that our human minds cannot adequately grasp the full import of divine revelation.”

John Calvin: “You farther see how faith and the merits of works are contrasted, as things altogether contrary to each other. As then trust in works is the chief hinderance, by which our way to obtain righteousness is closed up, it is necessary that we should wholly renounce it in order that we may depend on God’s goodness alone. This example of the Jews ought indeed justly to terrify all those who strive to obtain the kingdom of God by works. Nor does he understand by the works of the law, ceremonial observances, as it has been before shown, but the merits of those works to which faith is opposed, which looks, as I may say, with both eyes on the mercy of God alone, without casting one glance on any worthiness of its own.” (Romans 9, in loc.)

We agree with Calvin, but only wish that he saw this throughout all of Romans 9, rather than just at the very end.

(9:33) Just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”
Citation of Isaiah 28:16. You can either stumble over this rock or build your life upon it.

Questions for a Calvinist Reading of Romans 9
Who is Paul’s hypothetical objector in Romans 9, and what is this objector driving at? We have a number of reasons to think that Paul’s objector throughout the book of Romans is a hypothetical non-believing Jewish person. First, the context leading up to this point demonstrates a Jewish interlocutor (Rom. 3:1, 3, 5, 8, 31; 4:1-25; 6:1, etc.). Second, the context of Romans 9 deals with Israel—both at the beginning of the chapter (vv.1-5) and at the end (vv.24-33). We would contend that he is dealing with Israel all throughout. Third, Paul repeatedly cites OT Scripture to make his argument in Romans 9, which fits with a Jewish objector. Any reading of Romans 9 which neglects this key point is doomed to failure.

Why does Paul only refer to “Israel” (the nation) in Romans 9-11? Paul doesn’t refer to Israel as a nation outside of these three chapters. Does this weaken your contention that individuals are in view, rather than nations?

Why does Paul want to be “accursed” (v.3) for the non-believing Jews, if Jesus himself didn’t choose to save them? Was Paul outside of God’s will when he wrote this? Is Paul (salvifically!) loving people whom God “hates”?

Why does God “harden” a person who is spiritually dead from birth? Wouldn’t this be like putting a blindfold on a dead person?

Why does Paul consistently cite OT passages that refer to nations, rather than individuals? Does Paul consistently misquote the OT to make his argument for individual, unconditional election?

In Romans 10:21, what does Paul mean when he writes, “as for Israel He says, “All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people”? Does God want these people to be saved or not?

Why does Paul interpret and summarize his own discussion of Romans 9 by emphasizing a person’s personal responsibility for choosing to have faith? (vv.30-33) Why wouldn’t we interpret Romans 9 through the lens of Paul’s own commentary?
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-913-does-god-predestine-some-people-to-hell-before-they-are-even-born/ says:
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(Rom. 9:13) Does God “hate” unborn babies?
CLAIM: Citing Malachi 1:2-3, Paul writes, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom. 9:13). Does God hate unborn babies?

RESPONSE: The phrase “loving one and hating the other” was a Jewish idiom. It does not mean that God literally hates some people; it means that God loves one more than another. In Genesis 29:30 (KJV), we read that Jacob “loved also Rachel more than Leah.” In the next verse, we read that “Leah was hated.” Jesus said that we should not love our father or mother “more than [Him]” (Mt. 10:37). However, in the parallel account in Luke, we read that we need to “hate” our father and mother (Lk. 14:26). Clearly, Jesus is not teaching that we should “hate” our parents, because the Bible teaches that we should honor our parents (Ex. 20:12). Paul writes that it is shameful not to love our families (1 Tim. 5:8). It’s odd that Calvinists are willing to harmonize Luke 14:26 with other Scriptures, so that Jesus isn’t saying that we should literally hate our family (“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother… he

cannot be My disciple"). But they won't harmonize Romans 9:13 with other Scriptures that explicitly teach God's salvific love for all people.

To demonstrate this further, note that Jacob himself loved his brother Edom. Jacob told Esau, "Please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably" (Gen. 33:10). Esau was the father of the Edomites (Gen. 36:43). Later, God commanded the Jewish people, "You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deut. 23:7).

Why did God judge the Edomites? Was it because they were hated before the foundation of the world? Not at all. God judged the Edomites because of their violence toward Israel (Obad. 1:8-10). The descendants of Edom were under the curse of Genesis 12:1-3. Flowers writes, "Remember the false belief of the Israelites in Paul's day who assumed they were going to be saved simply on the basis that they were descendants of Abraham? Paul is proving that God's promise includes cursing those who opposed the fulfillment of that promise, even if they are of Isaac's seed. In short, being the seed of Isaac does not ensure your salvation, especially if you stand in opposition to the Word of God, as did the Edomites… In other words, Paul explains that being a descendant of Abraham will not ensure your salvation. In fact, any seed of Abraham who stands against the fulfillment of God's promise will stand cursed, or hated, by God. If you do not believe that truth, then just look at the Edomites, direct descendants of Isaac himself."
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-917-19-is-this-passage-saying-that-god-will-harden-peoples-hearts-to-keep-them-from-receiving-christ/ says:
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(Rom. 9:17-19) Is this passage saying that God will harden people's hearts to keep them from receiving Christ?
CLAIM: Calvinistic interpreters understand this entire section to refer to God's unconditional election and irresistible grace for individual people (vv.17-23). Other Calvinists go further, arguing that this refers to double predestination. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: This is not the case. Paul is teaching that God will harden people's hearts, so that he can get others to receive Christ. But even those who are hardened can turn back to God if they repent. Consider a number of observations that support this interpretation:

First, Pharaoh originally hardened his own heart. God predicted that Pharaoh would harden his heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3), but Pharaoh was the one who originally did the hardening in Exodus 7:13 through 9:11. God's first act of hardening Pharaoh was in Exodus 9:12.

Second, the word "harden" should be translated "strengthen." The Hebrew word for "harden" (chazaq) can be translated "become strong… encourage… repair."[1] HALOT defines the word as "be strong, grow strong… prevail over… have courage… harden… gird… repair… sustain."[2] Forster and Marston show that the term is always translated "harden" in Exodus, but not translated this way in the rest of the OT

Third, therefore, God gave Pharaoh the "courage" or "strengthening" to carry out his evil desire. Forster and Marston write, "The wicked desire was already in Pharaoh; the Lord's action simply gave him courage to carry it out… When any normal person would have given in because of fear, Pharaoh received supernatural strength to continue with his evil path of rebellion." To illustrate this, consider a man who desires to kill his boss, but he doesn't have the courage to follow through with the murder. To gain the courage, he reaches for a whiskey bottle, so that this "liquid courage" can give him the ability to carry out the thing that he wants to do. In the same way, God gave Pharaoh the strength to do what he had set his mind on doing.

Fourth, hardening people who are totally depraved does not make sense under a Calvinistic view. Calvinists argue that the reprobate are "dead," which means that they are incapable of even exercising faith in the gospel. But why would God "harden" a person who was spiritually dead from birth? This would be similar to putting a blindfold over a dead corpse.

Fifth, Pharaoh's individual "hardening" illustrates God's hardening for the nation of Israel. Pharaoh's hardening was not capricious on God's part. Since Pharaoh had rejected God's word and works, God hardened him ("strengthened him") to carry out his desire. Therefore, Pharaoh is the archetype for what Paul means when he writes that the nation of Israel had become hardened. This is not referring to arbitrary, unconditional election. Instead, the nation had hardened itself to Jesus' words and works, and God hardened them ("strengthened them") to carry out their desire.

Incidentally, this view fits perfectly with what we read in Acts 28. Paul lectured about the gospel all day to some Jewish listeners (Acts 28:23). Luke records that "some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe" (v.24). Citing

Isaiah 6:9-11, Paul argues that the reason why they don't believe is because they will not understand and will not perceive (v.26). Specifically, we read, "The heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they can scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes" (v.27). However, if they hadn't turned away from God, Paul states, "They might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them" (v.27). As a consequence, Paul says that he will take the message to the Gentiles, because "they will also listen" (v.28).

Sixth, the hardening of Israel is neither arbitrary nor fatalistic. The purpose of Israel's hardening was due to the fact that they were seeking to find salvation through works—not faith (Rom. 9:30-33; 10:3-4), and God was using this hardening to reach innumerable Gentile people. Moreover, Paul writes that individual Israelites are not doomed to unbelief, but can still come to Christ. Paul writes, "They [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" (Rom. 11:11-12). This passage explicitly teaches that God was using this hardening to reach many Gentiles ("By their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles"), and there is still hope for individual Israelites ("They did not stumble so as to fall, did they? …How much more will their fulfillment be!").

Similarly, God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh was to reach a multitude of people through Pharaoh's hardening—namely, Israel and beyond. Paul writes, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole Earth" (Rom. 9:17). In Romans 11, Paul turns this around on his Jewish objector. Paul states that God "hardened" the Israelites, so that he could show mercy on the Gentiles (Rom. 11:6-11). At the end of chapter 11, Paul writes, "For God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone" (Rom. 11:32 NLT). The purpose of God's plan is to show mercy on everyone ("the whole Earth" Rom. 9:17). Earlier, Paul addressed the judgment of God over both ethnic groups: the Gentiles (Rom. 1:18-2:16) and the Jews (Rom. 2:17-3:20). Walls and Dongell write, "If we accept Paul's strategy of indicting every individual through indictment of the group, then consistency requires that we allow the same extension to hold with regard to God's mercy, as Romans 11:32 seems to say."

Conclusion

The scandal of Romans 9 is not that God is choosing to save one person, rather than another. The scandal is that God bringing large numbers of Gentiles into his kingdom,

rather than the Jews. While some interpreters read Romans 9 as narrowing God's plan of salvation, we should read this passage as broadening God's plan of salvation.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-922-23-does-god-created-people-only-to-damn-them/ says:
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(Rom. 9:22-23) Does God create people only to damn them?
CLAIM: Calvinist interpreters argue that this passage teaches unconditional election. Others go further and claim that this supports the concept of double predestination. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: In response to this interpretation, a number of points can be made.

First, Paul uses different words for "prepared" in verses 22 and 23. The Greek words are katartizō and proetoimazō. These two Greek words are both translated as "prepared" in the NASB. But in the Greek, they aren't even in the same word family. The New Living Translation shows the difference between the two (see also the KJV).

Katartizō (v.22): This word means "to cause to be in a condition to function well, put in order, restore… to prepare for a purpose, prepare, make, create, outfit" (BDAG).

Proetoimazō (v.23): This word means "prepare beforehand" (BDAG). This is the word used for the "good works, which God prepared beforehand" (Eph. 2:10).

While Paul may be using these terms synonymously, it is at the very least interesting that he doesn't use the same terms to describe God's plan for his judgment and his grace. Witherington writes, "Katērtismena, used of the vessels of wrath, is a perfect passive participle. Proētoimasen, used of the vessels of mercy, is an aorist active indicative. This change cannot be accidental, and it suggests that Paul means that the vessels of wrath are ripe or fit for destruction. Indeed, one could… understand it in the middle voice: "have made themselves fit for" destruction. If so, this verse certainly does not support the notion of double predestination. Rather it refers to the fact that these vessels are worthy of destruction, though God has endured them for a long time."

Second, there is no subject that "fits" the unbelievers for destruction, but God is the subject who "prepares" believers. There is a subtle difference between verses 22 and 23. God is not the subject of the sentence in verse 22, but he is the subject of the sentence in verse 23. In other words, God does not actively prepare the unbeliever for

hell; they “fit” themselves. By contrast, in verse 23, God is the one who actively prepares believers for glory.

Third, these vessels of wrath might turn and become vessels of mercy. There is no fatalism in Romans 9. Paul has been warning them from the beginning of his letter to turn to God and become vessels of mercy (Rom. 2:4). However, he writes, “Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). Paul is explaining that these vessels of wrath are able to become objects of his mercy, if they merely turn to him in faith. At one point, all former believers were “by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2:3). But after we placed our faith in Christ, we became objects of mercy (Eph. 2:8-9). In the next chapter, Paul writes that God invited the people “all day long,” but “they were disobedient and rebellious” (Rom. 10:21 NLT).

Under Calvinism, there is no free willed person with whom God could be “patient.” Since God is the ultimate cause of all things, this would include human creatures. Remember, Calvinists appeal to the “lump of clay” to refer to human agency in the previous verse (Rom. 9:21). Therefore, under Calvinism, God is being “patient” with himself—not with free willed agents who rebel against him.

By contrast, God’s patience refers to his love for all people to turn to him. Peter writes that God is patient because he wants people to turn to him in faith: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). The goal of God’s patience with hardened Israel is to cause them to have jealousy and come to faith in Christ (Rom. 11:11-14).
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(Bruce) This section of scripture is one of the major proof texts for Calvinism. Let’s examine each section:

V4 - 9: This talks about the election of Israel, God’s chosen people. Many Israelites rejected God, and God ejected them from His nation. So, God’s chosen people were a mix of saved and unsaved people. The nation was chosen, but not all the people were. Jesus took this chosen nation and opened membership up to the Gentiles (and ejected all non-believing Israelites). Now, the nation only consists of those who believe in Jesus. So far, I think everyone agrees with this.

V10 - 18 - To continue the previous point, the passage talks about the progenitor of His chosen nation, Jacob (via Isaac and Abraham). This section of scripture is

discussing how Jacob was chosen to be His nation, and how Esau was not. This is directly what it is referring to when it says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” in vs 13.

V14 - 18, which discusses God’s mercy and hardening is directly referring to God’s choice in making Jacob the progenitor of His people. It’s not correct to use this particular section as an example of God’s predestination over individual salvation. (To be fair, perhaps no one is using this section as examples of individual salvation, but as greater examples of God’s sovereignty in general). The examples of Esau, Jacob, and Pharoah are clearly showing how God actively does things to bring about His plan to establish His people. (As already discussed in Exodus 4:21, 7:3 - 5) In the case of Pharaoh, this is one of several examples of judicial hardening. Is God causing Pharoah’s original rejection of God, or is God strengthening Pharoah’s resolve to accomplish His purposes? And how often does God do this? Whatever the answer, this section so far is not about individual salvation.

V19 - 21 go on to ask Paul’s rhetorical questions, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” and Paul’s response to that - “who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” This section is still about God’s choice of Jacob (and Pharoah) to bring about His plan, and cannot (yet) be used for examples of individual salvation. This is still about why God chose Israel over the Gentiles, and why He is choosing Gentiles now. To accomplish His ultimate plan God will use people to do it, just like a potter uses clay.

V22 - 24 See 2 Timothy 2:19 - 22. This passage discusses the preparation of vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. While this is still in context of God choosing Gentiles and rejecting some Israelites, the concept of preparing vessels needs to be dealt with. This seems to no longer talk about people groups, but individuals - although, that isn’t a given, since the next section goes back to talking about people groups. Calvinists would say that this clearly shows that God is the one that chooses which vessel is which ahead of time. One response to this is to say that while everyone agrees that God foreknows all vessels, the criteria for how a vessel becomes one or the other is not listed here. Yes, God does prepare the vessels for glory or destruction, but it doesn’t say whether the vessel itself had anything to do with what kind of vessel it wanted to be. Of course, the response to this would be to say that vessels don’t choose for themselves, the potter does. It all depends on how tight one holds the analogy. Romans 2:5 says “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”. Here it says that vessels store up wrath for themselves. So God prepares us, and we store up wrath for ourselves. 2 Timothy 2:21 says “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable

use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." So, there is definitely a criteria there.

V25 - 29 This goes back to talking about Israel and Gentiles. "Those who are not my people, I will call my people" refers to God calling Gentiles. It does look like this is referring to the Gentiles that heed God's call, but it doesn't say that God didn't call out to all Gentiles.

V30 - 33 This section wraps up by asking a rhetorical question as to why Israel failed to obtain righteousness through their efforts, and why certain Gentiles obtained righteousness even though they didn't do anything to try. Paul goes on to answer the question by saying that Israel didn't pursue righteousness through faith. Notice the words "obtain" and "pursue". These seem like conscious activities on the part of the receivers of salvation. This well may be describing a post-salvation activity. Everyone agrees that once we gain faith, we are called to pursue righteousness.

6.160. Romans 10:8 - 21

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"
(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your
mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the
dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and
with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone
who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction
between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on
all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be
saved."

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are
they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear
without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are
sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good
news!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who
has believed what he has heard from us?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and
hearing through the word of Christ.

18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for

"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."

19 But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

"I have been found by those who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

21 But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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We have the further ability to respond when the good news of His word is shared.
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(Bruce) Right after the passage (Romans 9) that many claim to support Calvinism, we have this passage. The order is confess and believe, and Then you will be saved. Some Calvinists claim the opposite: First you are regenerated, and then you will believe. There is another step before belief - hearing the word. I think a Calvinist would respond that this hearing is what is impossible for people, because we are incapable of hearing God. The passage goes on to say that faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Furthermore, everyone has heard Jesus' voice - but not everyone has understood it. And, that the Gentiles found Jesus even though they didn't seek Him - presumably because the Word reached them.

I'm not sure that this passage solves anything on the topic. The order could be: God opens people's ears to hear, then those people believe, and then they are saved. Or, it could be that God's Word reaches people's ears, and some respond in belief, and then are saved. Does God's Word itself have the power of opening people's ears? If this is the case, then it clearly doesn't open everyone's ears. So, there needs to be something true of someone who has open ears.

6.161. Romans 11:1 - 8
I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the

Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 3 “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” 4But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.
7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written,
“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that would not see
and ears that would not hear,
down to this very day.”

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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[Rom 11:2a] As in 8:29 (see the exegesis and exposition of 8:28-30), the work proginoskein doesn't merely connote foreknowledge but also implies foreordination with the emphasis being on God's covenant love for his people (cf. Amos 3:1; 1 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:9; 2 Tim 2:19). Such an understanding of proginoskein is confirmed by the immediate context, for proegno clearly functions as the antonym of "has forsaken". The latter verb means "rejected," and thus the former means "selected".

"Foreknew" focuses attention upon the distinguishing love of God whereby the sons of God were elected. But it does not inform us of the destination to which those thus chosen are appointed. It is precisely that information that "he also foreordained" supplies, and it is by no means superfluous.

Confidence in the sovereignty of God in dire circumstances is one of the fundamentals of the faith. It is one thing-and very necessary-to assent to the great historical facts of the gospel as touching the birth of Christ, his miracles, atoning death, resurrection from the dead and return to glory. But, I submit, confidence in God's sovereign goodness in the midst of a baffling and painful providence is equally important, if not more so.

[Rom 11:2] For the "know" in the verb "foreknow" refers to God's election: as Amos 3:2 puts it...The temporal prefix, "fore-" indices further that God's choosing of Israel took place before any actions or status on the part of Israel that might have qualified her for God's choice. How could God reject a people whom he in a gracious act of choice had made his own?

For the distinction between a general election of Israel as a nation and a specific election to salvation of individual Israelites...Paul falls in line with other Jews of his day...There developed during this period a new focus on a "special election" within Israel. This combination of a special election of individuals within, and alongside, a larger corporate election of Israel does better justice to the exegetical data than the view that Paul knows only a corporate election.

[Rom 11:6] The polemical force of "based on the election of grace" becomes clearer in this verse, as Paul explains just what such a gracious election entails. The principle of grace is antithetical to that of "works"; if God has elected the individuals who make up the remnant "by grace," it follows that he could not have elected them on the basis of works. The word "works" refers to anything that human beings do. Since Paul's focus is on the basis for the election of Israel, it is quite likely that he would think of these human actions as done specifically in obedience to the Mosaic law. But, as I have insisted before, it is not the fact that these works are torah-works that prevents them from being a basis for election. As Paul's references to the works of Abraham (4:2-8) and Jacob and Esau (9:11-13) suggest, his problem with works lies not in the fact that they are torah-works but in fact that they are human works. Paul's polemic, while focused on Israel because of his particular situation, is applicable to all human beings and finds its ultimate basis in the human condition. Because of their sin but also simply because of their creaturely status, people can make no claim on God.

"For if it were otherwise," if human beings could by their works secure the blessing of God (as Paul points out in the second part of the verse), grace would "no longer" be grace. For grace demands that God be perfectly free to bestow his favor on whomever he chooses. But if God's election were based on what human beings do, his freedom would be violated and he could no longer be acting in grace. For Paul, however, the gracious character of God's activity is a theological axiom, automatically ruling out any idea that would conflict with it.

To be sure, Paul distinguishes "works" from faith throughout Romans, and so his denial that election is based on works need not mean that it cannot be based on faith. But Paul's conception of God's grace (see particularly 4:3-5) would seem to rule out anything outside of God's own freewill as a basis for his actions. To make election ultimately dependent on the human decision to believe violates Paul's notion of the grace of God...God's grace is the efficient cause of salvation, human faith being not its basis but its result.

[Rom 11:2b-4] What receives prominence here is the verbal phrase "I have left for myself", in which God's action is the decisive reason that a remnant is preserved...This interpretation is also ratified by v5, where the remnant is due to "the election of grace"...The idea of the verse, then, is that God has not rejected those on whom he has set his covenant love. Such an idea is unthinkable and indeed impossible.

[Rom 11:5] The existence of a remnant of believing Jews is not ultimately ascribed to their greater wisdom or nobility, or to their free will or to their spiritual perception. The inclusion of the remnant in God's people is due to his electing grace. This point confirms the interpretation of "I have left for myself" in v4, for the phrase is explained in terms of "gracious election" (v5). The only reason some Jews believe is that God has graciously and mercifully chosen them to be part of his people. The linkage of grace and election also must be observed. Many worry that the choosing of some and not all would be unjust, but this idea overlooks the fact that election is gracious. No one deserves to be elected, and thus the election of any is a merciful gift of God that cannot be claimed as a democratic right.

[Rom 11:6] Verse 6 proceeds to forge a connection between election by grace and the exclusion of works. By definition if one is elected by grace, then works are excluded...Paul concludes this paragraph by explaining why works are excluded. If they are introduced as a factor in election, then "grace is no longer grace"...Once works play a role in gaining salvation, then grace by definition is excluded. Dunn's claim that "works of the law" are intended here is off the mark, since Paul speaks of "works" in general without introducing the word "law". Thus he shows that no works of any kind play a role in the reception of God's electing grace. One should also observe that Paul's teaching on election is indissolubly bound up with his gospel of justification. Those who deny unconditional election introduce, albeit subtly, the notion that human works play a role in obtaining justification and open the door for human boasting. For Paul, the purity of grace is bound up with the conviction that God elects apart from any work on the part of human beings...[Luther] defended the doctrines of the bondage the will and unconditional election so vigorously because the denial of either compromised the Pauline gospel that justification is by grace one through faith alone..
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(Bruce) This passage talks about God not rejecting His people Israel because of the remnant. Some key concepts are that God has kept His remnant that He chose by grace, and that God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear. This is a Calvinist proof text.

For v4, God keeping the remnant, there are a couple of responses: 1. God kept the remnant safe from Jezebel, not choosing who would be in the remnant. The problem with this response is that Paul is clearly using this example to talk about the remnant being in Christ. 2. God has kept the remnant, not individuals in the remnant. This has been a common non-Calvinist objection to Romans proof texts - that God predestines and keeps a group, but not individuals in the group. 3. God's act in keeping them is conditioned on them not bowing the knee to Baal.

For v8, God giving them a spirit of stupor, a non-Calvinist response is to bring up Judicial Hardening, which is the concept that God hardens those who continually reject His word. Some say that God hardens people, by withdrawing from them, which in turn leaves them in a state of blindness. Some others would claim that God can harden people for a while, yet come to them later and rescue them.

6.162. Romans 11:20 - 24

> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

https://www.theologyproject.online/post/how-romans-9-11-and-romans-8-make-me-arminian says:

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(This is part 1. Part 2 is in in Romans 9)

But if you were tempted toward a Reformed view of unconditional individual election by reading Romans 9, you might find Paul's argument somewhat surprising when you arrive at Romans 11. After all, it's there Paul entertains the possibility that God might exert his sovereign power to "cut off" justified believers if they fall into unbelief. That warning comes in the context of Romans 11:17–25 where Paul addresses the Roman recipients by drawing attention to their trust in Jesus, "You stand only through faith," (11:20). And since we've read Romans 3–4, we know standing by faith means they are justified. They have peace with God (Romans 5), union with Christ (Romans 6), and are indwelt by the

Holy Spirit (Romans 8). Yet Paul does not say something like: you stand by faith, and that means you'll be preserved to the end. Instead, the apostle warns, "perhaps he [God] will not spare you" (11:21). He puts it differently a few verses later, when he says that if the recipients do not continue in faith and in God's kindness, "you also will be cut off" (11:22). Note the significance of these verses. The apostle Paul entertains and warns about the real possibility that people who are justified by faith may, at some point, be cut off and not spared. Those verses make me Arminian.

Consider the implications. If Paul thinks justified persons can be cut off from grace, then he cannot think of individual election to salvation in unconditional terms. And in fact, he does not. In Romans 11:17–25, the condition for staying in God's kindness is belief (Greek pistis), and the condition for being cut off is unbelief (Greek apistis). Paul sets forth his understanding of this condition first in terms of unbelieving Israel in 11:20, "They were broken off because of their unbelief (apistis)." In contrast, and as we saw above, the Roman recipients currently stand by justifying faith (pistis, 11:20). It's worth noting that Paul's pronouns here are singular and not plural. He is addressing the individual member of the Roman congregation about his or her personal faith. And what is the condition under which such an individual might be cut off? For Paul, it's the same as it was for the individual Israelite, namely apistis, or unbelief. Given that Paul thinks these justified-by-faith people might be cut off for falling into unbelief, he cannot at the same time consistently think that their individual election is unconditional. To the contrary, the apostle portrays individual entrance into ultimate and final salvation as conditioned upon continued faith in Christ. But if this is true, what are we to make of Romans 9 and the temptation to build a doctrine of unconditional election upon it? Fortunately, Arminian readings of Romans 9 offer help.

Whatever we ultimately say about Romans 9–11, we must acknowledge that these chapters constitute a single coherent argument. And if Paul portrays individual election as conditional in chapter 11, then whatever he says about election in chapter 9 must be coherent with what he says in chapter 11.

(Please go to Romans 9 for a continuation of this article)
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(Bruce) I'll mention that this section of scripture is talking about one olive tree / nation that was made up of Israelites. God opened up membership to Gentiles by grafting them into that olive tree (and cut off unbelieving Israelites). I'm mentioning this to counter any claims that God cut down the entire tree that was Israel and replaced it with a new tree (replacement theory).

Onto the point regarding this topic: It certainly seems like this passage is talking about God cutting off individual believers if they don't continue in His kindness. One might respond that the "you" in this passage is referring to people in a group. In other words, this passage could be saying that it doesn't matter if you are an Israelite or Gentile, you still have to believe. Is Paul making a distinction between the visible church (everyone who is meeting together) and the invisible church (those that truly believe)?

6.163. Romans 11:28 - 29
As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

(Bruce) This is the section of scripture where Paul is describing the mystery of a partial hardening of Israel until the full number of Gentiles come in, and then all Israel will be saved. In this case, it appears that Paul is not talking about the Israel in which the Gentiles are grafted in, but ethnic Israelites (since this section starts with "lest you be wise in your own sight"). This section of scripture is a major dispensational proof text (a topic outside this discussion), which states that God has a separate covenant with ethnic Israel. I reject this view. There is one tree. However, it does look like this is a prophecy about a revival among ethnic Jews - if I am understanding this section of scripture at all.

Back on topic. This section of scripture is talking about the election of a people group - ethnic Israel. And, within this elected people group, there are many who are unbelievers. This gives weight to those who claim that election is not about people, but about groups. I will attempt to see if the concept of individual election holds up or falls down given the full weight of scripture.

The final verse says that God's call and election are irrevocable. This is once again in the context of ethnic Israel. It's interesting that God's call and election of ethnic Israel is still in place, even though many ethnic Israelites have rejected Jesus. It's something that non-dispensationalists need to pay attention to. (I'm not claiming that dispensationalists are correct on very much at all, but that non-dispensationalists need to handle this section of scripture).

6.164. Romans 11:30 - 32 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now

receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

(Bruce) One needs to take v32 in context. Paul is talking about how there is a time that ethnic Israel as a whole has been disobedient, and a time that Gentiles as a whole has been disobedient. The words “God has consigned all” is used for total depravity. But, this is not a good context in which to make that claim. This is talking about times and people in general. It’s highly probable that in this context, this section of scripture is talking about how by God’s election of Israel, and timing of the coming of Jesus, it shaped these times. This is a low-hanging view of God’s providence that everyone agrees with. Some claim a much stronger view of God’s providence, claiming that God directly controls a lot of things (perhaps, even everything?). This topic of God’s providence is extremely complex. How much does God control in the world, and how much does He intervene to do it? Can God drive a lot with relatively little intervention? Or does God drive everything with meticulous providence - intervening at every point? Unfortunately, I think there is not enough data in the Bible to answer this question. The Bible has lots of stories of God’s intervention, but we don’t know how constant God’s intervention is. We all have examples of God’s intervention in our own lives, but we are only directly aware of it several times over our lifetime. The rest we trust God for.

6.165. Romans 11:34 - 36
“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”
35 “Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”
36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

(Bruce) I think this passage speaks to our limited understanding and need to be generally humble about what we think we know (including on this topic). V36 speaks to creation and the purpose of His creation - that everything leads to Him.

6.166. Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/rom-123-does-god-give-us-our-faith-or-do-we-produce-faith/ says:
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(Rom. 12:3) Does God give us our faith—or do we produce faith?
CLAIM: Some Calvinistic interpreters argue that God gives us faith, so that we can believe in Christ. For instance, Calvinist John Piper writes, “Paul is concerned that people were ‘thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think.’ His final remedy for this pride is to say that not only are spiritual gifts a work of God’s free grace in our lives, but so also is the very faith with which we use those gifts. This means that every possible ground of boasting is taken away. How can we boast if even the qualification for receiving gifts is also a gift? … As Romans 12:3 says, So that we will not think too highly of ourselves. The last bastion of pride is the belief that we are the originators of our faith.” Are we called on to believe, or does God produce faith in us?

RESPONSE: This passage has very little to do with the Calvinism/Arminianism debate. After all, the faith mentioned here is for believers—not non-believers. Moreover, this doesn’t describe coming to Christ, because it is “difficult to think that Paul would consider this faith as given by God in different measures to Christians.” Therefore, if we use this verse as a proof text for “irresistible grace,” this is far from the context in which it was written.

But how are we to interpret this passage? The Greek literally says, “God has measured (merizō) the measure (metron) of faith.” Grant Osborne states that the “measure” of faith could refer to (1) God giving more faith to some believers rather than others or (2) our shared faith is the measure itself. Let’s consider each view:

OPTION #1. God gives more faith to some rather than others
Under this view, God gives more faith to some believers. The nearest grammatical parallel is 2 Corinthians 10:13, where Paul writes, “We will not boast beyond our measure (metron), but within the measure (metron) of the sphere which God apportioned (merizo) to us as a measure (metron), to reach even as far as you.” This parallel implies that believers have different measures of ministry (2 Cor. 10:13) or different measures of faith (Rom. 12:3). This seems to fit with the concept that God gives “gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:6).

Many commentators who hold this view believe that “faith” is equivalent with the “gifts” which God has given us. The context (vv.4-8) implies that the faith we are given is for the “function” (v.4) of our spiritual gifts. (Notice the connecting word “For…”)

OPTION #2. Our common faith is the measure itself
Under this view, the Christian faith is the measurement itself. In other words, the way that we have “sound judgment” and humility is to remember our common faith in Christ.

Douglas Moo writes, “The ‘measure of faith’ could refer to this shared faith as the standard by which Christians are to regard themselves. Our faith is the measure. On this view God has not given a different measure to each Christian but has given to each Christian the same measure… It is that faith which believers have in common as fellow members of the body of Christ that Paul here highlights as the standard against which each of us is to estimate himself.” Moo also notes that Paul does not imply that “it is God who gives believers that ‘degree’ of faith.”

Conclusion
Both views are tenable interpretations. Regardless, Paul’s point is for believers to be humble (“not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment”). So, before discussing spiritual gifts, Paul reminds them that faith is the measure of importance—not status or gifts. Moreover, later, Paul writes that we should use our spiritual gifts “according to the proportion of his faith” (v.6). Therefore, Paul understands faith to be our role—not God’s.
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(Bruce) I think that everyone agrees that some Christ followers exhibit more faith than others. Also, through God’s sanctification process in us, our faith grows throughout our lives. I think it’s quite reasonable to say that “the measure of faith that God has assigned” refers to the faith that God has grown in each of us. Calvinists would say that this is God giving us faith. Non-Calvinists would say that this is us appropriating faith that God is teaching us.

6.167. 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9
Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,
2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Bruce) I think no one denies that God calls His saints (and that they respond). Calvinists use the words “sustain you to the end” as a proof text for the point - the preservation of the saints. Non-Calvinists respond that Jesus does sustain those who continue in Him, but will not sustain those who reject Him. Calvinists agree with this, except that they would say that those people were never in Him.

6.168. 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 31

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The concept of calling obviously implies the need to respond in obedience. However, Paul does not use the language of response in contexts where he refers to God's converting call, leaving the impression that this calling of individuals to salvation is a decisive act of God. Indeed, the action of calling is synonymous in vv27-28 with God choosing the weak, the despised, and the lowly. In other words, in Paul's parlance, calling is a synonym for divine election, even if the latter is logically prior.

The two verses [27-28] together leave the unmistakable impression of the deliberate, sovereign action of God in assembling, or "calling," his people in Corinthian contrary to

all expectations. God's choice of the humble nation Israel was likewise surprising and unanticipated [Deut 7:7]. This is a stable pattern in salvation history. From Genesis onward, where he consistently bypasses the firstborn, God chooses the most unlikely figures, a model he followed in Corinth. In short, the Corinthians are God's people not because of themselves but "because of him" (1 Cor 1:30).

God's ultimate aim in his activity of choosing, shaming, and nullifying is to preclude all human boasting. The critical purpose of God's action of exalting the foolish and lowering the proud is that no one can sing his or her own praises in the presence of God...Paul insists that all praise is to be reserved for God, for "it is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus." Sometimes a brief remark carries more weight than a longer and more elaborate explanation. This is the case in point, with the first two words of the verse, literally "of him," offering a pithy summary of the conclusion of the argument in 1:31 to boast only in the Lord. The point is that if it is "of him" that the Corinthians have their standing with God, it is presumably not "of yourselves." It is hard to conceive of a more emphatic way of underscoring God's grace in such a short space.
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(Bruce) This passage talks about how God's message is foolishness to those not called. It also shows that God calls His own. Furthermore, it shows a criteria that God uses to call people - the low, the weak and foolish by this world's standards. I think that by now (in looking at the Bible passages in order), we can say that God really does make specific calls to specific people - and doesn't bother with others. So, there is a general call and specific callings. Furthermore, since God has chosen His own, He wouldn't waste time calling those who will not respond. So, effectively, no one will resist His call. I think the response to all this is to say that God, through His foreknowledge, calls those He foreknows will make a free choice to follow Him. It's not so much that His specific call can't be resisted, but that He only makes a specific call to those He knows will respond positively.

6.169. 1 Corinthians 2:12 - 15

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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This passage is often used by Calvinists to support the claim of Total Depravity/Total Inability. As with all Calvinist proof texts, it is taken out of context. We simply have to read the passages before and after to understand Paul's meaning and intention. In the preceding verses, it's clear that Paul is addressing and discussing that believers in Christ need to rely on the Spirit to discern and grow in understanding. Three verses later Paul calls these same Christians unspiritual:

3:1-3: "Brothers and sisters, I couldn't talk to you like spiritual people but like unspiritual people, like babies in Christ. I gave you milk to drink instead of solid food, because you weren't up to it yet. Now you are still not up to it because you are still unspiritual. When jealousy and fighting exist between you, aren't you unspiritual and living by human standards?"

Paul tells these Christians they can't accept "the things of the Spirit of God" because they are choosing to follow the flesh rather than the Spirit. The point is, whether Christian or not, setting your mind on the things of the world/flesh will close you off to God. Only out of context can Calvinistic philosophy be read into this verse.
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(Bruce) Everybody agrees that what God has to teach His followers are spiritually discerned (that is, we must have the Holy Spirit in us to understand them). Otherwise, our human nature would reject what He would teach us. That applies to His ways. But, does this also apply to the concept that there is a creator and a desire to know that creator. Earlier in Romans 1:20, it says: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

6.170. 1 Corinthians 4:7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

(Bruce) Calvinists claim that if there is anything we had to do with receiving God's salvation, we have room to boast. Non-Calvinists respond that receiving a free gift is not an act worthy of boasting about.

6.171. 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that we need to be washed, sanctified and justified in Jesus and by the Holy Spirit. How does one get to this point? Does God just change them, or are people intrigued and then God changes them?

6.172. 1 Corinthians 10:1 - 13

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

(Bruce) This is addressing a community of believers. Paul is telling the individuals in that community to not fall away and be rejected by God. This says nothing on our topic. It doesn’t say whether the elect can fall away, or whether there are non-elect in the community that need to repent.

6.173. 1 Corinthians 12:2 - 3

You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

(Bruce) I think it’s obvious that people can utter whatever words they want and not mean them. But to mean them, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I don’t see that there’s any indication that this is about election and calling, or anything else on this topic.

6.174. 1 Corinthians 15:1 - 2

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

(Bruce) This seems to be saying something non-Calvinistic. Is it a given that someone who is saved could not hold fast? Does believing mean that one is saved? Calvinists respond that this is not talking about salvation, but about believing in the true Gospel.

6.175. 1 Corinthians 15:20 - 23

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

(Bruce) This passage is talking about how the dead (that are no longer living in this world) will be raised up when Jesus comes back.

6.176. 2 Corinthians 3:4 - 6

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

(Bruce) Calvinists would say that nothing comes from us, which would include our ability to respond to God’s general call. A response to that is that God must make us sufficient through sanctification and regeneration, but, God can do that for those who

want it. It's possible to want to be God's. Does God have to woo us first before we have a desire?

6.177. 2 Corinthians 3:14 - 18

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

(Bruce) This looks to me like a major Calvinist proof text. Their minds are hardened and veiled, and only through Christ is it taken away. What is the answer? Turning to Jesus. Is that impossible for a hardened and veiled heart? This passage seems to be saying that turning to Jesus is how to get the veil removed. It seems like it's the expectation that we do that, and that is a personal choice. (For example, it doesn't say, "but when God turns a heart to Jesus, the veil is removed").

6.178. 2 Corinthians 4:3 - 4

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(Bruce) An even stronger Calvinist proof text. The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. How does one see? God must grant sight to that one. Under what circumstances does God grant sight? Is everyone either born "perishing" or "chosen"? I suppose a non-Calvinist response would be that the Gospel is only veiled to those who willingly reject it. Rejection comes first, then blindness.

6.179. 2 Corinthians 5:14 - 15

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

(Bruce) This is a non-Calvinist proof text that says Jesus died for all people, denying limited atonement. The common response is to say that “all” here specifically refers to God’s elect. (The claim is that the Greek says “the all”). It seems like the more likely reading is that Jesus died for all, to make it possible for those who might live. In other words, Jesus died to open the way for all people to have a chance of reconciling with Him. Of course, not everyone will want to reconcile.

On the other hand, one could make a case that Jesus died for the people who have died to this world (“one has died for all, therefore all have died”. To live in Christ, we have to die. If this interpretation is correct, “all” does refer to only the Elect, preserving limited atonement.

6.180. 2 Corinthians 5:17 - 21
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(Bruce) This may be a non-Calvinist proof text. V19 gives further support to the thesis I mentioned before that Jesus actually did reconcile the world to Himself, reconciling everyone on His end - although many would reject His salvation through unbelief. Of course, this doesn’t contradict Calvinism in that one could still claim that you need to be regenerated to believe. V20 implores us to be reconciled to God, which may contradict the previous statement. Why would Paul implore us to be reconciled to God if we have no ability to do so? This same question remains for many Bible passages that urge people to believe.

6.181. 2 Corinthians 6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

(Bruce) This is a non-Calvinist proof text, potentially denying perseverance of the saints. How can one receive the grace of God in vain? One Calvinist response is that this is directed at a church, and that each member should make sure that they are in Christ and have received His grace,, as opposed to just thinking they are in Christ. Another Calvinist

response is that this is about not bearing fruit unto salvation. One can become saved, but not bearing fruit is receiving God's grace in vain.

6.182. Galatians 1: 15 - 16
15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles,

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Calvinists interpret this passage to mean that God irresistibly called Paul because he was elected to salvation. They further argue that Paul's salvation is typical of all Christians in this regard.

Arminians would point out Paul's election and calling were based on God's foreknowledge of Paul's decision to believe. Some Arminians acknowledge that Paul may have been unconditionally elected and irresistibly called by God, but point out that this does not prove that God deals with all people in this way.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/romans-2/115-does-this-passage-support-the-doctrine-that-god-predestines-some-people-to-heaven-and-others-to-hell/ says:

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(Gal. 1:15) Does this passage support the doctrine that God predestines some people to heaven and others to hell?

CLAIM: Some Calvinist interpreters hold that this passage supports the notion that God predestines humans for heaven or hell, while they are still in their "mother's womb." Is this the case?

RESPONSE: A number of observations can be made.

First, this passage strictly refers to Paul—not all people. Therefore, at most, this passage shows that God worked this way in the life of Paul (c.f. Jer. 1:5).

Second, this passage teaches that Paul was chosen for the purpose of ministry, rather than the purpose of heaven or hell. If we stick strictly to the text, we see that God chose

Paul “so that [he] might preach [Jesus] among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:16). The purpose of Paul’s calling was for the purpose of ministry—not for the purpose of heaven or hell.

Third, Acts teaches that Paul had a choice regarding his heavenly vision. Paul told Agrippa that he did “not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19), which implies that Paul had a choice to obey or disobey God’s call. After all, there was a three day delay in Paul coming to faith. After three days of contemplating, Ananias said, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16).

Fourth, Paul brings this up to demonstrate the authority of his gospel message. He explains that his message predated his own birth, which further supports what he began his letter saying that he was “an apostle not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal. 1:1). Again, in Galatians 1:12, Paul wrote, “I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Paul mentions this event in his mother’s womb to further show that he did not invent the gospel message.

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(Bruce) This passage is being applied to Paul. God specifically called Paul before he was even born to his ministry to the Gentiles. Does God specifically call all Christ followers to salvation? Does God call them according to His foreknowledge of their response? Does God call people and give them the ability to respond, because otherwise they never would?

6.183. Galatians 4:23 - 26, 28 - 31

But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. 24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

(Bruce) This passage is making comparisons between two covenants and two nations. This has everything to do with choosing people to bear a nation, and nothing to do with the personal salvation of the two people involved..

6.184. Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Throughout the remainder of this passage (1:4-14), Paul gives a series of reasons why God is so worthy to be praised. The first refers to God's choosing of his people in eternity past.

[vv11-12] Paul ever so strongly emphasizes that God is not responding to events as they unfold with various countermeasures, but that he has a carefully designed plan that he is revealing and fulfilling, especially as it relates to the choosing and redeeming of his people. Here he uses three different words to express the fact that he has a plan (prothesis, boule, and thelema). It is difficult to find shades of differences between the three words, especially as they appear in this context. It is better to recognize a rhetorical stress on God's sovereignty.

It is also important for the readers to know that God has the power (energeo) to put his plan into effect. The power of God is a major theme in this letter, and Paul here introduces it by emphatically asserting that God will powerfully unfold his plan as he has willed it and against any conceivable opposition. To ward off any doubt, Paul explains that God works out "everything" (ta panta) according to his purpose.

[1:4: "In him"] One view is that it could be regarded as a dative of sphere, which connotes the idea that we are chosen in Christ as the head and representative of the spiritual community just as Adam is the head and representative of the natural

community. The other view is that it could be relational or instrumental in the sense that God chose believers in connection with or through Christ's work of redemption. The latter interpretation is preferable because it expresses that God chose the believer for his glory and that it had to be done in connection with the redemption accomplished in Christ.

[1:11] The present tense refers to God's continual activity toward the purpose that he resolved eternity past. The "all things" (ta panta) refers to all of God's providence and must not be restricted to God's redemptive plan. This coincides with v10 where "all things" are described as "those things in heaven and those things on earth."

The great theme of divine election is the first to be introduced as Paul's mind reaches back before creation, before time began, into eternity in which only God himself existed. Election is one of the variety of motifs found in this magnificent paragraph that describe different facets of God's gracious, saving purposes: note the language of predestination (vv5,11), good pleasure (vv5,9), will (vv5,9,11), mystery (v9), purpose (v9; cf. v11), appointment (v11), and plan (v11).

There is clearly a corporate dimension to God's election. It was God's intention to create for himself a people perfectly conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29-30). It is inappropriate, however, to suggest that election in Christ is primarily corporate rather than personal and individual...Some of the divine gifts, for example, redemption and forgiveness of sins in Christ (v7), together with the sealing of the Holy Spirit following belief in the gospel of salvation (vv13,14), must be understood as coming to believers personally and individually.

Further, to suggest that election in Christ is "not related primarily to individual salvation but to God's purpose" introduces an unnecessary "either-or." Predestination is to a relationship with God the Father through his Son, described in v5 under the imagery of adoption.

That choice in Christ was made in eternity, before time and creation, as the phrase "before the creation of the world" makes plain. The language of election before the foundation of the world occurs a number of times in the Pauline letters, not least in the context of thanksgiving (1 Thes 1:4; 2:13; cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Tim 1:9), as part of an expression of gratitude for God's amazing grace. To say that election took place before creation indicates that God's choice was due to his own free decision and love, which were not dependent on temporal circumstances or man's merit. The reasons for his election were rooted in the depths of his gracious, sovereign nature.

The verb "foreordain, predestine," which appears six times in the NT, is used exclusively of God (Rom 8:29,30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5, in relation to sonship; cf. 1:11; Acts 4:28) and serves to emphasize his sole initiative and authority in our salvation Predestination is for a God-designed purpose, in this instance, "adoption."

The basis or standard of God's action in foreordaining us to be his children is spelled out in the compound phrase, "in accordance with his pleasure and will." "Pleasure"...signifies not simply the purpose of God but also the delight that he takes in his plans..."Will" signifies that which is purposed, or intended.

By giving Gentile believers the Spirit, God "seals" or stamps them as his own now, and he will protect them through the trials and testings of this life (cf. 6:10-18) until he takes final possession of them (cf. v14) on "the day of redemption" (4:30).

The Holy Spirit by whom the Gentiles were sealed...is now called the "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." Beyond this translation lies the word that signifies a "downpayment" or "pledge."...In giving him [the Spirit] to us God is not simply promising us our final inheritance but actually providing us with a foretaste of it...

He has made them his own: they are his treasured possession..."They will be mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession" (Mal 3:17).
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https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Calvinists cite this passage as teaching unconditional election. These phrases are taken to mean that God has sovereignly decided in advance who will be saved, completely irrespective of human choice.

Arminians agree that vs. 4 is teaching God's election of the believer to salvation. However, they call attention to the significance of the phrase "in Him." This phrase, it is argued, means that Christ was the chosen one (Is. 42:1), and that believers participate in his chosenness because they are baptized into him when they believe (Eph. 1:13). Arminians also insist that God's election and predestination are based on his foreknowledge of our choice to believe in Christ (I Pet. 1:1,2; Rom. 8:29).
With regard to vs. 5 Arminians hold that this passage is referring not to God's choice of who will be saved, but of God's choice that those who believe will be ultimately

glorified. "Adoption as sons" is seen as references to the glorification of believers (cf. Rom. 8:23 for Paul's use of "adoption" in this way).
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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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The word ‘predestined’ literally means ‘a destination is set beforehand’. Thus when we see this word, we need to consider two questions, and look at the actual text of scripture to answer them: Who is being predestined? And, what is their destination?

The first question is answered in the opening statement:
“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God;
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Paul is addressing Christians, “saints” who are “faithful in Christ Jesus.” The pronouns ‘us’, ‘we’ and ‘you’ that follow refer to people who are already followers of Christ. The people being predestined in the following verses are Christians, not unbelievers.
The second question - What is the destination? - is answered in the next verses. Continuing in verse 3:

Notice what the Bible says. It does NOT say “he chose us TO BE IN HIM before the foundation of the world.” It says “he chose us IN HIM before the foundation of the world.” Remember who the Bible says is being predestined – Christians are being predestined for the spiritual blessings listed, not unbelievers being predestined to become Christians. It’s a huge difference, and the Bible is clear about what is meant. The phrase ‘in him’ or ‘in Christ’ is said 10 times in Ephesians. God has predestined that anyone who is in Christ will become “holy and blameless” and adopted as a child of God.

The “adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” doesn’t refer to unbelievers receiving salvation, it refers to “the faithful in Christ” one day receiving glorified bodies with which we can be with God as His children forever. Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:23, referring to people who are already believers but are still awaiting “adoption” and “redemption”. Romans 8:23: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” God has predestined people who have put their faith in Christ to be resurrected to eternal life.

A few verses earlier in Romans 8:15, Paul writes that we receive the "Spirit of adoption" when we become believers: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” Though we receive the "Spirit of adoption" upon receiving Christ, the Bible is clear that we as believers are waiting for the full adoption, when we trade our temporary earthly bodies for eternal ones. We don't have to wonder about whether that will happen. God has predestined it.

Continuing on with the rest of this passage in Ephesians, notice when believers are placed in Christ. It’s not “before the foundation of the world,” but “when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him.

The straightforward reading of this passage doesn’t teach that God has predestined certain individuals before the foundation of the world to believe and others to burn in hell. It teaches that God has predestined those who have put their faith in Christ to be “holy and blameless,” and to have “spiritual blessings in the heavenly places,” “redemption,” “forgiveness,” and “adoption.”

Ephesians 1, like many other passages, also refutes Calvinism’s backward and unbiblical order of salvation, where supernatural regeneration must occur before a person irresistibly responds to Christ. This passage teaches the correct order:

1) “you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”
2) “and believed in Him”
3) you “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”
This order of salvation is consistent throughout the New Testament.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/eph-14-does-this-passage-teach-that-some-people-are-chosen-for-heaven-and-others-are-chosen-for-hell/ says:
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(Eph. 1:4) Does this passage teach that some people are “chosen” for heaven and others are “chosen” for hell?
CLAIM: Paul writes, “[God] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph. 1:4). Calvinistic interpreters argue that this passage teaches God’s unconditional election of believers. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: Ephesians 1 is one of the “big three” Calvinistic passages (cf. Romans 9 and John 6). In other words, this is one of the best passages that Calvinists marshal in support of their view. But even this passage (one of their strongest), can be faithfully understood from an alternative perspective: Put simply, we are “chosen” because we are in Christ, but we are not chosen to be put into Christ. There are a number of reasons for adopting this interpretation.

Jesus is the “Chosen One,” and we are chosen “in Him.” God said of Jesus, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” (Lk. 9:35) Of course, Jesus was not “chosen” from a number of different messiahs (!!). Likewise, there are “chosen angels” (1 Tim. 5:21). But of course, angels are not chosen for salvation either (Heb. 1:14; 2 Pet. 2:4). Therefore, whatever “chosen” means, it does not mean “unconditionally elected for salvation,” as Calvinism teaches.

Paul uses the prepositional phrase “in Christ” ten times in the first thirteen verses of Ephesians 1 (in various forms). We aren’t chosen to be put into Christ, but chosen because we are in Christ. Commentator Klyne Snodgrass writes, “People become elect only in the Elect One—Christ… Individuals are not elected and then put in Christ. They are in Christ and therefore elect.”[2] Forster and Marston write, “We are chosen in Christ. This does not mean that we were chosen to be put into Christ.”

Consider a parallel example from the OT: Jacob’s descendants (the nation of Israel) were not chosen to be put into Jacob’s line. Rather, they were chosen, because they were in Jacob’s line.

Similarly, Paul is not referring to individuals—but to the entire church. Western people typically read the Bible as referring to me, when they often need to read it as referring to we. Ephesians 1 is a case in point. Paul is not referring to the individual believer, but to the entire church. Paul wrote, “He chose us…” rather than “He chose me…” Paul is not saying that an individual was chosen to be with Christ; he is saying that the entire church was chosen to be with Christ.

We are chosen IN Christ, but how are we put INTO Christ?
The context tells us that we get put into Christ simply through “faith” in Jesus Christ:

The EARLIER CONTEXT refers to the believer’s faith as the key to being “in Christ” (v.1). Paul writes his letter “To the saints… who are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). This verse is often overlooked. The term “faithful” (pistoi) can be translated as either “those who have faith” or as “those who are faithful.” However, the majority of even Reformed

commentators understand this to refer to “those who have faith.” These would include commentators like F.F. Bruce, Andrew Lincoln, Ernest Best, and Clinton Arnold. Therefore, if you have faith in Jesus, then you are part of the “us” mentioned throughout Paul’s introduction. This will change how you read the rest of this chapter:

“[God] chose [the faithful] in Him” (v.4).

“[God] predestined [the faithful] to adoption as sons” (v.5).

“[The faithful] have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose” (v.11).

In other words, it is not a mystery how we get into Christ. The text tells us that this is through our faith.

The LATER CONTEXT refers to the believer’s faith as the key to being “in Christ” (vv.13-14). Paul explicitly writes, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13). This passage teaches that being in Christ is contingent on “having also believed.” Leighton Flowers writes, “The first chapter of Ephesians is not about God predetermining which individuals will be in Christ. This passage is about God predetermining the spiritual blessings for those who are in Christ through believing the word of truth (vv. 1-3).”[10]

Other passages show that God chose us based on his foreknowledge. Peter writes, “[Christian believers] are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:2). Notice the order: God chose us based on his foreknowledge of future events, which would include our decision to trust in Christ.

Conclusion
We are not saying that a Reformed reading is ruled out by the interpretation defended above. It’s certainly possible to understand Ephesians 1:4 as referring to unconditional election. However, we are merely saying that this alternate reading is just as plausible, or perhaps, even more plausible. Moreover, seeing as how this is one of the best passages in support of unconditional election, this shows that the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election is not a strong view to hold in light of the various passages that speak directly to the contrary.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/eph-15-does-this-verse-teach-that-some-are-predestined-for-heaven-and-others-for-hell-see-also-verse-11-and-2-thess-213/ says:
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(Eph. 1:5) Does this verse teach that some are “predestined” for heaven and others for hell? (see also verse 11 and 2 Thess. 2:13)
CLAIM: Some Calvinistic interpreters argue that this passage supports the doctrine of unconditional election, where God predestines some for heaven and others for hell. Is this the case?

RESPONSE: Other interpreters read this passage differently.

First, God’s predestination is based on his foreknowledge of who would freely choose him. In Romans 8:29, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son…” Notice the order: God predestines the ones whom he foreknew would freely accept him (c.f. 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

Second, the purpose of predestination always refers to our destiny in the future—not in the past. Predestination never deals with how people came to Christ in the past. It always deals with what will happen to Christians in the future. That is, our “predestination” refers to our glorification. The thrust of this passage is referring to what we are saved for (“adoption as sons”), rather than who is saved. Forster and Marston write, “In any event, the most important point to grasp about predestination is that it concerns man’s future destiny. It does not concern who should, or should not, become Christians, but rather their destiny as Christians.”[1]

Some theologians capture our corporate election and predestination in Christ by using the illustration of an airplane that is “predestined” to travel to a certain location. Once we get on the plane, then we are signed, sealed, and delivered to go to that destination.
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(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9.

This is one of the Calvinist “Big Three” passages (along with Romans 9 and John 6).

Before the foundation of the world, He chose us and predestined us “in Him” according to His will. He works all things according to the counsel of His will.

This sounds solidly Calvinistic. God not only chose us, He did it according to His will. If it's by His will, it probably doesn't mean that it is solely by His foreknowledge. There's a couple of responses to this: 1. It doesn't say He chose us to be in Him, but that He chose us "in Him". He chose Jesus and all that are in Him. 2. This isn't about salvation necessarily, but about what happens to those who are saved. He chose us to be holy and blameless before Him. 3. This whole section is addressing the saints in Ephesus. God knew them from before the beginning of the world, and since they believed, He chose them and predestined them.

The next part of the passage says that He works all things according to the counsel of His will. Does "all things" just include those things that are part of His ultimate plan, or is everything down to the minutiae part of His plan? For example, did He work out what I had for breakfast each morning? Or is that something that He can just let happen without actively planning it? He did know before the foundation of the world what I would have for every breakfast, but did He exert His will to decide what that would be? Furthermore, if literally everything is planned by Him, can we be His stewards in this world, or are we just executing His predetermined plan without any effective will of our own?

When we heard the gospel and believed, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit.

This seems like a different order than what Calvinists state. Calvinists say that before we believe, we must be sealed with the Holy Spirit, since we have no ability to believe.

6.185. Ephesians 1:15 - 23

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that for us to get a clearer vision of God, and that for us to receive revelation and knowledge of Him, He needs to open our minds and help us see. That's one task of the Holy Spirit - to teach us the secret knowledge of Him. This opening of our minds starts happening at the very moment the Holy Spirit enters us, and even can occur when the Holy Spirit woos us when we aren't saved yet. There are (at least) two areas of disagreement: 1. How much of the Holy Spirit do we need to desire to be in God (total inability)? 2. Is there such a thing as general wooing by the Holy Spirit? In other words, is it possible for the Holy Spirit to attempt to woo someone, but ultimately fail (irresistible grace)?

6.186. Ephesians 2:1 - 10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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— 3 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. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:

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"Dead" [in sins] is here understood not as literal physical death, but in the metaphorical sense of alienation from the one who gives life [cf. 2:12; 4:18].

The readers formerly came under the controlling influence of "the age of this world."...This could be interpreted to refer to the various non-Christian religions, ideologies, philosophies, values, and economic systems as well as to the more mundane but equally powerful influence of peer pressure, fashion, and the media.

The second powerful influence that formerly held the readers in bondage to sin is the devil [2:2].

Paul now [2:3] indicates the third form of evil influence that holds unbelieving humanity in bondage to sin and from which they need deliverance...a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

[2:8] In Paul's thinking, faith is not something that people offer to God and with which God's grace then cooperates to save them. Rather, faith is aligned with grace, and both faith and grace stand over against anything that human beings can offer God.

The second statement (v9) denies that salvation comes "from" any "works" they might accomplish. Prior to their conversion, "the Ruler of the realm of the air" [Satan] was powerfully at work (energountos) in them, and they followed the cravings of their fallen flesh and mind (vv2-3).

"By nature" [v3] can only mean "by birth" at Gal 2:15, and this is its significance here. The expression "children of wrath" is a Hebraism, like "sons of disobedience" (v2), and means worthy to receive divine judgment.

[v8] However, the context demands that "this" be understood of salvation by grace as a whole, including the faith (or faithfulness) through which it is received.

[v9] "Works" now stand for human effort in general, a nuance found elsewhere in Paul.

The concluding statement of this stunning paragraph about God's gracious salvation underscores the importance and divine origin of these good works: "which God prepared in advance so that we might live in them."...The only other use of this verb at Rom 9:23 presents a strongly predestinarian thrust, and it is likely that the prefix "before" suggests that God's preparation precedes the foundation of the world...as already prepared in his mind and counsel from before eternity.

5. Efficacy. Turning to the effect of the gift, a perfect gift may also be figured as that which fully achieves what it was designed to do.

Hence, the antecedent of touto is the whole event: "being saved by grace through faith". One implication of this proper understanding of touto is that all the components of the event are also referenced as originating not from human capacity or exertion but as God's gift. This means that even the believer's act of believing comes from God, as is said more explicitly by Paul elsewhere: "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him..." (Phil 1:29). This is part of the evidence of Protestantism's historic position that salvation is sola gratia and sola fide). Humans

contribute nothing of their own to this salvation, since even believing (which the elect are indeed enabled to do) is a divine gift (cf. Rom 3:24-25). In the context of Eph 2:8, the key to this is what Paul had been driving home so forcefully up until now: Before God's gracious intervention, believers were hopelessly dead, with their wills imprisoned by nature in acts that led only to transgression and sin (2:1-5a,12). S. M. Baugh, Ephesians (Lexham Press, 2016), 160-61.
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https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Coming to God in faith is not coming to God attempting to be saved by works. Calvinism also confuses and conflates these, equating a person's faith as being a work. The Bible in numerous places contrasts faith and works. Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV): "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. " In the original Greek sentence structure of this passage, the "gift of God" is not faith, but the whole clause: "by grace you have been saved through faith." The gift is salvation by grace, and we come to Him by faith to receive this gift. Faith is always distinct from works, as Paul and other New Testament writers consistently teach.

Even if we misread the passage and claim that faith by itself is a gift from God, to whom is it given? Calvinists claim it is effectually, irresistibly given to some and withheld from everyone else. What definition does the Bible give for faith?
Hebrews 11:1 (ESV): "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

If faith is assurance, to whom is this assurance given? It is given to all
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/eph-21-5-does-this-verse-support-the-calvinist-doctrine-of-total-inability/ says:
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(Eph. 2:1, 5) Does this verse support the Calvinist doctrine of total inability?
CLAIM: Paul writes, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins… even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:1, 5). Calvinists sometimes argue that our human condition is "dead" in the sense of having a total inability to respond to God. Like Lazarus in the cave (Jn. 11), we needed God to impart spiritual life and call us from this corpse-like, dead state. Calvinists often argue, "Is a dead person able to respond to God or make himself alive?

No! Therefore, God had to give us spiritual life before we could believe and respond to him." John Calvin stated that this is "a real and present death." Wood states that this expression for death is not "merely figurative… The most vital part of man's personality—the spirit—is dead to the most important factor in life—God." Is this the case?

RESPONSE: This cannot refer to corpse-like death or total inability. Instead, this refers to alienation and separation from God and total depravity. There are a number of reasons for holding this view:

First, the IMMEDIATE CONTEXT demonstrates that Paul is thinking of death in terms of SEPARATION. In the subsequent verses, Paul describes these "dead" believers as being separated or alienated from God: "Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12-13). Later, Paul writes, "[The Gentiles were] being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). All of these terms describe separation—not corpse-like death.

Second, the GREATER CONTEXT of the NT uses the term "dead" for people who can still do certain things. For instance, Jesus told a man to "allow the dead to bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22; cf. Lk. 9:60). If "death" means total inability, then how can they do anything (including burying physically dead people)? Paul spoke of widows who were "dead even while [they] live" (1 Tim. 5:6). Jesus used the term "dead" to refer to the believers at Sardis (Rev. 3:1).

Third, the GREATER CONTEXT of the NT uses the term dead to refer to SEPARATION. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father says, "This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found" (Lk. 15:24). A number of observations can be made regarding this passage: (1) This is a soteriological passage; (2) the father in the parable uses the term "dead" in a metaphorical sense—not a literal sense; and (3) the father parallels being "dead" with being "lost" or separated from himself.

Fourth, even some Reformed authors agree that being "dead" refers to SEPARATION. For instance, F.F. Bruce understands the term death to refer to the sinner being "severed and alienated from God, the source of true life."

Finally, are we really to believe that non-Christians are so corpse-like dead that they cannot respond to God's own call in the gospel? After all, the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Are people so dead that they cannot even respond to "the power of God" himself? Humans do not seek God on their own (Rom. 3:11), but can they seek a God who is presently calling and seeking after them? Adam and Eve could hear God's words in the Garden (Gen. 3:9) and responded to him (Gen. 3:10). How much more should non-Christians respond to God's call through the gospel message?
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/eph-28-is-faith-the-gift-of-god-or-is-grace-the-gift-of-god/ says:
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(Eph. 2:8) Is "faith" the gift of God or is "grace" the gift of God?
CLAIM: Some Calvinists teach that this passage supports the doctrine of irresistible grace. They argue that "faith" is the "gift of God." Instead of exercising faith of our own freewill, God gives us the faith to believe in him, as a gift. Is this the case? Sproul writes, "The faith by which we are saved is a gift. When the apostle says it is not of ourselves, he does not mean it is not our faith. Again, God does not do the believing for us. It is our own faith but it does not originate with us. It is given to us. The gift is not earned or deserved. It is a gift of sheer grace." Is this the case?

RESPONSE: The gift of salvation is not faith; instead, the gift of salvation is grace. In the original Greek, the gender of the nouns is different. Paul writes, "For by grace [feminine] you have been saved through faith [feminine]; and that [neuter] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). The grammar demonstrates that Paul isn't explicitly referring to faith as the gift of God. Instead, he is probably referring to the entire package of salvation. Klyne Snodgrass writes, "Since there is no neuter noun is in the previous clause as the obvious antecedent of 'this,' the word most likely refers to the whole process of God's saving people by grace."

Moreover, note that "faith" is defined as being antithetical to "works." Since faith is not a work, Calvinists and Arminians can both affirm that their salvation was entirely based on God's grace—not works—even if people need to freely place their faith in Christ.
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(Bruce) This is another major Calvinist proof text. V1 discusses how we were dead in sin. Everyone agrees that all without Christ are estranged from the source of life, which is Jesus. Calvinists claim that being dead means that no one can come to Christ unless

Christ raises them to life first. One possible response would be that this earthly, temporal life doesn't stop us from having a desire to unite with our Creator. Today, there are a lot of people who believe in the existence of God, and many are seeking Him - although in a very selfish and impure way. It is true that God needs to grant the Holy Spirit, but He will do that based on a person who seeks Him (although He can come to those who don't seek Him).

V2 - 3 goes on to say that without Jesus, we followed the prince of the power of the air, following the passions of our corrupt flesh and minds, and became children of God's wrath. This is true without exception for those who haven't passed over to Jesus' life. Everyone agrees that this is the case. The disagreement occurs with the claim that no one in this state can desire to not be in this state. For me, this is where it gets tricky. Is it true that a person who is given over to the desires of the flesh cannot in any way also desire that God save them? Of course, even that desire will be corrupted. The person will want a relationship with God on their own terms. However, will God look at that desire and by grace come to that person and open their eyes? I presume some people who say they subscribe to the Calvinist doctrine would say that is exactly how it works. However, this conflicts with the claim that God does not rescue people based on anything they think or do.

V4 - 7: God, by His grace, made us alive while we were still dead. These verses don't say anything about whether we need to believe first, or if it is possible to do so.

V8 - 10: By grace, we have been saved by faith. This is not our own doing, but by the grace of God, not by works so no one may boast. Everyone agrees that God saves us by His grace, that it is not by our works, and that we have no room to boast. The disagreement lies in whether the initial desire that God saves us is a work.

6.187. Ephesians 4:1 - 7

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has a unique call for each of us, and that He has no call for those who will never come to Him. The disagreement is whether God waits for those who believe and then calls them.

6.188. Ephesians 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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It is noteworthy that the apostle goes out of his way to emphasize the perceptive and mental dimension in the human estrangement from God. The Gentiles' mindset has been drastically affected (v17b), their thinking has become darkened so that they are blind to the truth...the light of their understanding has gone out so that they were now in a state of being incapable of grasping the truth of God and his gospel.

Not only are the Gentiles darkened in their understanding; they are also "separated from the life of God," that life which God possesses in himself and bestows on his children. Gentiles who do not belong to Christ are "dead" through their trespasses and sins (2:1,5), and have no relationship at all with the living God (2:12). "God-forsaken" (p190).

Such ignorance is culpable. It is not an excuse for sin...As if to underscore this point, Paul adds that their delusion is "due to hardness of heart."

They are "separated from the life that comes from God." This is in part an expansion of Paul's declaration in 2;12 that Gentiles are "not having hope and godless in the world." Paul sets this parallel to being enemies of God in Col 1:21. The genitive of separation, "from the life," describes the nature of the alienation and helps us understand how Paul could earlier say that before coming to Christ, they were "dead" (2:1). The next noun, "from God," should be interpreted as a genitive of source and as such characterizes God as the fountainhead of life.
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees that non-believers are darkened in their understanding, dead apart from God, ignorant because their hearts are hard. Calvinists claim that this proves the total depravity of people. They are dead and their hearts are hard. A couple of possible responses are: 1. Notice that it says their understanding is darkened, not completely dark. That means that some of God’s light can get through, though dimly. 2. People harden their own hearts, and when they do the Gospel becomes more and more dim to them.

As to how people's hearts become soft enough to desire God to enter their lives, I don't know. Does this require a special act of God? If so, then a major facet of Calvinism is true. Or, is there a general wooing, or light shining that God does, and some people catch a glimpse and respond? Or, is there some mixture?

6.189. Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

(Bruce) Calvinists claim that this proves the preservation of the saints. It's true that we are sealed. But, can we become unsealed under any circumstances? An example we can look at in the Old Testament, is God's presence dwelling in the temple. There were a couple examples of God's presence leaving the temple (2 Chronicles 7:20-21, Ezekiel 10:18-19 and Ezekiel 43:3-7). If we are the new temple of God (collectively and individually), will the Holy Spirit leave if we apostatize? He did in the Old Testament.

6.190. Ephesians 5:5 - 6
For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

(Bruce) I'm not sure if there is anything here concerning this topic. I think that this is making an identity statement. It's impossible to be in Christ and have a second identity. I think this is not saying that if we fall in one of these areas once, we are no longer in the Kingdom of God. But, if we take these things up as our identities, we cannot also have the identity of Christ.

6.191. Philippians 1:5 - 6
because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

(Bruce) This supports preservation of the saints, teaching that God brings to completion everything He has begun. One possible response is that Paul is speaking to particular people, and not making a generic statement. Is Paul speaking to all the people in the church in Philippi, or just to particular individuals? Is it possible that one could reject God after God started a work in them?

6.192. Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

(Bruce) See John 6:44, 65, Acts 11:18, and 2 Timothy 2:25 - 26. This sounds like a pretty convincing Calvinistic proof text. Is this saying that we can only believe if God grants this ability to believe? One response I saw is that, yes, Jesus needed to die for us, which granted us the privilege to believe in Him. Everyone has this privilege now, some taking Him up on it and some don't. Another response is that Paul is trying to say that if you believe in Him, you will suffer for your sake.

6.193. Philippians 2:12 - 13 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that after we are saved we must work out our own salvation, and that God works in us.

6.194. Colossians 1:12 - 13
giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints, and that He has transferred us from the domain of darkness to Jesus' kingdom. The disagreement lies with how or if one chooses whether they want God to do this.

6.195. Colossians 1: 16 - 17
For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Wayne Grudem, in his Systematic Theology book says:

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Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of his power." The Greek word for "upholds" is "pherō", meaning "carry, bear". It does not mean simply "sustain". It has a sense of active, purposeful control over the thing being carried from

one place to another. The use of the present participle here indicates that Jesus is continually caring along all things. He is actively involved in the work of providence.

Similarly, in Colossians 1:17, Paul says of Christ that “in him all things hold together”. Both verses indicate that if Jesus were to cease his continuing activity of sustaining all things, then all except the triune God would instantly cease to exist. This is affirmed by Paul in Acts 17:28, “In him we live and move and have our being”. And Nehemiah 9:6, “You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.” Also, 2 Peter 3:7, “the heavens and earth that now exist” are “being kept until the day of judgment.”
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(Bruce) Everyone agrees with this verse - that all things were created through him and for him. The thing that is in purview is “and in him all things hold together”. What does that mean? Calvinists use this as a key to their theology on the sovereignty of God. Everyone believes that God is sovereign. The question here is what does “in him all things hold together” mean?

Hebrews 1:7 says “... and he upholds the universe by the word of his power”.

2 Peter 3:7 says “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

Do these verses mean that Jesus continually and physically holds the universe together? Does this mean that His word of creation was so powerful that it not only created everything, but put in place physical laws that hold everything together (and that Jesus isn’t currently exercising power to hold the universe together)? How much allegory and/or illusion is being used to show something that we can’t understand? Or, as 2 Peter 3:7 indicates, does this mean that God is merely making sure the universe lasts until the Day of Judgement?

My opinion on this is that this is a phrase that is outside our understanding. It’s very valuable to show us the wonder, the greatness and inscrutability of God. But, I think, no one really understands what this means. We all know that God is sovereign, but we don’t know exactly how God is sovereign. I think trying to pretend that we understand this will lead us into creating doctrine that may or may not be true. For example, Grudem says above that “Both verses indicate that if Jesus were to cease his continuing activity of sustaining all things, then all except the triune God would instantly cease to exist”. This

wouldn't be true if, for example, God put in place the physical laws that also included the sustainability of the universe. Yet, the reformed view insists that the universe would fall apart if Jesus stopped actively supporting it. That actually may well be true, but does it have to be true? I think we can't say. I think this is where Calvinism oversteps.

6.196. Colossians 1:19 - 23

> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
> 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

(Bruce) There are two things to focus on here (concerning our topic): Reconciling all things to Himself and continuing in the faith.

When Jesus died on the cross, He reconciled everything and everyone to Himself. That does mean that all of creation (outside of people) will be transformed. However, there is another step that needs to happen with people. The way to God is now open to everyone, but there needs to be an appropriation by each person for salvation to be complete. How anyone approaches God and appropriates His salvation is the disagreement. Can anyone desire God and approach Him without God first doing an additional work in them to make it possible?

One more thing that should be mentioned about God reconciling us is v22-23. One could see this as countering what v20 says - God reconciled all things. I think it's a mistake to connect "if indeed you continue in the faith" with "he has now reconciled in his body". I believe the "if indeed" statement is connected to the clause "in order to present you holy and blameless". I think it is saying that God has reconciled everything and everyone, and for those who continue in the faith, He will present us holy and blameless.

The "continue in the faith" part of the passage is a potential proof text countering the perseverance of the saints. It says that God will present us blameless in the case that we continue in the faith. One could interpret this as saying that saved people could not continue in the faith, but I think this doesn't mean that. I think it is making the first point in this passage that everyone is reconciled, but only those who continue in the faith will

be presented holy and blameless (which is required to enter God's kingdom). So, this is not a persuasive proof text countering the perseverance of the saints (although there are others that need to be addressed).

6.197. Colossians 2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

(Bruce) See Ephesians 2:1 - 10. We are dead when we are estranged from Christ, who is life. Calvinist theology claims that dead people cannot respond to God. A response to this is that we are obviously temporally alive and can make decisions, including whether we want to reunite with God.

Another point is that God made the Colossian church believers alive, having forgiven them their trespasses. I think we all agree that God only makes believers alive, and that is through uniting us with Jesus, who is life. Does this include "having forgiven us all our trespasses". I've made the contention that when Jesus died on the cross, He forgave everyone, both believers and unbelievers their trespasses. That didn't save everyone, but cleared the way for salvation for everyone. A person still must believe in Jesus to be saved. (By the way, this hypothesis doesn't say how people come to believe in Jesus). I think this passage doesn't counter that hypothesis. It could easily be read, "God made alive together with him (us believers), since he has already forgiven us all our trespasses (everyone)".

6.198. Colossians 3:3 - 4
For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

(Bruce) See Colossians 2:13.

6.199. Colossians 3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14. Everyone agrees that God chose us. Non-Calvinists say that God chose us in the beginning by His foreknowledge due to our belief in Him. Calvinists say God chose us and then implanted belief in us.

6.200. 1 Thessalonians 1:4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

(Bruce) See Colossians 3:12.

6.201. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

(Bruce) The Greek for “obtain” is peripoiēsin, meaning acquire, possess or preserve. It’s not clear (to me) whether this passage is saying that God has not destined us for wrath because He destined us for salvation, or that God has not destined us for wrath because He gave everyone the option of acquiring salvation..

6.202. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 - 24
Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

(Bruce) This is not saying that Jesus will surely save us. It says that He will surely sanctify us, which is a post-salvation activity. Everyone agrees that our sanctification is in God’s hands, and that we can obey or not obey at a particular time. When we don’t obey, which God foreknew, He will bring us situations which will teach us (or correct us) so that we will obey. This passage says nothing about whether one can lose their salvation.

6.203. 2 Thessalonians 1:5 - 10
This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

(Bruce) Virtually everyone agrees that God righteously inflicts vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus. Everyone also agrees that God expects everyone to

respond to and obey the Gospel. This passage doesn't say anything about whether people have any ability to respond to the Gospel.

6.204. 2 Thessalonians 2:9 - 12
The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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The truth was not insufficient. Their destruction was because "they refused the love of the truth that would have saved them."
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/2-thess-29-12-a-deluding-influence/ says:
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(2 Thess. 2:9-12) A deluding influence?
CLAIM: Paul writes, "God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false…" (2 Thess. 2:11). Why would God intentionally give these people a "deluding influence," so that they wouldn't believe in him?

RESPONSE: The key to understanding this verse is the context. God gave them a deluding influence, because "they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (v.10). In other words, this "deluding influence" only works on those who have rejected the truth. In the following verse, it states that they were judged, because they "did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (v.12). In other words, the reason they believed this deluding influence was because they were evil and took pleasure in wickedness. Even Calvinist Robert Thomas states that the reason for their judgment is their willful rejection of the truth: "Their blindness will be self-imposed because of a prior refusal to 'love the truth and so be saved.' …The right choice could have brought them salvation and deliverance from the lawless one's devices, but they elected not to receive God's salvation." Likewise, Martin comments, "God does not cause their unbelief, but he does set the stage for them to demonstrate it and thus openly earn their own condemnation. Genuine believers will not be deceived in this way (vv. 13-14)."

What is the “deluding influence” (v.11)? This certainly doesn’t refer to God working to deceive people from coming to Christ. Again, the context states that the “deluding influence” is the Antichrist (v.3) and his “signs and false wonders” (v.9). Martin writes, “The phrase (energeian planēs) indicates that God sends to those who have rejected the truth a ‘work of error.’ The phrase is reminiscent of the earlier comment that the coming of the lawless one will be according to an energeian tou satana, ‘work of Satan’ (v. 9). The lawless one as an agent of deception makes any further ‘delusion’ redundant.” Consequently, if people believe that this demon possessed (v.9) and horribly wicked man is actually God incarnate (v.4), then they will have fallen prey to the “deluding influence.” Those who believe in Jesus will be impervious to this deceiver.

Why does the passage make God the active agent in deluding these people? Paul uses an active verb (“God will send upon them…”) because this is a form of divine judgment for rejecting the truth in the first place.
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(Bruce) See John 12:37 - 40, Romans 11:1 - 8 and Ephesians 4:18. This passage says that God sends a strong delusion to those who refuse to love the truth. This concept of judicial hardening is present in several places in the Bible. There’s disagreement on how often this is applied. Calvinists claim that it’s applied to every non-believer who God isn’t directly calling. Non-Calvinists claim that it’s only a result of rejecting the Gospel (which Calvinists say that everyone who isn’t regenerated will do). Personally, I don’t know how it works - whether it’s a naturally occurring phenomenon (originating in the Law of God), or if God comes down and personally hardens people (I suspect the former).

One more thing that should be mentioned: “they refused to love the truth and so be saved”. Everyone agrees that there is an expectation to love the truth, but a Calvinist would insist that no unregenerate person can love the truth. I think that non-Calvinists can’t understand why there would be an expectation in the first place. A Calvinist understands that the expectation is there because of God’s standard of holiness. This is why we are justly condemned even if there is no practical possibility for us to love God’s truth.

6.205. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14
But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Calvinists interpret this passage to refer to unconditional election.

Arminians refer the term salvation to either glorification (see vs. 14) or maturity (I Thess. 5:23). Otherwise, why would it be "through sanctification"?
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(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14. Everyone agrees that God chose us. Non-Calvinists say that God chose us in the beginning by His foreknowledge due to our belief in Him. Calvinists say God chose us and then implanted belief in us. Notice that in this passage it says that God chose us through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. The sanctification is God's part, but whose part is believing in the truth? I guess it can go either way. One can say that God needs to grant us belief or one can say that everyone already has the power to believe.

6.206. 1 Timothy 1:15 - 16
The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

(Bruce) Virtually everyone agrees that God has foreknowledge of who will believe. Calvinists believe that no one has the ability to believe without being regenerated.

6.207. 1 Timothy 1:19 - 20
holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

(Bruce) This is a proof text opposing the perseverance of the saints. One would suppose that one would have to have faith if they are to shipwreck it. Calvinists say that one can look like they have real faith, but not be God's elect. It does say "their faith".Is it possible to differentiate between the faith that comes from God and our own faith? Is there such a thing as a faith in God that doesn't come from Him?

6.208. 1 Timothy 2:4 - 6

> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

https://www.monergism.com/calvinism-fact-sheet says:
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The key to this passage, again, is the context: 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

The first appearance of the phrase “all men” comes at the end of 1 Timothy 2:1, and its meaning is unambiguous. Paul is not instructing Timothy to initiate never-ending prayer meetings where the Ephesian phone book would be opened and every single person listed therein would become the object of prayer. The very next phrase of the sentence explains Paul’s meaning: “…for kings and all who are in authority.” Why would Paul have to give such instructions?

We must remember that the early Christians were a persecuted people, and normally the persecution came from those in positions of power and authority. It is easy to understand why there would have to be apostolic commandments given to pray for the very ones who were using their power and authority to persecute these Christians.

Who are kings and all who are in authority? They are kinds of men, classes of men. Paul often spoke of “all men” in this fashion. For example, in Titus 2:11, when Paul speaks of the grace of God which brings salvation appearing to “all men,” he clearly means all kinds of men, for the context, both before and after, speaks of kinds of men. In the previous verses Paul addresses such groups as older men (Titus 2:2), older women (Titus 2:3), younger women (Titus 2:2), older women (Titus 2:3), younger women (Titus 2:4), young men (Titus 2:6), bondslaves (Titus 2:9-10), and rulers and authorities (Titus 3:1). No one would suggest that in fact Paul is speaking of every single older man, older woman, etc.; he speaks of kinds of people within a particular group, that being the fellowship of the church. Likewise, “rulers” and “authorities” are obviously generic classifications that everyone would understand needs to be applied to specific locations in specific times.

The same kind of usage (all kinds of mean being in view) is found elsewhere in Paul, such as Titus 3:2. This should be connected to the fact that in the very commissioning of Paul, this phrase is used in a way that cannot be made universal in scope (Acts 22:15). Of course, Paul would not think that these words meant that he would witness of Christ to every single individual human being on the planet. Instead, he would have

surely understood this to mean all kinds and races of men. Likewise, the allegation against Paul was that he preached to all men everywhere against the Jews and the Law and the Temple (Acts 21:28). Paul speaks of kinds of people in other places as well (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). So it is perfectly consistent with the immediate and broader context of Paul's writings to recognize this use of "all men" in a generic fashion.

Returning to 1 Timothy 2, Paul then states that such prayers for all kinds of men is good and acceptable "in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." If we are consistent with the preceding context we will see "all men" here in the same manner as "all men" of the preceding verses: All kinds of men, whether rulers or kings (yes, God even saves people who used to persecute Christians, a fact Paul knew all too well). But there is much more reason to understand Paul's statement in this way.

Almost invariably, proponents of Arminianism isolate this passage from the two verses that follow. This must happen of necessity for the questions that can be asked of the non-Reformed position based upon 1 Timothy 2:5-6 are weighty indeed. 1 Timothy 2:5 begins with the word "for," indicating the connection between the statement made in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 and the explanation in 1 Timothy 2:5-6. Why should Christians pray that all men, including kings and rulers, be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth? Because there is only one way of salvation, and without a knowledge of that truth, no man can be saved. Paul says, "…there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." This immediately takes us into the meat of the discussion of the atonement, but for now just a few points should be made.

First, if one takes "all men" in 1 Timothy 2:4 to mean "all men individually," does it not follow that Christ of necessity must be mediator for all men as well? If one says, "Yes, Christ mediates for every single human being," does it not follow that Christ fails as mediator every time a person negates his work by their all-powerful act of free will? One could hope that no biblical scholar would ever promote such an idea, for anyone familiar with the relationship between atonement, mediation, and intercession in the book of Hebrews knows well that to make such an assertion puts the entire argument of Hebrews 7-10 on its head. For the moment, we simply point out that it is far more consistent with biblical theology to recognize that Christ mediates on behalf of the elect and perfectly saves them than it is to assert that Christ mediates for all (but fails to save all).

The second point is closely related to the first: The ransom that Christ gives in his self-sacrifice is either a saving ransom or a non-saving ransom. If it is actual and really made on behalf of all men, then inevitably all men would be saved. But we again see that it is far more consistent to recognize that the same meaning for “all men” and “all” flows through the entire passage, and when we look at the inarguably clear statements of Scripture regarding the actual intention and result of Christ’s cross-work, we will see that there is no other consistent means of interpreting these words in 1 Timothy.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/1-tim-24-is-a-calvinist-view-of-this-passage-plausible/ says:
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(1 Tim. 2:4) Is a Calvinist view of this passage plausible?
CLAIM: Calvinist theologians have difficulty with this passage. Paul writes, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). How does this passage fit with the notion that God does not save everyone from a Calvinist view, but rather, allows some to go to hell? Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes,

In 1 Timothy 2 Paul is urging that prayers be made for everyone—not just the poor and oppressed but also ‘for kings and all those in authority’ (v.2). In this context, verse 4 is best understood as Augustine and Calvin understood it, namely, that God is saving people from all categories of humanity. He is willing even to save kings, as unlikely as that may seem.

RESPONSE: This is a classic example of Calvinistic eisegesis. They are reading their system into this passage, rather than reading this passage into their system. The passage does not say that God is reaching all types of people, but all people. Paul says that we should pray for “all men” (v.1) and this is because Christ died “for all” (v.6). The Arminian view reads this passage at face value.
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(Bruce) See John 1:29, and John 12:31 - 32. God desires that all will be saved and Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all. This is one of the Arminian Big Three passages.

First, God desires all to be saved. One standard response is to refer to the two wills of God: His general will and His decreed will. In general, God does desire that all be saved, just like He desires that no one will murder each other. But to show the full measure of

His glory, not everyone has been chosen to be saved. The other response is that “all” means all kinds of people.

This response is common for Jesus giving Himself as a ransom for all (kinds of people).

6.209. 1 Timothy 4:9 - 10
The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

https://evangelicalarminians.org/5-biblical-texts-that-calvinists-cant-wiggle-out-of/ says:
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If they try to say that “all people” means “the elect” then what the verse is saying is absurd. We essentially have Paul saying “God is the savior of the elect, especially for the elect”. Yet, aren’t those who believe elect? Aren’t believers elect and vice versa?

If you try to say “all people” means “all kinds of people”, then you render Paul’s message as saying “God is the savior of all kinds of people [i.e those kinds whom He irresistibly causes to believe, a.k.a the elect] especially those who believe (i.e the elect)”. Again, you have the same group of people being talked about twice in the same sentence. God is the savior of those whom He predestined to salvation, especially of those whom He predestined to salvation. God is the savior of those within those specifically chosen individuals in every group of people in the world, especially of those specifically chosen individuals in every group of people in the world.

Born Again Christians are talked about twice if we interpret this verse in any Calvinistic fashion. How about we take the text at its face value meaning? God is the savior of all people (i.e all of mankind), but especially of those who believe (i.e the elect, Christians,). I take this verse to be saying that God is the savior of every human being in one sense or another, but is the savior of born-again Christians in a special and significant sense; a sense that differs from those who never repent.

God is the savior of all people in the sense that God The Son died on the cross for all people and sends prevenient grace to all people to enable them to repent (cf. John 12:32, John 1:9, Acts 17:30). God is the savior of all people in the sense that he made eternal life available for all people. God is the savior of believers in the sense that, not only did he do all of the aforementioned, but because we responded to God positively, God regenerated us (i.e caused us to be born again) and applied His blood to us,

cleansing us from every sin we've ever committed (cf. Isaiah 55:7, 1 John 1:9). God is the savior of all men in the sense that he offered salvation to all men. God is the savior "especially" of believers because it is only believers who actually enjoy the benefits of Jesus' death on the cross.
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(Bruce) This is a proof text for my theory - that Jesus died and saved all, but that people must believe or be guilty of Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (the only unforgivable sin). You can't use the "all kinds of people" here because of the "especially all those who believe" clause. Anyway you look at it, this is a problem with limited atonement. A possible response is to mention God's general grace to all people, although I wouldn't think of that as being the Savior..

6.210. 2 Timothy 1:9 - 10
who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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Calling can be used in a comprehensive sense to describe salvation as the result of God's sovereign control in summoning people to himself (Rom 8:28,30)...Next, the gospel summary describes the basis of this salvation. The next two lines consist of a negative/positive contrast that explains the basis of God's saving and calling. First, on the negative side, is the thoroughly Pauline statement rendered literally "not according to our works." Its effect is to rule human effort completely out of the process.

The text also describes the way in which the decision was executed-God's grace. In isolation "grace" refers to God's unmerited favor (1:2; see on 1 Tim 1:2,12; Tit 3:7), and the contrast between human merit and God's purpose and grace celebrates the divine initiative in the salvation of people.

Third, the closing phrase-"before the beginning of time"-commences a Pauline "transition of time" scheme, whereby the passage receives a salvation-historical character that allows the unique nature of the present age to be seen. The time phrase itself, literally "before eternal times," drawn from Hebrew thought, distinguishes between the timelessness of God's existence and the temporality of his creation...the point that

v10 will make is that what was conceived prior to creation-the plan to save people-was executed at a point in history in which the grace of God became manifest in history in Christ. But at this point in the text, the theological poem tells us that the plan to save through the work of Christ was made, and in God's mind worked out, prior to creation. In this way, the piece underlies God's sovereignty both in electing his people and in bringing this to pass through Christ's redemptive work. P. Towner, The Letters to Timothy and Titus (Eerdmans 2006), 468-70.
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(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14. Everyone agrees that Jesus saves us not because of our own works, but by His grace. However, this passage goes on to say that He saved us because of His own purpose. This sounds like a Calvinistic proof text. There's a couple of possible responses to this: 1. The clause "not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace" is on "called us to a holy calling". 2. His purpose could very well be to save those who desired to be with Him (which isn't a "work").

We all agree that God has perfect foreknowledge. It gets difficult to discuss His perfect will vs. human will in light of this foreknowledge. Since God has perfect foreknowledge, He can plan and do all kinds of things that bring about an optimal result (according to His own desires). For example, it's been proposed that if anyone would ever accept God's grace for themselves in any time and place, that God will put them in that time and place. God's foreknowledge makes this easy to do. But does He do this? Does it bring glory to God to ever lose anyone who would have otherwise accepted Him under different circumstances? Or, is this a moot question because we never have the ability to desire God unless He regenerates us? And if this is the case, our desires have nothing to do with what God chooses to do.

6.211. 2 Timothy 2:11 - 13
The saying is trustworthy, for:
If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

(Bruce) What does it mean that if we deny Him, He will also deny us? Is it at all tied with "If we have died with Him"? Can we deny Him after we have died with Him? Why would it talk about enduring with Him, if He's got us? One obvious response is that Paul is talking

of people in the community who are saved vs those who are not saved. These are separate statements. If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we endure in following Him (because we will if we are saved), we will reign in Him. If we deny Him, we can only do this if we were never part of Him, so He will deny us.

I see it either way. This passage could be talking about how people could lose their salvation, or it doesn't mean that at all. The important part is the command that we must die with Him and endure. If we find ourselves denying Him, we can go back to God and repent, because He is faithful.

6.212. 2 Timothy 2:19 - 22

> But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."
> 20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.
> 22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

https://biblevscalvinism.org/ says:
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Consistent with the meaning of 'vessels' in Romans 9, Paul speaks of a person choosing to be a vessel for honorable use, rather than for dishonorable. There is no reference to vessels being decreed to be one or the other.
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(Bruce) See Romans 9:4 - 33.

Everyone agrees that God knows those who are His.

"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity". V14 says, "remind them of these things". Paul wants Timothy to say this to his congregation. Timothy should tell everyone in his church who are serious about Jesus to live lives honorably to Him.

Vessels of gold and clay: It looks like “great house” refers to the church that Timothy is head of. There are some who have put their faith in Jesus and some who have not. In Timothy’s church, there are some who will be valuable to the kingdom and some who will not - and that will happen through their own obedience.

6.213. 2 Timothy 2:25 - 26
correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/2-tim-225-can-we-repent-or-does-god-cause-us-to-repent/ says:
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(2 Tim. 2:25) Can we repent or does God cause us to repent?
CLAIM: Paul writes that “God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). Some interpreters argue that we cannot repent, unless God grants this to us (c.f. Acts 5:31). Does this eliminate the importance of freewill in regard to repentance? In other words, are we responsible for repentance or is God?

RESPONSE: God gives us the opportunity to repent, but we still decide to repent. There are a number of reasons why this is the case:

First, Jesus, Peter, and Paul all call on fallen people to repent. Jesus called for repentance (Mk. 1:15). So did Peter (Acts 3:19). So did Paul (Acts 17:30). These calls for repentance would be an illusion if repentance is actually a gift. In other words, why would God call on us to repent, if this is actually impossible to do? Calvinistic interpreters often counter that God often asks humans to do the impossible, knowing that we cannot do it (Mt. 5:48; Mk. 12:30). However, these calls for perfection are analogous. God’s calls for perfection are the standard that God righteously requires (c.f. Rom. 2:7). Therefore, by appealing to these verses, we are really comparing apples with oranges.

Second, God granted repentance to a group, rather than an individual. We need to be careful not to read the Bible as referring to me, when it is actually referring to we. This corporate language doesn’t fit with the idea that God forced us as individuals to repent and receive him. Instead, Paul is effectually saying that God is breaking into new groups of people. For instance, in Acts 11:18, we read, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the

repentance that leads to life." Here, the focus is specifically on the Gentiles. However, when God grants repentance to the Gentiles, it is clear that he is not saving every Gentile! Instead, he is simply saying that God is reaching new groups of people. For this reason, we shouldn't read something into these passages that isn't there.

Third, being granted repentance refers to an opportunity –not an action. In one sense, being granted repentance is God's offer (i.e. opportunity). While in another sense, being granted repentance is our decision (i.e. action). Similarly, Paul viewed suffering as being "granted for Christ's sake" (Phil. 1:29). Of course, when God grants us to suffer, he is not forcing us to suffer. Instead, he simply gives us the opportunity to suffer for the cause of Christ.

In a similar way, consider the word "surrender." This can be used in two complimentary ways: both as an opportunity and an action. Likewise, when God grants us repentance, he is giving us the opportunity to repent. For instance:

OPPORTUNITY: "The enemy gave us an opportunity to surrender."
ACTION: "We surrendered to the enemy."
Fourth, it would be inconsistent to say that God grants some people repentance, when in 2 Peter he grants this to everyone. How could God grant some people repentance, when it's clear that he doesn't want "any" to perish but for "all" to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9)?
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(Bruce) See John 6:44, 65, Acts 11:18, and Philippians 1:29. "God may perhaps grant them repentance". This is in the context of Timothy teaching his opponents correct theology. This is interesting. God is not granting all of them repentance, but only some. What does it mean for God to grant repentance to some people? Is Calvinistic theology correct in saying that God grants only some people repentance without any prompting from the target (that is, the target receives it automatically)? Or, are Arminianists correct in saying that God grants everyone repentance, but it must be received?

6.214. 2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Bruce) Does this show perseverance of the saints? Or, is Paul referring only to himself? I think it's good and correct for us to be confident that God will take care of us, including bringing us safely into His heavenly kingdom no matter the circumstances. Yes, is it possible for people to have a false confidence?

6.215. Titus 1:1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that God has an elect. The disagreement lies with whether that elect is through God's foreknowledge, or if it's through God's sole choice. I don't know if it shines an answer on this question, but it's noteworthy that this passage says that the elect's faith and knowledge of the truth accords with their godliness. Unlike initial salvation, I think Calvinist theology does say that our choices affect God's sanctification in our lives. For example, if we willfully disobey, God will bring us to where we need to be by a slower, harder path. If we submit to Him in a particular area, we are able to absorb His gift of knowledge of the truth more quickly.

6.216. Titus 2:11 - 14
For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

(Bruce) In past verses, I have not been very convinced that all people meant "all kinds of people". However, here it seems more reasonable. It's obviously not saying that everyone will be saved, because it goes on to say that this grace will also train us to renounce ungodliness and live upright godly lives. Another possibility is that Jesus did bring salvation to all people, and to those that appropriated that salvation, it will train us to renounce ungodliness, etc.

6.217. Titus 3:3 - 7
For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that before Christ, we lived according to our own pleasures, being full of envy and hatred. We also all agree that when Jesus came, He saved us, and not according to anything we have done, but according to His own mercy. One can look at this in (at least) two ways: 1. God had mercy on some of us and saved us, not according to anything we have done. 2. God has saved us all according to His mercy, not according to anything we have done, but we can freely reject His salvation. V7 says "so that we "might" become heirs". That could mean just that because of what Jesus has done for those He saved, they will become heirs. Or, it could mean that Jesus died for us, offered us all salvation so that we "might" become heirs.

6.218. Hebrews 1:3

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

See Colossians 1: 16 - 17. This is an indication of God's sovereignty over the universe. In the referenced verse, I talk about how this is a mystery that we can't fathom. We shouldn't overreach in our theology about this.

6.219. Hebrews 2:9 - 10

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

(Bruce) It says here that Jesus tasted death for everyone. This might merely mean that Jesus tasted death, just like us. Or, it means that He died for everyone. It does go on to say that He brought many (not all) sons to glory, but that may be referring to the concept that not everyone has accepted His salvation.

6.220. Hebrews 6:4 - 10

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. 7 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a

crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.
9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

(Bruce) Some have used this as a proof text against the perseverance of the saints. But, this has nothing to do with that. This text is directed to Jewish people, and not to general people. It is basically saying that if you are in the Jewish community (of the first century), you have been enlightened by God's word, you have tasted His promise to ethnic Israel, you have shared in the Holy Spirit via Moses and the Tabernacle, and you have the very words of God. If you reject the fulfillment of it all, Jesus your Messiah, it is impossible to be saved through the old means.

If you think this is about modern individuals, think about this: All of us have known people who have fallen away from the faith who have been restored to repentance. Since there have been many Christ followers who have had a time in their life when they rejected Christ and came back, this passage can't be about them. Furthermore, there have been unbelievers who have attended church for a while, rejected Christ, and then later came to Him. So, this passage can't be talking about them. So just who is this talking about?

6.221. Hebrews 9:15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

(Bruce) Some would say this proves unconditional election and limited atonement. But this says "that those who are called May receive . . .". This could be taken either way: 1. All who are called will receive the inheritance, and a death has occurred for them, or 2. Everyone may receive the inheritance, and Jesus' death redeems all who answer the call. Or, it could be not about individuals at all. It's probably directed to the Hebrews, who are all called to the new covenant, but not all receive it.

6.222. Hebrews 10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

(Bruce) The words “once for all” is what’s in play for our topic. “We” have been sanctified through Jesus once for “all”. This passage could be claiming that everyone has been sanctified through Jesus' death, but it’s also likely that “all” refers to all of “we”. It’s likely that “we” are the Hebrews.

6.223. Hebrews 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

(Bruce) This seems to be talking about limited atonement. Everyone agrees that the sacrifice of Jesus has wiped clean the sins of those He chose. However, this verse does not say what Jesus’ sacrifice did or did not do for those who aren’t being sanctified. Furthermore, this is addressing the Hebrews.

6.224. Hebrews 10:26 - 31
For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(Bruce) This is addressed to the Hebrews who reject Jesus as Messiah. It does not make sense for individuals, because many people have sinned deliberately after having knowledge of the truth and later came to Christ. In fact, it’s pretty rare that a conversion will be a one step process.

6.225. Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that we must have faith to please God, and must believe in Him to draw near to Him. The discussion is about how we acquire faith.

6.226. Hebrews 12:15 - 17

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

(Bruce) This is a charge to the church in Rome to make sure that everyone there clearly understands the Gospel of grace, and to urge each other to believe. Some might claim that this is a challenge to Calvinistic theology. However, Calvinists say that since we don’t know who the elect is, it is incumbent on us to urge each other towards the Gospel.

6.227. Hebrews 12:22 - 25

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.
25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

(Bruce) Calvinist theology says that everyone is urged to believe. That’s the general call. But it also says that only some will respond, and those will be only those God regenerates ahead of time.

6.228. James 1:12 - 15

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology) says:
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If God tempts no one, why does Jesus tell us to pray in Matthew 6:13, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”. This makes sense if we carefully distinguish between (1) actively tempting someone and (2) leading someone into a situation where he or she is tempted or tested. God is never the active personal agent who tempts us, but he may lead us into difficult situations. Jesus himself was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. These verses make it clear that all secondary causes are real and that human beings do cause evil and are responsible for it.

God does no evil, but if we maintain that God does not use evil to fulfill his purposes, then we have to admit that there is evil in the universe that God did not intend and that the universe is not under his control, and that he might not fulfill his purposes. We couldn’t maintain that “all things” work together for good for those who love God.
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(Bruce) Non-Calvinists accuse Calvinists of saying that God is the instigator of all evil. This is mostly a misunderstanding. Calvinists believe that God is sovereign over everything, and that He uses everything for His own glory. Some Calvinists also believe that nothing happens apart from the will of God, including all evil. They would bring up the two wills concept, saying that God has a permissive will and a secret (or decretive) will. That means that God decrees all things. God allows evil agents to do evil, even though it’s all part of His plan. But, He doesn’t do evil Himself.

None of this answers that question of say, a child dying of cancer, God having the power to save the child, but doesn’t. I think this is a mystery all around, and it’s very hard for us to swallow.

6.229. James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

(Bruce) I think this is saying that God has created us by His specific design, and He created us to be first among His creatures.

6.230. James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

(Bruce) We discussed quite a bit that although everyone agrees that God chooses people, I asked what that choice is based upon. Does this passage reveal the criteria in which God chooses people? Are His chosen necessarily those without possessions

and/or money? Or, is it speaking of those who are spiritually poor? Is it possible to be poor and love Him and have a lot of money and possessions? It's something us Americans should think long and hard on!

6.231. James 3:8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(Bruce) Everyone agrees that this is the case (we have a sin nature that causes this). Yet, God commands us to tame our speech. Two verses later, James says, "these things ought not to be so". That's one of the key discussion points in this treatise. God commands us to do right, yet we always will fail. How can God command us to do what we cannot do? The answer is that He will give us the power to do right if we ask Him. And, that's exactly what He expects us to do.

6.232. James 5:19 - 20
My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

(Bruce) This sounds like a proof text disproving the perseverance of the saints. It seems to say that if someone who follows the truth wanders from it and does not come back, his soul will not be saved from death. One response is to understand that Jame's audience is a mixture of believers and unbelievers (who look like believers). If one "falls away " from Christ, it proves that they were in the latter category. Notice in v20 that it says whoever brings back a "sinner". An Arminian would say that the sinner was one who was saved and has now wandered off into sin. A Calvinist would say that the sinner was never saved in the first place. In a church setting, it is impossible for us to always tell the difference between a person who is one of the elect and someone who merely acts like one.

6.233. 1 Peter 1:1 - 5
Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:
May grace and peace be multiplied to you.
3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the

> resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The NT understanding of God's foreknowledge of his people indicates that God did not simply observe them or have information about them at some prior time in history. Instead, God chose them according to, or consistent with, his plan and purpose long before God formed a people to be his own. First Peter 1:20 states that the redemptive role of Christ was also foreknown (proginosko) to God before the creation of the world. Therefore, verses 2 and 20 express correlating thoughts that even before creation God had chosen both the people who would be redeemed and the agent who would redeem them. K. Jobes, 1 Peter (Baker 2005), 68.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/1-pet-12-are-some-chosen-for-heaven-and-others-chosen-for-hell/ says:
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(1 Pet. 1:2) Are some “chosen” for heaven and others “chosen” for hell?
CLAIM: Peter writes that all Christians are “are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Does this mean that Christians are “chosen” for heaven and non-Christians are “chosen” for hell?

RESPONSE: According to this passage, Christians are “chosen” (eklektos) based on God’s foreknowledge. That is, God chose these Christians, because he foreknew that they would freely choose him.

Peter uses the Greek word “foreknowledge” (proginōskō). In all 220 NT uses (and even in secular Greek at the time), the term never once refers to “choice.”[1] It always refers to knowledge. Literally, this word means “to know in advance.” In his second letter, Peter uses it to refer to knowledge of specific facts: “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand (proginōskō), be on your guard” (2 Pet. 3:17). Therefore, God foreknew who would freely accept him and reject him. This is our basis for being “chosen.”

The term “foreknowledge” only occurs once elsewhere as a noun, where it refers to God’s “predetermined plan and foreknowledge” to bring about the Cross of Christ (Acts

2:23). Moreover, Paul refers to how God "predestined" Christians on the basis of his foreknowledge as well (Rom. 8:29). Thus, both God's election (eklektos) and predestination (proorizō) are based on his foreknowledge.

Later, in chapter 2, Peter returns to the subject of election (or being "chosen" c.f. 1 Peter 1:1). He uses the same word "chosen" (eklektos) to refer to Christ being "chosen" (1 Pet. 2:4 ESV). Of course, it would be heretical to think that Christ was chosen from among many Messiahs. That is, it wasn't as though God had many sons to choose from to send to Earth! Instead, God "chose" Christ for the purpose of saving humanity. In the same way, Christians are chosen for the purpose of spreading the gospel ("to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" 1 Pet. 2:5). Therefore, Peter incorporates their election with Christ's election. Both Christ and the church were chosen for a purpose.

Calvinist responses considered
RESPONSE #1. Calvinists understand this to refer to knowing personally—not merely propositionally. Schreiner admits that God's foreknowledge refers to knowing the future, but he argues that it means "more than this.] Under Reformed theology, God knew the elect in a personal way (e.g. Jn. 10:14; 1 Cor. 8:3; 2 Tim. 2:19). He knew the people—not just their decisions.

This is misguided. The term foreknowledge simply refers to knowing the future beforehand. And even if a personal connotation is being communicated, this still wouldn't imply unconditional election. After all, knowing a person also includes knowing about the person. We've often heard people say, "I just want to know Jesus—not study theology." This is clearly wrong. An essential part of knowing Jesus is knowing about Jesus. In the same way, God knew all future contingencies and this was the basis upon which we are chosen: namely, his foreknowledge of everything.

Consider Peter's usage of the term "foreknow" (proginōskō) in verse 20. There he writes that Jesus was "foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times" (1 Pet. 1:20). God knew Jesus relationally and he knew the plan that he would carry out through Jesus. Later, this plan came to fruition when Jesus "appeared" to humans. This fits with the earlier context of the prophets wanting to know the fulfillment of their own prophecies (1 Pet. 1:10-12). God is omniscient with regard to all future events. This includes both people and their free decisions.

RESPONSE #2. Calvinists also argue that the word "chosen" is an adjective—not a verb. Grudem understands this to modify everything about believers, including their being aliens, their privileges as believers, their circumstances, etc. Yet this doesn't fit with the

context: Salvation is the context—not mere states of being. We agree with Karen Jobes who argues that the prepositional phrase (“according to the foreknowledge of God”) modifies “the term that most fundamentally defines who these Christians are: the eklektoi, the chosen.” Indeed, the nearest antecedent is how believers are “chosen.” Thus, God’s foreknowledge is the operating factor for believers being “chosen.”
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(Bruce) There are two things to examine here:

V1 - 2: To those who are elect exiles according to the foreknowledge of God. Everyone agrees that we are the elect and that God has foreknowledge. I think non-Calvinists try to use this passage to prove that God does not choose people, but just foreknows them. But, this really doesn’t say anything about what God did or didn’t do to call His elect - only that God did foreknow His elect.

V3: he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Calvinists view this passage as saying that God has caused us to be born again, and this proves that we have no control over it. However, everyone agrees that Jesus had to be resurrected from the dead for us to be born again at all. So, non-Calvinists would say that there is a two step process for us to be saved: 1. Jesus died and rose for us, and 2. We must appropriate His salvation, which begins with choosing Him. So, everyone is born again by His act on the cross, but there are people whom He has died for who are not born again.

6.234. 1 Peter 1:15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14, 2 Timothy 1:9 - 10. God does call us. Whether we have anything to do with whether He chooses to call us is in debate. Everyone agrees that God makes a general call. Non-Calvinists claim that it’s possible for people to respond to this call without God regenerating them first. Calvinists claim that God needs to make a specific call to all who become saved.

6.235. 1 Peter 2:8 - 10
They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but

> now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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God has not only appointed that those who disobey the word would stumble and fall. He has also determined that they would disbelieve and stumble.

The "but" (de) beginning v9 is most naturally understood as a contrast to what immediately precedes...God has appointed the disobedient to destruction, but on the contrary believers are a "chosen people" (eklekton genos). They belong to God's people because they have been elected, chosen by him. We saw in the first verse of the letter that Peter introduced the theme of election to strengthen God's pilgrim people, and he returned to it here.

Michaels (1988: 107) understands the appointment of Christ as stone and the appointment of unbelievers to stumbling not as two distinct appointing but as one divine appointment with a twofold result. This thought is supported by the use of the same verb (tithemi, place, appoint) to refer both to the stone God has placed in Zion (2:6) and to the appointment of those who disbelieve and stumble (2:8). When God appointed Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice, to be the stone placed in Zion, by that act God also necessarily appointed two consequential outcomes with respect to acceptance or rejection of Christ.

It is impossible to escape the force of Peter's teaching that God has sovereignly determined both the destiny of those who come to Christ and of those who disobey his word and reject his gospel. K. Jobes, 1 Peter (Baker 2005), 155-56.
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https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Some Calvinists find support for double-predestination in this passage.

Arminians point out that the specific cause for their stumbling is not God, but that "they are disobedient to the word." Since the noun "doom" is not found in the Greek text, it would be better to see stumbling as the antecedent. It is clear that they were appointed to stumble because they were disobedient in the same way as those who were hard of heart in the time of Isaiah (Is. 6:9,10). God veils his truth to those who stubbornly disobey his word (Mt. 13:12; Amos 8:11,12).

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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/1-pet-28-does-this-passage-teach-that-some-people-are-appointed-to-hell/ says:

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CLAIM: Peter writes, “They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed” (1 Pet. 2:8). Does this passage teach that God creates people with the express purpose of sending them to hell?

RESPONSE: The Bible repeatedly teaches that God’s will is for people to come to him –not hell. In fact, Peter himself writes, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Therefore, it would be contradictory to state that God wills certain people to go to hell.

Instead, when Peter writes that these people were “appointed” for this fate, he is referring to the principle that disobedient people will face judgment. He is not teaching that God fated them to be this way. Craig Blomberg writes, “The Greek uses a neuter relative pronoun for ‘which,’ suggesting the entire previous clause as its antecedent. In other words, unbelievers are not individually predestined to disobey God, but it is a prearranged principle that those who do disobey will stumble (i.e., spiritually fall).”

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(Bruce) “they disobey the word, as they were destined to do”. If God knew that people would disobey His word, did He ordain it or did He foreknow it? Also, is this about the destinies of people groups? V9 goes on to say, “But you are a chosen race”. So, this very well could be contracting two people groups - the disobedient and the obedient. The disobedient group is destined to disobey the word. However, who belongs to which group is up to the individual (now that Jesus has become the way for people to be in that group).

6.236. I Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

and

6.237. 2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14, 2 Timothy 1:9 - 10, 1 Peter 1:15. Everyone agrees that God calls us. How and why God calls us is a mystery.

6.238. 2 Peter 1:8 - 11
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. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(Bruce) In v10, election and calling are handled in the previous verses (in this document). The qualities to practice are mentioned in v5 - 7:

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

It says that if we practice these things, we will never fall. What happens if we don’t? It says that we will become nearsighted and blind, and forget that we were cleansed. So, does v11 say that we will not obtain salvation if we forget? Or, if Jesus lives in us, will we be compelled to practice these things (meaning that if someone is not practicing these things, Jesus doesn’t live in them)?

6.239. 2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

https://evangelicalarminians.org/5-biblical-texts-that-calvinists-cant-wiggle-out-of/ says:
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If Calvinists were correct in saying that Jesus only died for the elect, then how could it be the case that the Lord bought these false teachers? These false teachers clearly aren’t saved. For one thing, they’re false teachers! They teach “destructive heresies”.

Surely our Calvinist brethren don't expect us to believe that heretics are saved! Moreover, the text clearly says that they bring swift destruction upon themselves!

If Jesus only died for the elect, we are forced to say that false teachers who bring destruction upon themselves are part of the elect! If Jesus only died for the elect, we are forced to say that God elected certain individuals who teach heresies in the church and eventually meet spiritual ruin. This is absurd.
On the Arminian view, the atonement is unlimited in its intent but limited in its application. It was intended even for false teachers, it just isn't applied to them. Why? Because they resist The Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) and therefore miss the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15), and are destroyed (1 Thessalonians 5:3), for whoever does not believe in the son of God has God's wrath continuing to abide on them (John 3:36).

There's no other way to interpret this verse except to say that Jesus died for people who were non-elect. When The Bible speaks of Jesus "buying" people, it's always referring to Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Look at the following passages, for example.

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

"Keep watch over yourselves and the entire flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood." – Acts 10:28

"And they sang a new song: 'Worthy are You to take the scroll and open its seals, because You were slain, and by Your blood, You purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'" – Revelation 5:9

There's no way around it. The false teachers were bought by Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for them. Moreover, there's no way to make the people spoken of in 1 Peter 2:1 among the elect.

One last ditch effort the Calvinist reader might make to prevent this verse from extending beyond the elect is to say that the kind of destruction the false teachers bring upon themselves isn't spiritual destruction, but merely physical destruction. Perhaps God forgives them and regenerates them, but they still have to pay the price for their sins by dying a physical death, much like how God forgave David's sin but still gave him an Earthly punishment in his life by taking the life of his infant (see 2 Samuel 12:13-14).

Perhaps these false teachers were destroyed physically but were irresistibly regenerated prior to their physical passing.

The problem with this option is that it's implausible in light of what Peter goes on to say. " For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment."

Why would Peter mention the eternal condemnation of angels if he thought the false prophets he had mentioned only a couple of sentences earlier were eventually going to be saved?
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/2-pet-21-do-false-teachers-lose-their-salvation/ says:
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CLAIM: Peter writes that these false teachers will undergo judgment, because they denied "the Master who bought them" (2 Pet. 2:1). How can it be possible that these men are "bought" by Christ, and yet, they are judged as the rest of the passage teaches (v.9, 17, 20-21)?

RESPONSE: In our view, Jesus died for all people, whether they were believers or unbelievers (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9; Titus 2:11). Therefore, it is possible that these false teachers were indeed "bought" by Christ, but they were never true Christians. Christ died for them, but they never really had saving faith.

By contrast, this passage serves as a considerable difficulty for the five-point Calvinist who holds to the doctrine of limited atonement. Under this view, Jesus only died for the elect, and he didn't die for those predestined to hell. Yet, if this is true, then how could Jesus have "bought" false teachers who go to hell?

To explain this difficulty, five-point Calvinists typically argue that these false teachers merely claimed to be bought by Christ, but they really weren't actually believers. For instance, five-point Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes, "The best approach is to think of this as describing what the unbelieving teachers claimed rather than what they had actually received from Jesus." Likewise, five-point Calvinist Thomas Schreiner argues that Peter is using "phenomenological language." That is, Peter "described the false teachers as believers because they made a profession of faith and gave every appearance initially of being genuine believers… Peter said that they were bought by Jesus Christ, in the sense that they gave every indication initially of genuine faith."

But this twists the grammar of this passage. The passage doesn't say that the teachers claimed to be bought by Christ; instead, Peter states that they were bought by Christ. This response would only work if Peter stated what the false teachers were claiming. But instead, here we have an inspired author making the claim that the false teachers were indeed "bought" by Christ—not that the false teachers were merely making this claim. Therefore, this is an instance where someone is bought by Christ's blood, but since they reject him, they never have salvation.
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(Bruce) This seems to be saying that Jesus bought these false teachers who deny Jesus and bring about their own swift destruction. Some would say that this destruction is temporal and not eternal, but on the surface, that doesn't seem to be the best reading. If this is saying that Jesus bought people who are in turn going to hell, then limited atonement and perseverance of the saints cannot be true. However, look at the next passage, 2 Peter 2:9: God knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. This verse is part of this same section. It lends weight to the theory that this passage is talking about temporal destruction of false teachers.

6.240. 2 Peter 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,

(Bruce) Could this be referring to life after death in Hades? If it's referring to earthly life, we know many examples of the unrighteous having a decent life on this earth (think of the rich man and Lazarus) and too many of His followers who live under constant trials (think Jeremiah). This passage is a statement of God's sovereignty. However, we are warned we will face many trials in this life. But, God does help us through those trials and grow us through them.

6.241. 2 Peter 2:20 - 22

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: “The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.”

(Bruce) This passage is a serious problem to the concept of the preservation of the saints. The common counter argument is that the entangled one was never saved, but merely joined with believers in fellowship. Another objection is to say the person doesn’t lose their salvation, but that they come under God’s wrath. The problem with the first argument is one can only escape the defilements of this world by joining with the Holy Spirit and becoming regenerated (and thus saved). The problem with the second argument is that it would definitely be better to be saved than not, even if one has turned against God.

6.242. 2 Peter 3:7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

See Colossians 1: 16 - 17.

6.243. 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

https://www.monergism.com/calvinism-fact-sheet says:
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This is surely the most popular passage cited (almost never with any reference to the context) to “prove” that God could not possibly desire to save a specific people but instead desires to save every single individual person, thereby denying election and predestination.The text seems inarguably clear. But it is always good to see a text in its own context: 2 Peter 3:3-13.
Immediately one sees that unlike such passages as Ephesians 1, Romans 8-9, or John 6, this passage is not speaking about salvation as its topic. The reference to “coming to repentance” in 2 Peter 3:9 is made in passing. The topic is the coming of Christ. In the last days mockers will question the validity of his promise. Peter is explaining the

reason why the coming of Christ has been delayed as long as it has. The day of the Lord, he says, will come like a thief, and it will come at God's own time.

But the next thing that stands out upon the reading of the passage is the clear identification of the audience to whom Peter is speaking. When speaking of the mockers he refers to them in the third person as “them.” But everywhere else he speaks directly to his audience as the “beloved” and “you.” He speaks of how his audience should behave “in holy conduct and godliness,” and says that they look for the day of the Lord. He includes himself in this group in 2 Peter 3:13, where “we are looking for a new heaven and a new earth.” This is vitally important, for the assumption made by the Arminian is that when 2 Peter 3:9 says the Lord is “patient toward you” that this “you” refers to everyone. Likewise, then, when it says “not wishing for any to perish” but “all to come to repentance,” it is assumed that the “any” and “all” refers to anyone at all of the human race. Yet, the context indicates that the audience is quite specific. In any other passage of Scripture the interpreter would realize that we must decide who the “you” refers to and use this to limit the “any” and “all” of 2 Peter 3:9. For some reason, that simple and fundamental necessity is overlooked when this passage is cited.

2 Peter 1:1-3 tells us the specific identity of the audience to whom Peter is writing. Peter writes to a specific group, not to all of mankind. “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours.” This surely limits the context to the saved, for they have received this faith “by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ”. There is nothing in 2 Peter 3 that indicates a change in audience, and much to tell us the audience remains exactly the same.

Since this is so, it becomes quite clear that the Arminian is badly misusing this passage by ignoring what Peter is really saying. The patience of the Lord is displayed toward his elect people (the “you” of 2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, the “not wishing any to perish” must be limited to the same group already in view: The elect. In the same way, the “all to come to repentance” must be the very same group. In essence Peter is saying the coming of the Lord has been delayed so that all the elect of God can be gathered in. Any modern Christian lives and knows Christ solely because God’s purpose has been to gather in his election down through the ages to this present day. There is no reason to expand the context of the passage into a universal proclamation of a desire on God’s part that every single person come to repentance. Instead, it is clearly his plan and his will that all the elect come to repentance, and they most assuredly will do so.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/2-pet-39-does-this-passage-invalidate-limited-atonement/ says:
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This passage seems to deny Calvinism, because it claims that God desires “all” people to come to Christ. However, Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes,

2 Peter 3:9 is not talking about the salvation of all men and women, but only of the elect. The issue is the delay of Christ’s return, and Peter is explaining that God has delayed it, not out of indifference to us and what we may be suffering, but because he wants to bring to repentance all whom he has determined in advance will be gathered in.

Does this passage describe the desire of God to save the elect, or all people?

RESPONSE: The grammar of the passage refers to all people. Nothing in the passage directs us to the “elect.” This is being imported into the passage by Calvinistic thinkers.
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(Bruce) This verse is in the context of a passage talking about why God is waiting so long to judge the earth. So, what is being said here is that God is tarrying because He desires no one to be caught up in the final judgment that would have repented given a little more time (the elect). So, it is very probable that “all” does mean all the elect in this case.

6.244. 1 John 2:2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

https://evangelicalarminians.org/5-biblical-texts-that-calvinists-cant-wiggle-out-of/ says:
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Committed Calvinists do hermeneutical gymnastics to make this verse mean less than all humanity. But making John 2:2 mean “all kinds of people” or “world of the elect” or “every type of people” would result in an incoherent and redundant reading. It would be like saying,

“Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the elect, and not only for the sins of the elect, but ALSO for the sins of the elect!”

Why would anyone inspired by the Holy Spirit speak such babble? This is not a good interpretation! God loves the world (all people), desires all people to be saved, and Jesus has made it possible for all people in the whole world to be saved.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/calvinism-versus-arminianism/biblical-defense-of-arminianism/ says:
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CLAIM: John writes, "[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). However, regarding 1 John 2:2, Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes,

John may be stressing the universal application of Christ's work. Since 'sacrifice of atonement' is a strongly Jewish term and something associated in Jewish minds with the propitiation made at the temple on the Day of Atonement, John may be saying, 'Jesus made propitiation for our sins; but not just the sins of us who are Jews, which we might think since atonement is a Jewish tradition, but for all the peoples of the world. In that sense, he is a universal Savior.'

Steele and Thomas write,

One reason for the use of these expressions was to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jews alone… These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without distinction (i.e., He died for Jews and Gentiles alike) but they are not intended to indicate that Christ died for all men without exception (i.e., He did not die for the purpose of saving each and every last sinner).

John Piper writes,

The 'whole world' refers to the children of God scattered throughout the whole world.

Thus five point Calvinists argue that this passage refers to ethnic universality—not individual universality.

RESPONSE: The context of this passage is not Jewish ethnicity. The context is universal sin. Moreover, this explanation doesn't fit with the term "world" (Greek kosmos). John uses the word kosmos a number of times in his gospel (Jn. 1:9; 1:10; 1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 3:19; 4:42; 6:14; 6:33; 6:51; 7:4; 7:7; 8:12; 8:23; 8:26; 9:5; 9:39; 10:36; 11:9; 11:27; 12:19; 12:25; 12:31; 12:47; 13:1; 14:17; 14:19; 14:22; 14:27; 14:30; 14:31; 15:18; 15:19; 16:8;

16:11; 16:20; 16:21; 16:28; 16:33; 17:5; 17:6; 17:11; 17:13-16; 17:18; 17:21; 17:23-25; 18:20; 18:36; 21:25). However, as we read through his use of kosmos in these various passages, it never once specifically refers to the church or to the elect. In fact, his consistent use of this word kosmos refers to the world in general or the hostile world in rebellion to God. Even in the same letter, John writes that "the whole world (kosmos) lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19).
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(Bruce) See John 1:29, John 12:31 - 32, 2 Corinthians 5:14 - 15, 1 Timothy 2:4 - 6, Hebrews 2:9 - 10. This is a proof text countering limited atonement. The common response is that the "whole world" means all kinds of people in the world. The common non-Calvinist view is that Jesus died as a propitiation for everyone's sins, but only those who accept it are saved.

6.245. 1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

(Bruce) See Genesis 45:5 - 8, 50:20, Psalm 115:3, 2 Timothy 1:9 - 10. One of the topics of this discussion is what does the sovereignty of God mean, and what sovereignty does God grant to us (if any). The above seems to say that evil comes from the world and not the Father. Everyone would generally agree with this. But then you get into words like decreed and ordained vs authored. Calvinists talk about the two wills of God.

6.246. 1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

(Bruce) This passage is talking about antichrists, or false teachers. What John is saying is that you can tell they are false teachers because they have separated themselves from us.

6.247. 1 John 3:10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

(Bruce) This seems to be speaking about telling who is the elect. However, we all know people who passed the test and later left God. Perhaps this shows that people can be children of God, and then leave to become children of the devil?

6.248. 1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

(Bruce) See John 1:29, John 12:31 - 32, 2 Corinthians 5:14 - 15, 1 Timothy 2:4 - 6, Hebrews 2:9 - 10, 1 John 2:2. This seems to be against limited atonement. I think a response would be that while God did send Jesus to be savior of the world by dying on the cross (and resurrecting), that doesn't change the fact that people cannot respond to Jesus' free gift unless they are first regenerated (elect).

6.249. 1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. . .

(Bruce) This is a proof text supporting the claim that no one can come to Christ unless they are first changed by Jesus. I think a response to this is that if we come to God (on our own volition) for salvation, Jesus will give us understanding, so that we may know Him.

6.250. Jude 1:1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

(Bruce) Arminianists believe that everyone is called, but only some answer. Calvinists believe that only a few are effectively called and all who are called answer. Either way, those who answer are beloved and kept for Jesus Christ.

6.251. Jude 1:4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who . . .

https://www.dwellcc.org/essays/calvinism-arminianism-controversial-passages says:
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Calvinists hold that this passage teaches double-predestination.

Arminians point out that the participle "previously marked out" (progegrammenoi) can also be translated "previously written about." Since Jude goes on to cite several recorded examples of the destruction of ungodly persons (vss. 5-18), this translation is seen as preferable.
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https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/jude/jude-4-condemned-beforehand/ says:
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Does God predestine us to wrath?

RESPONSE: The NASB footnote points out an alternate translation: “Those who were written about long ago.” Jude goes on to quote multiple people in the OT era, who were “written about” as being judged (vv.5-16). In this way, Jude was not referring to predestination; he was referring to the writing of the Old Testament. Green concurs when he writes, “‘This judgment Jude has in mind is what he will outline in the rest of the epistle (vv. 5-7, 10-15). His concern is to demonstrate to his readers the final outcome of the heretics’ lifestyle and teaching.” Green goes on to state that these OT events could typologically predict the judgment of these false teachers.
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(Bruce) This is a proof text for double predestination. One response is that this is not referring to individuals, but to the category of false teachers in general. In other words, it’s certain (and written about) that false teachers will infiltrate the church body and be condemned

6.252. Jude 1:24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

(Bruce) Calvinists say that God keeps the elect from stumbling and does present the elect blameless before God. Arminianists say that God will do all of that if we remain in Him. Calvinists would say that God is the one who ensures we remain in Him.

6.253. Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

(Bruce) This seems to indicate the non-Calvinist point that we can open the door. However, the Calvinist perspective is that only those who are regenerated can hear God’s voice. And when we hear God’s voice, then we will open the door.

6.254. Revelation 13:8, 17:8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

> 8 . . . And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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The phrase "the book of life" appears five other times in the Apocalypse (3:5; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). In each case, as here, it is a metaphor for saints whose salvation has been determined: their names have been entered into the census book of the eternal new Jerusalem before history began, which is explicitly affirmed in 21:27, though the pretemporal phrase is omitted there, unlike 13:8 and 17:8, which express the notion of predetermination "from the foundation of the world." That saints were written in the book before history began is implied by the fact that the beast worshipers are said not to have been so written...The dual notion of a "book of life" for the righteous and "books" of judgment for the wicked is based on Dan 12:1-2 and 7:10.

This safety is the precreation identification of God's people with the Lamb's death, which means that they also identify with his resurrection life, which protects them from spiritual death and ultimate deception (cf. 5:5-13). No one can take this life from them. This conclusion stands regardless of how the syntactical problem is solved.

The "earth-dwellers" will not be able to withstand deception by the beast because their "names has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life." The same reason for worship of and deception by the beast is given in 13:8. Being "written in the book of life" is a metaphor referring elsewhere to believers, whose salvific life has been secured, or, with the negative, to unbelievers, who do not benefit from having such security...In 13:8, as here, this security or lack thereof was determined before historical time began, "from the foundation of the world." G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (Eerdmans 1999), 701-703; 866.
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(Bruce) Most translations say “From the foundation of the world”. The ESV, which was made by reformed scholars, chose to use the English word “Before”. The Greek word is “Apo”, which means “From”. This puts into question whether the Book of Life was finished before the foundation of the world, or started from the foundation of the world, and is still being written.

But, even if the Book of Life was finished from before the foundation of the world, the question then would be did God write those names without looking forward to how

people will react to Him (He elected who He wanted despite any possible reaction), or did God use foreknowledge of people's reaction to write the names?

6.255. Revelation 15:3 - 4
And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,
"Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed."

(Bruce) While there's debate on what "all" means in various passages, I think the term "all nations" is less ambiguous. This should mean a subset of people from all nations, and not all people.

6.256. Revelation 17:14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

(Bruce) See 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 2, 8 - 9, Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11 - 14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14, 2 Timothy 1:9 - 10, 1 Peter 1:15, 2 Peter 1:3. Everyone agrees that God calls us. People disagree on how and why God calls us.

6.257. Revelation 17:16 - 17
And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/annotated-prooftexts.html says:
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[God] will cause the political forces of evil to attack and destroy Babylon. God executes his will through the "hearts" of both the righteous and the unrighteous. This must be construed not as mere divine "permission" but as divine causation.

For the notion of God executing his will through the "hearts of both saints and the ungodly see with respect to the former especially 2 Chron 30:12, as well as 1 Kgs 10:24; Ezra 7:27; Neh 2:12; 7:5; Jer 32:40; for the latter see also Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 14:4,8; 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28. G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (Eerdmans 1999), 887-88.
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(Bruce) There are a bunch of examples where God puts something in people's hearts to carry out His purposes. The question is He overriding free will, or is He making a suggestion that He knows will be picked up eagerly? If the answer is that God overrides free will, how often does He do this? All the time? A lot? Or, very rarely?

6.258. Revelation 22:17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

(Bruce) Calvinists say that God puts out a general call to everyone, but only those who are effectively called can and will answer. But why is there a general call here if not anyone can answer it? There seems to be an expectation that everyone who hears and desires life answers. One response to this is that only those who have been effectively called can hear and desire life.

7. Various Discussions on Calvinism and Arminianism

7.1. Calvinism versus Arminianism

(by https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/calvinism-versus-arminianism/)

7.1.1. Introduction

At the heart of the Calvinist-Arminian debate is the question of how it is that humans come into a relationship with Christ. Is it through our freewill or God's selection? Arminians claim that we decide to come to Christ through our freewill, while Calvinists

will often ask, “Do you think that God was the one who was lost, and you found Him?” But how does this fit with the notion that “none seek for God” (Rom. 3:11). Moreover, how does this fit with the biblical teaching that humans are the lost sheep (Jer. 50:6) who need to be found by Christ—the good shepherd (Lk. 15:3-7; 19:10; Jn. 10:11)? Calvinist J.I. Packer writes,

The difference between them [Arminianism and Calvinism] 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.

Our understanding of this subject will affect a number of areas in our theology. It pervades our understanding of the problem of evil, God’s sovereignty, freewill, hell, total depravity, and hermeneutics. Moreover, while we might wish to disregard this subject as abstract theology, this simply isn’t an option. The subject is unavoidable when reading our Bibles and working with new Christians or non-Christians. What does the Bible mean when it uses the language of “predestination,” “election,” and being “chosen”? Let’s consider two differing perspectives.

7.1.2. The Case for Calvinism

Calvinism comes from the theology of John Calvin—one of the great theological minds of the Reformation. However, this term is really a misnomer. Many Calvinists argue that this teaching originates in Augustine in the fourth century (and others argue it originally goes back to Paul in the first century!). Calvin himself did not emphasize predestination in his Institutes (he only mentioned it in four chapters). While he taught predestination and election, he warned against delving too deeply into this subject. He writes:

“First, then, when they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter in inextricable labyrinth. For it is not right that man should with impunity pry into things which the Lord has been pleased to conceal within himself, and scan that sublime eternal wisdom which it is his pleasure that we should not apprehend but adore, that therein also his perfections may appear. Those secrets of his will, which he has seen it meet to manifest, are revealed in his word—revealed in so far as he knew to be conducive to our interest and welfare.”

However, Calvinism became one of the central teachings of Reformed Theology, expressed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. Calvinists make their case in this way:

1. God's sovereignty and decrees
Calvinists argue that God is completely in control of all things and his decrees are never frustrated by anything. Thus even a sinner's freewill cannot get in the way of what God wants. For instance, Isaiah writes that God declares "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'… Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it" (Isa. 46:10-11). Likewise, Paul writes that God "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). If God predestines all things, Calvinists ask, then how can we as humans claim to choose for our salvation?

2. Total depravity
Calvinists next emphasize the complete inability of humans to come to Christ on their own. Specifically, they will often ask how it is possible for dead people to become alive, unless God causes this ("You were dead in your trespasses and sins" Eph. 2:1). Calvinists will often ask, "How much did you decide to be born physically?" Similarly, they argue, we do not have a choice in our spiritual birth, either. For instance, Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes,

Like a spiritual corpse, he is unable to make a single move toward God, think a right thought about God, or even respond to God—unless God first brings this spiritually dead corpse to life.

Paul writes that "there is none who seeks for God" (Rom. 3:11), and Jesus said it is "impossible" for people to be saved, but "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26). Before Christ saved us, "We were still helpless" (Rom. 5:6), loving "the darkness rather than the Light" (Jn. 3:19). While Arminians often argue that freewill plays a role in our salvation, John writes that we were not saved by "the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:13).

3. Salvation is a complete and finished work of God—not man
According to the Calvinist, if we contribute to our salvation (by adding a faith decision), then we spoil our salvation (it becomes works). However, the Bible says that we were saved by grace—not works. Paul writes that our salvation was "the gift of God; not as a result of works" (Eph. 2:8-9). Even our faith—according to Calvinists—was "the gift of God." Since "nothing good dwells in me" (Rom. 7:18) according to Paul, we don't even have the power to exert faith without God doing this for us. As the apostle Paul writes, "Those whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also

justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). Freewill isn't involved anywhere in this picture; the entire act of salvation was a completed work of God—not man.

7.1.3. TULIP

To summarize the key teachings of Calvinism, theologians often refer to the TULIP acronym. This helps us understand the different aspects of Calvinism and Arminianism.

Total depravity
Westminster Confession: "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 good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 9.3).

Scripture describes humans as evil, deceived, and corrupt (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21). Since humans are so evil, they cannot respond to God. Sinners are so depraved that they are unable to "seek for God" (Rom. 3:11-12), and they are spiritually dead (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13). Just as dead people cannot cause themselves to come to physical life, sinful humans cannot cause themselves to come alive to spiritual life.

Arminian view: Arminians agree that "none seek for God" (Rom. 3:10-12). They agree that no one would come to Christ, unless he was drawn (Jn. 6:44, 65). However, they believe that God is drawing "all men" to himself (Jn. 12:32; 16:8). Therefore, because all men are being drawn through prevenient grace, they have the ability to exercise faith. Arminianism denies that faith is a work, since faith and works are constantly contrasted in the Bible (Rom. 4:4-5; Gal. 2:16).

Unconditional Election
Westminster Confession: "Those of mankind that are predestined to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel of good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, to everlasting glory, out of His mere free 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" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 3.5).

Salvation is not dependent on man's freewill to choose it. If human-generated faith plays a part in salvation, salvation would not be entirely by grace (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:8-9; Rom. 9:16-24). Jesus taught that "all" that the Father gave to him would be raised up on the last day (Jn. 6:37-39). God foreordains those who will come to Christ (Rom. 8:28-33). God has an "elect" people (Mt. 24:22-24, 31; Rom. 11:5), whom he has "chosen" (Eph. 1:4, 11; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). God has "appointed" some for eternal life (Acts 13:48). God chooses the elect based on his divine will—not based on anything in the sinner (Rom. 9:11-13, 16). The reason some people do not believe is because they are not those for whom Christ died (Jn. 10:26).

Arminian view: God chooses us "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3-4). Because Jesus was "chosen," believers are chosen "in Him." God does give one condition for salvation: faith (Eph. 1:13; Rom. 3:28).

Limited Atonement

Jesus only died for the sins of the elect—not the entire world. Jesus didn't try to save us through his atoning death; he actually saved us. Jesus didn't make salvation possible, but actual. Various passages state that Jesus died for "his sheep" (Jn. 10:11, 14-15), for "his people" (Mt. 1:21), and for "the church of God" (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). Furthermore, as John Owen argued, Christ must have only paid for the sins of the elect. Otherwise, there would be a "double payment" for people who reject Christ's offer. That is, Jesus paid for their sins, and then, they would pay for their sins as well.

Arminian view: Christ died for the whole human race, even if they reject his offer of salvation (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9; Titus 2:11; Mt. 11:28-29; Acts 17:30; cf. Ps. 145:9).

Irresistible Grace

Westminster Confession: "All those whom God has predestined to 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 and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving to 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. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer

this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.1-2).

Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" (Question 31).

Since humans are dead in sin and fully rejecting of God, then God needs to reach them by irresistible grace. God needs to regenerate the person so that they can love, seek, and respond to God's call in and through the gospel (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:26). The ordo salutis ("order of salvation") is regeneration and then faith—not faith and then regeneration. God "grants repentance" and "grants faith" to humans (2 Tim. 2:25-26; Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 5:31; 11:18). God "opens" people's hearts in order to come to faith (Acts 16:14). If God has given certain people to Christ, then they will irresistibly come to Him (Jn. 6:37, 44, 65; Rom. 8:28-32). We are not saved according to our will, but according to God's will (Jn. 1:12-13; Rom. 9:16).

Arminian view: God desires that all people be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; Ezek. 18:23), and he calls and convicts all people (Jn. 1:9; 12:32; 16:8; Mt. 22:14). However, Scripture teaches that humans are capable of resisting God's will (Mt. 23:37; Heb. 4:2; Lk. 7:29-30). The ordo salutis ("order of salvation") is faith followed by regeneration (Jn. 3:14-15, 18, 36; 1 Jn. 5:1).

Perseverance of the Saints (or Preservation of the Saints)
Westminster Confession: "They whom God has 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 therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 17.1).

Many passages affirm that the believer has eternal security (Jn. 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 6:51; 11:25; 1 Jn. 5:13; 1 Pet. 1:23). Jesus personally keeps the genuine believer secure (Jn. 6:37, 39; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:29-30, 35-39; 1 Cor. 1:8; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). Believers need to persevere in faith and good works to "make certain" God's "calling and choosing" (2 Pet. 1:10; Jn. 14:21; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13).

Arminian view: Many Arminians hold that believers can lose their salvation by apostatizing, persisting in heinous sin, or perhaps by returning the gift of salvation through their free will. However, it is neither logically nor biblically necessary for

Arminians to reject eternal security. We largely hold to Arminianism, but we also affirm the eternal security of the believer (see “Lordship Theology” and “Eternal Security”).

7.1.4. Biblical Defense of Arminianism

We have already explained the case for Calvinism (see “Calvinism versus Arminianism”). Here we will give the biblical case for the Arminian view.

The History of Arminianism
Arminianism is named after Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who strongly objected to the Reformed system—especially limited atonement. His position was published posthumously in the Remonstrance of 1610. However, it would be anachronistic to believe that Arminius was the first to hold this view. Jack Cottrell writes that Arminianism “was the consensus belief in Christendom prior to Augustine (A.D. 354–430).”[1]

Theologians who hold to Arminianism
Modern Arminian theologians would include Jack Cottrell, Craig Keener, Roger Olson, Ben Witherington III, F. Leroy Forlines, Robert Picirilli, Leighton Flowers, David Allen, Thomas C. Oden, Gordon C. Olson, Grant Osborne, Thomas McCall, and Scot McKnight (to name a few).

Is Calvinism unfair?
Some Arminians charge that Calvinism is “unfair.” However, this should not be the starting point for Arminian theology. God is free to dispense grace to whomever he wants. If God chose to save only one person, sending the rest to hell, this wouldn’t be fair; it would be merciful.

We agree with the consistency of Calvinism on this point: God is under no obligation to dispense grace. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be grace! As soon as we begin to ask for “fairness,” we are really pulling the rug out from under ourselves. If we want fairness, all of us would be judged for our sins! Therefore, Arminianism begins with a different biblical starting point: God’s character.

1. God desires all people to be saved
Arminianism points out that God desires all people to have a relationship with him—not just some. Peter writes, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul writes, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to

the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Jesus said that he would "draw all men to [Himself]" (Jn. 12:32), and the Holy Spirit would "convict the world"—not just the elect (Jn. 16:8). In the OT, God makes it clear that he doesn't desire people to be judged (Ezek. 18:23; Jer. 48:31; Isa. 28:21). However, under the Calvinist view, God would desire to judge some sinful people, and he does not desire all people to be saved.

2. God allows humans to resist his will

Calvinism places God's will as the primary attribute of God in their system—anything that speaks against this is thought to take away from God's glory and nature. However, Scripture clearly states that God permits people to oppose his will. The NT uses two different words for God's will in the NT: boulē and thelō.

1. Boulē (pronounced boo-LAY)

In the gospel according to Luke, we read, "The Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose (Greek boulē) for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John" (Lk. 7:30; c.f. Acts 7:51). This is the same word used for God's will in Ephesians 1:11 ("predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (Greek boulē)." Here, Luke explains that the Pharisees were capable of rejecting God's will for them.

Likewise, in 2 Peter 3:9, a derivative of boulē is used (boulomai), when Peter writes of God not "wishing for any to perish." Since some ultimately do go to hell, this must mean that God's will (boulē) is not fulfilled.

2. Thelō (pronounced THAY-low)

We see the same theme in the life of Jesus. Toward the end of his earthly life, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41). Matthew records that Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted (thelō) to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling (thelō)" (Mt. 23:37). Here, Jesus (God) wanted to do something, but this was rejected by the religious leaders. Earlier in the same chapter, Jesus said, "[The King] sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling (thelō) to come" (Mt. 22:3).

Elsewhere, Jesus prayed that God's "will" would be done on Earth, as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10). This word (thelēma) is in the same word group as thelō. If God's will cannot be resisted (as Calvinism claims), there would be no reason to pray this. Moreover, Jesus claimed that we are permitted to line up our will with God's (or choose not to). He said, "If anyone is willing (Greek thelō) to do His will (Greek thelō), he will know of the

teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself" (Jn. 7:17). These passages all imply that God allows us to resist and reject his will.

Freewill in the OT
In the OT, God enabled the freewill of the people to choose him (Josh. 24:15; Isa. 50:2; Jer. 1:6; 2:13-14; 7:13; 13:10; 26:2-3; Ex. 3:11; 4:1-13; Hos. 11:1-9; Ps. 78:10; 81:11-13; Jer. 32:33). Consider several examples:

(Isa. 65:12) "I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight."

(Prov. 1:24) "I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention."

(Jer. 18:8) "If that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

(Ps. 81:11-14) "My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. 12 So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. 13 Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! 14 I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries."

(Jer. 7:23-26) "This is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.' 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. 25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. 26 Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers" (Jer. 7:23-26). The larger context shows that God gave them a choice to obey and be forgiven, but they refused to do so (Jer. 7:1-22).

(Hos. 11:1-2 NIV) "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images."

3. Freewill is taught throughout the Bible

The Bible teaches freewill from one end to the other. It contains a number of broad, sweeping teachings that support the traditional concept of libertarian freewill. Even Reformed authors like D.A. Carson acknowledge these clear and perspicuous teachings of Scripture:

(1) God calls on people to obey, choose, and believe in him (Jn. 15:10; Josh. 24:15; Jn. 3:18). These calls would be nonsense, if we are not free moral agents.

(2) The very fact that we can sin implies freedom of the will, unless we are claiming that God is the agent of sin.

(3) God judges us (1 Cor. 3:10-15; Rev. 20:11-15). Humans are rewarded and punished according to their actions. Judgment only makes sense, if we are free to choose and culpable for our choices.

(4) God tests his people, which implies our ability to pass or fail (Gen. 22:1; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:13).

(5) Prayers are not scripted; they are free expressions of the heart (see the Psalms for good examples of this).

(6) God pleads with sinners to repent, which would only make sense in light of free moral decision (Ezek. 18:23-32; 33:11).

(7) God desires all men to believe in him (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Jn. 12:32). Consider this. An omnipotent being "desires" something that clearly is not happening. Something must be stopping God from doing what he wants to do. Freewill is the most likely solution to this problem (Lk. 7:30; Acts 7:51; Mt. 23:3, 37; Mt. 6:10; Jn. 7:17).

(8) God himself is a free moral agent, who is not determined (Rev. 4:11). Therefore, even the determinist will admit that it is not necessary for all decisions to be determined. Jesus was not determined; instead, he submitted his will to the Father's will (Lk. 22:42).

One final passage should be considered in this regard: Matthew 19:24. Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." What exactly could this verse mean from a Calvinist perspective? Arminian scholar Roger Olson comments, "What sense does this verse make in light of irresistible grace? Is Jesus saying it is harder for God to save a rich man than a poor one? How could that be? If everyone, without exception, only gets into the kingdom of

God by God's work alone without any required cooperation on his or her part, then Jesus' saying makes no sense at all."

Hermeneutical Principles for Disputed Passages

There are a number of passages that Arminians need to address in this discussion. We respond to these in detail below. However, before jumping to these passages, consider these four hermeneutical principles that should be considered.

PRINCIPLE #1: The "Me" or "We" principle.

In our modern individualistic culture, we usually read the Bible as referring to me, rather than to we. Often, passages on chosenness or election are referring to the entire church, rather than individual believers (Eph. 1:4). When reading difficult passages, ask yourself if it is referring to the church being saved, rather than a specific individual.

PRINCIPLE #2: The "chosen for heaven" or "chosen for ministry" principle.

Often God chooses us for the purpose of ministry, rather than for the purpose of salvation (Gal. 1:15; Jn. 15:16). Calvinists read all passages on choosing to refer to "going to heaven," rather than "going to work." Therefore, as you read difficult passages, ask yourself if the passage is describing how a person was chosen for a purpose in ministry, or if they were chosen to go to heaven.

PRINCIPLE #3: The "all believers" or "those believers" principle.

Sometimes, difficult passages refer to the original audience, rather than to modern believers. Therefore, in interpreting difficult passages, ask yourself if this passage is referring to all believers throughout human history, or if it is referring to those specific believers at the time. This is especially important when reading promises made to the twelve disciples or to Paul.

PRINCIPLE #4: Predestination and election are both based on God's foreknowledge principle.

God predestines the people that he knew would make the freewill decision to come to faith. Romans 8:29 reads, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son…" Notice that God's foreknowledge precedes who is predestined. Likewise, Peter writes that believers "are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Therefore, both predestination and election are based on God's foreknowledge of what humans would freely do.

7.1.5. Philosophical Defense of Arminianism

Here we will offer a philosophical critique of Calvinism from a moderate Arminian perspective.

Calvinists sometimes object that we should not use philosophy to judge our theology. They sometimes even charge Arminians of supplanting theology with philosophy. But this is patently absurd. Without the canons of logic and reason, we wouldn't even be able to practice theology! For instance, the Law of Non-Contradiction states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time. Without this logical law, we would be unable to point out contradictions in our systematic theology. Moreover, in defining the Trinity, we often appeal to philosophical concepts like "essence," "substance," or "persons." These philosophical terms are necessary in order to articulate accurate theological concepts. Claiming that philosophy is unneeded for theology (or somehow unspiritual) is like claiming that we can do theology without using grammar or the rules of hermeneutics. Philosophy is a necessary intellectual tool to exercise good theology.

This being said, we see several major problems with Calvinism philosophically.

PROBLEM #1: Calvinism makes God responsible for sin and evil
Many (if not most) Calvinists would reject this claim. We are glad that they would do so. However, we are stating that the system of Calvinism leads to this logical conclusion: If everything in the universe is according to God's will, then this would include sin and evil. But this would make God an evil being. We have obvious problems with such a view—given the goodness of God.

(1) God causes everything in creation to occur according to his will.

(2) Evil occurs in creation.

(3) Therefore, God causes evil according to his will.

How do Calvinists respond to this logical consequence of their view?

RESPONSE #1: God indeed causes evil
Some Calvinists bite the bullet on this logical consequence of this view, stating that God causes evil, rather than merely permitting it.

Mark R. Talbot (Calvinistic pastor and author): “[God] brings about all things in accordance with his will. In other words, it isn’t just that God manages to turn the evil aspects of our world to good for those who love him; it is rather that he himself brings about these evil aspects for his glory (see Exodus 9:13-16; John 9:3) and his people’s good (see Hebrews 12:3-11; James 1:2-4). This includes—as incredible and as unacceptable as it may currently seem—God’s having even brought about the Nazis’ brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz as well as the terrible killings of Dennis Rader and even the sexual abuse of a young child.”

Calvinist John Piper published a sermon after September 11, 2001, saying that God didn’t just permit the atrocity of 9/11, but he caused it. He made the same claim in an interview here.

Calvinist James White—in a debate in 2003—stated that God is responsible for evil—even the rape of a child (found here).

John Calvin: “To sum up, since God’s will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made his providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works, not only in order to display its force in the elect, who are ruled by the Holy Spirit, but also to compel the reprobate to obedience.”

RESPONSE #2: This is a “mystery” or an “antinomy”
Other Calvinists are not willing to connect God as the direct cause of evil. Instead, they appeal to “mystery” to explain this problem:

J.I. Packer (Calvinist theologian): “Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent… Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other.”

We do not accept this answer as credible. This is not a mystery or a paradox; it is an explicit logical contradiction.

RESPONSE #3: Compatibilism answers this problem
Many Calvinist theologians hold to a concept called compatibilism (also called soft determinism). This view holds that human agents acting freely insofar as they always choose what is consistent with their nature. Nothing external to the person causes them

to make a choice, but their own psychological state, beliefs, and desires caused them to act. The person could have acted differently if they wanted to, but because their psychological state, beliefs, and desires don't want to do differently, they choose the very thing that God decreed for them to choose.

However, there are many problems with compatibilism:

First, this view is still a form of divine determinism. Even under compatibilism, the moral agent does not act freely at all. Calvinist John Hendryx writes,

Compatibilism is a form of determinism and it should be noted that this position is no less deterministic than hard determinism. It simply means that God's predetermination and meticulous providence is "compatible" with voluntary choice. Our choices are not coerced …i.e. we do not choose against what we want or desire, yet we never make choices contrary to God's sovereign decree. What God determines will always come to pass (Eph 1:11). In light of Scripture, (according to compatibilism), human choices are exercised voluntarily but the desires and circumstances that bring about these choices occur through divine determinism.

Again, philosopher Jerry Walls writes, "The crucial point to keep in mind is that the agent could not want to do otherwise than she in fact does. If the agent had wanted to do differently, she could have done so, but it was impossible for her to want to do differently, given the prior causes and conditions that strictly determined her psychological states and character."

Consider an analogy. Imagine someone set up a string of 50 dominoes in a row to knock over an object. Would it be any less determined if I added another domino to the string of determined causes? Of course not. Compatibilism adds a person's nature and character into the string of determined causes, but under Calvinism, the person's nature is itself determined.

Second, this view lowers humans to the sum of their desires—almost like animals. If we put lettuce and lamb in front of a lion, the lion's nature will always choose to eat the lamb. While human desires are more complex than this, this is fundamentally the same view of humans—that we are at the mercy of our desires and nothing more.

Conclusion: Why not just accept freewill as the solution?
All people have an immediate experience of freewill. Imagine how good the arguments would have to be against freewill, in order for you to believe that you were determined in

your actions. The burden of proof on the Calvinist is enormous, because it flies contrary to our immediate experience (see “The Mind and the Brain: Is Freewill an Illusion?”). Furthermore, if freewill does not exist, then a number of logical consequences would follow:

(1) We could never know if our knowledge of anything is true.

(2) We should never persuade others, because all are determined to hold their beliefs.

(3) We cannot be held culpable for moral actions, because we are determined to do everything.

Calvinists would object to each of these statements above. And we are glad that they would reject each of these. We are not saying that Calvinists affirm these concepts, but rather, these flow logically from their theological system.

PROBLEM #2: Calvinism has a problem explaining the Fall (Gen. 3)
Calvinists offer several answers for the Fall of humanity:

RESPONSE #1: The Fall is a “mystery.”
This is an oft-repeated answer for Calvinists when an aspect of their theology is contradictory. For instance, Calvinist R.C. Sproul writes,

We are fallen creatures. But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don’t know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know. In spite of this excruciating problem we still must affirm that God is not the author of sin.

Sproul believes that Adam and Eve fell because of their “free will, not by divine coercion.” However, this answer to the Fall is guilty of double talk: They can’t have it both ways. Either we have freewill or we don’t.

RESPONSE #2: The Fall is the result of God removing his sustaining grace from Adam and Eve. Calvinist Paul Helm holds that human sin occurs from “divine withholding” of grace. That is, God merely allows humans to choose for evil. But if the first humans had freewill to choose for sin, wouldn’t this crush the Calvinist understanding of God’s sovereignty—that is, his meticulous control of all things? Why would the first humans be exempt from divine determinism?

RESPONSE #3: The Fall is God's sovereign decision so that he can reveal his attributes of mercy and justice. Without sin, God's attributes of mercy and justice would never be revealed to the world. Lorainne Boettner writes,

Sin… is permitted in order that the mercy of God may be shown in its forgiveness, and that His justice may be shown in its punishment. Its entrance is the result of a settled design which God formed in eternity, and through which He purposed to reveal Himself to His rational creatures as complete and full-orbed in all conceivable perfections.

While this is a side point, notice that Boettner uses the word "permitted" rather than "caused." This is the language of Arminianism—not Calvinism. Citing Romans 9:22-24, James Boice writes,

God considers the display of his attributes to be worth the whole drama of human history—to be worth creation, the Fall, election, reprobation, and everything else. From God's point of view, the revelation of his glory—meaning the revelation of all his glorious attributes—is the grand priority.

We agree that God demands us to glorify him. Since God is the greatest conceivable good, it is wrong for us to love other things above him. However, God is a giver and lover by nature. He doesn't glorify himself at the consequence of judging us in the process. He glorifies himself, ultimately, for our benefit—not his. Paul writes that God created his plan for "our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7). In the gospel of John, we learn that God received glory by being stripped naked, beaten, and nailed to a Roman Cross (Jn. 12:23-24; 13:31-32). Thus we agree with Calvinists that God does everything for his own glory, but God's glory is ultimately for our good—not his own. We agree with Leighton Flowers, who writes, "God is most glorified not at the expense of His creation, but at the expense of Himself for the sake of His creation." After all, the nature of love is self-sacrifice—not self-glorification (1 Cor. 13:5; Jn. 15:13).

By contrast, the Arminian explanation to the Fall is straightforward and close to the text of Scripture: The first humans chose to rebel against God, by virtue of their own freewill (see "Problem of Evil").

RESPONSE #4: God caused Adam and Evil to fall
Infralapsarianism teaches that God permitted the Fall. This comes from the Latin roots infra ("after") and lapsus ("fall"). By contrast, supralapsarianism teaches that God caused the Fall. This term comes from the roots supra ("before") and lapsus ("fall").[16] John Calvin seems to affirm supralapsarianism, when he writes,

They say that he [Adam] had free choice that he might shape his own fortune, and that God ordained nothing except to treat man according to his deserts. If such a barren invention is accepted, where will that omnipotence of God be whereby he regulates all things according to his secret plan, which depends solely upon itself? Yet predestination, whether they will or not manifests itself in Adam's posterity. For it did not take place by reason of nature that, by the guilt of one parent, all were cut off from salvation. What prevents them from admitting concerning one man what they willingly concede concerning the whole human race? . . . If there is any just complaint, it applies to predestination. And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendents, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision.

While most Calvinists hold to infralapsarianism (i.e. God permitted the Fall), others like Theodore Beza, Gerhardus Vos, G.H. Kersten, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Hoeksema, Arthur Pink, and Gordon Clark hold to supralapsarianism (i.e. God caused the Fall).

PROBLEM #3: God chooses NOT to save everyone
Some Calvinists believe in double predestination (i.e. where God sends some to heaven and others to hell). If God causes all things, then this seems to follow logically from the Calvinist view. However, other Calvinists hold that God merely withholds grace from certain people, and this is why some are judged. James Montgomery Boice writes,

The reason why some believe the gospel and are saved by it is that God intervenes in their lives to bring them to faith. He does it by the new birth or regeneration. But those who are lost—and this is the crucial point—are not caused by God to disbelieve. They do that all by themselves. To ordain their end, God needs only to withhold the special grace of regeneration.

Election is active; reprobation is passive. In election God actively intervenes to rescue those who deserve destruction, whereas in reprobation God passively allows some to receive the just punishment they deserve for their sins.

Why doesn't God save everyone? Remember, Peter writes, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul writes, "[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Jesus said that he would "draw all men to [Himself]" (Jn. 12:32), and the Holy Spirit would "convict the

world”—not just the elect (Jn. 16:8). Based on God’s own character, this would be internally inconsistent.

Calvinist thinkers usually claim that this is simply a “mystery.” For instance, regarding this question, James Montgomery Boice writes, “A perfectly legitimate answer to our question is that the ‘why’ is none of our business! God does not owe us an answer.”

R.C. Sproul writes,

The only answer I can give to this question is that I don’t know. I have no idea why God saves some but not all. I don’t doubt for a moment that God has the power to save all, but I know that he does not choose to save all. I don’t know why…. One thing I do know. If it pleases God to save some and not all, there is nothing wrong with that. God is not under obligation to save anybody. If he chooses to save some, that in no way obligates him to save the rest.

Again, appealing to “mystery” is not an adequate answer. God’s revealed word explains that he desires all people to be saved. Thus for him to send individuals to hell is inconsistent with his own character. This isn’t a mystery; it is a logical contradiction.

This is why Calvinists have to appeal to a “secret will” of God.

PROBLEM #4: God does NOT have a secret will
In order to explain the aforementioned problems of God being the cause of evil and that he does not choose to save everyone, most Calvinists appeal to God having a revealed will and a secret will. Commenting on Matthew 23:37, John Calvin wrote,

The nature of the Word shows us that here there is no description of the secret counsel of God… Certainly those whom He wishes effectively to gather, He draws inwardly by His Spirit, and calls them not merely by man’s outward voice. If anyone objects that it is absurd to split God’s will, I answer that this is exactly our belief, that His will is one and undivided: but because our minds cannot plumb the profound depths of His secret election to suit our infirmity, the will of God is set before us as double.

Furthermore, Calvinists hold to two different kinds of “calls” that God makes to sinners: the general call and the special call. The general call is an invitation to the unbeliever—even though they are fated for hell, while the special call is given to the elect person. Again, Calvin writes,

There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death [cf. 2 Cor. 2:16], and as the occasion of severer condemnation. The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believer alone, which by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts. Yet sometimes he also causes those whom he illumines only for a time to partake of it; then he justly forsakes them on account of their ungratefulness and strikes them with even greater blindness.

We agree that God has a directive will and a permissive will… but a secret will? While we agree that God does choose to keep some things a secret (Deut. 29:29), we deny that these secret components of his will would contradict his revealed will. After all, if this were the case, then how could we trust anything that we read in the Bible? Perhaps God's "secret will" could actually contradict what we are reading.

Consider God's words through prophet Jeremiah: "If you will not listen to it, My soul will sob in secret for such pride; and my eyes will bitterly weep and flow down with tears, because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive" (Jer. 13:17). Walls and Dongell comment, "Although the text seems to identify salvation as God's deepest desire, the Calvinist must conclude that at a deeper level God never intended to bestow transforming grace on Jeremiah's hearers. In other words, the true intentions of God cannot be discerned from his words."

PROBLEM #5: God does NOT love all people
Some Calvinists bite the bullet and state that God does not love all people. For instance, A.W. Pink writes, "God loves whom He chooses. He does not love everybody."

But by far, most Calvinists affirm God's love for all people. They note that God gives blessings to all people—regardless of whether they are elect—through common grace (Jas. 1:17). After all, Jesus taught that God "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt. 5:45). John Piper affirms, "Our hearts should go out to every single person whatever the color, whatever the ethnic origin, whatever the physical traits, whatever the cultural distinctives. We are not to write off anybody."

We wholeheartedly agree!—and we are glad that Calvinists affirm this. But are they being consistent with their own beliefs on this point? Why should our hearts "go out to every single person," when we know that God's heart does not go out to them? Should we show a love for them that God does not? Such a concept is unthinkable.

Moreover, how can we honestly say that God truly loves people by giving them earthly blessings, when he chooses to keep people from an eternal, saving relationship with himself? From a biblical perspective, the ultimate form of love is found in a relationship with God—not in temporal, earthly blessings. Isn't this what Jesus himself taught? It was Jesus who asked, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mk. 8:36) Giving people a world of blessings does nothing compared to an eternity in hell. This is simply not biblical love.

7.1.6. Limited Atonement: A Critique

Did Christ die for the entire world, or just the elect? Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes that limited atonement is "the most difficult for most people to understand and accept." But Boice gives an illustration to argue for limited atonement:

What kind of redemption would it be in which the death of Jesus only makes redemption possible and in which, as a result, some of those for whom he died are still in bondage? Imagine that a friend of yours is in trouble with the law and has been taken to jail. He is arraigned before a judge, and bail is set. He has no money, but you hear of his plight and immediately take money down to the courthouse to bail him out. You appear before the judge, pay the bail price, and go home. Your wife asks, 'Where is your friend?'

'He's in prison.'

'In prison?' she asks. 'But didn't you take the bail money down there?'

'Yes,' you say. 'I paid the money to redeem him, but he's still in prison. I didn't actually bring him out.' What kind of redemption would that be? …When the Bible says that Jesus redeemed us by his death on the Cross, that redemption must be an effective redemption, and those who have been redeemed must be actual beneficiaries of it."

We believe that limited atonement makes philosophical sense, given the other four points of Calvinism (see "TULIP"). However, it does not fit with various passages in Scripture.

Biblical Passages for Unlimited Atonement
The doctrine of unlimited atonement is supported by various passages:

(Jn. 1:29) The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

(Jn. 3:16) For God so loved the world [not the “elect”], that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

(Jn. 4:42) They were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.”

(Acts 17:30) Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.

(Rom. 5:18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

(2 Cor. 5:14-15) For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

(1 Tim. 2:3-4) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

(2 Pet. 3:9) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

(1 Tim. 2:5-6) For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

(1 Tim. 4:10) For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

(Heb. 2:9) But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

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

(1 Jn. 4:14) We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

(Isa. 53:6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

(2 Pet. 2:1) But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

(Titus 2:11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

It is incredibly difficult to overturn these various passages in order to favor limited atonement. Unlimited atonement is mentioned in various verses, in various terms, and in various ways.

Arguments for Limited Atonement
Advocates of limited atonement offer several arguments that support their perspective:

ARGUMENT #1: John uses the term “world” to refer to the elect or the church.
John writes, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Advocates of unlimited atonement hold that this verse is crystal clear: Jesus didn’t just die for the elect (“for our sins”), but he died for the entire world’s sins (“for those of the whole world”). However, the proponent of limited atonement argues that “the whole world” refers to the elect who would later come to faith.

This interpretation truly stretches the credulity of the student of Scripture—especially when one does a close study of the Greek word for “world” (kosmos). We encourage the interpreter to look through John’s usage of kosmos in his various books.

Use of kosmos in the Gospel of John
John uses the word kosmos a number of times in his gospel (Jn. 1:9; 1:10; 1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 3:19; 4:42; 6:14; 6:33; 6:51; 7:4; 7:7; 8:12; 8:23; 8:26; 9:5; 9:39; 10:36; 11:9; 11:27;

12:19; 12:25; 12:31; 12:47; 13:1; 14:17; 14:19; 14:22; 14:27; 14:30; 14:31; 15:18; 15:19; 16:8; 16:11; 16:20; 16:21; 16:28; 16:33; 17:5; 17:6; 17:11; 17:13-16; 17:18; 17:21; 17:23-25; 18:20; 18:36; 21:25). However, as we read through his uses of kosmos in these various passages, it never once specifically refers to the church or to the elect. In fact, his consistent use of this word kosmos refers to the world in general or the hostile world in rebellion to God.

Use of kosmos in John's epistles
John uses the term kosmos a number of times in his epistles (1 Jn. 2:2; 2:15-17; 3:1; 3:13; 4:1; 4:3-5; 4:9; 4:14; 4:17; 5:4-5; 5:19; 2 Jn. 1:7). Consider several of these usages:

(1 Jn. 2:2) He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

(1 Jn. 2:15-17) Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

(1 Jn. 3:1) For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

(1 Jn. 3:13) Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

(1 Jn. 4:4-5) You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.

(1 Jn. 5:5) Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(1 Jn. 5:19) We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Look at these verses for yourself. Is there any way for us to conclude that the term "world" (kosmos) refers to the "elect" or "the church"? John's consistent use throughout his gospel and three epistles leads us to the conclusion that John does not have the church in mind.

ARGUMENT #2: If Jesus died for the whole world, doesn't this imply universalism?
Five-point Calvinist Edwin Palmer writes, "Did Christ actually make a substitutionary sacrifice for sins or didn't He? If He did, then it was not for all the world, for then all the world would be saved." Likewise, five-point Calvinist James White argues, "If I said that Christ died substitutionarily in the place of every single man and woman in all the world, then I was forced to either say that 1) everyone will be saved, or 2) the death of Christ is insufficient to save without additional works." Of course, we do not hold to the unbiblical doctrine of universalism, as we have argued elsewhere (see our critique of Rob Bell's "Love Wins"). How then do we respond to this argument above?

We believe that Christ could die for people who would reject his offer. For instance, in Numbers 21, God provided the brazen serpent for the Jews. But some Jews failed to be saved by this gracious offer. Similarly, a feast could be offered to a starving person, but they would need to chew and swallow the food in order to be fed. Or a check could be written to someone in poverty, but the money would remain untouched until it was cashed. Likewise, Christ paid for the sins of the human race, but each individual needs to cash in on that payment individually (Jn. 1:12).

But why would Christ pay for someone's sins, if he knew that they would ultimately reject him? Why not just die for those he knew would receive the offer?
We aren't certain on how we should answer this objection, but we feel that our biblical exegesis should inform our view of God's actions and plan. To put this another way, our philosophical speculation should not trump God's revelation. At the end of the day, we don't know God's plans and desires; we need to depend on his revelation to us to understand this. And God's revelation makes it clear that Christ died for the whole world—not just the elect.

ARGUMENT #3: The Bible says that Jesus died for many, but not for all people.
Advocates of limited atonement argue that Christ only died for many people, but not for all people. They offer various passages to support this view:

(Isa. 53:11) My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.

(Mt. 20:28; c.f. Mk. 10:45) The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

(Mt. 26:28) This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

(Heb. 9:28) Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

However, in response, advocates of unlimited atonement reply that “many” is offered in contrast to “few,” rather than in contrast to “all.” For instance, earlier in Matthew, Jesus said that “few” find eternal life (Mt. 7:14) and “few” are chosen (Mt. 22:14). By contrast, Jesus’ death applied to many. They also point out that Jesus did not just become a ransom for some. Instead, Paul says that he “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6; compare with Mt. 20:28 above).

ARGUMENT #4: The Bible teaches that Jesus died for the church, his friends, or his people—not the entire world. Many passages teach that Jesus died for the church:

(Isa. 53:8) By oppression and judgment He was taken away… For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

(Mt. 1:21) You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

(Acts 20:28) Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

(Eph. 5:25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Advocates of limited atonement note that these passages limit Jesus’ death to the church—not the world.

(Jn. 10:15) I lay down My life for the sheep.

Advocates of limited atonement argue that the sheep are those who believe in Christ (Jn. 10:26-27), not just anyone on Earth.

(Jn. 15:13) Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus taught, “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (Jn. 15:14). Therefore, Jesus only died for the elect—not the world. Do these passages support limited atonement?

One should not conclude from statements like these that Jesus did not die for anyone else, unless, of course, the passage explicitly states that it was only for these people that he died.

These passages do not teach that Jesus died only for the church; they teach that he died at least for the church. Theologian Millard Erickson writes, “Certainly if Christ died for the whole, there is no problem in asserting that he died for a specific part of the whole.”

Moreover, Paul writes that Christ didn’t die just for his friends, but for “the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6), “sinners” (Rom. 5:8), and his “enemies” (Rom. 5:10). In fact, Paul compares the universal spread of sin to the universal spread of the atonement. He writes, “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom. 5:18).

While we do not hold that the doctrine of limited atonement is an essential Christian doctrine, we do feel that it stands in clear contradiction to Scripture, and therefore, it should be abandoned. Moreover, this has not been a popular teaching throughout church history. Roger Olson writes, “The vast majority of Christians down through the centuries, including all the church fathers of the first four centuries (i.e. before Augustine), believed in universal atonement.” Of course, the majority of interpreters could be wrong in their view, but this demonstrates that countless interpreters have never seen this teaching on the atonement.

Moreover, the doctrine of limited atonement has severe practical problems. For instance, we could never tell someone with certainty that Christ died for them under this view, because we are not sure. As counselor Jay Adams writes, “As a Reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died.” We feel that there is a major practical problem with this position, and we certainly never see this sort of approach in the NT (1 Cor. 15:3; Acts 3:26; Lk. 22:20-21). For these reasons, we hold that this doctrine should be abandoned.

7.1.7. Question 1

If we are able to exercise faith in the gospel, then aren’t we saving ourselves?
By James M. Rochford

Calvinist James Montgomery Boice writes, “The efficacy of the atonement does not rest on Christ’s saving work alone but also on the sinner’s faith and repentance. Although God’s grace is attractive and persuasive, it is not powerful enough to triumph over those who stubbornly resist his love.” However, we would retort that faith is not a work. Calvinists might believe that accepting Christ is a work, but Scripture does not define this as a work. Faith and works are contrasted as opposites in the NT:

(Rom. 4:5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

(Gal. 2:16) Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Can we really claim that it is work to accept a gift? Consider if a man is standing on the top of a burning building. At the last minute, a rescue helicopter flies above his head and lowers a rope. The man desperately reaches out and clings to the rope, as the chopper carries the man to safety. If the man didn’t make the decision to grab the rope, he would have died. But can we really claim that the man, therefore, saved himself? In the same way, while humans have the decision to receive Christ, no one can claim that they saved themselves. Likewise, if a person wins the lottery and redeems the winning ticket, they can’t claim that they earned the money—just by cashing in the ticket. Total depravity does not mean utter depravity (Rom. 2:14-15; see “Total Depravity”). Therefore, perhaps humans are totally depraved, but they are still given enough freedom to receive the gift of grace.

7.1.8. Question 2

How can God know the future unless he causes the future?
By James M. Rochford

Calvinist J.A. Crabtree argues, “Only on the assumption of divine determinism is the divine foreknowledge of free-will choices a rationally plausible doctrine.” In other words, in order for God to know the future, he needs to cause the future. How might we respond?

First, we shouldn’t be so arrogant as to limit God’s foreknowledge. It is certainly mysterious how God’s foreknowledge can allow for human freewill. But this is not a

contradiction. For God to explain his omniscience to us might be impossible—perhaps like a human explaining the rules of chess to a chimpanzee. God has revealed that he knows the future, and who are we to say how God knows this? Philosopher Jerry Walls writes, “Do we know that God can’t know what free agents will decide without causing or fixing those decisions? Why isn’t it possible for God’s knowledge of the future to be flawless and yet no more determine the future than our knowledge of the past determines the past?”

Second, this objection commits a fallacy of logic called the MODAL FALLACY. An example of the modal fallacy is this: “Because something is true; therefore, it is necessarily true.” We can see the problem with this fallacy when we consider the past, rather than the future. For instance, it is true that I ate bacon and eggs for breakfast this morning, but it is not necessarily true that I ate bacon and eggs; I could have eaten something else. Similarly, just because God knows all future truth claims, this does not make them necessarily true. God’s foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the events, but his foreknowledge is not logically prior to them.

Third, knowing is not the same as causing something. Again, let’s appeal to the illustration above: Just because you know what I ate for breakfast this morning, does this mean that you caused me to eat it? Obviously not. Similarly, in the film Minority Report (2002), three humans called “precogs” can see the future and stop crimes from occurring. While they know what will happen, they are not causing these crimes to occur. If this was the case, the future policemen would arrest the precogs, rather than the criminals! In the same way, God’s knowledge of the future identifies what humans freely choose to do, but he doesn’t cause them to do anything.

Some have created models for explaining the antimony between freewill and God’s sovereignty. Perhaps God allows us to enter into situations, knowing that we will freely choose a certain path. It is, therefore, extrapolated that God places every human in a specific situation, knowing how he or she will freely choose (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). While no model is perfect, various models demonstrate that sovereignty and freewill are not logically contradictory concepts.

However, once again, we should recognize that this is speculation. We need to remember that we should hold to the coexistence of God’s foreknowledge and human freewill—even if we can’t perfectly explain how these fit together. If we should appeal to a “mystery” anywhere, it should be here!—not regarding God’s moral character.

Fourth, Calvinism and Open Theism both err over the truth of God's foreknowledge. To answer this difficulty, Calvinists claim that God knows the future by causing the future. On the opposite extreme, open theists err by claiming that freewill invalidates God's knowledge of the future; therefore, he doesn't know the future! But both views are wrong. Instead, we should hold both biblical teachings (e.g. foreknowledge and freewill) and say that we don't know how God knows the future, but he does, because he says so!

7.1.9. Conclusions regarding Calvinism

The debate over Calvinism-Arminianism should not cause believers to break fellowship with one another. While we believe that Calvinists are wrong on this issue, we wouldn't break fellowship with Calvinists over it. Many of the best tomes on Systematic Theology are written by Calvinistic thinkers (e.g. Millard Erickson's Christian Theology), and some of the best thinkers in the church today are Calvinistic (e.g. D.A. Carson, Douglas Groothuis, James White, etc.).

It is also wise not to make this issue a focus in our theology. It is instructive that Francis Schaeffer makes no mention of his Calvinism in any of his many books. Commitment to the work of evangelism and missions is more important than one's position here.

In fact, historically, some of the best evangelists in church history have been Calvinists, including Augustine, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon. Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, and many effective missionaries have been motivated to share Christ because of their belief in predestination and election. In many cases, Calvinism has not caused fatalism—but evangelistic fervor! Calvinists believe that God not only ordained the ends—but he ordained the means to the ends. That is, God ordained that preaching and Scripture reading were the means through which he would draw his elect. Since Christ has people that are elect in every city, some Calvinists witness with confidence knowing that God will work powerfully (Acts 18:9-11).

7.1.10. Further Reading for Calvinism

Arminian Reading
See our articles "Calvinism versus Arminianism" and "Limited Atonement"

See the "Society of Evangelical Arminians"

Olson, Roger E. Against Calvinism. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Olson takes a rather hard line on this topic. At one point, he claims that he could not worship God, if Calvinism was true! However, his book is an excellent biblical and philosophical critique of Calvinism.

Klein, William W. The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001.

Allen, David. Steve Lemke. Whosever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010.

The best chapter in this book is the critique of limited atonement. Specifically, the authors demonstrate that John Calvin, Martin Luther, and various other reformers did not hold to limited atonement.

Calvinist Reading
Palmer, Edwin H. The Five Points of Calvinism. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972.

Sproul, R. C. Chosen by God. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986.

Boice, James Montgomery, and Philip Graham Ryken. The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002.

Unlimited Atonement
Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology: Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Books. 1998. “Chapter 40: The Extent of the Atonement.”

Hilario, Conrad. “For Whom Did Jesus Die? Evaluating Limited Atonement.” Xenos Christian Fellowship.

Rhodes, Ron. “The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement versus Unlimited Atonement.” Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries.

Allen, David Lewis, and Steve Lemke. Whosoever Will: A Biblical-theological Critique of Five-point Calvinism. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010.

Limited Atonement
Palmer, Edwin H. The Five Points of Calvinism. Grand Rapids: Moelker Printing, 1954.

White, James. “Was Anyone Saved at the Cross?” Alpha and Omega Ministries.

Boice, James Montgomery, and Philip Graham Ryken. The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002. Chapter Five: “Particular Redemption.”

7.2. T.U.L.I.P. - The Doctrines of Grace

compiled by Dr. C. Matthew McMahon

7.2.1. Total Depravity

http://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/total-depravity-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/

Total depravity is the extensive ruin of man’s nature. Man is made up of two parts primarily: the material (body) and the immaterial (soul). “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28. Both the body and soul are corrupted because of the fall. This does not mean that people are as bad as they can be, but rather, that the effects of the Fall have completely ruined the total being of man. It is not just that man’s mind is ruined, or that just his body is ruined, or that just his soul ruined. It means the whole man is corrupted with sin. This would mean that man cannot fundamentally do anything to please God. Isaiah 64:6, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Genesis 6:5 “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This depravity begins at conception. It does not begin when we do something bad. We are not sinners because we sin, rather, we sin because we are sinners. Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Depravity of the heart is completely extensive so that the creature (us), cannot will to do any good. All we do is evil. All we love is ourselves. We suppress God, and exalt ourselves.

1. Fallen man cannot do or work any good:

Matthew 7:17-18, “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

1 Cor. 12:3, “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.”

John 15:4-5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Romans 8:7-8, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

2. Fallen man cannot comprehend or apprehend the good:

Acts 16:14, “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

Ephesians 4:18, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”

2 Cor. 3:12-18, “Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ.15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

John 1:11, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

John 8:43, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”

Matthew 13:14, “And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:”

1 Cor. 1:18, 21, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God…For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

1 Cor. 2:14; “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

3. Man cannot have any desire towards the good:

Matthew 7:18, “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

John 3:3, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 8:43, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”

John 15:5, “…for without me ye can do nothing.”

John 6:64-65, “But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.”

Ezek. 11:19, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:”

Ephesians 2:1,5, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)”

Fallen man is wholly opposed to good in every way. This does not mean they act as bad as they could act. It simply means they are affected in every area of their being totally, and wholly opposed to the good things of God.

7.2.2. Unconditional Election

https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/unconditional-election-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/

Unconditional Election is defined in this manner through the catechisms and confessions: God did, by His most wise and holy counsel, of His own, freely and unchangeably ordain some men to heaven and some men to hell by the nature of His good pleasure. In eternity, God has predetermined the course of everything and everyone. He had foreordained the eternal destiny of everyone whether to heaven or to hell for His glory. Men are unconditionally elected by God for His purposes without any prior works (good or evil) by which God would judge them good or evil. The election of men rests solely on the counsel and purposes of God. God has not decreed anything which he foresaw in the future, for that would place His decree upon foreseeing something in the creature.

Instances of the word “hate” and its use.

Psalm 5:5, “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”

Psalm 11:5, ” The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth.”

Psalm 7:11-13, “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.”

Hosea 9:15 “All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolters.”

Nahum 1:2 “God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.”

Malachi 1:2-3, “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated. And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.”

Romans 9:13 “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” Both Jacob and Esau are the same; whatever is eisogeted (read into) one must similarly be eisogeted into the other. Or, biblical exegesis must stand firm–which is done according to the text. The names themselves have absolutely nothing to do with anything they did or did not do–which also is consistent with verse 11. God elected them without thought to what they did “good or evil.”

“Appoint”

1 Thessalonians 5:9 “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (which is used only as an alternate in certain tenses) 1) to make, to make (or set) for one’s self or for one’s use, to set, fix establish, to set forth, to establish, ordain; (The logical counterpart being that He does do this.)

To “Know/Foreknow”, and its meaning.

TDNT, “In the NT προγινώσκω is referred to God. It is an election or foreordination of His people (Rom. 8:29; 11:2) or Christ (1 Pet. 1:20).”

Baur, “Choose beforehand. (Rom. 9-11; 1 Peter 1:20).”

Zhodiates, “To specially consider beforehand, i.e. that which is done. Used of God’s eternal counsel it includes all that He had considered and purposed to do prior to human history. In the Scriptures, something “προγινώσκω” is not simply that which God was aware of prior to a certain point. Rather, it is presented as that which God gave prior consent to (or that all things are contingent upon His counsel), and that which received His favorable or special recognition. Hence, this term is reserved for those matters which God favorably, deliberately and freely chooses or ordains. In relation to Romans 8:29, to believers, it occurs with the verb προορίζω to predestinate. Both words are logically coordinate. The former emphasizes the exercise of God’s wisdom and intelligence in regard to His eternal purpose and the latter emphasizes the exercise of God’s will in regard to it. What He has decreed is what He has decided.”

KJV Genesis 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

KJV Amos 3:2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

“Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Romans 11:2, “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,…”

1 Peter 1:20, “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,”

To “Predestinate” and its meaning.

KJV Acts 4:28, “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

To “Choose” and its meaning.

KJV John 15:16, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

The “Elect” and its meaning.

ἐκλεκτός eklektós; • 1) the act of picking out, choosing 1a) of the act of God’s will by which before the foundation of the world he decreed his blessings to certain persons 1b) the decree made from choice by which he determined to bless certain persons through Christ by grace alone 2) a thing or person chosen 2a) of persons: God’s elect

KJV Mark 13:27, “And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”

The Justice, wrath and Judgment of God, and His glorification.

Lev. 10:3, “I will be sanctified by those that draw nigh Me.” (Nadab and Abihu were killed by God. God will be sanctified in wrath, or in holiness, through men.)

Psalm 104:31, “The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works.”

Psalm 145:10, “All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee”

Ezekiel 28:22, “And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her.”

Revelation 14:7, “Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Proverbs 16:4, “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

Romans 9:1-24(ff), “1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. 6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. 10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. 14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. 19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of

the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

Rev. 14:7, "Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

The Wicked Made specially for Destruction, to glorify God's wrath and justice.

Job 21:30, "That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath."

Proverbs 16:4 The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

2 Peter 2:9, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

2 Peter 2:17, "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever."

Jude v. 13, "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

Romans 9:21-23, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, "

2 Tim. 2:20, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor."

7.2.3. Limited Atonement

https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/limited-atonement-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/

God sends Christ to die and Christ dies on behalf of His people, church and sheep. He doesn't die for the goats. His death actually DOES SOMETHING upon the cross. It is not to make a hypothetical "way" but actually secures the salvation of His people. Isn't that assuring?

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is not limited in its power to save, but in the extent to which it reaches and will save certain individuals.

Limited atonement is a theological term that has been used for centuries to define a very important aspect of the Gospel. It is a fundamental Christian doctrine which states that Jesus Christ came and died for a limited number of people. He did not die, or redeem, every individual for all of time, but for some individuals, i.e. Christ is the Savior of only those He loves. For his friends, (John 15:13), His church (Eph. 5:25), His sheep, not the goats (John 10:15), to those He will reveal the Father to (Matthew 11:27), His chosen (John 15:19; 17:10-17). This does not mean that the power of His death could not have saved all men if He wanted to. The power and efficacy of His death in and through one drop of His blood could have saved a million-billion worlds. However, that was not what God intended. The Bible never speaks of Christ's work as "possible" but only "actual." The Scripture does not dabble in "possibilities." It does, however, state that the scope of His death is limited.

Jesus Christ, much like the lamb of the Old Testament sacrifice, died for some people, and secured the salvation of those people through His death which took away their sin and imputed (or accounted) His own righteousness to them. This is something Christ accomplished on the cross; not something individuals initiate. It is true, as the Scriptures state, that he died for "all men" and that God loves "the whole world". In these cases "all men" cannot mean every individual inclusively for all time including Judas and Pharaoh. Nor does it necessarily follow that Christ died for the whole world because God loves the whole world inclusively. (For a study of these passages see my work on John 3:16, John Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ, books 1, 2, 3, and 4; or in Calvin's the "all" passages.) Jesus secured the salvation of those for whom He gave his life, and for those God imputes His righteousness upon them. Jesus does not infallibly secure the salvation of all men, for then, all men would be saved.

As the Maxim goes:
God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for either:
1) All of the sins of all men – which means all men are saved.
2) Some of the sins of all men – which means men are still in their sins.
3) All of the sins of some men – which is the biblical position.

Those who hold to a deviant “gospel” must grapple with the fact that Jesus does His saving on the cross. All those for whom he died will be saved in time and justified by God.

It is not that Christ’s power is “limited” but rather His intent or use OF THAT POWER is limited to those for whom He died, and chose.

The “limitation” of the extent is a deciding factor in the Gospel message as to whether one believes that the God of the Gospel SAVES, or that men save themselves because Jesus did not save anyone directly, but made it hypothetically possible that they could reach out and save themselves. Hypothetical salvation is no salvation at all.

Jesus died and secured the salvation of all those that the Father gave Him, and that cannot be snatched out of the Father’s hands. It is not that Christ “might save,” but that He IS the Savior. He does not lay His life down for all, but for His sheep. He does not give His life for Judas, but only for His friends. It is the church, not the world, which Christ has purchased with His own blood.

Here are only a few verses that directly prove God’s intention in a limited atonement.

John 6:37-40, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Matthew 1:21, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

John 10:15, “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

John 15:13, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Acts 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;”

7.2.4. Irresistible Grace

By
https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/irresistible-grace-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/

A grace that cannot be resisted and always works in the manner in which God desires.

Since grace is by definition undeserved by any person, Irresistible Grace teaches that when the Spirit of God is sent to change a person’s heart (John 3:3ff), that person cannot resist the change. This is when the Spirit of God applies the work of Christ to the soul. This does not mean that the person is unwilling to be changed because the Spirit of God is “fighting against them”, rather the Spirit changes the heart of stone to beat as a heart of flesh. The change opens the eyes of the spiritually blind to the work of Christ. It is that which the Spirit of God does on his own, previous to any act of man. The Spirit of God will accomplish what He is sent out to do and will not be frustrated in His work of changing the sinner’s heart. There are two types of calling upon people, external and internal. The external calling is the preaching of the Word to men’s physical ears. The internal is the Spirit of God changing the heart to respond inwardly to the Gospel message. This is the means by which the blood of Christ is applied to the heart and conversion takes place. Here is where the Spirit of God alone draws men to Christ. The Spirit of God then causes the heart of the sinner to be willing to repent of his sins, believe on the Lord Jesus and come to Christ.

In John 3 Jesus explains exactly this point. He says, “That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of Spirit is spirit.” Flesh only gives birth to flesh. Flesh does not give birth to spirit. Only the Holy Spirit, big “S,” gives birth to man’s spirit, little “s”. Flesh, or human nature, does not have the capacity to give birth to spiritual things (cf. Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10ff; 1 Cor. 2:1). Only the Holy Spirit of God can “born

someone again." The action in which the Spirit of God enters into a union with man is through regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17; John 3:3; Col. 1:12; 1 Cor. 6:10-11; Titus 3:5.), or a new-making, by which, man who is sinful and corrupt, is made holy, and according to the image of his Maker, (John 3:1-9). An excellent work on the subject of Regeneration is Peter Van Mastricht's work, "The Doctrine of Regeneration."

Here are a few verses on Irresistible Grace:

John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;"

John 5:21, "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

John 10:16, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Romans 8:29-30, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (See tract on Regeneration.)

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

Ephesians 1:19-20, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,"

1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who maketh thee to differ from another?".

7.2.5. Perseverance of the Saints

By
https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/perseverance-of-the-saints-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/

Will the saints endure to the end? Can we know if we are going to endure?

Perseverance of the Saints does not mean “once saved always saved”. This corruption of the doctrine has been popular in recent years, but has never been a true representation of the teaching of the Bible. “Once saved always saved” is more likely called “Perseverance of the sinner” instead of “the saint”. For it teaches that man can be saved by Christ and then sin habitually, doing whatever he wants, and still “persevere to the end”. Perseverance of the saints does not teach this.

Perseverance of the saints teaches that once God has renewed the heart of a sinner through the application of the redemption wrought by Christ upon the cross, he will continue to be saved and show forth the fruits of that salvation. The sinner perseveres because of Christ, but he continually shows himself as one who has been changed by Christ. God has saved the individual and will sanctify him until the end when he is ultimately glorified, and in heaven. It does not mean man has a license to sin. Those who think they have a license to sin are not changed and saved by grace. They are still in sin. Those who are saved by grace and changed, desire to show forth the fruits of that salvation. God motions the heart to good work, and continues that good work to the end.

Christians may fall into grievous sins through the temptations of Satan and of the world. They fall into sins because of the corruption remaining in them, and they neglect the means of grace which aids them in their preservation. For a time they may even continue in such sin. By this they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit (“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption,” (Eph. 4:30). They become deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts. They have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded. They even sometimes hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporary judgments on themselves.

A few verses on Perseverance of the Saints

John 6:37-39, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

Phil. 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”

1 Thess. 5:23-24, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

2 Tim. 4:18, “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 1:23, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Romans 8:29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Consider God’s Preservation in Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Neh. 9:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6; Isa. 41:10.

7.3. Calvinism in the Early Church

By https://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/calvinism-in-the-early-church-the-doctrines-of-grace-taught-by-the-early-church-fathers/

(Contrary to Arminiast claims that no one before Augustine taught Calvinism, this article lists a bunch of earlier church fathers who, according to the article, did).

7.4. How Romans 8 Made Me a Calvinist

By https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/romans-8-made-calvinist/

To this day, whenever I stand behind a pulpit and say things like “All true saints will persevere to the end and none will be lost,” I still have to pinch myself. I laugh inwardly and think, What would the 22-year-old me say if he could hear me now?

You see, I wasn’t always a Calvinist.

I was raised a classical Arminian in the Free Will Baptist tradition. As a teenager, I cut my teeth on theologians like F. Leroy Forlines and J. Matthew Pinson, along with older divines like James Arminius and John Wesley. As a 22-year-old man, I believed and taught that grace was always necessary but never irresistible, and that genuine Christians could abandon Christ and forfeit their justified status.

Beneath these beliefs lay a view of the God/man relationship that went like this: humans were created to exist in a loving relationship with God. The nature of that loving relationship requires a free—and undetermined—response on our part. To quote Forlines, I saw God working with man in an "influence-and-response relationship" rather than a "cause-and-effect relationship" (like the Calvinists thought). God could influence us, but he respected our personhood by always leaving the final decision up to us. And God did this, not because he was weak, but because this was how he meant for the relationship to work.

And in case you're wondering, the difference between a God who influences and a God who causes can be summed up in one word: guarantee. Forlines puts it this way in his book The Quest for Truth:

I think the description of God's relationship to man that Calvinists would give would be much like my description of influence and response. However, the result is thought to be guaranteed. . . . Any time the result is guaranteed, we are dealing with cause and effect. When the guarantee is gone, Calvinism is gone.

He's right. I agreed with him then; I agree with him now. I've simply changed sides. So what happened? The short answer is I ran up against Romans 8:28–30.

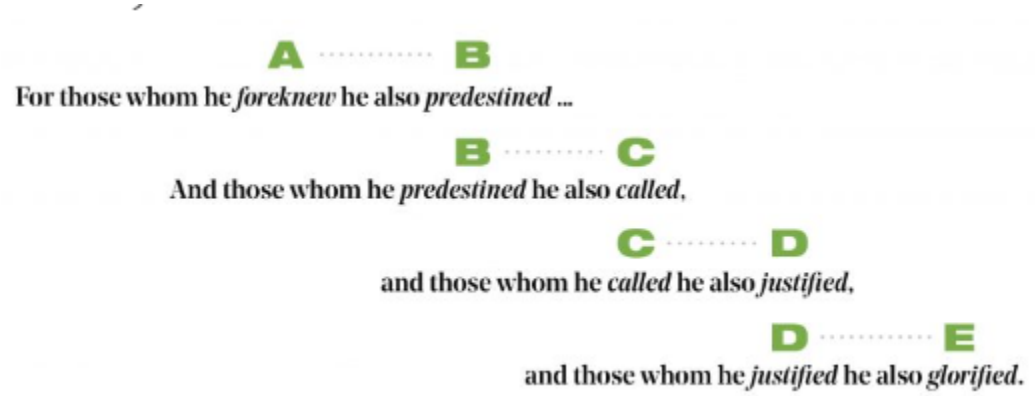
Romans 8:28–30 is often referred to as "the golden chain of redemption"—so called because of its five "links" of divine foreknowing, predestining, calling, justifying, and glorifying.

As an Arminian, I saw Romans 8:28–30 as a problem passage. Verse 29 was definitely a key prooftext for election-based-on-foreseen-faith. But the rest was difficult. I knew what my preferred commentators said about it, but I'd never been fully satisfied. So I chalked it up to an anomaly. After all, no theological system explains everything perfectly.

Eventually I came to realize that Paul's golden chain, like Calvinism, was very much about a guarantee.

Then I started listening to John Piper's sermons on Romans, and my world was unmade. It was 2004, I was 22, and I had never heard such preaching. His meticulous exposition exposed all the weaknesses I already sensed in my interpretation of the passage, while uncovering some new ones. I can't say I emerged from those sermons a convinced Calvinist. But my confidence was severely shaken. And eventually I came to realize that Paul's golden chain, like Calvinism, was very much about a guarantee.

Will the Chain Be Unbroken?
Let me lay out verses 29–30 to help us visualize the argument. (Read from the top left to the bottom right, and note carefully the italicized words and matching letters.)



As an Arminian, I naturally agreed with commentator Joseph Benson: "The apostle does not affirm . . . that precisely the same number of persons are called, justified, and glorified." After all, that would imply a guarantee. The more I studied the passage, though, the more it seemed like that was exactly what Paul was affirming.

First, consider each link individually. (For clarity, I've labeled the five groups with letters.) Paul begins by describing a group of people based on something God does for them ("those whom he foreknew"). He then adds something else God does for that same group of people ("he also predestined"). The word "also" in each link tells us that we're dealing with the same people in both halves. Those he foreknew are also the ones he predestined. Hence A = B. This is true in each clause of the chain.

But then notice the overlap between each clause. The second verb in each line serves as the first verb in the next. This is what binds the five clauses like links in a chain. And it's why I eventually had to conclude that Benson and I were wrong. Paul is affirming that precisely the same number of people—indeed, the exact same group of people—are foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Or to spell it out, A = B = C = D = E.

As an Arminian I'd been forced to argue that these five steps were simply a general sequence all true saints had to pass through, with no guarantee that those in group A would make it to group E. Indeed, I believed that some could fall out at any stage in the process. It was less like a chain and more like a bullseye, in which the circles got smaller as you moved inward.

But the more I examined the actual language, the more implausible this belief became. This inevitably pushed me to Calvinism. After all, if all the called get justified, then the call must guarantee faith, since faith precedes justification (Rom. 5:1). Further, if all the justified get glorified, then justification must be a permanent status—a verdict God never revokes.

This much I had always been uncomfortably aware of, though I hadn't fully appreciated the difficulty before listening to Piper. But there was one more problem Piper raised that I hadn't yet considered.

Guaranteeing Purpose of the Golden Chain
It's important to recognize why Paul forges this chain to begin with. The answer is found in the famous verse 28:

And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Notice that Paul isn't simply making a factual claim here (e.g., "All things work together for their good"). He's making a knowledge claim (e.g. "we know that all things work together for their good").

Which raises the question: "How do we know?" What guarantee can we possibly have that, despite all appearances, all things will conspire for the good of those who love God and are called by him? That's the question the golden chain exists to answer. That's why verse 29 begins with the word "for"—it's providing an argument for how we know verse 28. And here's the argument in a nutshell: We know that all things will work together for the good of the called because if you're called, that means you were first foreknown and predestined to be the conformed to the image of Christ, and it means that you're now justified and will eventually be glorified.

That's how we know: because there are no breaks in this chain.

Forlines was right. In the Arminian influence-and-response framework, there can be no guarantee. But that would defeat the purpose of the passage, because a guarantee is exactly what Paul is after. If people can fall out of the chain at any point, then we can never know that all things will work together for the good of the called. They might, but then again they might not—because the outcome would ultimately depend on the called themselves. Many of the called would never be justified, much less glorified.

But the good news is that this chain is unbreakable, having been forged by God himself. None of this means that our preaching or faith is unnecessary. Nor does it mean we can be assured of our salvation regardless of whether we persevere. It simply means that God hasn't left the composition of Christ's family in the hands of fickle human beings. God does more than just influence—he predestines. That's why all things will work together for the good of the called, and Christ will be the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29).

God is in charge. The outcome is secure. And that, my friends, is a guarantee.

7.5. Hyper-Calvinism

By https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-five-not-points-of-calvinism

Limited atonement may be the phrase of TULIP most prone to misunderstanding. And unfortunately, some Calvinists have played into the misunderstanding by accenting the word limited. In their zeal to defend the special love of Christ for his people, and the effective power of his redemption, some have spoken or acted in ways that suggest a narrowness to what Jesus purchased and a reluctance to publish it from the housetops.

Rightly taught, limited atonement says that even though the death of Jesus "is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world" (as Dort says, II.3), Jesus had particular people in mind when he climbed Calvary's hill. He died for his sheep (John 10:15), his friends (John 15:13), his bride and church (Ephesians 5:25) — or to pair the L with the U, he died for those whom the Father had unconditionally elected. As such, limited atonement emphasizes not the limited nature of Jesus's death, but its purposefulness. (Hence why many Calvinists prefer the terms particular redemption or definite atonement.)

Historically, some Calvinists have moved from a true statement (Jesus died for his elect) to a false conclusion: Christians should offer Christ to others only when those others show signs of election. Sometimes called hyper-Calvinism, this position is a fine

illustration of cart-before-horse syndrome, since the elect appear precisely by how they respond to the offer of Christ. Throughout Acts, for example, we find no apostle hesitating or tiptoeing before preaching Christ fully and freely. The apostles rather publish the gospel without distinction; only afterward do they discern who among the crowds was “appointed to eternal life” — because these elect ones “believed” (Acts 13:48).

Far be it from anyone, then, to take limited atonement as a reason to limit the precious value of Christ’s blood or the worldwide offer of that blood to any and every sinner, however non-elect he or she may appear at the moment.

7.5.1. Hard Determinism

Many who hear of Calvinism, with its depraved humanity and sovereign God, struggle not to see the world it presents as a puppet show. This was certainly my biggest struggle. Calvinism can seem to suggest, “Yes, people may appear to desire and love and decide on the stage of human life; they may appear personally responsible for their actions. But above lurks the Grand Puppeteer, raising arms and legs by invisible strings.” The phrase irresistible grace can seem to endorse the image. We, mere puppets, go wherever God’s strings pull us.

The original framers of the five points were sensitive to the struggle. “This divine grace of regeneration,” they wrote, “does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force” (III/IV.16). Well, what does irresistible grace mean, then?

The doctrine does indeed teach that God is the first and decisive actor in the miracle of salvation — and that it must be so, given the fallen will’s inability to seek God or submit to God (Romans 3:11; 8:7). As in the beginning, God and not man is the one who says, “Let there be . . .” And yet, those so wrought upon by God are neither blocks nor stones nor puppets. For, in regeneration, “God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant” (III/IV.11). When God saves a person, he does not drag him against his will; rather, he “penetrates to the inmost being” so that he becomes wonderfully, happily willing to be saved. Irresistible grace refers to the healing of the human will.

The I of TULIP, then, echoes the prophetic promise that God will write his law on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33) and even “remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). Puppeteers may tug on strings; God resurrects

hearts. And that means his decision to save us enables rather than cancels our own decision to be saved. As Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The choice is made for us even as it is made by us.”

“God’s decision to save us enables rather than cancels our own decision to be saved.”

7.5.2. Once Saved, Always Saved

The divines gathered at Dort were keenly aware that some “Calvinists” would live in such a way that Calvinism would appear as “an opiate of the flesh and the devil” (“Rejection of Errors,” V.6). Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in TULIP’s fifth point, perseverance of the saints, popularly paraphrased as “once saved, always saved.”

Now, understood rightly, “once saved, always saved” accurately captures the Calvinistic doctrine. Our God finishes every good work he truly begins (Philippians 1:6); he glorifies all those whom he justifies (Romans 8:30). But in popular practice, “once saved, always saved” often means something different: once you have made a decision for Jesus, you will be saved no matter what.

Such a doctrine would indeed function as an “opiate of the flesh” — and has. How many have walked fearlessly on the wide way to destruction because of the hour they spent upon the narrow road? How many have comfortably bowed the knee to their lusts because they once bowed the knee to Christ? How many have found their security in a past decision for Jesus rather than in present love for Jesus?

Perseverance of the saints, however, takes seriously that word perseverance. Yes, God forever saves those whom he has once saved, but he does so by enabling us to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast” (Colossians 1:23). Yes, Jesus keeps his sheep safe in his hand, but he does so by keeping them from becoming goats or wolves (John 10:28).

God’s persevering people, then, are not marked by a casual, drifting approach to the Christian life. They take seriously the warnings of Scripture, aware that those who “live according to the flesh . . . will die” (Romans 8:13). They take pains to enjoy God through his appointed means, knowing that whoever does not abide in Jesus withers and burns (John 15:6). They work out their salvation with fear and trembling, confident that their work is evidence of the God who works within them (Philippians 2:12–13).

7.6. God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation

By Steve Gregg -
https://opentheo.org/i/5467369947627944160/gods-sovereignty-and-mans-salvation

Note from Bruce: Steve Gregg's series is a very long series of lectures, which can be accessed above.. I'm attempting to summarize everything as succinctly as possible without losing any/many points. Furthermore, it is possible that I put words in Gregg's mouth. Consider the below my interpretation of what Steve Gregg is saying.

7.6.1. The Distinctive Points of Calvinism

Christians have different understandings of how God is sovereign and what that means. This view affects our views on how we are saved.

(Gregg talks about meticulous providence, which is a view that God intervenes in every minute detail. He incorrectly attributes this to the Calvinistic view - although there are/were people who did have this view. He ties the view that God sovereignly saves people through meticulous providence.)

The opposite of Calvinism is not Arminianism. These are just labels that people use. Jacob Arminius was a professor in Holland at a Calvinist seminary who began to question things that Calvinism affirmed. Almost every person who is called an Arminian has no idea what Jacob Arminius wrote.

The real opposite of Calvinism is called Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that God isn't sovereign at all over man's salvation, and that man doesn't have a sin nature, and that everything is determined by human free will. Calvinism has God making all the choices. Pelagianism has man making all the choices. Arminianism is sort of a middle ground.

Calvinism is also called Reformed teaching. Most people don't understand Calvinism. You can't be a moderate Calvinist or a two-or-three-point Calvinist and understand what it teaches.. A lot of people hold similar views to Calvinism, but they aren't the same.

Calvinism is often described with the TULIP acronym. The letters are total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

Sometimes I'm going to slip into calling the non-Calvinist view Arminianism. That's just because it's the convention of speech in Evangelicalism. If you're not Calvinist, you're usually called an Arminian.

Sometimes Calvinists will call Arminianists semi-Pelagianist, because they consider Pelagius to be a heretic. But semi-Pelagianism is another doctrine other than Arminianism.

The Bible doesn't have two different viewpoints it's presenting. Someone's not getting it right. And so, my desire is going to be to look at all the verses relevant, all the Calvinist texts and all the non-Calvinist texts, specifically to these subjects, and try to find out from the context and from biblical exegesis, if we can, which side really is using the Bible in a correct way. And although I've made it known that I'm not a Calvinist, it's not my desire to attack or to demonize Calvinists at all.

Reducing the Calvinist theology to five points wasn’t done by Calvin, but after his death. Arminians were the first to do that. In response, the Council of Dort (Calvinists) came up with the five points of Calvinism.

Total depravity and original sin are not the same doctrine. Total depravity means that the fall left man totally dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God. And thus, incapable of responding to the gospel. Faith in God is out of the question, unless God sovereignly creates a new life or regenerates in the sinner. This regeneration precedes faith. Faith is not what man contributes to salvation, but it's God's gift to the sinner.

Regeneration means being born again and coming spiritually alive. Calvinists believe that regeneration precedes faith and that only those who are regenerated can believe. No one can believe unless God regenerates them first.

Arminianists believe the opposite. If you believe, you will be saved. Not, if you are saved, you will believe.

How then does anyone get regenerated? Well, God picks who he's going to regenerate. He could regenerate all, because God's sovereign. He can do whatever he wants to. If he wished to, he could turn everyone into a Christian. But instead, he has a secret plan that involves saving some and damning others. Both of these sides of his sovereign plan are to glorify himself. He wants some to be saved and some not to be saved.

The old Puritan writers who were Calvinists, they had no trouble saying that. But modern Calvinists find it a little hard to come out and say they believe that God wanted the majority of mankind to burn in hell. And he didn't want to save them. And so many Calvinists actually deny double predestination, as it's called.

Calvin taught that God positively chose to save some and positively chose to damn others. Modern Calvinists usually hold to a view that God positively chose to save others and just didn't do anything about the rest. He just passed over them. This explanation is not satisfactory because if God saved everyone he wanted to and he didn't save them, then he didn't want to save them. If there's any predestination to salvation, it's double.

Some Calvinists admit this and say God loves only the elect and hates the reprobate. Other Calvinists say he does love the reprobate, and that's why he has us preach to them, because he wants them to be given a bona fide offer of salvation.

They call it a mystery. In fact, Calvin used the word mystery a great deal in his writings. How could God have preordained everything that happens and still holds man responsible for what happens? It's a mystery.

God's choice was not conditioned upon any foreseen response of faith, according to Calvinism, since the sinner is incapable of any response.

The third point is limited atonement, which means what Jesus accomplished on the cross was not for everybody, but only for the elect. Some Calvinists have backed away from that usage, instead using the term particular redemption, which sounds more positive.

The Calvinist believes that when Jesus died, he did not simply make salvation available for mankind. His death actually saved the elect. So he can only have died for the elect and not for the others.

The point they are making has to do with saying that Chirst’s death was completely effective. Arminianists believe that Christ died for all, but didn’t save all, which limits its power to save. Some Calvinists say that you can’t tell a sinner that Jesus died for them. The Bible says he died for his church, the sheep, His friends.

The fourth point is irresistible grace. Although the outward call of the gospel goes out to all men and can be resisted, there is a special inward call that God extends only to the

elect, which is never resisted. The outward call of the gospel goes out to all men and can be resisted, there is a special inward call that God extends only to the elect, which is never resisted. The non-elect are dead and can't believe.

Many Calvinists would say this preserves free will, because people do freely choose Him. But, God must regenerate us so that we can. But, when He does, we will always choose Him. Arminianists say this line of logic is potty. Calvinists distinguish between the external and effectual calls.

The last point of Calvinism is perseverance of the saints, which means that if you are elect you will necessarily persevere. Those who fall away permanently were never elect. Calvinists claim that this view is the only one that gives personal assurance. Arminianists say the opposite. How do you know you are elect?

Calvinists claim that their view is the view of biblical exegesis, which is reading out of the Bible the intended meaning. To do this, you need to consider the original language, vocabulary, grammar, culture, etc. The opposite of that is Eisegesis, which is adding your own opinion of what the Bible should say into the text.

The first of the non-Calvinist five points would be free will or human ability. Though no man can come to God without God first drawing him, man's free will allows him to decide whether to cooperate with the prevenient drawing of God or to resist it. The fall has affected man's nature significantly, but not to the point of rendering him incapable of choosing to receive the grace of God. People are fully responsible to make the choice to believe and to repent, and are blamed if they don't.

Jesus marveled at how little faith Nazareth had and how great of faith the centurion had. If God gives faith to people, there should have been no marveling at all. God blames people for their choices.

The second non-Calvinist point is election conditioned upon faith. Though God has elected to save all who are in Christ, He has not determined which persons will actually come to be in Christ. This decision rests with the individual. God foreknows which individuals will choose to believe and to persevere in Christ, and He elects to include them as His children based upon this foreknowledge.

The third point is universal redemption or general atonement. Christ's death makes salvation available to every man, but in itself does not secure the salvation of any individual.

The fourth point is that the Holy Spirit can be resisted against the doctrine of irresistible grace. The drawing of God is persuasive, but does not preclude the resistance of sinful and rebellious man, so that not all whom God would draw to salvation actually realize this salvation and experience. There seem to be many scriptures that indicate this. Calvinists explain them differently.

The fifth point is falling from grace. It is possible to cast off faith, and a person having done so is not any longer in the state of grace. You are kept by the power of God through faith, as long as you believe in Christ. You must keep the faith, otherwise you depart from God. Just as you are free to choose Christ, you are free to choose to depart from Christ.

You can know that if you're following Christ now, and you believe in Christ now, you really are saved. A Calvinist doesn't have serious, real grounds to know for sure that he is saved now, even though he appears to be. It might be a delusion.

What we're calling Calvinism is really more properly called Augustinianism. St. Augustine was the most influential Christian theologian in history. He lived in the late 4th century and the early 5th century. He was a Greek philosopher. He was a Manichean before he was converted. And he's the one who introduced these ideas that are called Calvinism now. He merged Greek philosophy with Christianity and he became influential. He's the father of Roman Catholicism.

For many centuries, Roman Catholicism was the only Christianity in Europe. So, all Christians were Augustinians in some measure, through the Dark Ages. When the Reformers came along, Martin Luther and Calvin, of course, were born Catholics. But Luther was an Augustinian monk. So, his views are Augustinian. Calvin’s views are simply a restatement of Augustine's doctrines.

Arminians believe that God knows all things future, including who will become believers. Because of that, God set His seal upon you and wrote your name in His book. So your election is based upon your faith. Calvinists object to this.

They believe that God knows the future because God makes the future. He didn’t save you because you did something or had something, because then you would contribute to your faith.

(Discussion on Augustine and the Manichaean heresy, and what early church fathers taught - which was decidedly non-Calvinistic. BTW, Augustine didn't understand Greek very well).

7.6.2. The Sovereignty of God in Scripture (Part 1)

Calvinists believe that God controls and ordains everything that happens, including sin. Anything less, makes for a smaller and weaker God.

Non-Calvinists also believe God is sovereign, but not in the way that Calvinists say.

If God is sovereign in the way that the Calvinist says, then people who go to hell don't have a choice in the matter. To give any say to man is to diminish God's glory. Anything less is humanism. The non-Calvinist agrees that God does have the right to do whatever He wants, but that His character controls what it is he wants to do.

Sovereign means not answerable to anybody else. You've got the authority to make your own decisions in your realm, and no one can gainsay you. But, this doesn't say anything about how God exercises His dominion. By giving others choices about things doesn't make Him less sovereign. Does He want to micromanage everything or does He want to give some of His creation some freedom. That doesn't interfere with God's ultimate will because God can checkmate anyone and fulfill all His purposes.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says, God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin nor is violence offered to the will of his creatures. Neither is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

This particular statement is a statement of what Calvinists call compatibilist sovereignty and compatibilist free will. Calvin didn't hold it, but the Westminster Confession of Faith represents more of what modern Calvinists usually hold. Compatibilism means that to believe that God ordained everything inevitably to happen and that man is still free to do what he wants can be considered compatible notions.

That's one of the mysteries of Calvinism, is that they are mysteriously compatible, that you can be making free choices and yet everything you choose is what God foreordained before you were born that you would choose and do. And the fact that

both these things can be true is called compatibilism and it's really the view of most modern Calvinists, not of Calvin.

R.C. Sproul is a compatibilist. He said, when we speak of divine sovereignty, we're speaking about God's authority and about God's power, that God, in some sense, foreordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty. To say that God foreordains all that comes to pass is simply to say that God is sovereign over his entire creation.

If God refused to permit something to happen, and it happened anyway, then whatever caused it to happen would have to have more authority and power than God himself. If there is any part of God's creation outside of God's sovereignty, then God is simply not sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then God is not God.

Wait a minute. Who gave you the right to define sovereignty that way? I can be sovereign in my home without ordaining everything that happens in my home. As long as nothing's really challenging my authority, I can allow all kinds of things to happen that I don't directly cause or don't directly ordain.

And I can even let other people in the home make the decisions about things. And I'm still no less or more sovereign by doing so. To say if God doesn't ordain all that happens, he's not sovereign, is to create a definition of sovereignty that only Calvinists accept. And you can win a debate by creating your own definitions. But it's not a valid way to win a debate.

I want sovereignty to mean God ordains all things. And certainly if God's not sovereign, he's not God. So you have to believe in Calvinism to believe in God. That’s what Sproul and many Calvinists say.

There is no dispute between Calvinists and non-Calvinists over the issues of God's authority and God's power. All Christians accept both concepts. By leaving out this issue of meticulous providence, Sproul insinuates that Arminians, in rejecting the Calvinist view of sovereignty, are in fact denying what no Christian has ever dreamed of denying.

No Christian has any problem believing that God is 100% sovereign. He has the right to do whatever he wants. God's omnipotence is not what’s being disputed. Calvinists insist that God has a certain management style.

James White believes that Arminianism denies that the potter has the freedom to make what He wants from the clay. He's wrong. It's not a question of whether God has the freedom to make what he wants. God has the freedom to make free agents that He doesn't control. Calvinists say that's impossible.

The second point of the Calvinist paradigm is everything man does, including sin, is ordained or instigated by God. The Westminster Confession of Faith says that God has unchangeably and freely ordained whatever comes to pass. That includes sin. Calvinists say that God is not the author of sin, but He foreordained sin.

John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion says that God has decreed that all events take place by his sovereign appointment. Everything done in the world is, according to his decree, so ordained by his decree. Lorraine Bentner, in his Reformed Doctrine of Predestination book, said, God creates the very thoughts and intents of the soul.

Arthur W. Pink, in the Doctrine of Election and Justification, wrote, God foreknows what will be because he has decreed what shall be. R.C. Sproul, in his book Almighty Over All, wrote, God wills all things that come to pass.

Augustine teaches that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to hold that anything is done without God's ordination. All events are produced by the will of God.

Calvinists talk a lot about God's sovereign decrees. God's decrees are irresistable. Everyone who is saved is saved by God's decree. Adam's fall was by God's decree.

The problem is that the word decree is never used in the Bible. It's a concept introduced by Augustine.

God allowed man to co-author, but Calvinism doesn't allow this. They say that God willed, created and ordained sin, but He didn't author it. God decreed that men would sin, but he did so in a permissive way. He didn't do it in an efficient way. It is a decree that renders sin absolute certainty, but it is not brought about by a direct divine act. So that's how God's not the author of sin. Adam and Eve are, even when it was inevitable.

Edwin H. Palmer, in his book, The Five Points of Calvinism, said, God ordained every evil thought, word, and deed in all of history.

John Calvin, in his Institutes, says, if God did not will it, we could not do it.

James (of the Bible) said God is not tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man. But God instigated? But God doesn’t like sin!

Sproul, in Chosen by God, says, we know that God is sovereign because we know that God is God. Therefore, we must conclude that God foreordained sin. What else can we conclude? Sin is not good, but allowing sin is. The fact that God decided to allow us to sin does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin. (This reflects modern Calvinistic thought).

Calvin felt that people who talk about God allowing something are watering down God's sovereignty. God didn't allow anything, he made it happen. Now what Sproul actually says diffuses much of the objectionable-ness of the Calvinist doctrine.

What Sproul said above is pretty reasonable. God could stop sin from happening, and if sin happens, God at least has chosen not to stop it. That doesn't mean he chose to make it happen. It doesn't mean that he inspired it in the mind of the sinner. God can allow bad things to happen without himself being bad. Sometimes bad things are the first step toward a good thing happening. There's no question about that.

But that's not what Calvinism teaches. They teach that God's the instigator of that sin, not just one who exploits it.

Calvin would take issue with what Sproul said. In his book, The Eternal Predestination of God, he says, it is quite clear from the evidence of scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as he will, whether to good, for his mercy's sake, or to evil according to their merits.

Modern Calvinists don't say that. They try to pretend that that's not what Calvinism is.

This brings us to the question, does man have free will? Martin Luther, in The Bondage of the Will, says that free will is an utter fallacy. Calvin, in his institute, said, those who seek for free will in man labor under manifold delusion. Charles Spurgeon, who is a strong Calvinist, said, free will is nonsense.

James White, a modern Calvinist, says that modern Calvinists believe fully in free will. David Hunt, who co-wrote a book with White called Debating Calvinism, responds that Calvinists contradict themselves and then say that we don't understand them.

Arminianists believe in libertarian free will. It means that man's choices are not predetermined, but that man is free to choose his own way..

Modern Calvinists have a concept called compatibilism. It means that although man is free to make any choice he wants, he is totally depraved, and on his own will always choose sin over God.. Human nature limits our choices. God must directly intervene.

If God intervenes and changes someone's will, is that free will? Compatibilism is a form of soft determinism, which affirms both complete determinism and freedom.

One proof text Calvinists use is Genesis 50:20, where Joseph tells his brothers that they meant evil, but God meant it for good. But, it didn't say that God put it into their hearts to do the evil thing they did. Instead, this is an example of God out-smarting free agents.

Not all Calvinists talk the same way as Calvin did because his words are frankly not as acceptable in the modern world as they were in his own world.

God can justly hardening the hearts of specific sinners to accomplish his will, like Pharaoh. God doesn't do this with innocent or neutral people. God was birthing a new nation. You can't make universal statements based on this one occurrence. Furthermore, this is only done when one has previously freely set themselves in a pattern of sinning. Pharaoh was already wicked and was ripe for judgement..

One of the major difficulties non-Calvinists find with Calvinism is the idea that one deserves to be severely punished for doing exactly what God ordained one to do, unchangeably and inevitably. In fact Calvin claimed that God takes pleasure in dooming people to hell - contrary to the Bible saying that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Sproul has a different take: there's positive and negative decrees. Positive decrees have to do with God's active intervention in the hearts of the elect. Negative decrees have to do with God's passing over the non-elect. God doesn't actively interfere in this case.

The question Calvinism doesn't address is how God could be a loving God, when He only loves the elect and hates everyone else. Is God love, or is God love some of the time to some of the people? Sinners who go to hell don't go there because they deserve it more than we do. They just go there because God delighted in not saving them.

7.6.3. The Sovereignty of God in Scripture (Part 2)

The distinctive Calvinist view is that God ordains all things that come to pass. And if anyone thinks that's hyperbole with them, it is not. Calvinists from antiquity believed that everything that comes to pass, including sin, is ordained by God. Modern Calvinists add that God ordained, created and instigated sin, but is not the author of sin.

Is God's will always done? If so, why does he so frequently complain in the Bible? If God instigates sin, why does He object to it? Does prayer affect anything? Can man change anything? Why pray for God's will to be done, if it already is going to be done?

Some Calvinists claim that prayer doesn't change anything - just you. It brings you more in harmony with God.

Why is evangelism necessary? Calvinists say that God ordained not only the ends but the means.

In Greek philosophy, everything was predetermined by fate. Augustine was a Greek philosopher. His ideas sound like they came from that.

Calvinists talk about the two wills of God: His prescriptive will and His decretal (or secret) will. His decretal will is what God decrees and what will inevitably happen. His prescriptive will is expressed in His commands. Anything that does happen, He secretly decreed. This is meticulous providence - God ordains everything that happens.

This is not correct. God is sovereign, which means that He has the right to do anything because He owns everything. But sovereignty doesn't mean He must impose those rights. God allows people freedom, even freedom to do things that He wishes they wouldn't do. If God sets out to do something, no one can stop Him - and He will not act contrary to His own nature and character.

Where Calvinists and non-Calvinists part company is how God chooses to intervene. Non-Calvinists believe that God limits His intervention and as a result, will not always get what He wants in the lives of men. That explains His frequent disappointment with men.

By having a child, parents make themselves emotionally vulnerable in a way that they wouldn't if they just had a pet.

God's intervention is often conditioned on man's exercise of faith and prayer. There are things that God would do only if He was asked. It says in Matthew 20:58 that Jesus couldn't do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the lack of their faith there. James 4:2 says you do not have because you do not ask. God doesn't normally override man's will to rebel.

In Isaiah 1:2, God says, I have brought up and reared children, and they have rebelled against me.

It's true that God's master plan will come to pass, and that will come about regardless of man's free will.

Psalms 115:3 says But our God is in heaven, he does whatever he pleases. There's lots of verses in the Bible that say that God does what He wants, no one can gainsay Him. If He purposed it, who can annul it? To Calvinists, this proves meticulous providence. But, all of these verses don't make the claim that God wants to tinker in everything. The question is, what does God want to do?

Calvinists claim that it's a misrepresentation to say they believe that God changes anyone against their will. He just makes them willing. Wrong! That is not a valid distinction.. God does change people's hearts, but it is because they are first willing.

Calvinists say that God only wants a few - He doesn't want the others. Non-Calvinists say God wants everyone, but only gets a few. Calvinists say that God gets what He wants. The Bible seems filled with examples of the opposite.

Daniel tells us that God raises up rulers and brings down rulers. He can also direct their decisions when they're in power.

Proverbs 21.1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Calvinists like this verse because it seems to say that God micromanages the decisions even of the rulers. Of course, it doesn't quite say that that's the case. What it says is that God does turn king's hearts wherever he wants them to go. It doesn't say how often he wishes to do such a thing. A king's decisions often affect God's people and God's overall purposes.

Hosea 8:4: They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.

God raises up kings and brings down kings, but that's not always the case. He does it when he wants to. Apparently a lot of times he lets politics run their course without his own intervention.

Now, how does God draw sinners? This is part of the providence of God that the Calvinists and Armenians disagree about. They believe God has an irresistible drawing of sinners. Armenians don't believe that. He desires all to be saved.

1 John 2.2 He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 Timothy 2.6 Who desires that all men should be saved. 1 Timothy 4.10 Jesus who is the savior of all men especially those who believe,

Acts 17:30: The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent

2 Peter 3.9 God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Ezekiel 33.11 Turn you, turn you, for why will you die? I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that the wicked would turn from his evil way and live.

These are ways that God draws sinners. But it's not yanking them totally against their will. These are ways in which he seeks to persuade them to be obedient and repentant.

God didn't predestinate some to be saved and some to be lost. What he predestined, according to Paul, is that there will be a certain destiny for those who are believers - that they will be conformed to the image of his son.

Jerry Walls said, We are not seeking to establish human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty. Rather, we are seeking to affirm God's freedom to create whatever kind of world he desired. Even a world whose every movement is not to be traced back ultimately to a specific divine determination.

7.6.4. A Defense of the Five Points of Calvinism

There’s a lot of verses that sound very Calvinistic, and a lot that don’t. A responsible Bible student needs to make sense of them all. In this section, we will examine why a Calvinist believes what they do.

It’s in a man’s nature to sin, and cannot draw near to God. In fact, he’s dead.

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.

Jeremiah 13:23: Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.

Jeremiah 17:9: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Ephesians 2: 1 - 3: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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— 3 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.

Ephesians 4: 17 - 19: Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Romans 3: 9 - 12: What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

The description of the unbeliever is that none seeks after God. It must be that God is the one who must change them before they seek Him.

John 6:44: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:65: And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

John 8:44: You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no

truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

John 15:5: I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Human nature is not capable of doing anything worthwhile without Christ. That's total inability.

I Corinthians 2:14: The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Calvinists believe that because we are totally depraved, we must first be regenerated before we can have faith and choose Christ..The Arminian view is that you are born again because of faith - faith first, then regeneration.

1 John 5:1: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

The point that you must be born of God first, and then believe has abundant scriptural testimony. When you are unilaterally and sovereignly regenerated, you will inevitably come to God - and the opposite is true.

Election means chosen. God chooses unconditionally. And God does not choose everyone. Arminians don't deny that God chooses people, but they believe that God chooses people on the condition of their faith.

How does God choose His elect? It's His secret counsel of His sovereign decrees. God considers nothing in the individual when He chooses. This is unconditional election. This is the biggest beef Calvinists have with Arminianists - who gets credit for our salvation. They reject that we share the spotlight with God..

John 1:13: who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 15:16: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Acts 13:48: And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Romans 8:28 - 30: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

These verses are called the golden chain of redemption.

An example in Romans 9 give the example of Esau and Jacob. While they were still in the womb, God says, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated. Is God being unjust? No, because God says, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy. This sounds like God's sovereign choice.

Romans 9:16 - 23: So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

These verses bolster the case for unconditional election.

Ephesians 1:4 - 5, 11: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

This is a proof text for meticulous providence.

1 Thessalonians 1:4: For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

2 Thessalonians 2:14: But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

James 1:18: Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Limited atonement (or particular redemption) is the most controversial point, even among Calvinists.

Calvinists (who do believe in limited atonement) point out that the atonement is either limited in range of persons, or range of power. God can't be such a failure that He could try to save people and then fail. Since God would not fail, atonement must be limited to a set of people.

Limited atonement (as well as all 5 points) is a must if total depravity is true. R.C. Sproul likes to say, you know what I call a four point Calvinist? An Armenian.

Douglas Wilson says he died to redeem to purchase his people as his own. He did not die for the possibility of justification, he died to justify to put us right with God.

Calvin says that God has two calls: The outward general call (via a proclamation of the Gospel), and the inward call (or effective call) that only the elect hears. When God gives the effective call to one, it is irresistible.

7.6.5. Challenges to Total Depravity (Part 1)

It's irresponsible to just list the verses that support Arminianism. We must deal with the verses that seem to support Calvinism.

A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim, regeneration precedes faith.

No Arminianist argues that a sinner can do whatever they want (and come to God). They may have a hard heart due to rebellion. Repentance is a response to God's convicting us. If we resist, the opportunity to repent may not come back any time soon.

Calvinists object to Arminianist claims that one can take any credit for repenting. They say that there can be no difference between the person who accepts God's grace and one who rejects it, except for what God does. Yet there is the example of the prodigal son who came to his senses. There's no impression that the father was in any way drawing his son back.

Almost all the Calvinist proof texts come from John, a few chapters in Romans, and a couple spots in Ephesians. Something is being communicated in these places, but it may not be what Calvinists say it is - especially since the rest of the Bible gives no hint of it.

Why do Calvinists think that all unbelievers have hearts who are evil and deceitful above all things? These verses are about specific groups. (Example of people before the flood). God doesn't bring judgement all the time - only when He can no longer bear the degree of corruption.

Most of these statements were not intended to be anthropological, theological, categorical statements about mankind. They are actual descriptions of certain people. All of us make the mistake of generalization - and it's an abuse of scripture when we do it theologically. (Another example is Jeremiah's condemnation of the people of his time).

Total depravity is an example of pigeonholing.

Romans 1 talks about men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. Does it say that everyone does that?

Ephesians 4:17 - 19 tells you not to walk as the rest of the Gentiles. He was referring to those who have given themselves up to impurity. This is a statement about a specific group of people.

Man was created in the image of God. It's the reason that even pagan philosophers talk about virtue and good. There's something in most men that wants to be good.

In John 8:44, Jesus says that their father is the devil, who is a murderer. He was talking to the people who wanted to murder Him. Not everyone wanted to murder Him.

The Bible does not say that everyone who's not a Christian is a child of the devil. Aren't there a bunch of people who are just children of Adam? There very well may be a broad category of people who are in between. A lot of Jews liked Jesus, while not necessarily believing Him.

It's extrapolation to say take all passages about bad people and make them about everyone.

It's true that in our human nature we are slaves to sin. We can't on our own power stop sinning. A Calvinist says we can't make a decision to follow Christ on our own. But most slaves want to be free, and will gladly respond to offers to be free.

A proof text that Calvinists use is John 6:45, 65: (summary) Jesus says that no one can come to me unless the Father draws him. This is true, but not the way Calvinists say. Jesus had to make the first move by coming to earth to die and rise again. He made a second move by having the Gospel preached to me. He made another move by convicting me of sin (via the Holy Spirit).

My move is responding. This is not giving me credit for my salvation. Calvinists object by saying dead men can't respond. They also say that if you have the power to respond, you have the ability to take credit. But nobody has ever thought that way.

Calvinists take it too far. We were made in the image of God, and can respond to God's grace. Satan cannot do that much damage to us. Original sin does make it impossible to live a holy life, but it does not prevent us from crying out for help.

Another Calvinist proof text is John 15:5: I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit for without me you can do nothing. This says you can't bear fruit without Jesus. It's not saying you can't accept Christ.

Romans 7:18: For I know that in me that is in my flesh nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I find not. He obviously means that he doesn't have the power to live the good life on his own. In the flesh, he can't really be a good person - but he can want to.

Romans 8:7 - 8 says that the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. What this means in its context is that God called all people to live a holy and righteous life that consistently pleases God. But you can't unless you are in Christ. That doesn't mean that you can never do anything to please

God if you are a non-believer. But you can't walk in the Spirit and live the Christian life unless you have the Holy Spirit in you.

Most or all of Paul's writings were addressing specific things in a particular church. Romans is no different. It's not just a general treatise about the Gospel. Paul is writing to the Romans for the same reason he wrote to the Galatians or the Corinthians. There was something in the church that needed to be addressed - the problem being that the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians didn't like each other very much.

The first four chapters are addressing Jewish privilege. So when it asks if we are any better than they, the "we" are the Jews and the "they" are the Gentiles. The Jews weren't any better and the quotes of the Old Testament prophets prove that. Paul is not writing a thesis on total depravity, but answering the question of whether the Jews are better than the Gentiles..

It says we all have turned aside and become unprofitable. This is talking about the Jews of that time becoming unprofitable despite all the advantages they had. They weren't born that way, but became that way. Please don't think I'm denying that we're sinners by nature. We are. What I'm saying is these are not proof texts about that. Here, though, Paul is showing how Jews are not better than Gentiles.

Doug Wilson said, we weren't sick, we weren't infected, we weren't wounded, we were dead. This point is emphasized in Calvinism. There are a couple places in Colossians and Ephesians that say we were dead in trespasses. But, there are also places that say we are dead to sin. That doesn't mean we stop sinning though. What does dead mean?

People who are spiritually dead can do lots of things. It doesn't mean you can't make decisions. What it means is that you are doomed to die - sort of like being on death row.

In Luke 15:24, the father of the Prodigal says, "my son was dead. And he's alive again." That's a pretty typical way to use that expression. The Prodigal son was specifically said to be dead at the time he did repent.

I Corinthians 2:14: The natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God because they're foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.

Calvinists use this to say that since the Gospel is a message from the spirit of God. The unregenerate can't receive it. Conversely, the context here is Paul talking to a specific

audience about a specific thing. He's talking about the meat that he gives to mature Christians, not the Gospel. Paul gave the gospel to the non-spiritual because they could understand it. The unregenerate can receive the Gospel. (Example of Lydia in Acts 16).

7.6.6. Challenges to Total Depravity (Part 2)

The last section cross-examined the scriptural case for total depravity.

Deuteronomy 30:11 - 14, 19 says that this commandment which I command you is not too difficult for you. This is not beyond your ability to obey, nor is it out of reach.

Contrary to what Calvinists believe, Moses thought that unregenerate people can seek and obey God. It's in reach for them. He exhorts them to choose life. The Bible throughout exhorts people to choose life. God treats sinners as if they have a choice - He's not teasing us.

Calvinists don't deny that the ungenerate can do anything good. What they say is that nothing is truly good unless it's done with the motive of glorifying God.

Paul said to the Athenians on Mars Hill, truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent. Calvinists say this is the outward call, but it's not the effectual call. But why would God give an outward call without an effectual call?

Romans 1, the chapter that supposedly talks about original sin - but it says that these people became darkened. Their thoughts became futile. That's the end of the process, not the start. Their choices led them there. Specifically, Romans 1 is talking about the Jews who knew the Law and rejected it.

The Bible uses a lot of limited negatives. For example, Jesus said He didn't come to bring peace on the earth, but a sword. Why did He say this when He also brought peace? Jesus also said we should not labor for food that perishes. So, we are not supposed to work for food? If we don't get this, we will misunderstand a lot of Bible passages.

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, what did people have to do to be healed? They had to lift up their heads to look at it. So it is with Jesus. Whoever believes in Him first, after will be born again. This is opposite the Calvinist idea that regeneration comes first. Having believed you were sealed.

R.C. Sproul says unless a person is born again the gospel will not have the power to save a person. He doesn't believe that the power of the gospel can save anyone before they're born again. I just think he's scripturally wrong. Romans 1.16 says I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God for its salvation to everyone who believes, not everyone who gets regenerated first.

Arminians agree that people saved by God need to be regenerated. They say that not only can people choose to believe, they are commanded to.

The Bereans were more noble minded than the Thessalonicans before they were saved. Calvinists say that no one can say they are better than anyone else when they get saved. To say that every unregenerate person is a hater of God simply doesn't fit the facts. (Example of Cornelius).

Calvinists say regeneration is a process, not an instant. God can begin to regenerate someone, which will make them responsive to the Gospel. That's not what regeneration is though. It's passing from death to life.

People are fallen and damaged - and they are made in the image of God - marred, not obliterated. There's still a longing for the creator in some people who have yet to find Him..

If people are already blind and dead, why are there examples of God hardening their hearts? Couldn't God have done nothing?

7.6.7. Challenges to Unconditional Election (Part 1)

Unconditional election states that not only did God choose to save some, but He did so without anything different about them than those He did not choose.

Non-Calvinists say there are conditions - such as those who humble themselves, repent and believe. Calvinists say this is man-glorifying.

Monergism, which Calvinists believe, states that salvation is entirely the work of God. Synergism states that more than one party does the work together. All Christians for the first four centuries were synergists.

Some Calvinists argue that faith is a work, therefore synergists believe in salvation by works. But the Bible argues that salvation is by faith not works, and is not a work. Accepting a gift is not crediting a person.

John 6:37 - 40: Jesus said, all that the Father gives me will come to me. And the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of the Father who sent me that of all he has given me I shall lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life and I'll raise him up to the last day.

Calvinists understand that the phrase “given to Jesus” as being one of the elect (covering both unconditional election and irresistible grace).

John 17:6: I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given me.

These passages are talking about God giving His people to Jesus, not the devil’s people. Who were these people? They were people like Lydia, who were part of the faithful remnant of Israel - a worshiper of God. These passages don’t address unconditional election.

John 15:16: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

This verse is a prime proof text for Calvinism. However, this is once again a limited negative. It should be understood as you didn’t simply choose me. But I also chose you. Many cases, in limited negatives, the second part is the key part. Certainly, the disciples had a choice to follow Jesus when He called them.

And more importantly still, He is speaking to them not as sinners who became Christians, but as disciples who became apostles. This is talking about his choosing them to the apostleship. These verses don’t do what they are supposed to do for Calvinism.

For purposes of establishing unconditional election, Romans 9 is used most strongly. It begins by discussing Jacob and Esau in the womb. It wasn’t based on their works (they haven’t done anything at this point), but on God’s sovereign election. Just like Esau, God hates the unelect.

Calvinists think that this passage lays out a gospel track for all sinners. But, this is addressing the problems between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were the chosen elect of God. But not all of them are saved. What's up with that? This is what Paul is addressing.

Paul begins Romans 9 with saying that it's not God's word that failed. The promises are applied to the remnant, not the whole nation. Not all Israel are His seed.

In the case of Isaac, he was the one chosen by God. But that didn't mean that Abraham's other seven kids were going to hell. We need to understand what it means to be chosen by God. It didn't mean those chosen to go to heaven or hell. He chose Abraham and Isaac to bring forth a seed, which is Christ. Only one family is going to do that. It's an earthly calling and has nothing to do with heaven.

This is the key to understanding "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated." It's not about heaven and hell. It's about the seed of Abraham and who is going to carry it. It's not about individuals, but about nations.

This is proven by the phrase, "the older will serve the younger." If Paul is talking about salvation, why would this be said? This is talking about their earthly relation to each other.

For all we know, neither Jacob and Esau, both, or one of them could be in heaven. This has nothing to do with salvation.

It's the same with Romans 9:14 - 16: What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

This is referring to God's selection of Jacob over Esau - which nation is going to have a more important role in history. Romans goes on to talk about Pharoah. Once again, this is talking about God choosing Israel over Egypt. Most people aren't shown special mercy or special harshness by God. When He does, it doesn't have to do with salvation, but with geopolitics.

It says God has mercy on whom He has mercy. It doesn't mean He has no conditions. For example, Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy". Many scriptures add conditions, such as humility and belief.

Romans 9:19 - 33: You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? . . .

Paul is raising a hypothetical objection and answering it. Calvinists say that Paul is saying that no one can resist God's will. Arminianists say that the premise is mistaken. The Arminianist says that Paul is disagreeing with the questioner's premise that no one can resist God's will. In fact, if the questioner's premise is correct, then their conclusion is also right - and Paul has no right to challenge them.

What Paul is saying to the questioner is really, If you think that no one can resist God's will and answer against Him, you are doing it right now by the very nature of the question. Who told you that I made this claim?

The potter and clay reference comes from Isaiah and Jeremiah. It talks about God dividing chosen Israel into vessels of honor and of dishonor.

Prepared for destruction doesn't mean predestined to go to hell. It meant the destruction Israel faced in 70 A.D. Israel was to come under God's wrath. The remnant, having been warned, had escaped. God would not use the entire nation of Israel for His purposes anymore. He would just use the remnant.

Romans 9 is in the same context as before and after this chapter - it's about Israel.

Acts 13.48 Now when the Gentiles heard this they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The Greek word for "appointed" is "taso". It's a word that can mean "disposed toward". It can be argued that this can be translated as, and as many as had been disposed towards eternal life believed.

Support of this translation comes in 1 Corinthians 16:15: Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—

The word devoted is the Greek word taso. Why not translate it the same way in the first passage? And as many as had been devoted to eternal life believed.

7.6.8. Challenges to Unconditional Election (Part 2)

Jesus said, “no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them”. Arminianists also believe this. God said to Jeremiah, “I chose you when you were in your mother's womb”. Paul said that God called him from his mother’s womb to be an apostle.

Romans 8:28 - 30: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Calvinists believe the decision to become a Christian on your part isn't yours. God made that decision and predestined you for it or not before the foundation of the world. But that’s not what Paul says. Paul says God foreknew them before predestining them.. Foreknowledge is not the same as predestination.

Predestination, in this case, does not mean becoming Christians. It means being predestined to be conformed to the image of God.

Ephesians 1:4 - 10: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us[b] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known[c] to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This sounds like Paul is talking about predestination. Who is the “us” in this case? It’s the church. What does it mean when It says that He chose us in Christ? It means that the church is His body. This is why we are accepted by God, and have all the advantages

and privileges involved. We are not chosen. Christ is chosen before the foundation of the world, and we are in Him.

All the other Bible passages teaching election are referring to the church, not individuals.

2 Thessalonians 2:13: We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit in belief of the truth.

If you get that election is corporate rather than individual, just like Israel in the Old Testament, all of these verses work perfectly well with others.

Having faith is a requirement for being saved, but there's no merit in it. It's what happens in relationships. Unbelief is just insulting. Believing in someone before entering into a relationship with them just makes sense.

Romans 3:27 - 30: Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Boasting is excluded by the law of faith. Unlike what Calvinists claim, faith is not a work at all. It does not violate God's sovereignty if God chooses to leave belief up to man. God sovereignly chose to make man with a free will to choose to believe Him or not. And why wouldn't He? It affects us more than it does Him.

Genesis 4:6 - 7: And the Lord said to Cain, why are you so angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.

Does it sound like both Cain and Abel were equally bad, and that God chose Abel, but not Cain? No, it's the one who humbles himself in the sight of the Lord who is exalted.

Election is corporate (the bride), not individual. Ephesians 5:25 - 27: Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might

present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

It's the olive tree that is elected. Branches are added because of personal belief and torn off that tree because of unbelief.

7.6.9. Challenges to Limited Atonement

Arminianists emphasize that Jesus died for all men. Calvinists also believe this, but also believe that atonement only reaches those whom God foreknew. Jesus didn't die for everyone, but it's guaranteed that everyone He did die for will benefit from it. Calvinists believe that the atonement meets particular people irresistibly. Arminianists believe that the atonement reaches everyone, but doesn't guarantee that everyone will benefit.

Hebrews 4:2: For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

The question is whether Jesus atoning work procured the salvation of the elect, or did His work make salvation available to everyone who believes?

2 Corinthians 5:18 - 19: All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

That sounds like universal atonement. Jesus commands us to forgive those who sin against us unilaterally, whether or not they are repentant. Of course reconciliation doesn't occur until the person repents. This is how Jesus' forgiveness works. He forgives us for our sins, whether we repent or not, but reconciliation doesn't occur until we repent. God loves His enemies and forgives them - that's why He commands us to do the same.

Christ removed the relationship barrier between us and God. The only barrier remaining is from the sinner's side. A relationship requires agreement from both sides.

2 Peter 2:1: But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Jesus bought them already. They bring their own destruction upon themselves. Atonement is not only for the elect, as it says here.

Hebrews 10:29: How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

How could someone who was sanctified by the blood of Jesus fall away and trample Jesus? This and other scriptures rule out that all who Christ died for is saved.

There are several verses that talk about the elect being atoned for. John 10 said that the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. John 15, Jesus said, greater love has no one than this. He laid down his life for his friends. Acts 20.28 says the church which he has purchased with his own blood. Ephesians 1.7 talks about we, Christians, have received redemption through his blood. Ephesians 5.25 says that Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, for the church. But these verses are not claiming that these are not the only people that have been atoned for. And there are many other verses that clearly state that everyone has been atoned for (although it didn't benefit them).

1 Timothy 2:3 - 6: This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man[a] Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Calvinists say all men doesn't mean all men without exception, but all categories of men. Surely, this is not the best reading of this scripture.

1 Timothy 4:10: For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Jesus acquired salvation for all, but only those who believe will actually experience it. Some Calvinists believe that the word "especially" should be translated, "namely".

Hebrews 2.9: But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

2 Peter 3.9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promises. Some men count slackness. But is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Some attempt to claim that earlier in chapter 3, the readers are identified as Christians. So, the “all” in this verse refers to the Christians. Other Calvinists will bring up their “two wills” argument, and say it’s God’s prescriptive will that He commands everyone to be saved. But His decreed (or secret) will doesn’t match His commands.

I John 2:2: He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Calvinist says the whole world refers to just the Jews. But, John is a Jewish believer. What does “not for ours only” mean?

7.6.10. Challenges to Irresistible Grace

Irresistible grace means that God’s effectual call is irresistable. God’s outward call will always be resisted, unless it’s paired with the effectual call. Faith and repentance are a gift from God.

John 6:37: All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

Calvinists believe that “All that the Father gives me” are the elect. But, I already responded in that last section that Jesus is referring to the people that already belonged to God. When Jesus told some of the Jews that if they had believed Moses, they would have believed Him. Anyone who loves God and wants to follow Him, God will open their eyes to see Jesus as the Messiah.

For Jesus to say that all that the Father has given me will come to me, is not to make a statement about unconditional election or irresistible grace. It's just the next step in their development of following God.

Acts 13:48: And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Once again, “appointed” should be translated “disposed” (see previous sections on this). Two verses earlier say, “judged themselves unworthy of eternal life”. This describes two types of people - some who were disposed one way, some another way.

John 6:44 - 45: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—

Calvinists say that the word “draws” (helkouo) means to drag, not invite. Yet, there’s so many other verses about people successfully resisting God.

One of many examples includes Hosea 11, which begins with recollecting how God loved Israel and called them out of Egypt. Then, of course, they rebelled and sacrificed to the Baals. The Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, says that God drew them with loving cords and compassion - the same word, helkouo. These Israelites did not respond to God’s drawing.

John 12:32: And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

God draws by the show of his grace and his mercy. God seeks to win our hearts by being good. It's the goodness of God that leads you to repentance. Arminianists have no problem with the concept that God draws people. But, they don’t agree that people can’t resist.

Isaiah 5:3 - 4: And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

It sounds like God is frustrated. Why is God complaining that He didn’t get the results He wants? And this happens all over the Bible. Calvinists say this is only the outward call. But God chose not to effectually call them - why is He frustrated with them and punishing them?

Matthew 22:14: For many are called, but few are chosen.

Calvinists say that this is the outward call.

Matthew 23:37: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Why didn't God just effectually call them? God sounds pretty broken up about this. God wanted them to come, but they didn't.

Acts 7:51: You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

One can resist the Holy Spirit. Calvinists get stuck because of their belief in total depravity. Since they believe that the unregenerate cannot believe or repent, these necessarily must be a gift from God - and God doesn't give worthless gifts. Those receiving these gifts will respond. How could it be otherwise?

Ephesians 2:8 - 9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Is faith a gift of God, then? This is referring to salvation, not faith.

Mark 6:6: And he marveled because of their unbelief.

This is referring to Jesus being rejected in his hometown, Nazareth.. Why did He marvel if He knew that people could not believe on their own? In other cases, when Jesus finds great faith, He is astonished. If the Calvinist system is true, there should be nothing astonishing about faith and unbelief.

Why does God hold them accountable when only God can make it happen? Calvin says this is a mystery and that we shouldn't try to pry into them.

7.6.11. Challenges to Perseverance of the Saints

Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that people who appear to be Christians and are convinced they are, may fall away. The difference is the Arminian believes that those people may actually be Christians. The Calvinist does not.

For the Calvinist, perseverance is the final measure. They also say that you can know you are one of the elect. You can tell if you are regenerated, because you live a godly life.

But, if you live long enough, you will see those who have displayed all those characteristics defect and rebel against Christ. Calvin said that God sometimes effectually calls those who are not elect, so that they become illuminated and believe. And while God called them, they weren't truly elect, so they fall away.

Calvinists say Arminians have no assurance of salvation because we might fall away. I say Calvinists have no assurance of salvation because they might fall away too. In their theology, they can't know if they are elect until they persevere to the end.

The Arminianist doesn't have to worry about whether they are saved, because as long as they are trusting in Jesus now, they are saved. But, how can one have eternal life, and then not have it? Eternal life is in the Son. As long as we abide in Him, we have it. If we stop abiding in Him, we forfeit eternal life.

Mathew 7:21 - 23: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

1 John 2:19: They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Perseverance of the Saints is not the same as "once saved, always saved". Neither Calvinists or Arminians really believe in unconditional security, which says if you accept Jesus at any time, you're still saved.

John 5:24: Most assuredly I say to you that he who hears my words and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment.

John 6:37: The one who comes to me, I will by no means cast out. Apparently under any conditions.

John 8:51: Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death.

John 10:27 - 30: My sheep know my voice and they follow me. And I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.

John 11:26: And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

In all the above verses, the first part of the verse is in the present tense. The above could be translated, whoever is hearing, keeping, knowing, believing, etc. At any given moment of time, there are people who won't believe or hear, but later on, they do. Before they come to Christ, they will see death and perish. But, as soon as they come to Christ, they receive all those promises. Depending on their current condition, they will or won't have eternal life. It's an ongoing condition.

2 Timothy 2:11 - 13: The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;
13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

This verse is often used to teach eternal security. People say God is faithful and will never let us go. But, this doesn't say He will remain faithful to us. It just says He and His words remain faithful. Words, such as "if we deny Him, He will deny us".

Romans 8:35 - 39: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Calvinists say nothing can separate us from God. Paul has a pretty extensive list here, but all of those things are external to the person.

1 John 5:11 - 12: And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

As long as you abide in Jesus, you have life.

Galatians 5:4: You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

You can't fall from grace if you've never been in grace.

John 15:6: If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

My responsibility is to hold fast to the gospel and therefore to remain in Christ. If I don't remain in him, I'm not saved.

Calvinists say this is not about salvation, but about fruitfulness. But, how can that be? A branch that is cut off from life is dead, and destined to be burnt up.

Romans 11: 22, Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

Colossians 1:21 - 23: And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Why would anyone use this kind of language if inevitable perseverance was their doctrine?

Hebrews 3:6, 14: but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

It seems like many writers of scripture are careful to make promises and then state the conditions. Sometimes, we see that they didn't state the conditions. But, why would we assume that if the conditions are unstated, that the stated conditions in other passages don't apply? In all these cases we are talking about salvation. There are conditions, one of which is to continue.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times, some will depart from the faith. Giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

You can’t depart from where you’ve never been.

Hebrews 6:4 - 6, For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance. Since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

What do Calvinists do with this? They’ve tried to fix it in a couple ways. One, they say this is a hypothetical, because if one falls away, they are subjecting Christ to a second crucifixion. And of course, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear elsewhere that Christ can’t be crucified again - He suffered once for all. Move commonly, the Calvinist will argue that these people were never saved in the first place.

One objection to this is that the writer certainly is not giving the impression that he's writing about unsaved people. All the language he uses is stuff that's used to describe Christians elsewhere.

1 Corinthians 9:26 - 27. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The Greek word here is translated reprobate in Romans 1. Why try so hard Paul? Don't you know you're secure?

Hebrews 10:26 - 29: For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

This sounds like they were Christians. They were sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

I Peter 5:8 - 9: Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Now, if you can't be devoured because you're a believer, why warn you about it? Why be vigilant? Why be sober?

2 Peter 2: 20 - 21: For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Calvinists say that these warnings were given to the church as a whole, not to elect. The author doesn't know who is elect, and is in danger.

7.6.12. What Does It Matter?

I'm not trying to prove Arminianism, and am not even that familiar with it. Calvinism, on the other hand, is very well known and perpetrated by very important, widely read teachers. So, this has been a negative enterprise, looking at Calvinist arguments and showing that they're not the correct interpretation of scripture.

With reference to certain things, it doesn't matter very much. Calvinists and non-Calvinists agree on most practical things about which Christians need to be concerned. They believe that people need to persevere to the end. They need to believe in Christ. They need to repent of their sins. They need to live holy lives.

I'm a great admirer of Charles Spurgeon, George Mueller, the Puritan writers and other Calvinists. There's no reason that Calvinists and Arminians can't be in the same church and fellowship together.

Some people are just good people with wrong ideas, and they haven't really worked through the practical implications of their ideas enough to realize that their good behavior is not called forth from the particular concepts they embrace. The reason they walk well is because they know Jesus. And people who know Jesus can be wrong about many subjects, including this subject.

Any Calvinist that listens to these lectures say that I just don't understand our theology. Well, I've been trying for a long time. If no one understands them correctly and their theology is full of mysteries, it's because they're getting something fundamentally wrong.

We shouldn't be overly-impressed that a lot of leading Christian thinkers are Calvinists. Sometimes, people get there by agreeing with the status quo. The church tends to embrace whatever the status quo is and distributes it.

Furthermore, no matter how smart someone is, if his training inclines him all in one direction, there's not many who are smart enough or brave enough to question all their professors, especially if they are all saying the same thing. We shouldn't assume that all those who have been theologically trained are clear thinkers, and are willing to rethink what is considered to be orthodoxy. When one goes to a theological college, your professors hold some kind of theological system, and that's what they're going to train you in.

Why would pastors want to go against everyone in their circle, those they admire, everyone who trained them?

We can't make compromises in our hermeneutics in order to sustain a certain view. You never know where those compromises will end.

A.W. Tozer said virtually every problem in the church and in the Christian life can be traced back to a wrong view of God. Does God love His enemies? Calvin believed that God damned certain people to hell out of the good pleasure of his will (in contrast to Ezekiel, who said that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked)..

Early Calvinism taught that God hates His enemies. We become like the God we worship. I believe that it is primarily Calvinism that has encouraged a mentality that God hates sinners and that we should too. But, Jesus viewed the lost as the sick, needing a physician. Physicians are not the enemy of the sick.

Contrary to what Calvinism says, God loves sinners (while hating sin). Jesus came to die for them. Jesus is a friend of sinners. Calvinists say that God predestined sinners to burn in hell, all for His glory. The weird thing is that many Calvinists contradict their own teaching by claiming that God is a merciful God who loves sinners.

Calvin acted more consistently according to His own beliefs. He wanted to burn the witches and kill the sinners - anyone who didn't give evidence that they are one of the elect.

How can he love me and elect me for salvation and not elect my children? I love my children and my happiness is tied to their well being. Does God love me if He doesn't love those who I love? The irony of Calvinism is that God could hate someone that we love..

Calvinists want to fit God into their conception of who God is. But do you think of God as a real person? God would call us evil if we did what Calvinism says He does. And yet we are supposed to imitate God?

Calvinists believe that all non-Christians are haters of God. Was that true of Cornelius and the Bereans? Where does this idea come from that all non-Christians are godless people? It comes from looking at certain passages through a certain lens.

Calvinism emphasizes God's prerogatives. Non-Calvinists emphasize God's character. God is not jealous of His rights. He emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. It's his character, his love, that is emphasized in the gospel, not his prerogatives.

All of the Puritans were Calvinists. Kendall says that nearly all of the Puritan divines went through great doubt and despair on their deathbeds as they realized that their lives did not give perfect evidence that they were elect. Modern Calvinists aren't afraid - but I think it is because they are not thinking their theology through as clearly as the Puritans.

Calvin is a great example of a consistent Calvinist. His view of God led him to want to kill heretics. His view of people led him to want to arrest and kill non-believers. Calvinism has a logical and unavoidable conclusion that modern Calvinists just can't agree with. If Calvinism is biblical, then we should want to be Calvinists. We shouldn't have emotional attachments about it. Fortunately, all five points of Calvinism are not biblical, and demonstrably so.

7.7. Systematic Theology (2nd edition), by Wayne Grudem

7.7.1. Chapter 16 - God's Providence

Providence is the summarization of God's ongoing relationship to his creation.There are some common errors in thinking about God's providence. The Bible does not teach that events in creation are determined by chance (randomness), nor are they determined by impersonal fate (determinism), but by God.

We may define God's providence as follows: God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them (preservation); (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do (concurrence); and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes (government).

It should be noted that this is a doctrine on which there has been substantial disagreement among Christians since the early history of the church, particularly with respect to God's relationship to the willing choices of moral creatures.

7.7.1.1. Perseverance

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of his power." The Greek word for "upholds" is "pherō", meaning "carry, bear". It does not mean simply "sustain". It has a sense of active, purposeful control over the thing being carried from one place to another. The use of the present participle here indicates that Jesus is continually caring along all things. He is actively involved in the work of providence.

Similarly, in Colossians 1:17, Paul says of Christ that "in him all things hold together". Both verses indicate that if Jesus were to cease his continuing activity of sustaining all things, then all except the triune God would instantly cease to exist. This is affirmed by Paul in Acts 17:28, "In him we live and move and have our being". And Nehemiah 9:6, "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you." Also, 2 Peter 3:7, "the heavens and earth that now exist" are "being kept until the day of judgment."

Perseverance is not continuous creation. Rather, God preserves what has already been created. We must also appreciate that things are real and their characteristics are real. God's providence continues to sustain the universe that acts in predictable ways, providing a basis for science.

7.7.1.2. Concurrence

Concurrence is God cooperating with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.

Ephesians 1:11 says that God “works all things according to the counsel of his will”. This indicates that God brings about all things according to his own will. No event falls outside of his providence. This is not clear from observation, but only scripture.

There’s proof of concurrence in:

(1.) Inanimate Creation. God causes every natural occurrence to happen. Psalm 148:8 says, “fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word”. Psalm 135:6 - 7 says, “whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.”. (Other verses from Job and Psalms).

(2) Animals. Matthew 6:6 - “Look at the birds of the air . . . your heavenly Father feeds them.” Matthew 10:29 - not one sparrow “will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”

(3) Seemingly “Random” or “Chance” events. Proverbs 16:33 - “The lot is cast from the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

(4) Events Fully Caused by God and Fully Caused by the Creature as Well. We observe the conditions under which grass grows or rain falls. Yet Scripture says that God causes the grass to grow and the rain to fall. Just because we know the cause doesn’t mean that God didn’t cause it. While these things are entirely caused by God, they are also entirely caused by factors in creation as well.

The doctrine of concurrence affirms that God directs and words through the distinctive properties of each created thing so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see. God is the primary cause of all things. Creaturely factors are the secondary cause.

(5) The Affairs of Nations. Acts 17:26 - Paul says, “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” Daniel 4:34 - 35 -
“for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,

and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, “What have you done?”

(6) All Aspects of Our Lives.

Philippians 4:19 - “my God will supply every need” of his children. Psalm 139:16 - “In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.” Galatians 1:15 - God “had set me apart before I was born”. Jeremiah 1:5 - God said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations”.

All our actions are under God’s providential care, for “in him we live and move” (Acts 17:28). Jeremiah 10:23 - “I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps”. Proverbs 20:24 - “the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” Psalms 18:34 - “He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.”

Psalm 33:14 - 15 - for he looks down “on all the inhabitants of the earth” and “fashions the hearts of the all.”

All of these passages lead us to conclude that God’s providential work of concurrence extends to all aspects of our lives. Our words, our steps, our movements, our hearts, and our abilities are all from the Lord. But, we must guard against misunderstanding. God's providential direction as an unseen, behind the scenes “primary cause” should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again Scripture affirms we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and responsible. Our choices are real and bring about real results.

God causes all things that happen, but he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices that have real and eternal results for which we are held accountable. We shouldn’t deny one aspect or other (because we can’t explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all of scripture.(Example of a play: The characters did things in the play, but the author of the play wrote the play).

(7) What about evil?

God does not do evil, but he brings about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures.

Genesis 50:20 - “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today”. Another example is God hardening the heart of Pharaoh. Concurrence occurred with Pharaoh hardening his own heart and God hardening his heart.

Joshua 11:20 - “For it was the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction”.

1 Samuel 2:25 - “would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death”.

In 2 Samuel 24:1 - 10, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people, but afterward David said, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done”. In this same story in 1 Chronicals 21:1, it says Satan incited David, showing the means by which God did. God, to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but regards David as responsible for that sin.

When Job’s children were taken away from him, Scripture says that Job “did not sin or charge God with wrong”. To blame God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents is sin.

1 Kings 22;23 - God “put a lying spirit in the mouth” of Ahab’s prophets. He also sent the wicked Assyrians against Israel and the Babylonians against Judah. Yet, God held this against Assyria and Babylonia and punished them.

Ezekiel 14:9 - “if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.”

God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation upon hardened sinners. All of this will work in God’s good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness and power when he punishes evil in those who are not redeemed.

In Acts 2, Peter both says that Jesus was delivered up to lawless men according to the plan and foreknowledge of God, but was still killed by the hands of lawless men. Even though it was according to God's plan, the moral blame lies on the lawless men. They were not forced by God to act against their wills, rather God brought about his plan through their willing choices, for which they were responsible.

(8) Analysis of Verses Relating to God and Evil

(a) God uses all things, including evil, to fulfill his purposes for his glory and our good.

Romans 8:28 - "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose".

(b) Nevertheless, God never does evil and is never to be blamed for evil.

James 1:13 - 14 - "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."

If God tempts no one, why does Jesus tell us to pray in Matthew 6:13, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". This makes sense if we carefully distinguish between (1) actively tempting someone and (2) leading someone into a situation where he or she is tempted or tested. God is never the active personal agent who tempts us, but he may lead us into difficult situations. Jesus himself was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. These verses make it clear that all secondary causes are real and that human beings do cause evil and are responsible for it.

God does no evil, but if we maintain that God does not use evil to fulfill his purposes, then we have to admit that there is evil in the universe that God did not intend and that the universe is not under his control, and that he might not fulfill his purposes. We couldn't maintain that "all things" work together for good for those who love God.

(c) God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do.

Isaiah 66:3 - 4:
These have chosen their own ways,
and their soul delights in their abominations;

4 I also will choose harsh treatment for them
and bring their fears upon them,
because when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, they did not listen;
but they did what was evil in my eyes
and chose that in which I did not delight.

We willingly choose to do evil.

(d) Evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others.

We should remember that there are things that are right for God to do but wrong for us to do. God uses evil to bring about good purposes, but he does not allow us to do so.

(e) We confess that we do not understand how God can ordain that we carry out evil deeds and yet hold us accountable for them and not be blamed himself.

(9) Are we free? Do we have free will?

This is fraught with misunderstanding. In some senses of the word free, everyone agrees that we are free in our will and in our choices. But, free will is not sufficient to enable man to do good works, unless he be helped by grace. We are wicked by will, not by compulsion. We are not masters of our mind and will.

We make willing choices that have real effects. Fatalism or determinism is mistaken, just as the assumption that we have freedom outside of God's sustaining and controlling activity is mistaken. Absolute freedom, totally free of God's control, is not possible in a world providentially sustained and directed by God.

In academic circles, two types of concepts for free will are used:

- Libertarian free will: The ability to make a choice independently of any circumstance, and God's providential guidance and influence.
- Freedom of inclination: We are free to do what we most want to do.

We will do what we want, but God can influence what we want.

7.7.1.3. Government

God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.

Daniel 4:35 - “he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”

Ephesians 1:11 - God “works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

God’s will is unified and not divided or contradictory. We cannot begin to understand the depths of God’s will, and only a small part is revealed to us. There is God’s moral (or revealed) will, which includes the moral standards of Scripture. The other aspect of God’s will is his providential government of all things (sometimes called his secret will). This includes all events of history that God has ordained to come about.

Some have objected to this distinction between the two aspects of God’s will, saying that this indicates a self-contraction in God. However, even human experience tells us that we can will and carry out something painful that we do not desire. For example, a parent can punish a disobedient child or take them in for inoculations, in order to bring about a long-term result, even though it’s painful.

7.7.1.4. The Decrees of God

The decrees of God are the eternal plans of God. Before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens. His providential actions are the outworking of the eternal decrees that he made before everything began.

Ephesians 1:4 - God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

All that God does is part of his eternal plan. God never makes up plans as he goes along. He will accomplish all his good purposes.

7.7.1.5. The Importance of Our Human Actions

God works through human actions in his providential management of the world.

- We are still responsible for our actions.

They have real and significant results. God rewards or punishes us based on our actions. Some things God's will of decree has planned are not in themselves good, so they should not receive our approval, just as they do not receive God's approval.

- Our actions have real results and do change the course of events.

God had ordained that events will come about by our causing them.

- Prayer is one specific kind of action that has definite results and that does change the course of events.

God had ordained that our prayer would be a means he would use to bring about the changes in the world.

- In conclusion, we must act!

Sitting back and being lazy is a distortion of the doctrine of providence.

7.7.1.6. Another Evangelical View: The Arminian Position

They maintain that in order to preserve the real human freedom and real human choices that are necessary for genuine human personhood, God cannot cause or plan our voluntary choices. Therefore they conclude that God's providential involvement in or control of history must not include every specific detail of every event that happens but that God instead simply responds to human choices and actions as they come about and does so in such a way that his purposes are ultimately accomplished in the world.

They argue that God's purposes in the world are more general and could be accomplished through many different kinds of specific events. So God's purpose or plan for the world is a dynamic program for the world, the outworking of which depends in part on man. Arminianists believe that God achieves his overall goal by responding to and utilizing the free choices of human beings, whatever they may be. Predestination does not apply to every individual activity, but is rather the comprehensive purpose of God which is the structured context in which history moves.

Moreover, God's will cannot include evil. The fall of man is an eloquent refutation to the theory that God's will is always done. Not everything that happens is what God desires. These statements make clear that the differences between the reformed and arminian

position are not merely differences in terminology, but that there is a real disagreement in substance. Here's a summary in four major points:

(1) The verses cited as examples of God's providential control are exceptions and do not describe the way that God ordinarily works in human activity. It is natural that the Old Testament teems with accounts of special providence. But we have no reason to assume that God was working in Australia and South America in such ways at the same time.
(2) The Calvinist view wrongly makes God responsible for sin. James 1:13 - "God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." . 1 John 1:5 - "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" Psalm 92:15 - "the Lord is upright . . . and there is no unrighteousness in him." It is simply blasphemous to maintain that man's rebellion against God is in any sense the product of God's sovereign will or primary causation.
(3) Choices caused by God cannot be real choices. If a man uses a lever to move a rock, the man is the sole cause, not the lever. Although, prayer does affect human freedom. In a way prayer does limit human freedom. Furthermore, the invitation to all humans to repent implies that all humans have the ability to repent.
(4) The Arminian view encourages responsible Chirstian living, while the Calvinistic view encourages a dangerous fatalism. However, Calvinists, in practice, often avoid such fatalism and live and talk like Arminians.

7.7.1.7. Response to the Arminian Position

(1) Are these scripture passages unusual examples, or do they describe the way God works ordinarily? The examples are so numerous that they seem to be designed to describe the ways in which God works all the time. God causes all the grass to grow, sends all the rain, keeps all sparrows from falling to the ground without his will. He chooses all Christians to be holy and blameless before him. By contrast, there seems to be nothing in Scripture that would indicate that some things are outside God's providential control, and there's nothing to indicate that the way God acts in scripture are unusual or unrepresentative from the way he acts generally. Hebrews 1:3 - Christ "continually carries along all things by his word of power". Colossians 1:17 - "in him all things hold together". Acts 17:28 - In him we live and move and have our being". Ephesians 1:11 - He "works all things according to the counsel of his will." Matthew 6:11 - He provides our food. Philippians 4:19 - He supplies all our needs. Proverbs 20:24 - He directs out

steps. Philippians 2:13 - He “works in us to will and to do his good pleasure.” These are not exceptions, but the way God always works in the world.

(2) Does the Calvinistic doctrine of God’s providence make God responsible for sin? The Calvinist view allows that God decrees to permit sin and evil. Arminianists say that God is not responsible for sin and evil, and does not ordain them or cause them in any way. The problem is it doesn’t account for many texts that clearly say that God ordains that some people sin or do evil. This is an issue even if God ordains one sinful act, and the Bible is full of examples of God doing just that. Calvinists say that God himself never sins but always brings about his will through secondary causes - that is personal moral agents who voluntarily, willingly do what God has ordained. The personal moral agents are to blame for the evil they do.

(3) Can choices ordained by God be real choices? People tend to address this through human experience and intuition, rather than scripture. Scripture indicates that we can’t extrapolate from our human experience when dealing with God’s providential control of his creatures. Scripture repeatedly affirms that our choices are real. God ordains all that we do, and we exercise our personal will and make real, voluntary choices.

(4) Does a Calvinistic view of providence encourage either a dangerous fatalism or a tendency to “live like Arminians”? Those who accuse reformed persons of this have not understood the doctrine of providence. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that our actions have real results, they are eternally significant, that we make voluntary, willing choices, that God answers prayer, and that obedience to God results in blessing in life. But the differences are very significant. Calvinists (who are true to their doctrine) will have a far more comprehensive trust in God in all circumstances and a far greater freedom from worry about the future because they are convinced that God will cause his major purposes to work out right in the end. They also believe that no person’s free will can get in the way of God’s goodness. They also believe that every adversity is part of God’s wise plan.

(5) On an Arminian view, how can God know the future?

    (a) Foreknowledge without foreordination. This is the most common answer. The problem here is that even if God did not plan or cause things to happen, the fact that they are foreknown means that they will certainly come about. Everything is predetermined by something (whether by fate or the cause and effect mechanism of the universe), and they still are not free the way Arminians wish them to be. If future choices are known, then they are fixed, and not free.

(b) Open theism. God is not able to know what choices individual human beings will make in the future. While this seems to be the most consistent Arminian position, the Bible shows a different picture.
(c) Middle knowledge (Molinism). This is promoted as an attractive alternative to both Calvinism and Arminianism, preserving the important aspects of each of them. But, since the ultimate factor that determines whether someone is saved is not God's eternal choice, but that of the individual person, this is just a third Arminian view.

Luis de Molina (1535 - 1600), who was a Spanish Roman Catholic priest, promoted this view. Today, the most prominent promoter is William Lane Craig. According to the middle knowledge view, the future choices of people are not directly determined by God, but God knows them anyway, because he knows how each free creature would respond in any set of circumstances that might occur, and that he creates a world in which those circumstances will occur.

An example of this is God knowing by his middle knowledge, what circumstances that Peter, being a free agent, will deny or not deny Christ.

Since God created a world in which certain people will find themselves in circumstances that God knew they would choose Him, both predestination and free will are preserved.

There's no question that God has this kind of knowledge. Instead, the question is whether this theory provides a correct understanding of how God's sovereignty relates to human responsibility, particularly how God's predestination of individuals to be saved relates to human choices to accept or reject Christ. There are several substantial objections that can be raised against the middle knowledge position.

First, the theory is way different from the biblical description of predestination of individuals.

Ephesians 1:3-4 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Romans 8:29-30 - For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Acts 13:48 - When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Second, middle knowledge is a speculative theory devoid of explicit biblical support.

Third, God cannot determine a set of circumstances without determining millions of human choices. Such a process denies the kind of libertarian free will that middle knowledge advocates are claiming to protect.

Fourth, middle knowledge is inconsistent with the essential claims of both Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinists cannot agree with the idea that God ordains circumstances but does not choose individual persons for salvation, nor can they agree that God's foreknowledge of human choices is contingent upon what each human being freely chooses. Nor can Calvinists agree that "it is up to us whether we are predestined". Therefore, middle knowledge does not provide a better solution than Calvinism or Arminianism. It's just a variety of Arminianism. On the other hand, on Craig's view, God's knowledge of the circumstances guarantees that a certain choice will be made. But, if God knows what the choice will be, then that choice is guaranteed to happen, and then it could not be otherwise.

(6) On an Arminian view, how can evil exist if God did not want it?

This would mean that God was powerless to prevent it. The common Arminian response is to say that God was able to prevent evil, but he chose to allow for the possibility of evil in order to give angels and humans freedom to rebel. God bound himself to react in certain ways should sin become a reality.

But this is unsatisfactory, because it implies that God also has to allow for this possibility in heaven for eternity, because, as Arminianists claim, there is no free will without this possibility. Another even more troubling implication of the claim that real choices have to allow for the possibility of choosing evil are either: a. God's choices are not real, or, b. God's choices are real and he might decide to choose to do evil again. Both of these are contrary to scripture.

(7) On the Arminian view, how can we know that God will triumph over evil? If evil can come into the world without the will of God, how can we be sure that God will

triumph over evil, or that it just won't come into the world again? We may have difficulties in thinking about the Reformed view of evil as ordained by God and completely under the control of God, but the Arminian view of evil that is not ordained or willed by God is much more troubling.

(8) The difference in the unanswered questions.On one hand, Calvinists must say that they do not know the answer to the questions of how God can not be blamed for evil when he ordains that we do it, and how can God cause us to choose something willingly? This causes us to appreciate the greatness and knowledge of God. On the other hand, Arminians leave questions unanswered as to why he would allow evil when it is against his will, and whether he will triumph over evil. This diminishes God's greatness and elevates man's.

7.7.2. Chapter 32 - Election and Reprobation

In previous chapters, we have talked about the fact that we all have sinned and deserve eternal punishment from God and the fact that Christ died and earned salvation for us.

God's work of election means that God decided to choose us to be saved before the foundation of the world. This didn't apply salvation at that time, since Christ had not yet died for us. It is the first step in the process of God bringing salvation to us individually.

Various theologians have given a specific order to the steps of salvation in our lives. This is called the order of salvation. (Here's Grudem's order):

- Election (God's choice of people to be saved)
- The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
- Regeneration (being born again)
- Conversion (faith and repentance)
- Justification (right legal standing)
- Adoption (membership in God's family)
- Sanctification (right conduct of life)
- Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
- Death (going to be with the Lord)
- Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

Election and reprobation are different for several reasons. Reprobation is the decision of God to pass over those who will not be saved, and to punish them for their sins. It's important to distinguish these two things so that we don't think wrongly about God or His activity.

Predestination includes both election and reprobation. Double predestination is a misleading term because it gives the impression that both election and reprobation are carried out in the same way. This term is usually only used by critics of reformed theology.

Election can be defined as follows: Election is an act of God before the creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.

(A) Does the New Testament teach predestination?

Acts 13:48 - “When the Gentiles heard this they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

Romans 8:29-30 - For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 9:11-13 - though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Romans 11:7 - Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.

Ephesians 1:4-6 - He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Ephesians 1:11-12 - In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined . . . to the praise of his glory.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 - But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

2 Timothy 1:9 - God is the one “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”.

Revelation 13:7 8 - and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

Revelation 17:8 - And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

(B) How does the New Testament present the teaching of election?

(1) As a comfort to believers

Romans 8:28 - for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

From eternity to eternity, God always acts for the good of those whom he called to himself.

(2) As a reason to praise God. Paul praised God for the believers in the churches. It seriously diminishes any pride we might feel due to some good in us or credit to us.

(3) As an encouragement to evangelism. Paul knew that God has been working on the hearts of elect people so that some will come to Christ if he preaches to them.

(C) Correcting misunderstandings of the doctrine of election.

(1) Election is not fatalistic or mechanistic

Fatalism is a system in which human choices and human decisions really do not make any difference. Our humanity would be destroyed, our choices would mean nothing, and the motivation for moral accountability is removed. God’s act of election was neither

impersonal nor mechanistic, but was permeated with personal love for those whom he chose.

We make willing choices to accept or reject the gospel. In the Bible, many invitations are addressed to genuine persons who are capable of hearing the invitation and responding to it by a decision of their wills. Regarding those who will not accept him, Jesus clearly emphasizes their hardness of heart and their stubborn refusal. The choices we make are real choices.

(2) Election is not based on God's foreknowledge or our faith.

Predestination is nothing more than God's confirmation to the decision he knows people will make on their own. This verse is commonly used to support this view - Romans 8:29 - "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son".

This text actually says nothing about God foreknowing or foreseeing that certain people would believe, nor is that idea mentioned in any other text of Scripture. "Those whom he foreknew" is best understood to mean, "those whom he long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself".

Sometimes people say that God elected groups of people but not individuals to salvation. In some Arminian views, God just elected the church as a group, or that God elected Christ, and all people in Christ. But Romans 8:29 talks about specific people whom God foreknew, not just undefined or unfilled groups. Ephesians 1:4 - He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Scripture never speaks of our faith as the reason God chose us.

Romans 9:11-13 - though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Romans 11: 5-6 - So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Some argue that faith is not a work, so God could predestine people based on foreknowledge of faith. But this doesn't work. Paul is not contrasting human faith and human works, he is contrasting God's sovereign choosing of people with any human activity.

Ephesians 1:4-6 - even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Paul mentions nothing about human faith, but only mentions God's predestining activity, his purpose and will, and his freely given grace.

Election based on something good in us (our faith) would be the beginning of salvation by merit. One's view is shaped by answering the question, "What ultimately makes the difference between those who believe and those who do not"? If the answer is that it's based on something God does, then it's based on grace alone. On the other hand, if we answer that the ultimate difference is because of something in man, then salvation ultimately depends on a combination of grace plus human ability.

Predestination based on foreknowledge of a person's faith still does not give people free choice. A person's fate is still determined before they were born. This is still determinism. There's no way that a person who has not been foreknown to be saved can be saved. And if that's the case, it's not even God who determines people's destinies.

Conclusion: Election is unconditional. It seems best to reject the idea that election is based on God's foreknowledge of our faith. We conclude instead that the reason for election is simply God's sovereign choice, and not on any foreseen merit in us. This is unconditional election, because it is not conditioned upon anything that God sees in us that makes us worthy of his choosing.

(D) Objections to the Doctrine of Election

(1) Objection: Election means that we do not have a choice in whether we accept Christ or not.

This objection says that election denies all the gospel invitations that appeal to the will of man and ask people to make a choice. The response to this is that the doctrine of

election is fully able to accommodate the idea that we make willing decisions in accepting or rejecting Christ. We decide what we want and do what we decide to do.

It's important that we define what we mean by free will. Two possible meanings are:

Libertarian free will (also called absolutely free will): The ability to choose differently.

Freedom of Inclination: We are free when we choose according to our strongest inclination or deepest desire. We are free to do what we most want to do.

Reformed understanding is that Freedom of inclination is the kind of human free will that is taught in the Bible. This does not mean that our choices are absolutely free because God can work sovereignly and indirectly through our desires, which will influence our choices. For example, when we come to trust in Christ, God ordains that we will choose Christ voluntarily. The mistaken assumption underlying this objection is that a choice must be absolutely free in order for it to be a genuine human choice.

(2) Objection: On this definition of Election, our choices are not real choices.

Choices don't have to be absolutely free to be genuine or valid. Scripture never makes the claim that our choices have to be free from God's influence or providential control to be real choices.

(3) Objection: The doctrine of Election makes us puppets or robots, not real persons

We do make voluntary choices. It's the one thing that distinguishes us from much of the lower creation. Being created in God's image allows us to make genuine choices that have real effect on our lives.

(4) Objection: The doctrine of Election means that unbelievers never had a chance to believe

When people rejected Jesus, he always put the blame on their willful choice to reject him.

John 8:43-44: Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. . .

John 5:40: You refuse to come to me that you may have life.

(5) Objection: Election is unfair

It is unfair that God chooses some to be saved and passes over others. Two responses:

It would be perfectly fair for God to not save anyone. Any offer of salvation to anyone is a demonstration of grace that goes beyond the requirements of fairness and justice.

The second response is that it is not correct of us to impose our ideas of justice on God, since he is the author of justice. We don't and can't understand everything about God.

(6) Objection: The Bible says that God will to save everyone

Scripture says that it's God's will that everyone be saved. The reformed perspective on this is to say that this speaks of God's revealed will (telling us what we should do), not his hidden will (his eternal plans for what will happen). God invites and commands every person to repent and come to Christ for salvation, but this doesn't tell anything about God's secret decrees regarding who will be saved.

Arminians object to this, saying God does not have two wills. But, they can't answer the question of why God wills that all are saved, yet also wills that people have absolute free will. Isn't this making a distinction between two aspects of God's will.

Both sides say that God wills us to be saved. But both sides also say there is something else that God deems more important than saving everyone. Reformed theologians say that God deems his own glory more important than saving everyone and that it is also furthered by the fact that some are not saved. Arminianists say that God deems the preservation of absolute free will is more important. It seems that the reformed view has much more explicit Bible support.

(E) The Doctrine of Reprobation

When we understand election as God's sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, there is another aspect of this choice, namely God's sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them. This decision of God before creation to pass over some persons is called reprobation. In many ways, this doctrine is the most difficult for us to

think about and accept. The love that God gives us for others causes us to recoil against this doctrine.

Jude 4 - For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation . . .

Romans 9:17 - 23 - For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” **18** So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. . . What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, **23** in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory . . .

Romans 11:7 - What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

1 Peter 2:8 - They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

We must be careful not to reject these verses. We are obligated both to believe it and accept it as fair and just of God, even though it will cause us to tremble in horror as we think of it.

Matthew 11:25 - 26 - At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

Romans 9:22 - 23 - What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

We must remember that there are important differences between election and reprobation. Election is cause for rejoicing and praise to God, who receives all the credit for our salvation, and is delighted in it. Reprobation is viewed as something that brings God sorrow, and the blame for the condemnation of sinners is always put on the people or angels who rebel, never on God himself. The cause of election lies in God, and the blame for Reprobation lies in the sinner. Another important difference is that the ground

of election is God's grace, whereas the ground of reprobation is God's justice. The term "double predestination" is not helpful or accurate because it neglects these differences.

But, if God genuinely feels sorrow at the punishment of the wicked, then why does he allow it or even decree that it will come about? The answer must be that God knows that this will ultimately result in greater glory for himself. It will show his power and wrath and justice and mercy in a way that could not otherwise be demonstrated.

(F) Practical Application of the Doctrine of Election

It is appropriate to apply the doctrines of election and reprobation to our own lives. God in eternity past decided to set his love on me, not because there is any good in me, but because he decided to love me. It humbles us before God to think in this way. It makes us realize that we have no claim on God's grace whatsoever. Our only appropriate response is to give God eternal praise.

7.7.3. Chapter 33 - The Gospel Call and Effective Calling

Romans 8:30 - And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Here, Paul points to a definitive order in which the blessings of salvation come to us.

(A) Effective Calling

Calling is an act, specifically of God the Father, for he is the one who predestines people "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

1 Peter 2:9, 1 Cor. 1:9, Acts 2:39, 1 Thes. 2:12, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Peter 1:3, Rom. 1:6 - 7, 1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 7:15, Col 3:15, Gal 5:13 Eph 1:18, 4:4, 1 Thes 4:7, 1 Peter 2:20 - 21, 3:9, 1 Tim. 6:12 all indicate that no powerless, merely human calling is in view.

This calling is rather a kind of "summons" from the King of the universe, and it has such power that it brings about the response that it asks for in people's hearts. It's an act of God that guarantees a response (Rom 8:30 - all who were called were also justified).

This powerful act of God is often referred to as effective calling. This is distinguished from the general gospel invitation that goes to all people and which some people reject. God's effective call comes through the human preaching of the gospel. Many hear the gospel through an external calling. But in some cases the gospel call is made so

effective by the working of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts that they do respond - they have received the "effective calling".

It is important that we not give the impression that people will be saved by the power of this call apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Although it is true that effective calling awakens and brings forth a response from us, we must always insist that this response still has to be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual person puts his or her trust in Christ.

Unless God works in people's hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response.

John 6:44 - No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Acts 16:14 - The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

In distinction from effective calling, which is entirely an act of God, we may talk about the gospel call, which comes through human speech. The gospel call (or external, or general call) is offered to all people, even those who do not accept it. However, this is not to diminish the importance of the gospel call - it is the means God has appointed through which effective calling will come.

(B) The Elements of the Gospel Call

(1) Explanation of the facts concerning salvation

Anyone who comes to Christ for salvation must have at least a basic understanding of who Christ is and how he meets our needs for salvation. Therefore an explanation of the facts concerning salvation must include at least the following:

- All people have sinned.
- The penalty for our sin is death.
- Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins and he rose from the dead and is alive today.

But understanding those facts and even agreeing that they are true is not enough for a person to be saved. They must repent of his or her sins and trust personally in Christ.

(2) Invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith.

When the New Testament talks about people coming to salvation it speaks in terms of a personal response to an invitation from Christ himself.

Matthew 11:28 - 30 - Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Revelation 3:20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 22:17 - . . . And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

(3) A promise of forgiveness and eternal life

The primary thing that is promised in the gospel message is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God.

(C) The importance of the Gospel call

Romans 10:14 - . . . And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

If there was no gospel call, we could not be saved. God does not save us automatically. He speaks to our wills by asking us to hear his invitation and respond willingly in repentance and faith.

7.8. Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Christian Belief, by John Frame

7.8.1. Chapter 8: The Acts of the Lord: Providence, Part 1

Definition of Providence: God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

7.8.1.1. Providence and Miracle

By the above definition, miracle is a subdivision of providence, one way in which God preserves and governs his creatures and their actions. Psalms 107 shows God's wonders in his general providence to his creatures. The fact that the world does not just drift along on its own, but is the place where a great person lives and acts is as great of a miracle as anything we consider a miracle.

7.8.1.2. Providence and God's Control

God's providence is efficacious, which means that it always accomplishes its purpose. Even if it looks like defeat, every apparent defeat actually makes God's eventual victory all the more glorious - the cross of Jesus being the chief example. God's purposes will always prevail.

Isaiah 55:11
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Daniel 4:35
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"

This emphasis on the general efficacy of God's purpose stands as the background for the Reformed doctrine of irresistible grace. Sinners do resist God's purpose - it's a significant theme in Scripture. But, the point of the doctrine is that their resistance does not succeed against the Lord. When God intends to bring someone to faith in Christ, he cannot fail, although for his own reasons he may choose to wrestle long with a person before achieving that purpose. God's election always precedes, and is the source of, our response of faith. And we will also see that God calls sinners effectually into fellowship with him.

Ezekiel 11:19 - 20
And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

John 5:21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

Romans 8:29 - 30
For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Psalms 65:4
Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple!

Romans 9:18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Scripture regularly teaches that when God elects, calls, and regenerates someone in Christ, through the Spirit, that work accomplishes his saving purpose. When God gives us new life, we cannot send it back to him. If God foreknows someone, he will certainly predestine him to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, to be called, to be justified, to be glorified in heaven. Like his Word, therefore, God's grace will never return void.

7.8.1.3. Universality

God exercises such efficacious control over everything that happens in the world, in accordance with his universal covenant.

The biblical writers do not hesitate to ascribe the events of the natural world to God (Ps. 65:9 - 11, 135:5 - 7, 147:15 - 18, Gen 8:22, Jer. 5:22, 10:13, Nah 1:3, Acts 14:17). God doesn't just allow things to happen, but makes things happen because they please him. God waters the land, drenches the furrows, makes the clouds rise, makes it snow, sends the frost and ice, and melts it. God created all things by his word, so he sends his word to govern the events of nature.

Even events that are most random are under God's sovereign control (Prov. 16:33, Jonah 1:7, Acts 1:23 - 26). What we call accidents come from the Lord (Ex. 21:11, Judg. 9:53, 1 Kings 22:34).

God is the One who gives rain to one town and withholds it from another (Amos 4:7). He sends prosperity and famine (Gen 41:28 - 32). Jesus teaches that this divine control extends to the smallest details. The Father not only makes the sun rise and sends rain (Matt 5:45), but also feeds all the birds (6:26 - 27), clothes the lilies (6:28 - 30), and accounts for the falling of the sparrows and the number of our hairs (Matt. 10:29 - 30). And he demonstrates his unity with the Father by calming the sea, by his own command (Matt 8:23 - 27).

The biblical view of the natural world is intensely personalistic. Natural events come from God, their personal Lord. He also employs angels and humans to do his work in the world. The concept of an impersonal natural law that governs the universe is absent from the Bible. So is the notion of an ultimate "randomness" postulated by some exponents of quantum mechanics. Now obviously, there are such things as natural forces. But it's plain in the view of the biblical writers, any impersonal objects or forces are only secondary causes of the course of nature. Behind them all stands the personal God, who controls all things by his powerful word.

7.8.1.4. Human History

We cannot exist without a vast accumulation of apparently random events. We all owe our existence to the combination of one sperm and one egg out of a vast number of possible combinations, and to equally improbable combinations that produced each of our parents and ancestors. All these things, plus the improbable events of our own life experience, have made us what we are.

So if God controls all events of nature, then certainly he also controls the course of our own lives. Scripture teaches this explicitly, like in the example of Joseph. At every point in the story, God is the One who brings about the events of the narrative. God gave Joseph the power to interpret dreams, and it was God who determined that Joseph's brothers would betray him.

Again and again, it is God who brings about each event, good or evil, for his own good purposes. God didn't merely allow Joseph to be sent into Egypt; rather, God himself sends him, though certainly the treacherous brothers are responsible. Throughout the scriptures, God stands behind each great historical event.

Israel is often at war, but God decides who will prevail. The outcome is always in the Lord's hands. God raised up the Assyrian power to judge his people. The Assyrians do not intend to do God's bidding, but they do it, for their own reasons, after which God judges their sins as well.

Isaiah 14:26 - 27 -
26 This is the purpose that is purposed
concerning the whole earth,
and this is the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.
27 For the Lord of hosts has purposed,
and who will annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
and who will turn it back?

The Babylonians do the same to the southern kingdom, and God raises up the Persians to restore Israel through Cyrus. Cyrus is a free agent, and doubtless he made up his own mind for his own reasons to let Jerusalem be rebuilt. But God predicted that Cyrus would do this long before in Ezra 1:2 - 4.

Another example is that Judas made a personal decision to betray Jesus, for which he is fully responsible. Nevertheless, his betrayal takes place "as it has been determined" (Luke 22:22). The gospel of John teaches that Jesus' death happened at a particular "hour" determined by the Father. Before that hour, nobody could kill Jesus, though they wanted to.

Through the centuries of redemptive history , everything has come from God. He has planned and done it all. He has not merely set boundaries for creaturely action, he has made everything happen.

Scripture focuses on the great events of the history of redemption: God's election of Israel, the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus. But, for these great events to take place, God had to be in control of all the nations: Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and Persia, as well as Israel. Indeed, his mighty deeds prove him to be no less than King over all the earth.

7.8.1.5. Individual Human Life

God does not only control the course of nature and the great events of history, he is also concerned about details. God controls the course of each human life.

Jeremiah 1:5 - God said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations”.

Is Jeremiah an exception to the general rule because he is God’s prophet, or does God know us all before conception? If God knew Jeremiah before his conception, then God must have arranged for one particular sperm to reach one particular egg to produce each of Jeremiah’s ancestors back to Adam. So, God is in control of all the “accidents” of history to create the precise person he seeks to employ as his prophet. God’s foreknowledge of an individual implies comprehensive control over the human family.

Ephesians 1:4 - even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . .

All of human procreation is under God’s control. He acts intentionally to bring about the conception of each of us. And of course, God is also active after the child’s conception, as he is formed in the womb.

Psalm 139:13 - 16 -
For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

We are who we are individually by God’s providence.

1 Samuel 2:6 - 7 -

The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.

James tells us that all the events of our lives are in God's hands. Whatever we do depends on God's willing it to happen.

James 4:13 - 16 -
Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

7.8.1.6. Human Decisions

This is more controversial. Does God bring about our decisions? Some of them or any of them? Human responsibility and freedom are genuine and important. But we must face the face that our decisions are not independent of God, and therefore our definition of freedom must be, somehow, consistent with God's sovereignty over the human will.

We have already seen that God brought about the free decisions of certain people, such as Joseph's brothers, Cyrus, and Judas. So we should not be prejudiced by the unbiblical but popular notion that God never foreordains our free decisions.

Further, since God ordains the events of nature and the events of our daily lives, how can such pervasive divine involvement not profoundly influence our own choices? God made us who we are, inside and out. He controlled our heredity, who our ancestors married. He placed us in our environment and in situations that require us to make decisions. He decides how long we will live, who brings about our successes and failures, even though such events usually depend on our free decisions as well as the factors outside us.

Negatively, God's purposes exclude many free decisions that would otherwise be possible. For example, Joseph's brothers were not free to kill him. Goliath couldn't

have killed David. The Roman soldiers were not free to break Jesus' legs when he hung on the cross, for God's prophets had declared otherwise.

Over and above those inferences, Scripture teaches directly that God brings about our free decisions. God does not merely foreordain what happens to us, but also foreordains what we choose to do. The root of human decision is the heart.

Luke 6:45 - The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Thornbushes cannot bear figs, because that would be contrary to its very nature. So the heart is the center of human life, our fundamental nature and character. And the heart is under God's control.

Proverbs 16:9 -
The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps.

God not only directs the hearts of kings, such as Pharoah, but all people. He controlled the decisions of the Egyptian people by giving them a favorable disposition toward Israel. Scripture underscores that this change was the Lord's work, for it mentions that God had predicted it in his meeting with Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:21 - 22).

According to many Scripture passages, God controls free decisions and attitudes, often predicting those decisions far in advance. God said he will control the minds and hearts of these pagan peoples so that they will not cause trouble for Israel during their feasts.

Exodus 34:24 - no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.

In Judges 7:22, God set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. In Daniel 1:9, God causes a chief Babylonian official "to show favor and sympathy to Daniel". God foreordained that the soldiers at Jesus' crucifixion freely decided not to tear Jesus' garment, but instead cast lots for it (John 19:24, Ps. 22:18). This event took place so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

The Gospels tell us over and over again that things happen so that Scripture may be fulfilled. Many of those events involve free decisions of human beings (Matthew 1:20 - 23,;2:14 - 15, 22 - 23; 4:12 - 16; and many others). People did not even know they were fulfilling Scripture. This divine purpose imparts a certain necessity to the human decision to bring about the predicted event.

7.8.1.7. Sins

This will raise even more serious difficulties than the last. If it is hard for us to accept God's foreordination of human decisions in general, it is even harder to accept his foreordination specifically of our sinful actions. The former raises questions about human freedom and responsibility; the latter raises questions about God's own goodness. For how can a holy God bring about sin?

It's important to see that God does in fact bring about the sinful behavior of human beings, whatever problems that may create in our understanding. However we answer the notorious problem of evil, our response must be in accord with Scripture and the great number of Scripture passages that affirm God's foreordination of everything, even sin. Many attempts to solve the problem deny this premise - but scripturally, the premise will not be denied.

We have already seen that God controls the free decisions of human beings, particularly by controlling the heart. But the heart of fallen people are sinful.

Jeremiah 17:9 -
The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

Evil hearts are no less under God's control than the hearts of the righteous.

Psalm 105:23 - 25 -
Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24 And the Lord made his people very fruitful
and made them stronger than their foes.
25 He turned their hearts to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.

God told Moses in advance that He would harden Pharoah's heart. No doubt Pharaoh was a wicked man before this time, and God's hardening could be seen humanly as a natural extension of Pharaoh's previous attitudes, or even as a divine punishment for previous sin. This is true of all other hardening passages in Scripture; God doesn't harden people who have been good and faithful to him. But the hardening, when it happens, nevertheless, comes from God. So God does deal with sinners by causing them to become more sinful.

Pharaoh is not the only example, by any means. There's Shihan, king of Heshbon (Duet 2:30, Josh 11:18 - 20), there's Saul, whom God sent a "harmful spirit" that tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14), and the false prophets, whom God would send another spirit who would cause them to lie to wicket King Ahab (1 Kings 22:20 - 23).

God hardens the people of Israel as well as their evil kings.

Isaiah 6:9 - 10
And he said, "Go, and say to this people:
"'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'
10 Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed."

Isaiah 63:17
O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways
and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?

Isaiah 64:7
There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

The prophets indicate that God's purpose is to bring about the sin of the people in order to glorify himself in it (Isaiah 10:5 - 11, Ezekiel 38:16). Scripture also indicates

that sometimes God brought about a sinful action for his purposes. When Samson married a Philistine woman, which was against God's law, his father and mother were properly indignant, but the author says,, "His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines" (Judges 14:4). In 2 Samuel 24, the Lord incites David to conduct a census, for which God later judges him and for which David repents.

In all these cases, and many others, God's word was accomplished precisely what God intended, difficult as that may be for us to accept (Isa 55:11).

In the New Testament, Matthew 13:14 - 15 Jesus quotes Isaiah 6 to explain why he used parables to enlighten the disciples but also harden the wicked. Jesus mentions how Judas was excluded from his blessing, necessitated by prophecy (John 13:18). God, through scripture, has made betrayal necessary. In Scripture, God's Word typically brings light and salvation, but in some cases, it brings hardening: darkness and unbelief. Paul also regards God's hardening as the reason for the unbelief of the Jews:

Romans 11:7 - 10 -
What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written,

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
  eyes that would not see
  and ears that would not hear,
down to this very day."

9 And David says,

"Let their table become a snare and a trap,
  a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
  and bend their backs forever."

Before Israel's hardening was God's hardening of the Gentiles (Romans 1:19 - 28). The culmination of the theme of God's sovereignty over human sin is the murder of the Son of God. Judas' betrayal, the Jews' murderous hatred, and the horrible injustice of the Romans were all due to God's definite plan and foreknowledge. They did what God's "hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 2:23, 4:28).

For God to foreordain the crucifixion, he had to foreordain sinful actions to bring it about.

Proverbs 16:4 -
The Lord has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

7.8.1.8. Faith and Salvation

Just as there is a negative side of God's sovereignty, there is a positive side, and they are both quite inseparable, and reinforce each other. If saving faith is a gift of God, then the lack of saving faith, sinful unbelief, comes from God's withholding of that blessing.

We should rejoice that "salvation belongs to the Lord!" (Jonah 2:9). God breaks down our resistance to bring us into his fellowship. Without God's salvation, we were all once without hope, "dead in … trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1), "by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). But,

Ephesians 2:4 - 10
But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The central message of the gospel is that God came in Christ to reconcile us to himself by grace - by God's unmerited favor to those who deserve wrath. Salvation comes not through what we do, but through what God does for us. WE have nothing to boast about. We are hopeless, guilty sinners, whose only hope is God's mercy.

Salvation is God's work - not only in its broad historical outlines, but also for each of us as individuals. It is an exercise of God's sovereign control over his world and his creatures. That control begins before we were conceived, before the world was made.

Ephesians 1:4 - 6
even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

2 Timothy 1:9
who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

God chose a people for himself before the foundation of the world. Election is a biblical truth, and therefore, salvation is ultimately by divine appointment, divine choice.

Certainly there is also a human choice, a choice to receive Christ, to believe in him. Without this choice, there is no salvation (John 3:36). There are also human decisions to follow Jesus, to obey his commandments, decisions that Scripture continually urges us to make. Which comes first? Does God choose us for salvation and then move us to respond? Or do we first choose him and thereby motivate him to choose us for salvation?

The second alternative is quite impossible, since it violates the very idea of grace. If our choosing God moves him to save us, then salvation is based on a word of ours, and we have something to boast about. Further, God's choosing takes place in eternity past. Before we began to exist, God's plan for us was fully formulated. We can't change God's decision.

But Arminians theology nevertheless claims that God chooses us because he knows in advance that we will choose to believe in him. On this view, our choice is the cause, God's choice is the effect. We are the first cause. Some have supported this understanding by Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, which say that election is based on "foreknowledge". But the foreknowledge in these passages is not foreknowledge that we will choose God. In biblical languages, when "know" has a noun rather than a fact clause as its object, it refers to a personal relationship rather than a knowledge of information. God doesn't just know what they are doing, but that he guards and keeps those who walk in his path.

Amos 3:2
You only have I known
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

The NIV correctly translates the word “known”, “chosen” God is not confessing ignorance of all the families other than Israel. So, in Romans 8:29, God’s “foreknowledge” means that he has established a personal relationship with believers, one that began in eternity past.

Jesus told his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide . . .” (John 15:16). God’s choice precedes our choice, our response, our faith. We’ve seen that God is sovereign throughout nature, history and human life in general. Can it be that the choice to believe in Christ is the one choice that is outside God’s control?

Many passages explicitly teach that our response is God’s gift. Jesus teaches that “all that the Father gives me will come to me” (John 6:37); that “no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . .” (v 44); “this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (v 65); “It is the Spirit by whom we call on God as our Father, our Abba (Rom. 8:15).

About one of Paul’s listeners, a woman named Lydia, it says “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 13:48). The divine appointment came first; belief (faith) was the result.

Repentance, too, is the work of God in us. It is the opposite side of faith. Faith is returning to Christ; repentance is turning away from sin. You cannot have one without the other. 2 Timothy 2:25 - “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth”.

There is the doctrine of effectual calling, by which God efficaciously summons people into union with Christ. Another type of calling is the universal offer, or general call, that many refuse.

There is also the doctrine of regeneration, which is also an act of God. Without this new birth, we cannot even see the kingdom of God, because our spiritual eyes are dead.

Other passages emphasize that our spiritual understanding is a gift of God. In Matthew 11:25 - 27, we learn that God hides spiritual insight from some and reveals it to others. We are constantly dependent on the Lord for the resources to live obediently. Sanctification and regeneration is his work, though of course we are responsible for what we do.

7.8.1.9. Summary Passages

Nothing is more important, especially at this point in the history of theology, than for God's people to be firmly convinced that Scripture teaches God's efficacious universal control over the world, and teaches it over and over again. Scripture mentions and implies this control in many different historical and doctrinal contexts and applies it to our own life with God in a great number of ways.

Today there are large theological movements that would deny the universality of God's control over the universe, particularly over the free decisions of man. Even if there are interpretative difficulties in some of these passages, it is quite impossible to escape the cumulative force of all of them.

This pervasive emphasis sets the context in which we should consider the relatively few passages that are explicitly universal, those that state that God controls everything that comes to pass. We have already shown that everything that happens in this world - creation, providence, history, redemption (both large, historical movements and tiny details) - is under God's sovereign control.

Let's look at only four passages that explicitly teach the universality of God's control over the world.

Lamentations 3:37 - 38 -
Who has spoken and it came to pass,
   unless the Lord has commanded it?
38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
   that good and bad come?

Romans 8:28 - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Paul has been talking about the sufferings that Christians must endure in hope of the glory to come. The summerings have a cosmic dimension: “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22). The sufferings include not only persecutions for the sake of Christ, but all the sufferings introduced into the creation by the fall of Adam. The good news is that Jesus’ atonement has cosmic dimensions: in time it will counteract all the effects of the fall as well as sin itself, so that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Therefore God is now working in all things, not only when we suffer for the gospel, to bring good - good for those who have been effectually called into fellowship with Christ. The conclusion is that every event is part of God’s great plan to bring the richest blessing to his people. We do not often see how the sufferings of this world will enhance the joy to come, but we trust that God is bringing about just that result, since he works in, and therefore controls, all things.

Romans 8:38 - 39 - For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 1:11 - In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Salvation is part of God’s overall control of the world he has made, because the Savior is the One who controls all things.

7.8.2. Chapter 9: The Acts of the Lord: Providence, Part 2

God’s control is both efficacious and universal. But that’s not all. God controls the world in terms of government and preservation.

7.8.2.1. Government

God’s rule is teleological. That is, God governs all events for a purpose. Nature and history are moving. They have a direction, a destination, and everything works toward that end.

Hebrews 1:3 - He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. . .

Jesus carries the world from one point to another through time. Jesus' purpose is to bring the world process to that goal. God’s rule of the world is distinctively personal, not mechanical.

Ephesians 1:9 - 11 - . . . the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

7.8.2.2. Preservation

If God is to direct the creation towards his intended goal, he must preserve its existence at least until it reaches that goal. Preservation has several senses in the theological vocabulary, and I will distinguish them as follows:

1). Metaphysical preservation is God’s act to keep the universe in being.

Colossians 1:17 - And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Without God, nothing would exist, and nothing would continue to exist. The world continues to exist by God’s permission. Were He to withdraw His permission, there would be no world. This is efficacious permission. The world is completely under the control of its Sovereign Lord.

2) Redemptive-historical preservation is God’s temporary preservation of the world from final judgment, so that he can bring his people to salvation. God preserved the descendants of Adam and Eve, to the point that he designated the one that will crush the serpent’s head.

Redemptive-historical preservation is, however, limited and temporary. This limit is shown through the story of the flood, and shortening the life span of humans. The flood proves that historical judgments alone cannot deal with sin. Because of this, the earth cannot endure forever. In 2 Peter 3, Peter says that there will be another de-creation, this time by fire. God’s patience resides between the two great judgements, to give time for people to repent and believe in Christ.

3) Covenant preservation refers to God preserving the lives of believers and the church as part of his covenant blessing.

Covenant preservation is corporate, as well as individual. It's closely related to redemptive-historical preservation. For as God preserves the earth to bring the lost to himself, he preserves his people on earth as his witness. But, like redemptive-historical preservation, it has a limit. In this life, there is death and suffering. The complete fulfillment of covenant preservation is not in this life but in the next. We will not be abandoned to the grave.

Evil is not a refutation of God's good purposes for creation or of his love for his people.The evil of this world served God's long-term purpose to glorify himself and to do good for his people. Even persecution is a privilege. God preserves his people through persecution and honors their suffering by uniting it to the sufferings of Christ.

Covenant preservation is what most believers mean by providence, rather than government, concurrence, or metaphysical preservation.

4) Eternal preservation is redemption itself. It's his ultimate providence to his people. And when God provides salvation to his people, he preserves them, so that they will not fall away, for all eternity.

John 10:27 - 30 - My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

The Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not teach that everybody who makes a profession of faith is eternally saved. In John 6:66, many who believe in Jesus turn away. There are solemn warnings about apostasy. The apostates, at one time, shared in the life of the church, and therefore in the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Judas himself cast out evil spirits and healed diseases in Jesus' name.

Those who persevere are those in whom God begins a work of saving grace. And they persevere imperfectly until they are perfected in Christ.

7.8.2.3. Revelation

Providence includes an authoritative revelation of God. There is a correlation between the “word” that controls the course of nature and the “word” that God revealed to Israel.

Providence also displays the wisdom of God. Wisdom and “word” are closely related in Scripture. God’s works declare the marvelous mind of God that has planned everything to happen according to his will.

Providence reveals God’s lordship, his power and his presence in the world he has made. It declares his wrath against sin.

God’s providence is universal and pervasive as a form of revelation to all people. It leaves us all without excuse.

God’s providence provides guidance to us. It opens and closes doors. Our spiritual gifts, heredity, environment, education, temperament and interests suggest to us how we can best serve God. However, it’s much easier to see how God has used providence to lead us in the past than to figure out how he will use it to lead us in the present and future. In any case, we can rightly interpret providence only through the spectacles of Scripture.

7.8.2.4. Concurrence

Concurrence is the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do.

This concept involves the relation between the divine Primary Cause and the secondary causes of events in the world. The libertarian view of free will states that God determines the natures of all beings and forces in the world, but does not determine the specific actions that these beings perform. On the contrary, Calvinism affirms concurrence.

God controls nature, history, and individual persons (including their free decisions) in minute detail. God determines not merely the major trends in the world, but the smallest events as well: the falling of a sparrow, the fall of a lot, and so on. Romans 8 - 11 and Ephesians 1 teach that he controls absolutely everything.

The doctrine of concurrence is merely an application of the general principle that God brings all things to pass. God causes events on the micro level as well as on the macro level. He uses second causes, but he is always working in and with those second causes. God's will explains all events, both large and small.

The main objection to concurrence is that it makes God the author of sin, since it makes him not only the remote cause, but also the proximate cause of sin. Later, I will discuss the remote-proximate distinction and the concept of authorship. Author means not a mere cause of sin, but a doer of sin. God's causal proximity to a sinful act does not make God a doer of sin.

Another objection to concurrence is that it makes second causes superfluous. God is the sufficient cause of each event, and the second cause doesn't really cause anything. Later, I will discuss in more detail the paradox that although God controls everything, he has created a universe that is significantly different from himself, operating on the basis of its own nature and the laws of its being. In the narrative of nature and history, almost all events in the story have two causes: divine and creaturely. The creaturely causes are genuine. Creatures bring about the events they cause, and the events would not come about without those causes. The same can be said of the divine causes. Creation is like a book written by a gifted novelist, who creates a story world in which events have causes within the story, but in which every event is brought about by the volition of the author.

7.8.3. Chapter 35: Human Responsibility and Freedom

The doctrine that God controls all things, including our own decisions, raises the question: "How can we be responsible for our actions?"

7.8.3.1. Responsibility as Accountability

In Scripture, human beings are clearly responsible in the first sense, because they are accountable to God as the supreme evaluator of human conduct. Human responsibility is a consequence of God's lordship attribute of authority. God made us according to his plan and for the purpose of glorifying him. The fundamental standard of human conduct is that we should reflect God's own nature. We should image him.

God's Word definitively reveals human obligations and responsibilities, and will be evaluated by God.

Asking the question of the relation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is to ask about the relationship between three lordship attributes. Those are: God's control, his authority, and his covenant presence.

We are responsible, answerable to God, for our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. Everything we do and are brings God's commendation or condemnation.

1 Corinthians 10:31 - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17 - And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Romans 14:23 - . . . everything that does not come from faith is sin.

We are even responsible for our moral nature. Paul says in Romans 5 that our natural sinfulness, for which we are born, leads to our condemnation, if God does not bless us with saving grace. We did not individually make ourselves evil by nature, but we are responsible for that evil anyway.

And we are responsible to seek salvation. We must make a decision to serve the Lord. We must receive Christ and believe in him; we must repent, believe, and be baptized. But, God chooses us before we choose him, and his choice brings ours about. But, we must choose nevertheless, and we will not be saved unless we make the right choice.

The biblical writers see no problem in affirming together both total divine sovereignty and complete human responsibility, and in most places does so without suggesting some sort of difficulty. The exceptions are Paul's imaginary objector, and the example of the potter and clay; and Paul quoting Exodus 33, which states that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

It is significant that Scripture often affirms divine sovereignty and human responsibility together in the same passage. Genesis 50:20 rebukes the wicked intent of Joseph's brothers, but also reveals the good intention of God in bringing about Joseph's ministry in Egypt. In Isaiah 10, we discussed how God uses the Assyrian kings as his tool to punish Israel.

Proverbs 16:4 - 5:

The Lord works out everything to its proper end—
even the wicked for a day of disaster.
5 The Lord detests all the proud of heart.
Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

It is God who gives new birth, but those who are born of God accept the responsibility to receive Christ and believe in his name. Scripture curses the wicked men who betrayed and crucified Jesus, but it also traces these events to the decree of God. The evangelistic work of the early church is the work of God, but it is also the product of human preaching. Acts 13:48 mentions that "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed," but 14:1b attributes faith to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. Paul does not hesitate to say that it is his responsibility "that I might win more of them" (1 Cor. 9:19). We post-reformers want to say, "No; it's God who saves, not human preachers." We must recognize that no one will be saved unless God works through preachers.

When Paul was a prisoner on the ship to Rome, he prophesied danger to the ship, then says that on God's authority, no one on the ship will die. But, when the sailors try to escape the ship in a lifeboat, Paul says that "unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." God determined that all will live, yet the sailors must take responsibility for this deliverance. We work because God works in us.

Colossians 3:1 - 3 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

"You have been raised" is the indicative, "set your minds on things above" is the imperative. God raised us, but Paul expects us to make a decision to give priority in our hearts and minds to the affairs of God. The Christian life warrants great exertions, and God's sovereign gift is what motivates our exertions. Satan is responsible for what he does, but God is on the throne and limits what Satan does according to his plan.

In Phillipians, Paul appeals to God's sovereign working to motivate our responsibility. Here are some suggestions as to why this linkage makes sense in the context of a biblical worldview:

1) God's sovereignty involves not only his control over everything, but also his authority and his evaluation of everything. By his control, God foreordains our actions; by his authority, he evaluates our them. Because of that authority, we are answerable to him, responsible. Far from being inconsistent with God's lordship, our responsibility is based on it.
2) God's promises of success motivate believers to act in accord with those promises. Action to further God's goals is not an irrational response to revelation, and it is eminently rational when we consider that we are a toll in God's hands by which he accomplishes his purpose. It is those who obey God's commandments who will receive his rewards.
3) It is when we are most aware of God's providential control over us that we are most aware of the necessity to live responsibly before him. When we are overwhelmed by his grace and love (or by his wrath and judgment), we are powerfully impressed with our need to repent and believe. We will work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.
4) Without God's control over the universe, there could be no human responsibility. God, being the paneer, maker, and governor of all of nature and history, makes God the ultimate interpreter and valuer of everything. If anything was independent of God, it would have no value. Our responsibility would be confused by two or more standards of value. We would be morally responsible in some areas of life, but not in others. But, in Scripture there is one standard; we are to everything to God's glory.
5) Scripture is not nearly as concerned as we are to promote our self-esteem. We want to believe that the meaning and significance of our lives depends on what we do for ourselves, without any outside influences or constraints. In Scripture, the goal of human life is to glorify God. Our dignity is found in not what we do, but in what God has done for us and in us. Our meaning and significance are to be found in the fact that God has created us in his image and redeemed us by the blood of his Son. The biblical writers are not horrified as we are by the thought that we may be under the control of another. The fact that God has made us for his glory imparts the maximum meaning for our existence.

7.8.3.2. Responsibility as Liability

We are completely and totally responsible for everything that we are, think, say or do. However, there is a second sense that indicates our liability for a state of affairs. In the first sense, you can't be more or less responsible. In the second sense, you can be more or less liable. Liability has to do with the results of our own decisions. But, events in this

world have multiple causes, and so, therefore, none of us causes anything by our free decision alone. For example, courts must often ascertain the degree of liability for a crime or injury, and that judgment amounts to assigning partial responsibility (in the second second sense). In thinking about the second sense of responsibility, we shouldn't ignore the first sense, in that we are exhaustively responsible for everything in our lives.

7.8.3.3. Responsibility and Ability

Many claim that freedom is a condition of human responsibility, so that we are responsible only for what we do freely. Certainly, there are cases in which that claim is credible. A counter example, however, is if someone freely chooses to do something under duress. They still have a choice, but we can be far more sympathetic to the circumstances under which someone makes a choice.

So, even a person under duress is fully responsible to God for everything he did. But none would say that the person under duress is responsible in the same way as a person who is not under duress. Freedom and responsibility (in the second sense) are linked to ability. How able was someone to act in a different way? Ability limits responsibility.

For example, murder and manslaughter are treated differently, but, a person guilty of manslaughter does not get off scot-free. When it happens, the perpetrator must be prepared to accept liability. Another example is ignorance. It limits, but in most cases does not eliminate liability (the level of negligence must be determined). We are culpable for our willful ignorance of God.

Romans 1:21 - 23 - For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Leviticus 4 deals with unintentional sins of the whole community and the prescribing sacrifices. Even though the sins were unintentional, they were still culpable and had to make atonement. We can also be culpable for our family's or communities' sins, even though we had nothing to do with them. Ability and knowledge does limit responsibility in some cases, but it usually doesn't completely absolve.

Luke 12:47 - 48 - “The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Ignorance is a disability, but it is often willful, and so avoidable. In our relationship with God, particularly, we are never disabled in such a way as to be innocent before him. We are justly convicted as willful sinners.

We are totally responsible before the ultimate Judge, even when he divinely foreordains events. Specifically we see examples where God hardens people, making them more sinful. Judas was fully responsible, even though it was predicted he would betray Jesus. He still wasn’t forced to betray Jesus. He did what he wanted to do. Moral inability does not limit responsibility.

Romans 8:6 - 8 - The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Not only do we sin, but we cannot do otherwise. This inability does not mitigate our responsibility. The wages of sin is death.

The question of whether ability limits responsibility does not admit of a simple answer.

7.8.3.4. Excursive on Ability

The terms ability, possibility, can, and kindred expressions are important not only for the discussion of human freedom, but also in many other theological questions, such as the nature of God’s omnipotence, miracles, total depravity and common grace (what can man do apart from saving grace?), regeneration-sanctification (what can believers do as the result of grace that unbelievers cannot), Christology (was Jesus able to sin), and prophecy.

Let’s say that a preacher has another commitment which makes him unable to preach on Sunday. It’s not that he couldn’t choose to, but that he can’t because he has an insurmountable conflict in his schedule. He could, but he can’t. Despite the

contradiction, both statements are true, because they refer to two different kinds of ability.

The concept of ability is complex. There are different kinds of abilities. We might say, “Either you can or you can’t!”. But it’s not that simple. Some circumstances can prevent an act or event - I call these circumstance preventers.

For example, were Jesus’ bones breakable while He was on the cross? Was it possible, even though it was prophesied that they wouldn’t break? In a sense, yes, it was possible. But, since God declared that Jesus’ bones would not be broken, it was also impossible that Jesus’ bones would be broken - by virtue of God’s decree.

We can see that some events are both possible and impossible in different respects. There are different kinds of preventers:

Logical possibility refers to the mere absence of inconsistency. In this case, the only preventer is inconsistency. 2 + 2 = 5 is only impossible because of inconsistency with our mathematical system.

Physical possibility refers to the laws of physics. Events are physically possible if not prevented by the laws of physics.

Economic possibility refers to whether someone has the money to accomplish something.

Political possibility refers to whether someone has the votes, or political will to accomplish something.

Can unregenerate people believe in Jesus apart from grace? Again, they are physically and mentally able, but morally unable. This ableness is relevant to the degree in which we are responsible.

7.8.3.5. Freedom

Freedom refers to various kinds of abilities and the lack of certain abilities, or preventers. Moral freedom is the freedom to do good. Scripture teaches that Adam’s fall took away our moral freedom so that apart from grace we “cannot” please God. Christ set us free from that bondage.

1) Moral freedom is the freedom from sin, but it is not a condition of moral responsibility. Those who are bound in slavery to sin are morally responsible, no more or less so than those who are free in Christ.

2) Compatibilist freedom is the freedom to do what you want to do. We act and speak according to our character. We follow the deepest desires of our hearts. Scripture never refers to this moral consistency as a kind of freedom, but as a condition of heart-act consistency.

Determinism is the view that every event has a sufficient cause other than itself. Compatibilist freedom means that even if every act we perform is caused by something outside ourselves, we can still be free, for we can still act according to our character and desires.

There are some ambiguities in this concept, because there are different levels of human desires. On the compatibilist view, we always act according to our strongest desire in the here and now, in a concrete situation. We would like to always act according to our broader preferences, but we do not always do that. On the compatibilist view, we are always free to follow our most concrete desires, not always free to carry out our more general desires.

So compatibilist freedom is consistent with moral responsibility, with conditions of ability, ignorance, and others. And, we saw that moral inability does not remove moral responsibility. Moral inability is simply the character of unregenerate human beings. They do what they desire to do, though their desires are evil.

3) Libertarianism is the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives. This is commonly called “the power of contrary choice” or “the liberty of indifference”. This belief does not claim that there are no influences that might affect the fill, but it does insist that normally the will can overcome these factors and choose in spite of them. Ultimately, the will is free from any necessary causation.

Libertarianism is sometimes called incompatibilism because it is not compatible with determinism. It is a clear alternative to compatibilism. Libertarians emphasize that our choices are not determined in advance by God. On their view, God may be the First Cause of the universe in general, but in the sphere of human decision, we are the first causes of our actions. Our free choices are independent of God.

Furthermore, libertarians claim that we have the ability to choose contrary to our character and even our strongest desires. This position assumes that our will is independent of every other aspect of our being, and that decisions can be made contrary to every motivation.

Libertarians claim that we must have this kind of radical freedom to be held responsible for our actions. If our decisions are caused by anything or anyone (including our own desires), they are not properly our decisions, and we cannot be held responsible. To be responsible, we must be able to do otherwise.

7.8.3.6. Critique of Libertarianism

Most of the church fathers held the libertarian position until Augustine, during the Pelagian controversy, which called it into question. Since then, there has been a contest between the Augustinian and Pelagian conceptions of freedom, resulting sometimes in various unstable mixtures of the two. Today, the libertarian view prevails in much of evangelical Christianity, and even among some thinkers in the Reformed tradition.

But there are some very severe criticisms of libertarianism:

1) Scripture does not teach it in any explicit way. No biblical passage can be construed to mean that the human will is independent of God's plan. Libertarians generally don't even try to establish their position by direct exegesis. Rather, they attempt to deduce it from other biblical concepts, such as human responsibility itself, and the divine commands, exhortations, and pleadings that indicate human responsibility. Libertarianism is a rather technical philosophical notion, making various assumptions about causality, the relation of will to action, the relation of will to character and desire, and the limitation of God's sovereignty. Attempts to derive these technical concepts from the biblical view of human responsibility have been far from successful. If they fail to bear this burden of proof, then we must abandon either libertarianism or sola Scriptura.
2) Scripture never grounds human responsibility in libertarian freedom - or any kind of freedom. We are responsible because God made us, owns us, and has a right to evaluate our conduct. God's authority is the necessary and sufficient ground of human responsibility. Scripture never suggests that libertarian freedom has any relevance at all, even to liability.
3) Scripture does not indicate that God places any positive value on libertarian freedom (even granting that it exists). The free-will defense against the problem of evil argues that God places such a high value on independent human free

choice that he gave it to creatures even at the risk that they would bring evil into the world. One would imagine that Scripture would abound with statements by God to the effect that causeless free actions by creatures are terribly important to him, that they bring him glory. But Scripture never suggests that God honors causeless choice in any way or recognizes its existence.

4) Scripture never declares someone innocent because his conduct was not free in the libertarian sense, nor does God ever warrant a judgment of guilt by pointing to the libertarian freedom of the individual. Rather, we see that Scripture sometimes refers implicitly to compatibilist freedom, but never incompatibilist freedom.
5) In civil courts we never assume that libertarian freedom is a condition of moral responsibility. Libertarianism would make it impossible to prove the guilt of anybody at all.
6) Law courts assume the opposite of libertarianism, namely, that the conduct of criminals arises from motives. They spend a lot of time determining whether a defendant had an adequate motive to commit the crime. In fact, those without a motive are judged as insane and not responsible for their actions. We can see that libertarianism destroys moral responsibility.
7) Scripture contradicts the proposition that only uncaused decisions are morally responsible. God's sovereign control of human actions and man's responsibility for the same action often appear together in the same passage.
8) Scripture denies that we have the independence demanded by libertarian theory. We are not independent of God, for God controls human free actions. Nor can we choose to act independently of our own character and desire. Recall Matthew 7:15 - 20, which says that the good tree brings forth good fruit, the evil tree evil. It's only when one's heart is right that his actions will be right.
9) Libertarianism violates the biblical teaching concerning the unity of human personality in the heart. Scripture teaches that the heart, and therefore our decisions, is wicked because of the fall, but the work of Christ and the regenerating power of the Spirit cleanses the heart so that our actions can be good. The integrity of human personality is not possible in a libertarian construction, for in that view the will must always be independent of the heart and the character.
10) If libertarian freedom is necessary to moral responsibility, then evidently God is not morally responsible, for he is not free to act against his holy character, as well as saints in heaven. If glorified saints do have libertarian freedom, then they could fall again into sin.
11) Libertarians say that if our decision is afflicted by any kind of inability at all, it is not truly free and responsible. While there is some truth to this principle, it is not

always valid, because we are always afflicted by some kinds of inability. Because of this, we must be cautious, but Libertarianism throws caution to the winds.

12) Libertarianism is inconsistent not only with God's foreordination of all things, but even with his knowledge of future events. For example, if God foreknows that one is going to wear a green shirt on a certain day, then one is not free to wear another color. Now, libertarians make the point that God can know such future events without causing them. But, who is causing the foreknown events? Is it some other force besides God? Libertarianism has no answer for this. Open theists deny God's exhaustive foreknowledge. But, this is radical and denies traditional Arminianism. It would be better to reject libertarianism.
13) Libertarians tend to make their view of free will nonnegotiable, making it a central truth, with which all theological statements must be made consistent. It takes on presuppositional status. But, as we have seen, libertarianism is unscriptural. It's bad enough to merely assert libertarianism contrary to the Bible. But making it a central truth or governing perspective is very dangerous indeed. If a theological system is based on an unbiblical principle, then the whole theological system is in danger of a shipwreck.
14) Philosophical defenses of libertarianism often appeal to intuition, for we feel that we could choose either way, even against our strongest desire. The problem is that our feeling of intuition can never identify causation outside ourselves.
15) If libertarianism is true, then God has somehow limited his sovereignty so that he does not bring all things to pass. But Scripture contains no hint that God has limited his sovereignty in any degree. Ephesians 1:11 - ". . . him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,". If God limited his sovereignty, he would become something less than Lord of all, something less than God.

7.8.3.7. Creaturely Otherness, Integrity, and Significance

Humans are fully responsible to do everything to the glory of God. God is our supreme evaluator, even though human actions are completely under God's control. This sounds like God judges and punishes man for things that God himself is actually responsible for.

Firstly, we cannot distort the Bible's teaching in order to make it more palatable to people today. Our objections cannot be based on non-biblical views. We must be willing to accept the consequences of believing scripture, which humbles us, making us potter's clay.

Libertarians claim that lack of “real” freedom invalidates the blessings of this life. But, libertarian freedom amounts to the arbitrary activity of meaningless “will”. Would we give up all the blessings of this life in order to gain experience of random activity?

Covenant presence means that God cares for his world. He did not set it in motion and leave it to run on its own. He remains with and in the world to control it, to evaluate it, to bless and to judge. He is the potter and this world is the clay.

God’s creatures are created to be different from him, and therefore have natures and functions different from his own. Our lives have significance, but are different from God’s significance. Of course, our lives are dependent on God and his providential rule. In every way, God will see his decrees will be fulfilled.

Does God limit his sovereignty? Yes and no. No, because this creaturely integrity is itself part of God’s decree. At no point does God relinquish control over his world. God is limited by the consistency of his own plan. He creates and puts together the puzzle pieces of his own plan.

Arminians say that God’s foreordination is based on his foreknowledge. This is true, but we need to go on to say that the foreknowledge itself is based on foreordination. Foreknowledge and foreordination are reciprocal. Neither are “prior” to the other. Both are eternal.

Middle knowledge is God’s knowledge of what takes place under various conditions. His necessary knowledge is of everything possible, his free knowledge of everything actual. Middle knowledge is of things hypothetical and their results. The issue with this is that middle knowledge is based not on God’s nature or plan, but on his perceptions of the independent behavior of possible creatures in possible circumstances. In other words, it is radical libertarianism.

Reformed theology does not deny that God has middle knowledge, but does deny that things happen outside the decisions of his will. God is not limited in his divine sovereignty. However, God does take human nature into account when he formulates his eternal plan for us. But, that is only one perspective. The other perspective is that God’s knowledge of our nature is itself dependent on his plan to make us in a particular way. God’s will is based on his knowledge, and his knowledge is based on his will.

The problem with Arminianism, then, is not so much in what he affirms, but in what he denies. Arminianists insist on looking at the problem from only one perspective. To really understand this, we need to take into account the third lordship attribute, God's covenant presence. God not only controls us, he also grants to us covenantally a role to play in his grace plan.

In one sense, we are tools in his hand to accomplish his vast purpose for the universe. But in another sense, the universe is his tool for accomplishing his purpose in each of us. His vast power controls us, but he always acts in full knowledge of who we are, and in profound commitment to accomplish his individual purpose for each of us. Everything that happens furthers that commitment.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

In this sense, we can say reverently that God's knowledge of human beings before creation influences God's eternal plan. God's sovereign plan includes a covenant commitment to every creature, to fulfill the role of that creature. This should be a central element in our own view of human freedom, responsibility, and significance.

7.8.3.8. Divine and Human Creativity

We are important not only because we are different from God and in common with him, but also because we are his image. This is mysterious because God is mysterious. But, there is something analogous to God's creativity in us, and that is relevant to freedom and significance.

Human choice is an activity of affirming one alternative and rejecting others. This aspect of choice has much to do with our feeling of freedom. God holds us responsible for our choices not only because of his lordship attribute of authority, but also because he is imaged in our power of choice. This gift speaks not of our independence from divine causation, but of our participation in God's creativity.

7.8.3.9. Models of Divine and Human Agency

The concept of how God is completely in control of the world and that man is nevertheless fully responsible for his own actions is complicated. Both God and man can both play significant roles in the course of nature and history. Here are some illustrations that may assist in our thinking on this:

1) Pilot and Copilot: This is not a good picture because both can take on the entire job at one time. In Scripture, God's control and man's actions are both involved in bringing about historical results.
2) Teacher and Classroom: This is also not a good picture. God is in control and sets boundaries that he has the power to enforce. But students still make these decisions independent of him within those boundaries. This model is favorable to a libertarian view of freedom, as it attempts to reconcile libertarianism with a significant form of divine sovereignty. The problem is that, while certainly God does set boundaries, God is different from the human teacher in that he also has the power to control every thought, word, and deed of those under his lordship. God never permits anyone to do something contrary to his will. When God permits something, He intends for them to do it.
3) Primary and Secondary Cause: It's common in Reformed thought to think of God as not the author of sin, but the remote, or secondary cause. But, this is not true. Not only is God responsible because he is the ruler, but his involvement is in some sense always direct. For not even the smallest motion of the smallest object can occur without his government, preservation, and concurrence. It's not wrong to suggest that God often works through secondary causes, but it is wrong to suggest that God does not also work directly in and with his creation.
4) The Commander and His Troops: This model brings out the fact that God exercises his control particularly through his word. He performs all his works by speaking. This model needs to be generalized to include forms of the word of God other than commands. God also accomplishes his purposes by promising, expressing love, and sharing with us the poetry of his own heart.

5) Author and Characters in a Story:

No analogy is a perfect description of the Creator-creature relationship, because that relationship is unique. In this case, the author has complete control over his characters by conceiving the character, who then takes a life of its own. The author then takes responsibility to shape the events of the story in light of the integrity of the character, and to fit with the complete integrity of the story. The author is not only the "primary cause" who sets in motion a chain of causes and effects that unfold without his further involvement. Rather, he writes every detail of the narrative and dialogue, and everything that happens.

The character can never rise to become an author. However, the character is still entirely responsible for his actions within the plane of the story - horizontally. The analogy breaks down a little when we consider vertical responsibility. In our case, we have received revelation from God, and have a covenant relationship with God. Although, the

author does judge his characters and many times brings judgment for their actions to them.

We can see how various elements of this analogy reflect God's relationship to us: a) God's creativity, b) his fitting of characters to the plot and vice versa, c) the two complete causal structures, d) God's complete control, e) his involvement in every detail of the story, f) the two distinct levels of reality, g) the asymmetry by which God has the power in himself to become man, but we don't have power to become God, and h) creaturely responsibility to other creatures and to God.

The author-character analogy fits the third lordship attribute: covenant presence. The author is always present in the drama. In this case, the characters take on a life of their own. While God has complete control over nature and history, his creatures do influence his plan. So, there is a give and take.

The analogy is imperfect, chiefly because God's creatures are real. Nevertheless, the parallels are worth our meditation. As literature alone, the overarching story outlined in scripture is fascinating. What is all the more wonderful is that it is real. God will resolve all the tensions in a way that will delight.

7.8.4. Chapter 36: Sin

Man is made in the image of God, as God's vassal king over the earth, free and responsible. Man is a good creature of God, but fallen in sin.

7.8.4.1. Man's Original Goodness

When God finished creating everything, including man, he judged everything good. There are various kinds of goodness. There is teleological goodness - usefulness for some purpose, as when we speak of a "good manner" or a good "tomato". There is aesthetic goodness, which refers to beauty, or other factors in a work of art. There is moral goodness, applied to persons who have obeyed God's commands and deserve God's blessing. Moral goodness is a personal quality, applying only to humans, angels, and God himself.

When God declared the creation good, he meant good in every sense appropriate to every creature. The earth, each plant, and each animal was formed and acted perfectly according to its God-given purpose. Adam and Eve were good in every sense, even ethically good. Their actions, thoughts, words, and deeds pleased God. They bore God's image without distortion.

We must reject the notion that God created us in a morally neutral state, so that we could achieve goodness by our own decisions. God gave to Adam and Eve a created character. Arminians teach that moral goodness and sin are always the result of conscious choice. Even before the fall, it is God who determines the moral character of his creatures. Of course, the same problem arises with the relation of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. How can man be good if his moral character is created into him? This is the same problem that arises with man's responsibility for sin and for that goodness in him that comes through redemptive grace. It's a mystery, we know no answer.

Another mystery: If God conferred on Adam a morally good character, how did he become a sinner? We should avoid invoking philosophical concepts that the Bible does not support (such as libertarian freedom). Scripture teaches that character does indeed constrain our decisions. That, and the fact that God himself controls the free decisions of man eliminates libertarian free choice.

Roman Catholic theology suggests that the fact that man has both a soul and a body creates a difference between the two, and leads to conflict between the desires of the body and the limits of reason. This tendency is not sinful, but it can lead to sin. (There's more explanation of this view). They say this condition explains why the fall was the result of libertarian free will. This view doesn't help at all in the following ways:

1) Scripture does not distinguish man's soul and body as metaphysical, separable components. And certainly it does not present them as opposed to each other. That's what Greek Philosophy presented.
2) The Roman view says that the desires of the body are often irrational, or they wouldn't conflict with reason. If this is true, then man's original condition could not have been good, because irrational desires seek ends that are contrary to God's glory.
3) The Roman distinction between nature and grace is not biblical. It claims that man's nature functions apart from God. Scripture contradicts this notion by saying no part of creation can function apart from God's eternal decree, his law, and his covenantal presence.
4) The Roman statement comes close to saying that man under grace can transcend the Creator-creature distinction.
5) The plight of human beings is not metaphysical, but ethical (sin). The solution to sin is not to rise above our human existence to become something other than human, but to be reconciled with our Creator whom we were estranged from.

6) The state of man after the fall is nothing like what the Roman Catholics describe, but rather a state in which man is sinful in all aspects of his being.

So it's best for us to stick to what Scripture says about man's original condition, even if it doesn't solve to our satisfaction the mystery of how sin entered the world.

7.8.4.2. The Nature of Sin

Scripture defines human righteousness in three ways that reflect God's lordship attributes. A righteous deed is one that (1) obeys God's standard, (2) seeks God's glory and the success of his kingdom, and (3) is motivated by true faith and love.

The unregenerate man cannot act in these three ways, and therefore, every act of theirs cannot please God. Yet, neglecting good acts is more sinful and displeasing to God.

The best definition of sin will accommodate this threefold defectiveness in unregenerate behavior: (1) a false standard (normative), (2) a false goal (situational), and (3) a false motive (existential). The Westminster catechisms focus on the first (normative) definition of sin. But the situational and existential perspectives remind us that ethical behavior is not just a response to commands, but commitment to a historical program (the kingdom of God) and a personal relationship with Christ.

Our life is not only a life of obeying commands, but is also a journey towards God's kingdom, seeking to bring glory to him. And the existential perspective indicates that we are in a relationship of faith and love with our precious Savior. This triperspectival understanding of sin helps us to understand that sin is a condition of the human heart and affects all areas of our lives.

The fall did not begin with Eve's eating the fruit, but with her inner intention to eat the fruit. Jesus repeatedly emphasizes in the Sermon on the Mount, God's commandments are not merely about externals. The commands about murder and adultery not only forbid them, but forbids the anger and lust that lead to them.

So, sin is a radical disruption in the core of our being. In sin, we turn from God's good commandments, his kingdom and glory, faith, and love. It's irrational. Why would anyone turn from joy and life and embrace death and misery?

7.8.4.3. The Origin of Sin

Sin is not an aspect of man's created nature, and not simply part of what we are. Rather, it's the disruption of a personal relationship, which in turn began in a series of events. The origin of sin in man began with the fall of man. Before that, it began in the angelic realm.

In the fall of man, Satan begins by questioning God's word. Such questioning is arguably the root of all sin. Sinners turn from considering God's word to following their senses, and using these as justification for disobeying God. Sin is an attempt to overturn the order of creation. Eve submits to an animal, Adam submits to his wife, and both of them claim to be judges of God's behavior.

7.8.4.4. The Effects of the Fall

Sin did not end with the Fall. The effects of the fall on the human race can be summarized in three ways: Guilt, punishment, and Corruption.

1) Guilt

Scripture teaches us that we are guilty of Adam's sin. We have inherited it, though we only bear the guilt of our own sin.

Romans 5:12 - 19 - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.
14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.
15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.
18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Adam's sin led to our sinful status before God. One might object that this is not fair. Consider the following:

a) We never have the right to charge God with unfairness, for he has chosen not to provide us with a justification for his actions.
b) Whether or not we are implicated in Adam's sin, we are certainly guilty of many sins that are indisputably our own.
c) If we had been in Adam's place, we would have most likely sinned as he did.
d) Human life always has a corporate dimension. What we do has consequences on others.
e) If we object to God's act of condemning us in Adam, we should equally object to his justifying us in Christ.

2) Punishment

Romans 5:12 says that "death spread to all men because all sinned." Ultimately that death will be an eternal separation from God if God's grace does not intervene. Creation itself experiences effects of man's fall.

The sin of humans has led to a twisting of the whole universe that only redemption of human sin can set right. This cosmic disruption is an index of the seriousness of human sin.

3) Corruption

The third consequence of the first sin is its impact on the moral character of Adam's descendants. Adam's sin begets more sin. None of our strivings will keep us from sinning. This continuing sin is a heart condition. Our hearts are desperately sick. We were dead, and the dead cannot get up and walk around. So, we should conclude that sinful man cannot do anything good in God's sight.

Isaiah 64:6 -

We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

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.

Titus 1:15 - To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

1 Corinthians 2:14 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

These passages present the sin of the human race in extreme terms. There is nothing here to give us any hope that we can achieve anything good, let alone save ourselves from sin. Sin pervades our existence.

But is it really true that there is “no good in us”? We see many people around us who have no interest in God, but who appear to be kind, gentle, generous, indeed to be better people than many who trust in Christ. This is sometimes called the problem of the virtuous pagan. There are several ways of responding to it.

1) Previously, I defined moral goodness in a threeful way. A morally good work is one that is in accord with God’s law, seeking God’s glory, and motivated by love and faith. A sinful act is one that lacks one or more of these aspects. Unbelievers sometimes appear to manifest one or more of these criteria, but the threefold criterion shows how painfully difficult it is for anyone to perform a good work, and how precarious it is to claim that anyone is good, whether ourselves or others.
2) It is possible to perform an act that is good for society, at least at a surface level, without being good in the triperspectival way just noted. This is civic righteousness, rather than moral goodness. Partial moral goodness is not enough to please God.
3) Although scripture says that evil attaches to our deepest dispositions and to everything we think, say and do, it does not teach that man is “as evil as he can be”. The Bible recognizes various degrees of sin. Any degree is sufficient to bring condemnation. The fact that there are different degrees is one fact that lies behind our perception that some people are good apart from grace.
4) There is also common grace, which is the benefits that God gives to those who are his enemies. Among those benefits is the restraint of sin. God does prevent people from being as bad as they can be.

So Scripture’s extreme language about the sinfulness of human beings must be qualified by these considerations. Still, that language must be taken seriously. We are dead in sin, even our best deeds are filthy rags, and there is none righteous. This deadness pertains to every aspect of life.

Calvinists often describe the extent of sin as total depravity. But, this can be easily misunderstood to suggest that man is “as bad as he can be”. This concept is best expressed by Romans 8:8: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” No matter how relatively good a person is, he will never please God. Seizing on that, Calvinists prefer the phrase “total inability”. We cannot save ourselves from God’s wrath. We cannot come to God out of our own strength or resources.

John 6:44 - No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him

7.8.4.5. Temptation and Sin

We are tempted by Satan, others, or our own lusts. Temptation “gives birth to sin”, but it is not itself sin. These temptations fall into 3 categories: The world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world embraces flesh. 1 John 2:16 - For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

7.8.4.6. Are Believers Totally Depraved?

While we are unworthy, we are no longer totally depraved. God’s grace prevails over sin. The Westminster Confession seems to describe absolute depravity, which means that man is as bad as he can be, not total depravity. Although later in the confession there are some qualifications that describe good works done by unregenerate men.

The confession goes on to say that while the unregenerate can do good works, these works are never pleasing to God. But, what of the regenerate? This corruption of nature, during this life, does remain in those who are regenerated. But, Christ not only pardoned our sin, he “mortified” it - that is He put it to death.

How can sin be mortified while our “truly sinful” corruption continues? Our good works coming from us are still not pleasing to God, because they are defiled. But, the good works that proceed from God’s Spirit are good. So, we as human beings are not changed by regeneration. What we do as human beings is still totally depraved. But the works that God does through the regenerate are “good”.

The righteousness the regenerate has is due to God's justification - it is imputed to us. It refers to our legal standing, not our personal holiness. However, there is another imputation that takes place, in the sphere of sanctification. Just as God sees us as justified in Christ, he sees our works through Christ's justification. Our goodness is in Christ and not in ourselves.

This teaching does not encourage us to expect much of ourselves or any other believer by the way of practical goodness. We are being sanctified, but that causes a continual and irreconcilable war between our flesh and the Spirit. The good news is that ground is slowly being gained all the time by the Spirit, and so we grow in grace. The corruption that remains in us is constantly weakened by God's grace.

The Westminster confession makes these assertions:

1) Humans have original corruption through the Fall. We are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.
2) From that corruption comes all our individual transgressions.
3) Unregenerate people do nothing good. The apparently good things they do are actually evil, because they lack the proper goal, standard, and motive.
4) The regenerate retain their original corruption. What it is and what it does are both sin.
5) Our best works cannot justify ourselves before God.
6) Yet God rewards our good works for the sake of Christ, though they are imperfect.
7) God also creates in his elect a new heart and spirit, enabling us to "practice true holiness", even practicing holiness in the fear of God.
8) Through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome.

The final word about the believer is not corruption, but overcoming.

Romans 6:14 - For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Believers are not totally depraved. They can say no to sin and can successfully resist the devil. We have victory over corruption through obedience to God's commands. We need to be careful of some of the traditional "prayers of confession", in which they say things such as "there is no health in us". That's not true. Jesus has made us to be his saints, servants, and children. Our flesh has been crucified in him. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but now are alive in Christ.

7.8.5. Chapter 40: Calling

The list of blessings are calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance and glorification. These are often called the application of redemption. In this, Jesus brings the blessings of salvation to individuals. Redemption was accomplished at the cross, once for all. But the blessings of redemption must then be applied to each individual believer. God calls each of us to Christ, who then regenerates us, converts us, etc. Although the atoning work of Christ is complete, God has much to do in and for each one of us (a major way being through the church body).

Salvation begins in God's eternal decree, the normative perspective is accomplished through Jesus' atonement in history, and is applied by the Spirit to each of us.

Ephesians 1: 4, 7, 13 - 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

When were we saved? (1) Before the foundation of the world, (2) on the cross of Calvary, and (3) when we came to believe in Christ.

7.8.5.1. The Ordo Salutis

Many theologians attempt to come up with an order of salvation. It's sometimes based on:

Romans 8:29 - 30 - For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The issue is that Scripture doesn't emphasize an order. And this is further complicated by the fact that there are different kinds of order (such as temporal, causal, conditional and pedagogical). However, it is useful to talk about the terms and their relationships.

7.8.5.2. Perspectives on the Application of Redemption

In chapter 36, I described the triperspective major effects of the fall (which were guilt, punishment and corruption). The application of redemption deals with these three aspects of sin (Justification, Adoption and Regeneration).

In justification, God deals with our guilt and accounts us righteous for the sake of Christ. In adoption, God provides us with a new environment, a new family. In regeneration, conversion and sanctification, God deals with us inwardly, giving us new hearts. As we grow in grace, we gain more and more the ability to say no to sin.

7.8.5.3. Effectual Calling

Calling is the efficacious summon on the part of God, in accordance and in pursuance of his eternal purpose in Jesus, addressed to the sinner dead in trespasses and sins, and that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and salvation; immutable in its character by reason of purpose from which it proceeds and the bond it effects.

Verses about calling include Romans 8:28 - 30, Romans 1:6 - 7; Romans 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9, 24, 26; 1 Corinthians 7:18; Galatians 1:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1 - 2; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:10. Calling is a sovereign act of God and does not drive in definition from any activity on our part, such as faith, repentance or conversion. We cannot resist it.

Sovereign election is the first step, not the final step. Subsequent to this is effectual calling, in which God summons us into salvation, the kingdom, holiness, freedom, hope, light, patient endurance and eternal life. This calling is high, holy and heavenly, and calls us into fellowship with Christ. So in the life of a believer, God acts first, before we offer him any response, but his act calls forth from us a godly response.

7.8.5.4. Application of God’s Call

The term “call” in Scripture does not always refer to effectual calling as such. There are additional callings, such as calls to what roles to play in the fellowship of Christ, vocational calling, or the general gospel call to everyone (Matt. 22:14 - many are called, but few are chosen”).

7.8.6. Chapter 41: Regeneration and Conversion - Subjective Salvation

Effectual calling is the first event of this application of redemption (ordo salutis). The second event is regeneration, or new birth. Regeneration is the first effect of effectual calling. It is a sovereign act of God, beginning a new spiritual life in us.

How do you know whether someone is born again? It's not a visible event. It is the work of the Spirit - like the blowing of the wind. You don't see it and don't know where it comes from, but you can see the results. Some noticeable effects are a life that grows to resist temptation, one that grows in love, and in faith.

Regeneration usually occurs when we hear the gospel. There is, however, a distinction between regeneration as it appears in various passages. 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18 show that regeneration comes through a faithful appropriation of the Word of God. While in John 3 and other passages, regeneration clearly precedes and causes any such faithful hearing of God's Word. This ambiguity of two senses of regeneration shows a weakness in the concept of ordo salutis.

Regeneration confers on the elect person a desire to live a holy and righteous life.

8. My Response

Before I respond to Calvinist theology, I will give you my summary of what I think it states. If you detect any misrepresentations, please email the author at brucehartman123@gmail.com. I promise to carefully consider the objections, and make changes to this thesis based on those considerations.

8.1. My Summary of Calvinisitic Theology

First of all, we need to be aware that everybody (even those who agree with and know Reformed theology) doesn't have the same view of what Reformed doctrine is. In fact, there are whole different denominations who are Reformed, but have their own flavor of Reformed teaching. In my case, I am going to treat Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology and John Frame's Systematic Theology works as the gold standard for modern Calvinistic thought (and I'm probably right to do so) - and I will base my response on their works. Their works should cover and reflect everything Calvin claimed in his writings and various confessions since then.

You can't talk about Reformed theology without first talking about:

8.1.1. Reformed view of God's Sovereignty

I think it would be fair to say that every Christian says that God is sovereign, but they have different views of **how** God is sovereign. This is important, because there's a lot of (I believe unwarranted) accusations from people who subscribe to one viewpoint that people from an opposing viewpoint don't take God's sovereignty seriously enough (or they would share their viewpoint).

I put the various views of how God is sovereign on a continuum (although there's flavors all over the map). On the left side of the continuum is the view that God controls, runs and prescribes absolutely everything, and that humans have no control whatsoever (this would be a form of meticulous providence). I think it would be fair to say this is the view of "hyper-Calvinists".

On the right side of the continuum is the view that God made everything, but He doesn't have anything to do with His creation or humans anymore. I don't think any serious Bible believing Christian has this view. But, I think I would be right in saying that people who hold the Open Theology view would lean in this direction.

In the middle of the continuum would be the Arminian view that God created the world and gave it over to humans to be sovereign over, but does intervene from time to time.

In this case, the middle of the continuum does not necessarily reflect the "moderate" or correct view. There are plenty of truths that lie on an extreme end of the continuum of what people think. Arminians say that it's up to us if we want to follow God or not. It's up to us to make this world good. It's up to us to not sin. We have complete libertarian free will.

Modern Calvinists (in my view) reside closer to the left end of the continuum (somewhere between hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism). They insist that God is absolutely sovereign over all conceivable areas, but that humans do make free-will decisions that are important and have effects. This is called compatibleist free will, which means that our free choices are not free from God's sovereignty.

Here are some thoughts from Grudem and Frame that cover this view:

- All events in creation are determined by God. He decrees everything before the beginning of the world.
- God's providence is efficacious, which means that it always accomplishes its purpose. Even if it looks like defeat, every apparent defeat actually makes God's eventual victory all the more glorious.
- God exercises such efficacious control over everything that happens in the world, in accordance with his universal covenant.
- God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them (preservation); (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their actions (concurrence); and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes (government).
- God causes all things that happen, but he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices that have real and eternal results for which we are held accountable.
- God controls the course of each human life.
- All "random" events are actually caused by God.
- God does not do evil, but he brings about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures. But, He is never to be blamed for evil.
- Human responsibility and freedom are genuine and important. But we must face the face that our decisions are not independent of God, and therefore our definition of freedom must be, somehow, consistent with God's sovereignty over the human will.
- It's important to see that God does in fact bring about the sinful behavior of human beings, whatever problems that may create in our understanding.
- If saving faith is a gift of God, then the lack of saving faith, sinful unbelief, comes from God's withholding of that blessing.
- We are responsible, answerable to God, for our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. Everything we do and are brings God's commendation or condemnation.

8.1.2. Total Depravity

The Reformed view of God's Sovereignty leads directly and incontrovertibly to the TULIP principle. Since God is in control of everything, including our free decisions, He is also in control of whether we will "choose" Him.

Total Depravity is misunderstood by most people. It is not just about our sin nature (but is related), and it is not about how evil we are (even though that's related too). It's better understood as Total Inability. Without God performing a certain direct act in us

(regeneration), we do not have the ability to turn towards Him, or even desire His salvation. Our corrupt human nature hates God and everything about Him, and will never willingly submit to His will.

This leads to the idea that because we never desire Him or have anything good in us, God's election cannot be based on anything we have done, or anything that is in us.

Here are some things Grudem and Frame say about this:

- God's work of election means that God decided to choose us to be saved before the foundation of the world. This didn't apply salvation at that time, since Christ had not yet died for us. It is the first step in the process of God bringing salvation to us individually.
- Election is an act of God before the creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.
- Moral freedom is the freedom to do good. Scripture teaches that Adam's fall took away our moral freedom so that apart from grace we "cannot" please God.
- Scripture teaches that character does indeed constrain our decisions. That, and the fact that God himself controls the free decisions of man eliminates libertarian free choice.

8.1.3. The Other 4 Points of Calvinism

If one understands what Total Depravity is, the other 4 points fall into place and are incontrovertible.

Because we have total inability, we must be (U) Unconditionally Elected, because we do not have anything within us that would want or merit God's favor.

Since God is in charge, and we are not, and He always accomplishes what He plans, (L) Limited Atonement must be true. If God calls us, He will regenerate us and He will make atonement for us. For those He doesn't call, He doesn't make atonement for, otherwise, they would respond.

Since we have no ability, when God calls us, we cannot resist. This is (I) Irresistible Grace. Our response to God's calling is 100% in God's hands.

Since we don't have any ability to respond to God's calling, and it's all up to Him. Those God calls He keeps - otherwise they wouldn't have been called. This is called (P) Preservation of the Saints. God doesn't just elect someone from before the beginning of the world to let them slip through His fingers. He keeps all He elects.

8.2. My Specific Objections to Calvinisitic Theology

Calvinistic / Reformed theology is well thought out. It carefully uses Scripture to back up its assertions. Furthermore, there are a lot of positive teachings that are truly helpful to living a Christian life and having a right understanding of God. In fact, most Christians agree with the majority of assertions from Calvinistic theology. However, there are some assertions (that I will list) that I think are overstated. It's not that they are definitely incorrect. It's more that they are probably not correct (and in some cases, more probably incorrect).

I'm not the only one who thinks that there are several probably incorrect assertions in Calvinistic theology. There is a large body of smart, Christ-centered people who also think that. This is all normal. There is little disagreement on the Gospel, but there is a lot of disagreement (and various schools of thought) on a lot of topics in the Bible. My mantra is to assert the Gospel, and hold loosely any area in which there is disagreement among Godly people.

Finally, I think I'm not being ungenerous by saying that the whole of Reformed theology, while being a decent work, is still created by men who are as ignorant and dumb as we humans are. While they have tried to be careful and thorough, and have gone through many peer reviews, they have also failed to convince a large percentage of people of (all) their position(s). This is concerning to me by itself. I assume that if 50% of smart (relative to humans), trained people disagree with an assertion that I make, I'm probably not correct. I may fail to be convinced by counter-arguments and still have an opinion that my assertion is probably correct. However, I am not going to hold onto it. That would be a mistake. From what I see and read, many Calvinists have made this mistake.

Before I get into specific objections, I want to respond to one common assertion I've heard from people who ascribe to Calvinism. The assertion is, "I believe in Calvinism because the Bible clearly teaches it". My response is that the Bible does not necessarily teach it. It's just one reading of the Bible, and not the only one. The majority of this document is my attempt at covering every single scripture passage even tangentially

related to Calvinism. In all cases, I have listed both the Calvinist viewpoint and all other reasonable viewpoints. (Almost) All of those scripture passages can be read in multiple ways to either support the assertions of Calvinism, or not. The objections to the Calvinistic interpretation of almost all the Bible passages are both real and reasonable (in my opinion). After going through all the passages, I don't believe that the case for (or against) Calvinism is iron-clad by any means.

For those Scripture passages that you think are proof-texts for or against Calvinism, please read that analysis of the passage in this document. Each passage has alternative ways to view the passage and things may not be as clear as one would think. Finally, please let me know if I missed any passages that you think are important to this conversation.

Like I said above, everything starts with our view of God's sovereignty, and what it means.

8.2.1. How is God Sovereign?

Reformed theology is correct in stating that God is absolutely sovereign. But, what does that mean? I don't think the answer to that is clear. Does God "ordain", or plan everything like Reformers teach, or do things happen in the world that are outside His plan (but not knowledge)?

In some instances, Calvinists use poetry scripture (and references to it) to try to prove that God exercises iron-clad control over everything. The problem with this is that poetry requires us to walk a journey with the poet. The last thing poetry is trying to accomplish is to try to be factually correct in each stanza. Instead, poetry is a tool that uses language and imagery to get us to go beyond intellectual understanding to a heart understanding of truth. It uses hyperbole all over the place. It requires a completely different method of analysis. Unfortunately, not many Westerners have the ability to do the kind of analysis required (blame the hyper-focus on STEM).

If one doesn't get that, they will not understand the Psalms or any of the poetry (which is 40-50% of the Bible). Is the Lord actually my physical shepherd? Am I actually a sheep? Or, is the image of the shepherd a good way of describing God's relationship to me? Is the poet attempting to give us a course on deer panting for water - is that a truth that the poet is trying to communicate? Does God actually control every single lightning strike? All of this imagery are building blocks to communicate truths that are mostly understandable on an emotional level - and not a series of facts that we can individually

apply to a theological framework. The psalms are useful and essential for communicating God's truth, but that truth is in the overall meaning of the entire poem, and not in the individual building block verses. It's really hard for many Western Bible readers to understand this, and when we don't, it leads to all kinds of wrong conclusions.

Anyway, we all agree that God is absolutely sovereign. But what does that mean? Furthermore, I think that Reformers (and almost everyone else) are absolutely correct in asserting that God has an unshakable plan for His creation that He is actively bringing to fruition over time. I think the Bible clearly teaches this much. My question is how much of this plan includes every happenstance? (For commentary on non-poetic Calvinist proof texts, see the sections on Romans 9, Ephesians 1 and Isaiah 46:10).

8.2.1.1. Objection #1- Control

This is the first area in which I believe that Calvinistic theology oversteps. Reformed theology teaches that God's ultimate plan includes every happenstance on earth. Once again, I don't say for sure that that's wrong. I just think that it is a mystery to us and we shouldn't make conclusions. I think it's highly likely that most happenstance on earth has no relation to God's plan. God is aware of everything that happens, but He may not have anything to do with what I chose to have for breakfast.

I propose that it's entirely likely that God has granted decision making powers (i.e. sovereignty) to His imagers, to such a point that those images will make decisions that go against what God desires. In fact, I hypothesize that most of the happenings on earth are not planned by God, ordained by God, originated by God, and are not part of God's will - or even, part of God's plan (although part of His knowledge). What I had for breakfast may not have anything to do with God's ultimate plan for us.

8.2.1.2. Objection #2 - How many wills?

This leads to the second potential objection I have with Calvinistic theology - The Two Wills of God. For Calvinism to work, God must have two wills - a secret/decretive will and a revealed will. The revealed will contains all God's commands to us. I got a decent description of His decretive will from https://learn.ligonier.org/devotionals/your-will-be-done:

“The Lord’s hidden, or decretive will, contains his secret decrees and foreordains all things. It is this will that results in the final manifestation of His mercy and justice, and thus brings Him His sovereign glory. This will can never be thwarted. This does not mean God is happy with every single event that occurs, for He hates sin. But the Lord is utterly transcendent, and from His perspective, His decrees paint a wonderful, God-glorifying picture even if we cannot yet see the entire, beautiful tapestry weaved by His hidden will. Mysteriously, God’s sovereignty over evil will further exalt and glorify Him on that final day.”

I have to confess, assuming my understanding is correct, I think this is the most nonsensical assertion made by Calvinists. Yet, it’s necessary for their explanation of the problem of evil. In Calvin’s view, God must ordain and control everything - even evil.

If my assertion above (that God ceded a certain amount of sovereignty to us) is correct, then evil is a natural consequence of giving control over to fallen humanity. The concept that we are in control and God is not (by His own act and will) is antithetical to Calvinism. Yet, I think it is a much better explanation (at least to me) at explaining the problem of evil, and how God is not responsible for evil, and we are. (I know, there are philosophical arguments about how knowingly allowing something is the same as making it happen - I just disagree with those arguments).

If my hypothesis is right, then God knowingly ceded some decision making power over to the human race, knowing that evil will happen. One important caveat: God will never let random evil interfere with His ultimate plan. In fact, as Reformed theology teaches, God uses evil to fulfill His ultimate plan. I hypothesize that God uses evil as a Judo expert redirects force. Instead of planning evil in the first place, God will instead redirect the intent of certain evil to bring His good into fruition. Did God point His finger to give someone cancer? Did He write it into His plan from the beginning? I don’t think that has to be the case at all. It’s just as easy to contend that God, knowing about the cancer, used an evil happenstance to bring about something good (such as bringing the cancer patient’s friend to Himself).

So what about things that are outside of man’s control? Is a lightning strike random, or did God direct it? This brings us to:

8.2.1.3. Objection #3 - Nobody’s Fault

God certainly (at least) set up the systems that produce lightning and weather, etc. But, does He direct every lightning strike, every tornado, etc.? From everything I’ve read,

Reformed theology teaches that He does. Certainly, they say the Bible teaches this (see my comments on how to read poetry).

I propose that it's entirely likely that there is a category of things that's outside of everyone's (direct) control - even God's. Certainly, humans can't control the weather. Of course, God can (and most likely does in at least rare cases), and He's well aware of each weather event and its effects. But I propose that there is no need for Him to control (or even ordain) each weather event. It's entirely possible that God's standard operating procedure is to just let things happen, and only intervene in circumstances to fulfill His ultimate plan. So, God is aware that Charlie would die of a lightning strike on October 8, 2013 - but that doesn't mean that He directed/ordained it at all.

If my objection is true, from what I read, this concept is extremely unsettling to people who have the Reformed understanding. They would say, "Then, God is not in control! Anything can happen!". I say, "Not so!". I think that God can and often does intervene in our lives - especially in the lives of us who believe. It's entirely possible that He actively keeps us safe from random events - at least until He decides not to intervene - which is also part of His plan. Especially for those who are in Him, it's clear that He does intervene in randomness, according to His plan, to bring about His purposes.

If my hypothesis is correct, it would work like this: 1. God knows about a random event before the earth was created (because He allows for random events). 2. God decides then to just let it happen, or whether to intervene. 3. God decides whether He wants to weave the event (or some of its results) into His plan or not.

I recognize that this hypothesis is entirely unacceptable to Calvinists. To them, it looks like God is just reacting to things, instead of being in charge of things. However, I propose that this could be the way God has set things up to work. He didn't have to though. The reason I propose it is because I think it has a lot more explanatory power towards the problem with evil. I just don't buy that God is an active party in, or is the ordainer of evil. I think it's much more likely that evil comes from outside of God (which is an allowance He purposely made).

One important caveat and this gets confusing: God is ultimately responsible for everything, in that He allows it. I recognize the philosophical contention that there isn't a difference between knowingly allowing things and doing them yourself. I just don't agree that they are the same thing. Although, I do agree that God does hold some responsibility for allowing evil, but not at all in the same way as if He were the ordainer of evil.

8.2.2. Objections to TULIP

I contend that if you buy into the Calvinist view of how God is sovereign, TULIP is a necessary fallout from that. Of course, I don't necessarily buy it.

Let's address Total Depravity first. I totally agree (as well as virtually all Christ followers) that we have no ability to be clean before God. We have no way to be justified before Him. There's nothing we can do to save ourselves from God's justified wrath. However, the concept of Total Depravity / Total Inability goes well beyond that. The concept of Total Depravity says not only the above, but that there is no chance that we will have any desire to reunite with the Creator that we separated from. We have no ability to respond positively to God's general call in any way. This leads to . . .

8.2.2.1. Objection #4 - Do we Hate God?

We are still made in God's image. All people are His imagers. It's true that we are broken and sinful, but we still have a little of God's light within us (general revelation). There are many unsaved who do noble and right acts that (I believe) please God. But, God is absolutely Holy. He cannot abide with any kind of impurity. That's why we need Jesus' act on the cross to be made Holy. I think that every human being has a part of them that longs to reunite with the creator, and that given the opportunity, some would come to God for salvation, even though it has to be on His terms.

The question is are we willing to put aside our own rights, will, etc. to be subsumed by God's Holy Spirit? From what I've read, Calvinists would say absolutely not! I don't necessarily agree. I think that like the prodigal son, we all can come to the end of our rope, where we are just tired of ourselves. In those moments, we desire a God that can save us from ourselves. This leads to the next objection . . .

8.2.2.2. Objection #5 - Bragging rights

I agree with Calvinists that God chooses us from before creation to be in Him (and does not choose others). The Bible seems to be pretty clear on that. But, Calvinists go on from there to strongly declare that there cannot be anything in us that would make God choose us. If that were true, we would have merit (and bragging rights) over those God did not choose. This is called Unconditional Election (the U in TULIP).

I do agree that we don't have merit or bragging rights. I don't claim to know the criteria for why God chooses us before the beginning of the world, but I think it's very highly likely that God did have a criteria. Otherwise, He just picks at random, like a cosmic eenie meenie miny moe. I think that one possible criteria could be that He picks people who humble themselves before Him out of desperation because they have come to the end of their rope. I also think that coming to the end of our rope and becoming desperate is not a bragging right. He's the one who saved us. He's the one who had mercy on us. I think it's likely that He chooses those who would want to be with Him (even under His terms) if they could.

A Reformed person might respond that all of that is correct. People are brought low so that they respond to God - but that is all God doing that. I agree that it's likely that God does manipulate circumstances to get the attention of His chosen at the right time. The difference between that and what I'm suggesting is that I'm suggesting that every person has the ability to look towards God and desire reconciliation. Even though God knows who this will be, and even set up circumstances to bring them to that point, it's still up to the individual to humble themselves before God and desire His Lordship in their lives. There's a real distinction between the possibility I'm suggesting and what Calvinism says. This leads to another objection . . .

8.2.2.3. Objection #6 - Dead Men Tell Nothing

I've read the Calvinist's metaphor of the dead man's inability. The Bible clearly labels people who don't have the Holy Spirit residing in them as dead. They are separated from Jesus', the wellspring of eternal life. Calvinists extend this metaphor to explain why we are totally unable to respond to any call from God unless we are first regenerated / brought back to life. It's true that we cannot rise up to true life without first being filled with Jesus' life.

My problem with the extension of the metaphor is that all humans have a form of temporary life on this earth that God has given all of us. We walk around, talk to each other, make moral choices, etc. I think it's highly likely that we can also respond to God's general call on this earth. See the commentary on Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 3:9 - 31. Which brings up another objection . . .

8.2.2.4. Objection #7 - How many Calls?

Just like the two wills of God hypothesis, to deal with the whole of the Bible through the Calvinistic lens, Calvinists have come up with the two calls of God concept. Calvinists do believe that God generally calls people (there's too many examples in the Bible to deny this), but that because we are dead we don't have the ability to respond, unless God makes a specific call to us personally. Before (or at the same time) God specifically calls us, He must regenerate us, and when He does, we will irresistibly answer God's call.

It seems to me that throughout the Bible, God makes general calls to people that He expects them to answer. I propose that one of Jesus' acts on the cross was to give everyone the ability to respond. He cleared the way for all to reunite with God. If that's true, then there is only one call - a general call to repentance that we not only are expected to answer, but that we have been universally granted the ability to answer. If I'm correct, this breaks the concept of Total Depravity / Total Inability as I understand it.

Let me add one important thing that is more in line with Calvinism. God knows from the beginning who will answer His general call. Who answers His call is written into His eternal plan, and because of that, God's plan includes quite a bit of happenstance in the elect person's life. For example, He might direct us to get the right career and the right job so that we might speak to certain people who are also those He has chosen, but have not responded yet.

I admit that this is confusing whether you subscribe to Calvinist theology or not. Did God plan it all from the beginning or not? Calvinists attempt to simplify this part by saying He did. The problem with this is it leaves out of the equation God granting sovereignty to us, and the resultant mess it created. If I believed that God planned everything, I would be very confused about why we are able to mess up this world so badly. I suggest a hybrid approach. God sometimes just plans things without any input from us. But, I also suggest that God sometimes uses future happenstance to construct His plan from the beginning. This leads to another objection . . .

8.2.2.5. Objection #8 - Under Every Obligation?

Calvinist theology states that since God has elected us from the beginning, and that His election has nothing to do with what the person's thoughts or actions are, when He

makes the specific call to His elect, they cannot resist the call. He regenerates them first, so that they will naturally be drawn towards Him. Therefore, His direct call is irresistible (Irresistible Grace - the I in TULIP). See John 6:37 - 40, 44 - 47.

I think it makes more sense that there is one call that we are free to accept or reject. In fact, I contend that the choice to respond to God's call is vital. On earth we have the choice to live with or without God, walk in His ways or not. In eternity, we will not have the choice to live without God. We will not have the choice to do anything else but what He commands (which is what we will want, after what we saw in this world). And, this is normal and natural whenever you face the one who is completely Holy. Of course, everything has to be His way - because His way is the only correct way.

Bear with me a second here, and take this part with a grain of salt. If I'm correct, this is likely very important. I contend that the whole point of our lives here on earth is to give us the choice of what we want for after we die - to live under God's iron, no-exceptions rule (which I'm excited about), or to not. I think that God doesn't force that decision on us because that would be out of character for Him. I propose that He wants the kind of person in His kingdom that (deeply) desires the same things He does (i.e. His iron will). I could (and would like to) go on about this much more, but I feel compelled to leave it for now. However, if I'm correct, it explains what I think is an important character trait of God - His gentlemanlyness, for lack of a better word. He woos His bride, He doesn't just take her.

8.2.2.6. Objection #9 - This Doesn't Apply to You!

Calvinist theologians claim that Jesus' atonement is limited to only those He has chosen (Limited Atonement, the L in TULIP). This is even controversial in Reformed circles. However, if you truly believe in Total Depravity and God's "total" providence, it once again makes perfect sense. According to Reformed theologians, when God sets out to do something He succeeds. When Jesus died on the cross to save people, He would not fail at saving anyone He died for. All He dies for is saved and will come to Him.

The issue with this is that the Bible says in several places that Jesus died for all. The common Reformed counter-point is to say that "all" means all the elect. As much of a stretch that is, what does one do with this verse: 1 Timothy 4:10 - "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all

people, especially of those who believe.”. I think this suggests two steps to complete salvation: Jesus died for all, but only some complete it by putting their faith in him.

My reading of the Bible makes me think that when Jesus died for all, He actually took away everyone’s sins. Now, everyone has the opportunity to reunite with God - if they want to. I think that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is to reject this kind offer (see Mark 3:28 - 30). And, lastly, my final objection . . .

8.2.2.7. Objection #10 - No Refunds!

If one believes in Reformed theology, Preservation of the Saints (the P in TULIP) makes perfect sense. If God is responsible for irresistibly calling us in the first place, He would naturally be responsible for keeping us.

What do you do with Hebrews 6:4 - 6 - “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”?

Of course, there are a few different views of what this is saying, and this objection is weaker in my mind than the others. However, if I’m right to think that just as God is a gentleman in wooing His bride, He is a gentleman in keeping His bride. Yes, He will do everything possible to correct and woo His bride, but if we really decide in the end that we don’t want to be with Him, I don’t think He’s going to override what we truly want.

8.2.3. Anticipating Counter-Objections

8.2.3.1. Bible References?

“Bruce, this is fine and all, but where are the Bible references to back up your point?”

Firstly, half of this document contains all the Bible references and the analysis of them. It’s vital to look at all the Bible verses pertaining to a subject to get the whole picture. I believe that I have done that in that section. If you want to see what the Bible says and the various interpretations of those references, search for it and you will find it. (If you don’t find a Bible reference you would expect, please let me know).

Finally, everyone sprinkles Bible verses in with whatever their point is, and it's mostly useless. I could easily cherry pick all kinds of Bible verses to make my points sound legitimate, but it doesn't really help anyone in the end. The Bible has an overall theme and message that cherry picking muddies. Doing this shouldn't lend credibility to anybody. That is not to say that we shouldn't bring up specific Bible passages to analyze - but we should be humble enough to understand that our reading of that passage could be the wrong reading.

8.2.3.2. Philosophize Schilosophize

"Bruce, your objections are mostly philosophical instead of logical and exegetical".

Remember 400 pages ago at the beginning of the document, I said that philosophical analysis of ideas is very important. So, is logical analysis of course. I've done all the logical analysis of scripture in the section that lists the scriptures. Reading over it, the conclusion that I reach is that certain aspects of Calvinist Theology are inconclusive. Now that we've done our best to logic things out, it's time for a philosophical analysis. What does it all mean?

Remember what I said earlier about poetry. The Bible is made of 40-50% poetry. Poetry defies logical analysis and the people who try to apply it to poetry. Poetry is exclusively the domain of philosophy. What I have attempted to do is soak all of the pertinent scripture on the topic in (as well as use all of scripture that I've soaked in over a lifetime) to respond to ideas in a philosophical manner. I believe it's important and vital to do so when the subject matter requires it - and this topic definitely requires it. Is philosophical analysis imprecise? Absolutely! And it's important, but requires humility and an open mind to people with other ideas to be successful.

8.2.3.3. Weak God?

"Bruce, Reformed theology paints a picture of a strong, sovereign God. You tend to give a lot of power to His creation, which paints a picture of a weak God."

I actually agree that God is almighty and completely sovereign in everything. On the macro-scale (that is executing His ultimate plan), He is in control of it all. If God decides to grant some sovereignty over to His imagers, that's both His prerogative and His choice. This doesn't weaken God at all, but shows how He is even stronger than we can imagine. No matter how far we can try to upset His plan, He will redeem it both while we are "upsetting" it, and in the end. In the end, we will see without a shadow of a doubt,

through personal experience, that God should be in control and that we shouldn't. (I propose that learning this lesson is one of the major purposes for our lives here on earth).

8.2.3.4. Rejecting Tradition?

"Bruce, there are a ton of writers throughout history that have very carefully thought this out. Do you think you are smarter than them?" I'll also add this: "Bruce, these people are trained theologians who have put a huge number of hours researching this, thinking about it and reading multiple views on it. You don't. You haven't. How do you think that you have anything to add?"

Humans are humans. I acknowledge what experts say and treat it seriously. However, I don't just buy what anyone says automatically. We should all scrutinize what we are told. The fact that I'm putting in this much analysis into this subject is a testament to how much respect I give to the authors of Reformed theology.

Furthermore, it's our duties as Christ followers to correctly exegete the Bible to the best of our abilities. My goal is to be like the Bereans, who double checked with scripture what Paul told them. They didn't just buy it. They checked it, and were commended for it.

8.2.3.5. That Word Doesn't Mean What you Think it Does

"Bruce, I don't think Calvinists believe a lot of what you claim they do."

This is true. People that ascribe to Reformed theology (and most other bodies of thought) are all over the place. However, I have attempted to be very careful to represent Wayne Grudem's and John Frame's views accurately. I view them both to be the Gold Standard of modern Reformed theology. Furthermore, I attempted to bring up every objection I could think of to their works. Those objections are real objections. I'm almost entirely sure that they would recognize my objections as antithetical to their conclusions (and not say something like - "I didn't mean it the way you described it".).

8.2.3.6. Doing vs Allowing

“Bruce, you say that God allows evil but doesn’t do it Himself. There’s no difference between those two!”

This objection has some validity to it. I claim that it goes against God’s nature to ordain an evil act. Yet, I also claim that God specifically allows every evil act when He could easily prevent it. There are many who would say that there is no moral difference between these.

I think there’s a real difference between the two. In one case, God would be the one who wrote the evil in His plan. God is secretly delighted in the evil He planned because it will bring about His glory in the end. In the other case, God gave control/sovereignty over to humans before they had become capable of evil. Of course, He did this knowing that humans would bring evil into the world. And, when humans did bring evil into the world, He decided not to destroy us, or take back our responsibility over the world. Even knowing that evil was coming, and even though He chose not to destroy us or replace us, God is extremely sad at each evil act. In a way, it was never meant to be!

In the end, God decided to redeem humanity instead of destroying us, temporarily putting up with the evil, and in the end destroying evil forever. God can put up with evil for a time because of His redemption plan.

8.2.3.7. Why Do All this?

“Bruce, this is not very important. Most people don’t care, and it really doesn’t matter to the Gospel of all. Why are you writing all this?”

Two reasons: 1. I am curious about the topic and wanted to study it, as well as do a deep topical Bible study to learn more of what the Bible is trying to teach us in general. 2. One of my missions in life is to figure out which teachings we Christ followers need to hold tightly to and which ones we need to hold loosely. I’ve met a few people (and leaders) in my current church (2026) and my previous church that seems to hold pretty tightly to Reformed theology. My goal in this paper is to show that a few of the principles of Reformed theology are not things to hold tightly to. It’s OK to be a doubter of some aspects of Reformed theology.

8.2.4. Conclusion

I imagine that reading through all the objections, one would come to the conclusion that I am anti-Reformed theology. The opposite is true. I find that Reformed theology is very helpful in every single instance I've heard it represented from the pulpit, or from personal exhortations. Whenever I've heard a Reformed-leaning person say something about the Bible, I've always ended up agreeing with them. It takes quite a bit of targeted questioning from me before I can get someone to say something that I may not agree with. Even then, it's not that I disagree necessarily - it's more that I don't necessarily agree with the assertion.

I listed every single objection, or doubt, I had about the entirety of Reformed theology in ten points. Out of the couple of 2000 page books, I have a total of 10 objections. If I wrote a paper about the areas in which I agreed with Reformed theology, it would have had hundreds of points. I mostly agree with Reformed theology. There's just a few points in which I don't necessarily agree - although, I admit that they are notable. I would never be labeled a Reformer with the doubts I have.

As people respond to this (and hopefully, they do), I hope to add all objections that warrant a response here to the best of my ability. So, please email me at brucehartman123@gmail.com with your objections and responses.

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