

# **Tip-Toeing Through the TULIP:**

**A Biblical Perspective on Election**

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# Introduction

Has God from eternity past chosen certain to be saved to the exclusion of others? Is the reason that certain will be saved to the exclusion of others simply that God from eternity past has foreordained certain people to be saved and not others? Think about the absurdity of that accusation. Think, for a moment, about the terrible injustice with which the Calvinist charges God, that God would allow a person to be born into this world who is certain to spend eternity in everlasting anguish simply because God chose not to enable that person to come to faith in Christ! From my perspective, to state that this is the reality in which we exist is to charge God with a great injustice. Calvinism, specifically the doctrine of Unconditional Election, is the belief that God, from the foundations of the world, has marked out for salvation certain individuals to believe and be saved to the exclusion of all others.

The Calvinist arrives at this conclusion through wrongly systematizing many passages of Scripture that, on the surface, appear to be teaching this fatalistic approach to a relationship with God. There are many passages in the Bible that, at first glance, look like this is the teaching of the Bible. This interpretation, however, flies in the face of many other Scriptures that teach that God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Calvinism has long been considered the orthodox and enlightened position among conservative Christendom. Calvinism, for far too long, has been considered to be the position of the “sophisticated theologian.” Upwards of ninety percent of the conservative commentaries and doctrinal works written in the past 200 years have been written by Calvinists. So many otherwise

seemingly orthodox men are Calvinists. R. C. Sproul, C. H. Spurgeon, John MacArthur and J. I. Packer are just a few men who have a great deal of respect in the evangelical community who hold, or have held, to one degree or another, to the tenets of five point Calvinism.

Contrary to popular opinion, Calvinism is not within the pale of orthodoxy. On the contrary, Calvinism, at its core, sheds doubt on the assurance of the Gospel. In proclaiming the message of the cross, our goal is to get people to the place where they are assured that Christ really did intercede in their behalf on the cross for their sins. The “L” of the TULIP, the doctrine of Limited Atonement, teaches that Christ died only for the elect, a doctrine which effectively introduces doubt into the truth of the Gospel. The Calvinistic teaching that Christ died only for the elect suggests that He might not have died for you. Consequently, Calvinism introduces doubt concerning the very truth of which a person must be assured if that person is to pass from death unto life. Therefore, Calvinism is not just one of many acceptable systems within the pale of orthodoxy, it is a system that denies the message of the cross and, therefore, needs to be refuted by clearly systematizing Scripture.

Calvinism is more a philosophy of religion than it is systematic Bible teaching. When debating Calvinists, you will find that the discussion very quickly diverts away from a systematic discussion of Biblical contexts and very quickly devolves into a philosophical discussion of foreknowledge. The Calvinist assumes that he knows to what degree God has chosen or not chosen to allow His foreknowledge to interact with His salvific dealings with men. Moreover, it is on this basis that the Calvinist develops his statement of faith.

## **Part One: The TULIP**

Calvinism is quite often spoken of in terms of the acronym “**TULIP**.” The following is a brief description of what is meant by that acronym.

**Total Depravity:** Man is so depraved that he must be regenerated before he can believe. Total Depravity teaches that man cannot comprehend the way of grace until the Spirit gives him the ability to do so; that ability is received in the new birth. The Calvinist believes that, until a person is born again, he does not have the capacity to assimilate the truth of salvation.

**Unconditional Election:** That which determines whether or not a person will spend eternity in heaven or hell is a decree of God through which He, from the foundation of the world, determined which individuals were to be saved to the exclusion of others.

**Limited Atonement:** Since God knows that only certain would be saved, Jesus died for only those people.

**Irresistible Grace:** Since God, from eternity past, has determined who is to be saved, then those whom God has chosen will not be able to resist.

**Perseverance of the Saints:** Those whom God has chosen to be saved are those whom He is certain to glorify. Therefore, those who are saved are certain to progress upwardly in the direction of holiness. A person who is not experiencing growth has never been saved and, therefore, is not a believer.

I have quite often jokingly described myself as a zero-point Calvinist. I would disagree with every point of the TULIP and,

therefore, must declare myself to be a zero-point Calvinist. Let us now examine each of these points in greater detail and consider them from a biblical perspective.

## **Total Depravity: The “T” of the TULIP**

The “T” in TULIP stands for Total Depravity. Depravity means that man is totally corrupt in his thoughts, actions and ambitions. Depravity is the inability of a person to produce within himself the righteousness and integrity of God. It is also an inability to commune with God. We, as fallen beings, have no capacity for communion with God. We, as fallen beings, are possessed with, and are operating from, a frame of reference that, at its core, is diametrically opposed to the perfection of God’s character.

The Calvinist takes Total Depravity one step further to include the concept of total inability; that is, man is so depraved that he will not and cannot respond to the light that God has placed within his reach until God first regenerates that individual so that he can respond to the light. The Calvinist believes that God first regenerates the individual who, with this renewed heart, now begins to seek God.

Quite frankly, the term “total depravity” is a doctrine not worth debating. The term “depravity” does not appear in Scripture; it is rather pointless to center a core tenant of one’s faith upon a word that the Bible never uses. What the discussion of depravity is really about is this: To what degree does the sinfulness of man prevent that individual from comprehending the light of the gospel of Christ? Can a person who is not born again comprehend the gospel, believe it and, as a result of that belief, be regenerated? Or,

as the Calvinist teaches, is an individual first regenerated, and then as a result of that regenerated state, believe the gospel?

The following Scripture demonstrates that regeneration is the effect and not the cause of a person's believing:

Ephesians 1:13: In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Notice that the giving of the Holy Spirit, which is a fundamental element of the New Birth, is the result of, and not the cause of, believing. The same cause-and-effect relationship between believing and the new birth can be demonstrated in the context below:

Acts 15:7-11: And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

It is worthy to note that the Cornelius household's conversion experience, to which Peter here refers, is considered to be the

standard gentile conversion experience in the New Testament. That is to say, in the early church, when the question of gentile conversion to Christ was brought up, Peter uses the conversion of Cornelius's household as the standard experience. Once again, notice the order in conversion:

1. Hear
2. Believe
3. Giving of the Spirit

If we are to understand that the giving of the Holy Spirit is the core characteristic of the New Birth, then it follows that people are regenerated as result of believing.

Another argument of the Calvinist is that the Scriptures teach in Romans 3:11 that there is none who seeks after God. As a consequence, they say that man is totally passive in his arrival at faith. Actually, it could be argued that, according to Acts 17:27, God's manipulation of geopolitical boundaries is for the purpose of making it conducive for men to seek the Lord.

Acts 17:27: "that they might seek the Lord."

So, is there a contradiction between Acts 17:27 and Romans 3:11? No, not at all! A careful examination of the Greek word "seek" in both contexts will reveal that it is actually two different words. In Acts 17:27 the word "seek" is the Greek word "ζητεω" which means, "to seek in order that a person might find." In Romans 3:11, the word "seek" is the intensified version of the same word "Εκζητεω" which means, "to draw out knowledge (about God) in order that we might appreciate His character." So, while Acts 17 tells us that God intends for men to seek the Lord, Romans 3 tells us that men do not, in their unregenerate state, seek

to appreciate the character of God with a desire of having that character duplicated in their own souls. So, actually, there is really no contradiction between the two contexts in question.

Another argument that the Calvinist likes to use with reference to depravity is that, before a person is saved, there is no virtue in that person which would cause him to seek God. Actually, I would agree with that assertion. However, it is not personal virtue that drives a person to seek God but, rather, a desire for self-preservation. Quite frankly, there is no virtue in not wanting to go to hell. When I first started going to church as an unregenerate 16-year-old, I heard about hell and noticed that I was one of the only individuals in the congregation who did not know for sure he was not going there. Consequently, I was scared. From a selfish heart set on self-preservation, I began to seek to escape the threat of an uncertain and less-than-favorable eternal destiny. It was pure selfishness on my part that drove me to seek to be saved.

Another argument of the Calvinist with reference to depravity is taken from I Corinthians 2:14:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned

The Calvinist's argument from this passage is as follows: Since the natural man (a reference to the unregenerate, fallen frame of reference) cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, and since the unregenerate does not possess the enablements of the Spirit which accompanies the New Birth, then he cannot understand the Gospel until he is first regenerated.

In response to the above objection, it must be recognized that it is the purpose of God that only the believer understand the truths spoken of in this context. It is God's desire that only His children experience the transformative power of His truth. This can be seen in the following context:

1 Corinthians 2:6-14: However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

A careful consideration of the above context will demonstrate that Paul is not speaking of the content of the gospel message. On the contrary, he is speaking about truth meant to grow believers. He is speaking of truth that God has ordained for the glorification

of the believer (verse 7). God wants only believers in grace to experience the edifying, transforming, victory-giving power of transforming truth in order that the world may recognize that believing in grace makes a positive, eternal difference. It is the will of God to, in this world, glorify only His saints as people with wisdom and divine guidance in order that the transformative power of God will be evident in the believer. This wonderful distinction in the life of the believer is then used by the Holy Spirit as a primary source of conviction to the conscience of the yet-to-be converted.

It is in the conscience of those who have yet to believe that the struggle for eternal souls takes place. It is the human conscience that becomes convicted of a lack of positive virtue (John 8:9). It is in the human conscience in which the issues of right and wrong are weighed in the minds of the unregenerate as we can see in the following context.

Romans 2:14-15: for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*

While it true that man is fallen and, therefore, does not have the capacity to commune with God, even as a sinner, he is in possession of a conscience that can discern right from wrong. Because man has been created in God's moral image, even after the fall, there are still remnants of that image engraved upon His soul. Man, by virtue of the conscience, has a sense of right and wrong. Man's moral dilemma is that, because of a fallen moral

frame of reference, he does not have the power to perform divine good; he can only perform wrong. This truth serves as a foundation for evangelism. As the unbeliever recognizes the evidence of the presence of God in the life of the saints, he becomes accused by his own conscience of his own lack of righteousness. This accusation causes fear of judgment. When the sinner decides to pursue God's solution to this dilemma, his fear becomes the primary impetus to get saved. God uses this fear to train an unbelieving individual to the point of coming to grips with his own condemnation. When such a person has abandoned all hope in personal righteousness as the foundation of a relationship with God, the individual is ready to be confronted with the gift of righteousness which has, as its basis, the merits of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. When a person embraces Christ's substitutionary sacrifice as the only basis of an eternal relationship with God, then that person is born again.

There is nothing virtuous about not wanting to go to hell. The virtue is all with God, who, even while we were still sinners, sent Christ to die for us and, through His Holy Spirit, leads us to believe on Him.

The Calvinist states that, since the unregenerate do not have the capacity to respond to God, it is, therefore, necessary for God to first regenerate the soul. Then, and only then, can the individual begin to respond to God. However, the Scriptures contain many accounts of the unregenerate responding positively to the gospel and pre-faith information. For example, the Scriptures contain accounts of the non-saints falling under conviction of the Holy Spirit. We can see that in the following context:

John 8:7-10: So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without

sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

We see in the above context that the Scribes and Pharisees became convicted in their consciences. This conviction is not surprising since the Lord taught His disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring conviction to the hearts of the people of the world.

John 16:8,9: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me;"

The Calvinist has an incorrect view of the human conscience. His doctrine of Total Depravity incorrectly concludes that the human conscience cannot respond to God. Even though unregenerate man does not have the capacity to produce the righteousness of God, he can perceive the righteousness of God, fear the consequences of not possessing that righteousness, and, through that fear, seek to escape the consequences of his lack of personal righteousness.

The human conscience can also comprehend salvific truth; that is, truth which is necessary to lead a person to saving faith in Christ. This can be demonstrated from the following passage:

Acts 17:10-12: Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

Notice that, as a result of these unregenerate Bereans' consultation of the Old Testament Scriptures, they became persuaded of the message of Paul and exercised faith. Without the power of an indwelling Holy Spirit, without the divine enablements of the New Birth, these noble Bereans perceived the person and work of Christ and believed unto eternal life. This context alone should be enough to retire the Calvinist's faulty concept of total inability.

Actually, it is safe to say that the worship of the Old Testament saint was the combination of the Spirit of God's relating truth to the quickened conscience of the saint. This can be demonstrated in the following passage.

Hebrews 9:7-10: But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- *concerned* only with foods and drinks,

various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

As we read in verse 9, it was “according to the conscience”; that is, agreement with and rejoicing in the precepts of God took place in the human conscience. Old Testament saints rejoiced over the precepts of the law; the problem was, they could not consistently continue in them. The Old Testament saint did not have the supernatural enablements of the New Birth functioning in his soul to create communion with the Father. It is worthy to note that the word “conscience” does not once occur in the Old Testament. This is probably due to the fact that, until the New Birth experience was established, the **only** platform upon which a degree of edification could take place was human conscience. The precepts of God, an external Holy Spirit impacting the human conscience with the law, was the greatest degree of edification an Old Testament saint could achieve. When the resurrection of Christ secured for the church the divine enablements of the New Birth, this lesser form of edification through the law could now be contrasted with the superior form.

One final note on depravity: Like so many precepts that are addressed by Calvinists, they utilize words which do not appear in Scripture. For example the word “depravity” does not appear once in the Bible. So, to come up with a definition of a term the Bible does not even use is, to a certain degree, pointless. It would be better to have a discussion on this topic from a biblical perspective. Let us entitle it, “The extent to which the unregenerate mind can comprehend the knowledge of God.” To build an entire system of doctrine around a word the Bible does not use is to leave man as the final arbiter of the doctrine.

Apparently, the Calvinist does not see the inconsistency in his insistence that God commands all people to seek Him while simultaneously denying them the capacity to do so.

## **Unconditional Election: The “U” of the TULIP**

Unlike the term “depravity”, the words “elect” and “election” (but not “unconditional election”) are used often in the Scriptures. From a consideration of a wide range of contexts, it is safe to say that “election” has the following definition: “God’s choosing of those through whom He will be glorified.” The concept of election is often used in passages that are contrasting Israel’s forfeiture of its priestly nation status before God to the church. The term “election” is also used to refer to a believer’s qualification to function as a priestly representative of God to the world.

To the Calvinist, election is God’s choosing of those who will ultimately be saved to the exclusion of all others. Think about the absurdity of the accusation that God would allow an individual made in His image, to come into the world whose only future expectation was to spend eternity writhing in conscious torment in Hell because God has decreed it to be so. I don't know about you, but I believe that is to charge God with a great injustice. Folks, God is just and gracious and His desire is that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. To say that a person can go to Heaven only if God has elected to enable that person from eternity past to believe is to charge God The Father with a serious injustice.

The Calvinist defines election as God’s predetermination of those who will be saved. The Scriptures define election as God’s choosing of those through whom God will be glorified. Election is not unto salvation. Election is unto service. To understand

election from a biblical perspective, we first need to trace the usage of the term “elect” to the Old Testament.

The word “elect” is used three times in the book Isaiah. In every case, it is used in reference to service to the Father.

### **Election in the Book of Isaiah**

Isaiah 42:1: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 45:4: For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

Isaiah 65:9: I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, And from Judah an heir of My mountains; My elect shall inherit it, And My servants shall dwell there.

These three verses are examples of Hebrew poetry. Unlike English poetry, in which we focus on rhyme and meter, Hebrew poetry consists of two verses placed in apposition; even though different words are used, the two verses say essentially the same thing. Through the use of Hebrew poetry in the above passages, we see that election is unto service, not unto salvation.

What do all three of these verses in the book of Isaiah have in common in mentioning election? Election is unto service. Election is God’s choosing of those individuals through whom He will be glorified. The Calvinist has misinterpreted this point by saying that election is God’s choosing of those who will ultimately

be saved. Election has to do with God's choice of those through whom he will be glorified, His choosing of those who will be His servants to carry His glory and testimony to the ends of the earth. In this dispensation, that vessel is no longer Israel; it is the church.

This relationship between election and service can also be seen in the New Testament. A major group of Scriptures that, on the surface, seem to be promoting Calvinism are actually presenting a contrast between Israel, now rejected as the representative of God on the earth, and the Church which has now been chosen and tapped as the representative of God. The issue in these verses is not who will be saved and who will not; the issue is, rather, whom God will use to be His priestly people upon this earth. The below verse is one of those contexts.

1 Peter 2:7-9: Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The word "chosen" here is the word "elect."

By the way, the Israelites were not appointed to be disobedient; rather, people disobedient and neglectful of the word are appointed to stumble. Moreover, this is in line with the two possible outcomes for Israel as revealed in the Old Testament. When the children of Israel were walking in the ordinances of God, they

were used by God for His glory to the ends of the earth in a positive way. Likewise, when they were not mindful to walk in the precepts of God, they were appointed to stumble. This is the concept of the blessing and the curse as often prophesied in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28: " Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known."

Two other verses in the New Testament where we see election being associated with service are noted here:

1 Thessalonians 1:4: knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

(I have said it before and I will say it again, the King James and New King James are translated with a Calvinistic bias. Look at the Greek of the above passage.)

1 Thessalonians 1:4 εἰδότες ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν

In the Greek, the above context literally translates, "knowing brethren beloved by God, the election of you." The American Standard Version of 1901, probably the most unbiased translation ever produced (albeit based on the Alexandrian text) translates this verse as follows: "knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election." The Apostle Paul is recalling and drawing blessing from

his remembrance of the faith and zeal of the Thessalonians. He is, as we read in verse 3,

“remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”

Paul summarized that recollection as “knowing their election”; which basically means that Paul was drawing blessing from reflecting upon the consistent fruit-bearing being manifested in the lives of the Thessalonians. For Paul, “knowing their election” was savoring the remembrance of their faithful service. The election, or preparation for service, was brought about by their continued occupation with grace unto maturity.

Here is another passage from the New Testament demonstrating that election was unto service and not unto salvation:

2 Peter 1:10: Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

This verse occurs in this following context:

2 Peter 1:3-11: as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-

control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Verse 10 is a summary of the process described in verses 5 through 7 of II Peter chapter 1. Through the upwardly ascending building blocks of virtues enumerated in verses 5 through 7, the believer makes sure or certain his election unto service. Adding to our faith virtue, to our virtue knowledge, to our knowledge self-control, to our self-control godliness, to our godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love; these building blocks of virtue, when stacked one upon the other in the believer, cause him to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the experience of that believer will be fruitful Christian service. On the other hand, the believer who lacks these things will be in a state of unproductiveness before the Lord. Proven character unto Godliness produces a certainty that the Lord will make use of the believer in service. We make our election sure by pressing on to maturity. Again, election is unto service.

How does the Calvinist explain making one's election sure? If election is equated with being saved, as the Calvinist presupposes, then why would we need to make it sure (Βεβίωυς)? If God had

already decreed the outcome as a certainty, then would it not already be a sure thing? However, if election is unto service, then this verse would be a promise that, as a believer, God is not going to set you on the shelf, but use you for His purposes, if you are advancing in grace. So we also see, that election in the New Testament is not unto salvation; but, rather, unto service.

Having understood this distinction, let us now look at Romans 11:5-14. Romans chapters 9 through 11 seems to be the “holy ground” of the Calvinists. They seem to imagine that, of all the contexts in the Scriptures, this one constitutes an irrefutable foundation for their system of belief.

Romans 11:5-14: Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I

may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them.

One thing we can immediately discern from this context, is that the issue of election does not have to do with God's choosing who will be saved. After this entire discussion on election, the apostle Paul states that the purpose of Israel's blinding and rejection is in order that they might be provoked to jealousy and, in the process, some of them might be saved. So, what ever the loss of election was about for Israel, it certainly wasn't a loss of opportunity to hear and believe the Gospel and be saved.

Once again, as we can see in the above passage, Israelites as individuals did not forfeit their opportunity to believe the gospel. God's blinding of the Israelite was in order that he could no longer continue as the chosen vessel of God to bear His light to the world. That privilege, with its bountiful benefits, is now for the believer of any nationality who is functioning in grace.

## **The Issue of Blinding as a Judgment from God**

When discussing and debunking the Calvinistic doctrine of Unconditional Election, it is necessary to explain the numerous passages in which it is stated that the reason that certain groups of people cannot respond to God is because God has supernaturally blinded them and, therefore, they cannot believe. The Calvinist takes such verses and states that it cannot possibly be the desire of God that all would be saved because why would God be blinding people? From that position, the Calvinist then states that the only way that people can be saved is that God first regenerate them, enabling them to believe. Let us seek to understand this biblical issue of supernatural blindness.

The supernatural blindness that God places upon certain groups of people in the Scriptures was not for the purpose of preventing them from believing the gospel and being saved. The purpose of God's blinding of Israel was in order that they, as a nation, could not continue to function as the priestly people of God in the world. God, in the blinding of Israel, removed from them the ability to experience edification through the assimilation of biblical truth and through that assimilation be exalted as God's salt and light to the world. God does not want to use people as His ambassadors who are not rooted and grounded on the foundation of His grace.

Here is a passage in Isaiah that presents this blindness as a possible judgment from God:

Isaiah 29:9-11: Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. For the LORD has poured out on you The spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, *namely*, the seers. The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it *is* sealed."

Notice the phrase "blind yourselves and be blind." God nationally blinded Israel from being able to continue as God's vessels of outreach because they, themselves, had grown dull of hearing. God collectively blinded the Israelites because they collectively, yet individually, made light of their opportunity to hear.

The Lord Jesus used blindness as a judgment upon those whose neglect of the light of Scripture had caused them to not perceive the arrival of Christ into this world. This judgment from God consisted of Christ's always teaching the Israelites in parables; that is, He taught them in a deliberately cryptic fashion, requiring them to draw upon the light that God had already dispensed to them. Jesus explains this judgment of teaching in parables to His disciples in the following passage:

Matthew 13:10-15: And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'"

Jesus had come to judge His people Israel. This judgment was because of their neglect of the light of the Old Testament prophets. The Israelite who had not heeded the teachings of the prophets was about to lose his status as ambassador of God to the world. However, the Israelite who had occupied himself with the

teachings of the prophets would discern the person and work of Christ, experience the new birth and continue as an ambassador of God, with a more abundant capacity to experience and manifest the fruit of righteousness than ever before.

The healing mentioned in the above passage is a reference to the blessings of the millennial kingdom which was to have followed the law, had Israel as a nation been ready for their Messiah. Consider the below contexts which, when considered together, talk about what Israel lost by not being ready to perceive the arrival of Jesus the Christ.

Luke 8:10: And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given* in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.

Mark 4:12: "so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And *their* sins be forgiven them.'

The two above verses are quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, which reads as follows:

Isaiah 6:9,10: And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

This verse in Isaiah has as an earlier foundational precept this verse from 2 Chronicles:

2 Chronicles 7:14: "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

These verses, when considered together, constitute the blessing and the curse promise, which was basically the foundational promise that God made to Israel.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28: " Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: "the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.

If Israel walked with God, they experienced blessing and abundance in their land of promise. If they neglected the precepts of God, their land would cast them out or would not yield its abundance. The ultimate experience of this blessing of God towards Israel will take place during the millennial reign of Christ, during which time Christ will sit on top of Mount Zion, with the Israelites filled with the Spirit and the land flowing with abundance. The Apostle Paul said it this way:

Acts 28:27: For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they

have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.

So we can see, when the above passages are considered together, that the purpose of the blinding of God upon the Israelites was to prevent them from continuing as the ambassadors of God, experiencing the blessings of God in the Kingdom. Because of the collective unbelief of Israel, that kingdom was postponed. Moreover, the special priestly people status that was to have been the blessed experience of the Israelite has been temporarily forfeited to the church.

Here is another interesting passage on blindness as it relates to election:

John 12:37-43: But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

This context marks the place in the Gospel of John where the Kingdom offer of God to Israel is withdrawn. Notice that, even though as a nation the Israelites could not believe because, by this time in the earthly ministry of Jesus, God had shut down their ability to assimilate truth; nevertheless, the blinding of the nation did not prevent individuals of that nation from believing (verse 42). This verse, once again, demonstrates that, while God was not going to allow the Christ-rejecting nation as a whole to believe and experience the blessing of the earthly Kingdom; nevertheless, the invitation to believe the gospel and be saved was always extended to the individual Israelite.

It was the purpose of God to shut down the opportunity of Israel to continue as God's priests to the world if the people of Israel did not perceive and embrace Christ as their suffering substitute. The means by which that shutting down was to occur was through a national blindness; that is, a supernatural inability to experience edification through the precepts of the law. This blindness was a judgment upon them because they had neglected their opportunity with the light that God had previously entrusted to them, a light that included the underlying precepts of grace. Listen to these words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 9:

Romans 9:30-33: What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Notice, once again, the reason assigned to Israel's forfeiture of special people status is because Israel refused to transition to grace as the underlying enablement of their service to God. They refused to function as God's elect people by the power of grace. This refusal to transition to grace resulted in God's removing from them the ability to continue to experience edification through the law, edification that would distinguish them as the ambassadors of God to the World.

Consider also the following statement of the Apostle Paul concerning the reason for God's blinding of the Israelite:

2 Corinthians 3:13-16: unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Again, the purpose for the veiling of the conscience of the Israelite was not to prevent them from believing unto salvation; it was, rather, a judgment upon them for their refusal to transition to grace as the underlying enablement to continue as the ambassadors of God to the world. God would not allow them to continue as the elect people of God until they first embraced a salvation founded upon the sacrifice of Christ, whose perfect sacrifice constituted the only merit of an everlasting relationship with the Father.

## Limited Atonement: The “L” of the TULIP

Limited Atonement is the “L” of the TULIP, inferring that Christ has died only for the sins of the elect. The Calvinist argues, “Why would Christ die for people that God had no intention of saving?” Actually, of the five points of Calvinism, quite often this doctrine of Limited Atonement is rejected by many Calvinists, and for good reason.

First of all, it is an error to refer to what Christ has accomplished on the cross as atonement. Nowhere in the New Testament, with the exception of a mistranslation in Romans 5:11, do the Apostles refer to the results of the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement. The word “atonement” speaks of a covering to be provided for sin. However, the New Testament does not speak of the Work of Christ as hiding or covering sin. We as believers are not “hiding” behind the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ does not hide our sins from the Father; rather, the sacrifice of Christ takes our sin out of the way.

John 1:29: The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"

Christ's blood does not hide our sin. The Lord Jesus, when He went to the cross, dealt in a final way with sin to such a decree that the Bible tells us that sin has been put away.

Hebrews 9:26: He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

So we see that the blood of Christ did not cover sin, it took the issue out of the way as being that principle which tied God's hands, so to speak. Now, because Christ has settled the issue of sin, the reigning principle of God in His salvific dealings with men is grace.

Romans 5:21: so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is a mistake to refer to what Christ accomplished on the cross as merely atonement. It is also a mistake to refer to the sacrifice of Christ as limited in its application toward people.

1 Timothy 2:5-6: For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

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

These two verses will suffice, but there are many more passages that testify to the fact that what Jesus did on the cross He did for every man.

Probably the most destructive aspect of the doctrine of Limited Atonement would be its effect upon the power of the Gospel, the preaching of the cross and the effectiveness of that message to produce salvation.

The Bible teaches us that the message of the cross, when properly proclaimed, is the power of God to salvation. That is, the Gospel is the tool of the Holy Spirit which, when believed, results in a person's being transferred from death unto life. But, really, what is one believing when he believes the Gospel?

A person is saved when he is persuaded from the Scriptures that all that is necessary to have an eternal relationship with God the Father is found in what God has already provided in the redemption that Christ has accomplished on the cross. A person is saved when he is assured from the word of God that Christ's offering of Himself was for his sin and places his faith for all eternity in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for him. A person is saved when he rests the eternal destiny of his soul on the fact that Christ Jesus has already grappled with his sin debt, to God the Father's complete satisfaction. But, wait a minute. If Christ died only for the elect, then I cannot be sure that He died for me. Now, follow me on this one, folks; if saving faith is born of an assurance that Christ really did intercede on the cross in my behalf, to God's satisfaction, but Calvinism teaches that Christ interceded only for the elect, then Calvinistic doctrine actually causes a person to doubt at the very point at which he needs to believe and be saved. Therefore, the doctrine of Limited Atonement is not within the pale of orthodoxy as far as biblical truth goes; rather, it introduces doubt to the very point the yet-to-be converted needs to believe in order that he might pass from death unto life.

So, we can see from the Scriptures that not only is Limited Atonement a doctrine which has no scriptural basis, but it is a doctrine which is fundamentally detrimental to the proclamation of the Gospel.

## Irresistible Grace: The “I” of the TULIP

In the Calvinist's way of thinking, logically, it follows that if God, from the foundations of the world has chosen certain to be saved to the exclusion of others, then one who is truly elect could not resist the drawing of the Father.

When we talk about Irresistible Grace we must first of all define grace.

Grace is the eternal purpose of God in which He has not set His heart on sinful man's destruction; but has, from the foundations of the world, decreed a plan by which fallen man can be established into a confirmed state of righteousness before God the Father. This plan is centered around Christ's intercession for us sinners on the cross. With the manifestation of Christ, the plan also includes the grace-operating assets at our disposal as a result of what Christ has accomplished on the cross.

This grace, or good will, of the Father is directed toward all men. It is the desire of God that all men be saved as we read in 1 Timothy 2:3,4:

For this *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.

Likewise Peter said it this way:

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering

toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

If it is the desire of God that all men be saved and yet not all men *are* saved, then men must be resisting the grace of God. Of course, men do resist the grace of God. Since independent volition is a part of every meaningful relationship, men, for a variety of reasons, chose to resist giving the gospel of grace a fair hearing. Jesus makes mention of why people choose to resist the light in the following context:

John 3:19-21: "And this is the condemnation that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

From the above passage, we can see that people refuse to give grace a hearing because they would rather continue in their sin than experience the life-transforming power of truth in their lives.

Other people resist the grace of God because they are afraid of what becoming a child of God might mean to their relationships with others.

John 5:44: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?"

A classic example of a man successfully resisting the grace of God is found in Acts 24:24,25

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

Felix, because of the political cost of becoming a believer, waved off the conviction of the Holy Spirit caused by the reasoning of Paul in favor of maintaining his cushy job as a Roman governor. People resist the grace of God for a variety of reasons, mainly lies of the devil. As a matter of fact the reason that people are eternally judged is because of their resistance of the grace of God. Consider the following passage:

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12: And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So we can see from the above examples that, for a variety of reasons, people choose to hold at bay the supernatural light of the gospel of Christ. Christians are called upon to partner with God and the Holy Spirit by manifesting evidence to the world

concerning the genuineness and blessedness of a life in Christ. We are also called to bear witness to the world concerning the fate of those who do not obey the gospel of Christ. We, as believers, are called upon to dismantle the reasons people have for not giving consideration to God's saving message. Whatever reason people have for not believing, it is not God's fault that some choose not to hear. Oftentimes, when God reveals Himself to individuals' consciences, people run the other way.

### **Perseverance of the Saints: The “P” of the TULIP**

When most people think of Perseverance of the Saints, they think of the doctrine of Eternal Security, but the Calvinist means something totally different from that. The Calvinist believes that one who has been chosen for salvation is certain to persevere on a track of upwardly progressive sanctification and will continue with the Lord until such practical sanctification is completed in his life. Calvinists also believe that a true Christian could never apostatize; and if he does, in a final way, forsake the Lord, then that is a sign that he was never saved in the first place. In this way, the Calvinist backloads the gospel, denying the freeness of the gospel invitation. A common saying among Calvinists is, “We are not saved by works. If you are genuinely saved, then your life will be producing good works; and if not, then you were never genuinely saved.” Or, “We are not saved by works but genuine salvation will produce good works.” So, one way or the other, those who cannot accept a “no strings attached” gospel invitation will get good works in there somewhere.

Does being saved guarantee that the only direction in this life that a believer can progress, is in the right direction? Does being

positionally set apart in Christ guarantee that we will, in this life, become in practical experience what God has declared us to be in position? This is the real issue surrounding the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, the “P” of the TULIP.

Does being saved guarantee that a believer will, in this life, be experiencing practical sanctification? From my perspective, it is wrong to create the expectation in a new believer that being saved is automatically going to result in victory over sin. To be quite honest, growing to a place of maturity takes constant watchfulness on the part of a believer; something, quite frankly, which most believers never implement in their lives. Growing to a place of maturity takes a steady diet of the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, spiritual exercise in Christian duty, mutual exhortation of other believers and dependency on the Lord in prayer.

That growth is not automatic can be demonstrated from the following verses:

Romans 12:1,2: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is an exhortation by the Apostle Paul for believing brethren to not be conformed to the image of this world. For Paul to feel it was necessary to exhort believers in such a way demonstrates that Paul considered it more than just a remote possibility that believers could live an untransformed life. Quite

frankly, many Christians can live their entire lives as immature believers. Consider also the following context:

Hebrews 5:10-14: called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Those whom the author of Hebrews is exhorting had for some time continued in a state of infancy. They had been saved for some time and were still only able to assimilate milk. No Christian ever arrives at such a place in his or her life that he can sit back and say, "I have arrived." Every Christian, at his best, is in imminent danger of failure and of bringing reproach to the cause of Christ. Even the Apostle Paul considered himself to be in danger of disqualification.

1 Corinthians 9:27: But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

How can this be? You know, as well as I do, that the time when a Christian is most vulnerable is when he has just experienced a spiritual victory; that is when we become puffed up and strut

around like the victory was ours. That is when we are most likely to let down our guard.

It is possible for genuine believers, when it is all said and done, to have failed and even lose rewards. Consider Demas: Demas had been a fruitful servant of the Lord. Consider the following commendations of Paul's partner in ministry, Demas:

Philemon 23: Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

Colossians 4:14: Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

In Paul's final epistle, Demas had fallen for the lure of this present evil age as we see in the verse below:

2 Timothy 4:10: for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica -- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

So, certainly, Demas lost some reward before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Likewise, the Galatians had started out by exhibiting great sacrificial love for the Apostle Paul:

Galatians 4:15: What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

But, by the time Paul had penned the epistle to the Galatians, they had been beguiled away from grace. Did Paul consider these people to have never been saved? No, Paul knew that the Galatian believers were saved and, in fact, states that fact in the following context:

Galatians 4:9: But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

To know God in the New Testament is to be in fellowship with God. To be known by God is to be His child by a previous act of justifying faith. So, in the above verse, Paul affirms that the Galatian believers have fallen out of fellowship and in fact have reverted back to the law. However, Paul affirms that the Galatians are still children of God. They are still known by God.

That some believers never arrive at a place of maturity is obvious from the Lord's letter to the church of Laodicea. There are believers who will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ ashamed of their lack of spiritual accomplishment.

Revelation 3:16-19: "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes

with eye salve, that you may see. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Here, the Lord warns the Laodicean Christians that they are in danger of arriving at the Judgment Seat of Christ naked of any spiritual accomplishment.

Calvinism teaches that such a believer was never saved to begin with. But these are people whom the Lord loves and the familial relationship that He has with them includes the right of chastening.

That a believer might someday stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, in spite of having lived less than a victorious life, is demonstrated from the following verses:

1 John 2:28: And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

So, we can see from the Scriptures that there will be believers who will arrive before the Judgment Seat of Christ, ashamed of having lived a life wasted for the Lord. Such believers will eternally lack the distinction of several unfading rewards which will be given to people who, in addition to be saved, so prioritized their lives that they might vibrantly represent the Lord during their earthly sojourning here on the earth.

It is a pattern of the Pauline epistles that the Apostle exhorts believers to become in practice what God has declared them to be

in position. When we are saved, we are positionally set apart unto the Lord. It then becomes the goal of the Lord for us to practically manifest on the outside what we are on the inside by virtue of the new birth.

The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints as the Calvinist understands it is dangerous for several reasons:

1. It causes true believers to doubt the genuineness of their salvation and, therefore, to no longer have access to the throne of grace. When a believer fails to reckon that his relationship with the Lord is genuine, he will lack boldness to go before the Lord in prayer and, consequently, never avail himself of the power of the Lord to live a victorious Christian life.
2. Along these same lines, the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints causes genuine believers to become introspective regarding assurance. When a Christian seeks to focus on personal performance, as that through which he is assured of an eternal standing before God, he fails to focus on the merits of Christ crucified, which is the true basis for assurance. When such is occurring in a believer's life, he will never mature past infancy because God will not allow a believer who has a false basis of assurance abiding upon his heart to grow past infancy. As the author of Hebrews said in Hebrews 6:3, "and this we will do if God permits," God will not allow a believer who is not rooted in His grace to bear fruit because God is not glorified by coerced obedience. Not until the believer is rooted and grounded in love, is he able to, in an unintimidated fashion, respond to God from a heart free from anxiety. We have the assurance of salvation, not because we have arrived at some level of maturity, but because God has accepted and always will accept the offering of Christ in our behalf. Truly, the assurance of salvation is not based on good

works; rather, good works have as their foundation the assurance of salvation.

3. The doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints causes believers to discount the threat that the world poses to a believer. If a person really believes that God is going to mature him regardless of that individual's participation in the process, then why be watchful and sober? Or worse yet, if maturity is automatic, then why does a believer need to pay attention to his conduct? After all, he will eventually get there. He will eventually arrive at a place where he is pleasing to God. As a popular bumper sticker says: "Be patient God is not finished with me yet." Well, the truth of the matter is, if you take that *laissez faire* attitude towards growth, you never will be finished; but continue as a rough, unpolished, abrasive believer in your deportment before others. Calvinism causes genuine believers to discount the importance of watchfulness in their own growth process.

4. The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints also would cause believers to deny the reality and harmfulness of personal transgressions against the Lord. If believers are automatically progressing upwardly toward Christlikeness, then the actions of the untransformed lusts of the flesh, in which most believers find themselves, are just a temporary setback from that which the Lord has obligated Himself to eventually deliver them. Such people could logically reason, "It's no big deal that I lost my temper; why, I will just confess. I mean after all, if God has already ordained from the foundations of the world who is going to be saved, my blowing of my personal testimony doesn't matter that much." In this way, many an unbeliever will never experience the conviction caused by the deportment of a Spirit-filled believer, leading to the unbeliever's salvation.

So, as you can see, the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, the “P” of the TULIP, is actually counterproductive to genuine growth in grace. It causes genuine believers to become introspective with reference to assurance and, thus, permanently stunted in their growth. Moreover, it causes untransformed believers to adopt a *laissez faire* attitude toward Christian growth. A biblical attitude towards perseverance is, yes, I am saved forever and on my way to heaven, and no, growth is not automatic. Moreover, if, as a believer, I am living an untransformed life before my unsaved loved ones, I am giving them license to continue not to take seriously the call of the Holy Spirit to come to faith in Christ.

## **Part Two: Verses which Seem to Promote Calvinism Explained**

Calvinism is the belief that God from eternity past has chosen certain to be saved to the exclusion of others. Calvinism is the result of mis-systematized Scripture. That is, it is a body of Scripture that has been improperly compared with others to produce a false system of theology.

The core error of Calvinist doctrine is that it sheds doubt on the assurance of the Gospel. In proclaiming the message of the cross, our goal is to get people to the place where they are assured that Christ did really and truly grapple with and put away the insurmountable obstacle of their sin debt. A person is accounted eternally righteous before God when he is persuaded concerning the all-sufficient nature of the work of Christ and, as an act of the will, determines to bet the eternal destiny of their souls on the sufficiency of that work. Calvinism, however, sheds doubt at the

very point of the Gospel presentation where there needs to be certainty in order for a person to be saved. The “L” of the TULIP, the doctrine of Limited Atonement, teaches that Christ died only for the elect, which is to introduce doubt into the truth of the Gospel. “If Christ has died only for the elect, then he may not have died for me.” Therefore, Calvinism is not one of many acceptable systems within the pale of orthodoxy; it is a system which needs to be refuted by a clear systematization of Scripture.

Calvinism also disparages the relationship between God and the joint heirs with Christ. If God from eternal past has chosen certain to be saved to the exclusion of others, then, in the final analysis, where is the meaningful victory for God in the age to come? I mean, is the relationship between God and His blood-bought saints really meaningful, if we are nothing more than predestined agents who believe at the appointed time chosen by the Father?

As the Devil sought to belittle the relationship God had with Job, thus the Devil seeks to make light of the relationship God has with all of His saints. In the final analysis, predestination produces a relationship with God that the devil could belittle. The devil could point at the relationship between God and the joint heirs and shout, “Well, of course these people chose to commune with God, He programmed these people to respond exactly as they have!”

I can program my computer to come on every morning at 6:30AM and say, “Dan, you are the greatest, best specimen of the human race which has ever come into this world.” (I actually did that once as a joke.) But that would really be meaningless coming out of my computer because I programmed it to say that. Thus, if God’s children are nothing more than beings who spring to life at the time preappointed by the Father, in the final analysis, such a relationship is really not meaningful and, thus, would be easily

disparaged by the Devil. For a relationship to be genuinely meaningful, it must also be volitional. Under Calvinism, such a relationship does not exist. In actuality, God created man with the capacity to choose in order that God's relationship with His people could be meaningful.

Calvinists are often heard to say, "We cannot reconcile God's sovereign predestination of people with man's responsibility to believe. These concepts are beyond man's ability to comprehend;" to which I would say, "Amen!" because they are two contradictory viewpoints that cannot be reconciled. God does not record in His Scripture concepts not meant to be understood by men. As we read in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are* revealed *belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.

God does not reveal to us in His Scripture truth that we cannot process and systematize. If your study of Scripture leads to some contradictory conclusions (like predestination and human responsibility) then at least one of your conclusions is in error. I will admit that there are things which I have not yet properly reconciled in my mind that are revealed in the Scriptures, but it is not because these truths are not knowable, it is because my systematization of truth has not yet matured to the point of having all the information needed to reconcile some concepts.

### **Is it God's desire that only certain be saved?**

1 Timothy 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

The above two verses refute both the notion that God died only for the elect and that His desire is that only certain be saved.

Systematic theology is the process of comparing Scripture with Scripture in order to produce a unified statement concerning a particular truth of Scripture. Calvinism is a missystemization of Scripture, the result being a premature assessment and an association of a body of Scripture that, on the surface, seems to be teaching fatalism.

To successfully refute Calvinism, it is necessary to reexamine those Scriptures the Calvinist has missystematized and reassign to them the Biblical view of God's revelation of His dealings with man. The purpose of this portion of this book is to do just that.

A major group of Scriptures that, on the surface, seem to be promoting Calvinism are actually presenting a contrast between Israel, now rejected as the representative of God on the earth, and the Church that has now been tapped as the representative of God.

The Calvinist defines "election" as "God's predetermination of those who will be saved." The Scriptures define "election" as "God's choosing of those through whom God will be glorified." Election is not unto salvation; election is unto service.

## **Verses which seem to promote Calvinism explained**

The following verses in the Gospel of John appear to, on the surface, support the doctrine of total depravity and unconditional election.

John 6:37-43: "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 should 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 will raise him up at the last day." The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

The reason this context presents a problem is that many Christians have failed to discern the real ministry of the Lord Jesus while He was on the earth. The bulk of Jesus' ministry was not for the purpose of evangelizing the unreached; rather, "plan A" of His ministry was to endow Old Testament believers with the addition of eternal life by enabling them, through the New Birth, to partake

of that true life which Jesus had died to provide and, through those individuals, evangelize the world.

The reason Bible passages such as these are problematic is that unstable souls imagine that they are all referring to heaven and hell. Are the people to whom Jesus is speaking saved or lost? Is their belief causing them to pass from unjustified to justified? There are some verses in John where that is the case, but there are others, such as the one above, where a positive response to the light is resulting in an already justified, but not yet regenerated, believer to be granted everlasting life. Those whom Jesus foreknew in these contexts are not those he decreed from eternity past to be saved; rather, they are those who were already in possession of the light, were already justified, and needed to have added to their experience the component of eternal life. They had already been taught by the Father and received His truth; now they needed to have added to their experience before God the component of eternal life.

Once again, because we have boiler-plated the concept of eternal life, we are confused. Let us consider the Lord Jesus' definition of eternal life:

John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

In this verse, we see that eternal life is the capacity to commune with God and need not be equated with justification. Of course, today, when someone believes the Gospel, a person is not only justified, but he simultaneously receives the enablements of the New Birth. God can now legally and fully take possession of the individual, because his sin debt has already been accounted for in

the cross work of Christ. But before Christ died, Old Testament saints were justified but not yet born again. They had not yet received the enablements of the new birth because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

John 7:39: But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Here is another verse in John that, on the surface, appears to teach Calvinism:

John 6:65: And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

A similar passage occurs in John in the following context:

John 6:44,45: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

Now notice this second verse offers the explanation. Those who can come to Christ are those who have been already taught by God. In other words, God was directing those who already possessed justifying faith to come to Christ.

Here is another passage in John which looks like an open and shut case for the Calvinists:

John 12:37-40: But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

It is at this point in the gospel of John that Jesus closed the door of opportunity for the Israelites to be regathered and the kingdom established in their midst. This closing of the door of opportunity for the Jewish nation to be collectively constituted as the people of God is also cited for us in the following verses:

Matthew 23:37-39: " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' "

When one's house is left desolate, it is time to move to another house; that other house, the Israelites would soon discover, was to be the church.

Luke 13:34,35: " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as

a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' "

The house of which this verse speaks, I believe, is the temple, where the glory of the Lord dwelt. Of course, when the Lord returns, He Himself will inhabit the house in the presence of the Israelites.

Mark 12:7-10: "But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.'"

These three contexts teach us that, because of the rejection of Christ by the Israelites, now the kingdom's physical appearance in Israel would be postponed for a nonspecific period of time.

Okay, let's now go back to our context in John. John chapter 12 speaks of the blinding of Israel as a whole, but not as individuals. Notice verse 42 in this context:

John 12:42: Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.

In other words, even though collectively the nation of Israel was now under a divine, supernatural blindness as a judgment from God, as individuals they could come to faith in Christ and be saved. It is just that now, rather than these believers becoming part of Israel, they would become part of the church, a body which would include believing Jews and believing gentiles, a body which would function before God as the ambassadors of God, apart from the governance of the law of Moses.

John 10:14-16: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

John 10:25-27: Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, 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

Here we can see that the sheep are those who were already the possession of the Father because of a justifying faith and it was now time to add to their experience with God a New Birth during which Christ was to now manage the progress of their faith. As the

chief Shepherd of our souls, Christ directs our lives through truth, into trials and creates opportunities for growth and service.

Many passages that, at first glance, seem to teach the Calvinistic view of election are actually presenting a contrast between God's rejection of Israel in His plan and God's taking up of the church to now accomplish His plan.

Ephesians 1:4: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Paul is not saying that God has chosen us to be in Christ; rather, he states that He has chosen us, who are in Christ, to be holy and without blame before Him in love.

### **Several observations concerning the above contexts**

1. If Paul had wanted to say that God has chosen us to be in Christ, the original language would have been different. Here is the literal translation from the Greek:

As he chose us in him from the foundations of the world, us to be holy and blameless before him in love.

The infinitive "to be" does not appear before "in Him", only before "holy and blameless." We are not chosen to be in Him; God has chosen us who are in Him to be holy and blameless.

2. Another thought about Ephesians 1: the primary theme of the first three chapters of Ephesians is that God always had a plan for

the gentiles; however, it was not revealed like God's plan for the Jews was. With that in mind, look at the following context:

Ephesians 1:5-9: having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

What is the mystery to which verse 9 refers? The answer is in the following passage:

Ephesians 3:4-6: by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

The mystery is that God had always had a plan to incorporate gentiles into His assembly of saints in such a way that the distinction between Jew and Gentile would one day disappear. Again, these verses that, on the surface, appear to be teaching predestination are actually presenting a contrast between Israel and the church.

The idea of us being before Him in love was the hope of Israel, that is now being realized by the church.

Ephesians 1:12: that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

The contrast between Jew and Gentile begins in the following verse:

Ephesians 2:11: Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands –

...and continues through the remainder of the chapter and through chapter 3

In fact, a major underlying theme of the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians is that God has always had as His plan to allow the gentiles to enjoy and glorify the Lord in His plan of salvation; God, from the foundation of the Word, had always purposed to bless the gentiles. God has always had a plan to occupy Himself with a special people comprised of people other than Israelites. The Church today, is the habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now that blessing of God is being realized by the church. To a large degree, that which God intended for Israel to experience in their regeneration is now being experienced by the church. This is not to say that Israel will not experience it at a future date during the earthly reign of Christ, for all of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26), just not right now.

Ephesians 3:6: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

The plan of God was not to abandon Israel, but rather it was to incorporate Gentile believers in the Jewish body. The idea of Jews being rejected in favor gentiles was not plan A, but the idea of a unified assembly was always the plan of God.

“You who were once afar off are now brought near by the blood of Christ” is another contrast between Jew and Gentile in this passage (Eph 2:13)

Ephesians 3:12: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Before the sacrifice of Christ, the gentiles had to stand afar off. Now, gentiles have access to the Father with confidence through the past and present intercessions of the Lord Jesus Christ. The entire first three chapters of Ephesians are a revelation that God, from eternity past, had a plan, through His grace, to also transform gentiles into His special people with whom He would be occupied.

3. One point I would like to make with the passages that contrast Jew and Gentile. The purpose of God is not just to save souls. This is another subject that confuses people. The ultimate purpose of God is to promote sons in the kingdom and our salvation is just the beginning of that promotion. The reason so many people get caught into this Calvinism issue is that they look at the Scriptures through the narrow prism of evangelism, not realizing that there is more at stake for the individual than just heaven or hell.

## **Ordained to Eternal life**

Acts 13:46-48: Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' " 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.

I might explain the above context as follows: Like the Cornelius household, there were gentiles during the transitional period of the book of Acts who had the facts of the gospel in their hearts, but they were not aware that they could, as gentiles, exercise saving faith because they did not understand that it was their turn to partake of the blessings of salvation. Just like Cornelius, who already understood the peace that Jesus had made on the cross, the missing component in their faith was the universality of the invitation. They understood grace and believed it, but did not perceive that it was "their turn," so to speak, to partake of the transforming enablements of the Holy Spirit. When they perceived through the preaching of the apostle Paul that their time was now, they immediately exercised appropriating faith and were saved.

Once again, notice the contrast between Jew and gentile in the above context.

The word "appointed" in Acts 13:48 means "ordered," as in, "set in order." We have already seen in other contexts such as

John 6:44 that those who came to Christ were those who had previously been taught by God and thus ready to believe. They were ready to believe because of the gospel truth they had already assimilated but not yet exercised.

So, who are those set in order for eternal life? They are either gentiles who were already in possession of a justifying faith or they were gentiles who were ready to believe because of the prior truth they had already heard. Another possibility is that there was a missing component keeping them from reckoning to themselves the truth of the Gospel. I believe these people in verse 48 had been introduced to the Gospel the week before. Apparently, they were the same audience that Paul had preached to the week before but, up to the point of Acts 13:48, they still considered themselves second-class recipients of the promises. However, after Paul's message in Acts 13:47 and 48, they now considered themselves to be direct beneficiaries of the grace of God.

The missing component, like with the Cornelius household in Acts 10, was the universality of the invitation.

## **Chosen from the Beginning**

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

What is the context of the above passage? It is the wrath which is going to fall upon the professionally disobedient person who,

rather than doing something with the truth which he had at his disposal, chose rather to pursue his own ambitions. Such people are destined for condemnation; if they are living during the time of the great tribulation, they will perish at that time.

“From the beginning” here can refer to several events.

There was a time in my understanding of this passage when I was intrigued by a variant reading in the Alexandrian text. Without getting bogged down in the Greek, suffice it to say that it would cause this verse to be translated “God has chosen us first fruits unto salvation.” In other words, before the wrath of this context was to fall upon the general population of Christ-rejecting humanity, God would harvest his first fruits out, with the remainder of the fruit being harvested along with the regathering of Israel. However, I no longer take that position since I am pretty much a Majority Text guy.

So, then, what is the beginning at which time God chose us for salvation?

I believe the beginning in II Thessalonians 2:13 is a reference to their initial faith. I will demonstrate why that is the case shortly.

The first thing question that needs to be answered to properly understand this context is what is the salvation of which this context speaks? It is more than the just the present wonderful state of the church age believer. In this context, that salvation is a reference to the age to come, during which the faithful believer will fully participate with the Lord Jesus Christ in helping Him govern the world. That the word “salvation” is often used to reference the age to come can be demonstrated from the following two contexts.

Hebrews 2:1-5: Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

The salvation addressed here is “the world to come.”

Consider also the context below:

1 Peter 1:5-11: who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of *your* souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them

was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Notice in the verse 5 that we are kept by the power of God through (during) faith (our earthly sojourning) for (unto) salvation ready to be revealed at the last time. Once again we can see the salvation of which this verse speaks is the kingdom age, during which Christ will be reigning upon this earth. All believers will be with him, and faithful believers will be helping him call the shots.

This fits with the context of 2 Thessalonians. Consider the next verse:

2 Thessalonians 2:14: to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“To which he called you by our Gospel”: The word “called” in the Scriptures usually means “invited to a position.” The obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is sharing with Christ in the administration of His government during the His millennial reign. God has called us to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this consideration, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is a reference to the center of His heavenly administration. The Scriptures teach that the greater the degree of transformation into the character of Christ a believer experiences in this life, the greater will be his promotion unto authority in the next life. To obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ could be likened to being a member of the presidential cabinet. When you believed on Jesus as your savior, God automatically enrolled you in the “prepare to rule with Christ” preparatory school. The primary lesson plan of that school is represented in the following verse:

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14: But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice, in II Thessalonians 2:13, the two-fold aspect of being equipped for salvation; that is, the age to come. We are equipped to rule and reign with Christ in the age to come through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth is the process believers go through in order that they might experience promotion in the age to come. Sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth in this context is not how we are born again, is rather how we are made worthy of promotion in the dispensation following the church age.

This passage is not saying that God has chosen people for justification; rather, that He has chosen to invite those who are born again to experience additional growth in order that they might fully reign with Christ. In addition to abiding in the presence of the glory of Christ, He has called believers to share in that glory. This is not to say that believers will become equal in power and glory to Christ. Nonetheless, there are degrees of glorification in heaven. Moreover, those degrees of glorification relate to our positions of leadership in the age to come.

The following verse make mention of our promotion in the age to come:

2 Corinthians 4:17: For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,

In other words, there are measures (weight) of glory to be experience in the age to come. Moreover, to glorify is to elevate in status of priority. When we glorify God we are elevating him to a higher level of priority in our lives. When he glorifies us in the age to come, he will elevate us to higher level of authority.

Romans 8:17: and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Everyone who is a child of God is an heir of God but not everyone is a joint heir with Christ. Only those who allow suffering to shape their character towards the image of Christ will one day be glorified together with Christ.

2 Timothy 2:11,12: *This is* a faithful saying: For if we died with *Him*, We shall also live with *Him*. If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us.

So, in conclusion, being chosen from the beginning for salvation in II Thessalonians does not mean that God, from eternity past, chose those who would be born again; it does mean, rather, that God, at the time that we become his children, invites us to continue to grow to a place where we will experience promotion in the age to come.

### **Romans 8:29-30: Foreknown and Predestined**

Romans 8:29,30: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

First of all, let us get the entire context of this passage. This is a discussion of the favor of God directed towards His saints, even when seemingly bad things might happen. The subject matter of this context is encouragement. Moreover the context begins back in Romans 8:17 with the discussion of heirship and continues to the end of Romans chapter 8.

Romans 8:17-32: and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,

but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Romans 8:28 is a summarization of the previous context concerning everything which comes into the life of the upwardly progressing believer having a purpose of accomplishing God's greater good for the believer. Lets look at that verse again:

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

Let us make some statements concerning what this verse is not. It is not a guarantee that only good things will happen to Christians. It is, rather, a promise that everything that comes into the life of the growing believer is for the purpose of the transformation of that believer into the image of Christ. That is the image to which the believer is predestined. Everything which

comes into the life of that believer will be beneficial toward that end.

Let us talk a bit about the phrase, “called according to His purpose.” The purpose of God is to transform His children into glorious trophy saints. A trophy saint would be one of God’s children who, in addition to being saved, presses on to maturity, maturity being conformity to the image of Christ. This is precisely the conformity of which Romans 8:29 is speaking.

Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

But before we move on, let me explain what “to be called” means in Romans 8:28.

To be called is to be invited to pursue Christlikeness: It is the invitation to grow towards the image of Christ. We are called, that is, we are urged by God to grow into the image of Christ. Here is a key cross reference that demonstrates this:

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

Notice the order of events in this passage: we are saved and then we are called. Notice again in this passage that we are called according to the purpose of God. Now, the main thing I want you to see out of this passage is that we are first saved and then invited to partake of a foreordained plan, that plan being conformity to Christ.

Notice also in II Timothy 1:9, that the concept of being called according to the purpose of God is again mentioned. The difference is that 2 Timothy 1:9 makes it clearer that this invitation to conformity to Christ occurs after a person has been saved. Once again, we see that the purpose is foreordained, and not the participants. Okay, with this background in mind, let us now go back to Romans 8:29:

Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Romans 8:29 is an explanation of the statement made in verse 28. We know that because of the conjunction which occurs at the beginning of the verse. The foreknowledge of this verse does not refer back to a point in time in God's past; but, rather, refers to God's knowing an individual through salvation even before the process of conformity to the image of Christ begins. God foreknew these people in their conversion to Christ before they began down the path of conformity to the image of Christ. God first knows them through the new birth, then, at that time, sets them on the path of conformity to Christ.

Verse 30 of this context begins a very important transition of consideration:

Romans 8:30: Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Now, it is very important in this context not to ignore the transitional word "moreover" between verse 29 and verse 30. Paul

here transitions in thought to an additional, more universal manifestation of the favor of God as manifested, in this case, toward a more universal audience. The word “moreover” in this context begins a transition in thought from the believer’s calling unto conformity to Christ and manifests the universal favor of God in His universal call unto grace to all people.

The key, I believe, to understanding this context is three-fold:

1. Understanding that the call of Romans 8:30 is not the call of verse 28
2. Remaining mindful of the context and
3. Observing the transitional nature of verse 30

That verse 30 makes a transition in thought to the universal favor of God in salvation is obvious from verse 32 on this context:

Romans 8:32: He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

The bottom line is this: whether a person is a child of God or not, God is on his side. If a person is not saved, God still delivered Jesus up for them. If a person is saved, God is manipulating the circumstances of the believer’s life in order to maximize that person’s opportunity to grow into the image of Christ. Either way, God’s good will is manifest to all people.

## **Part 3: Understanding Romans Chapter 9**

Calvinists believe that Romans 9-11 is the stronghold of their theology, which teaches that God from eternity past has chosen certain to be saved to the exclusion of others. They believe that Romans 9 confirms their position that people's eternal destinies are determined by a sovereign decree of God in which He, in eternity past, looked down through the eons of time and marked out certain to be saved and then, at the appropriate time, quickened their spirits so they could believe. So let us begin this section of this book by establishing a backdrop of truth against which Romans 9-11 is to be understood.

I guess the first question we need to ask concerning Romans 9-11 is to what do the Scriptures ascribe the reason for the unsaved state of the Israelite? We can discern the answer to that question from each chapter under our present consideration.

Romans 9:31-33: but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Romans 10:1-3: Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

According to the above passage, the reason for the unsaved state of the Israelite is their refusal to submit themselves to a grace way of salvation.

As already stated earlier in this book, if the issue of election in Romans 9-11 impacts a person's personal opportunity to be accounted eternally righteous before God, then Romans 11:8-14 makes absolutely no sense.

Romans 11:8-14: Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them.

We can see in verse 14 of the above passage that, whatever God's blinding of Israel as a whole is about, it does not prevent the Israelite as an individual from believing and being saved. So, the conclusion we must draw from the above context is that the Calvinist does not understand the issue behind election. Once again, election has to do with God's choosing of those through whom He will be glorified. It has everything to do with who will

occupy the status of special, chosen people before God; that is, those people God has now chosen to bear His truth to the world.

Who are the special people of God? The special people of God are not those of the seed of Abraham. The special people of God are those who are of the faith of Abraham, which is comprised at this time of both Jews and gentiles.

The church, at this time, is the people of God chosen to show forth to the rest of the world the salvation of God. The Church is now the priestly collective body of saints among whom the Spirit now makes His home.

1 Peter 2:7-9: Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The point of stumbling for the Jew was the fact that Christ had to die. The Israelites were temporarily set aside as the special people of God because they were looking for a national deliverer instead of a suffering substitute as Paul states in the following verse.

1 Corinthians 1:23: but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

The primary point of stumbling for the Israelites was the concept of a dying Messiah.

Galatians 5:11: And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

According to the mindset of the Jew who failed to believe, the Messiah was not supposed to be killed, He was supposed to conquer.

God has chosen, at this time, not to be glorified by just any Jew, but rather those Jews who believe like Abraham believed. And, of course, this upsets the apple cart of the expectation of the Jew who thought that, because he was a descendant of Abraham, he was automatically enrolled as a recipient of the position of special person before God.

John the Baptist was the first to warn the Jews that this was not the case.

Luke 3:8: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Likewise, the rich man in hell tried to use that argument.

Luke 16:24: "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

I have just laid the backdrop for you against which Romans 9-11 needs to be understood.

Let us now continue to examine Romans 9 verse by verse, starting in verse 4:

Romans 9:4: who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises;

The language of this verse is speaking of special status and future expectation of Israel. Their special status before God is reflected in the giving of the law for their protection in the here and now and their ultimate status of sonship in the age to come.

Romans 9:5: of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

In other words, the Israelites are the rightful heirs of the special people status of God. They are the nation of people associated with the patriarchs and they are the special people from whom the humanity of Christ was spawned. The Israelites are the special people of God through whom and for whom Christ primarily came.

Okay, let us talk a little more about the overall purpose of God. The purpose of God is to manifest and commend Himself to people's consciences as the answer to their need. God desired to manifest his mercy to all peoples. Furthermore, God always held out the possibility that Israel would not be great enough to manifest His glory to the all the world; that is, if they existed in a state of unbelief, they as a nation would not constitute the people

through whom God would be glorified. He decided that, nationally, because of their collective unbelief, He could get a greater bang for His buck if He sought to invite gentiles to participate in that special person status. He did that. Bypassing His natural seed, God instead decided that he would have mercy on all and invite all, at this time, to partake of his election. And to this, the carnal Jew objects. Romans chapters 9 through 11 answers that objection.

Let's now continue our consideration of Romans chapter 9:

Romans 9:6-8: But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

"In Isaac shall your seed be called" points out the previous point Paul made, which is not every child of Abraham is a child of God, but only those children who are of the promise. He is not a child of God who is a physical descendant of Abraham, but the spiritual descendants of Abraham, that is, those who believe in the promise of salvation to be accomplished by the seed of Abraham, those are counted as the children of God.

Christ came through the seed of Isaac, as promised by God, and Christ came through Jacob, a fact which was contrary to man's understanding of the oldest son being the heir. But God knew through what line His Son would be born, so God made sure that that line was memorialized in Scripture, and the genetic roots of the Lord Jesus was maintained through some miraculous means.

The purpose of God was to memorialize the path of His seed, the Lord Jesus, and we see that He has done that in Scripture. It is truly miraculous that the lineage of Jesus is recorded for us beforehand in the Scriptures. It is truly miraculous that the Scriptures record the unusual path that the seed of Christ took through human history before Christ ever arrived on the scene. I mean, do we have recorded for us in history the detail of the progenitors of George Washington twenty-four generations before he was born?

Now who are the children of promise? They are the children who hope in the power of God to meet their need of righteousness. The promise began with God's promise to Abraham that "in thy seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed." Those who were to be instrumental in God's plan of salvation were not going to be those who were generated by an act of unbelief; but, rather, those who were the result of an act of faith in the provision of God in spite of the fleshly odds. Isaac was the result of a seemingly humanly impossible birth. His birth was a type of life out of the dead.

Romans 4:19: And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

Romans 9:9: For this *is* the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son

Notice that the two components of this promise are allegorical for the hope and future of Christ. Sarah did not conceive right away but Abraham had to wait on the Lord. Thus, Old Testament saints had to wait on the Lord for their righteousness which they

would receive at the end of the dispensation, upon the resurrection and return of Christ,

Romans 9:10: "And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac.

This verse should literally be translated "and not only but also even Rebecca, out of one sexual encounter with Isaac."

In other words, Isaac knew Rebecca was barren but he, upon the testimony of God, decided to take God at his word and, thus, they bore a son. It was the power of God that produced in Rebecca the progenitor of the Lord Jesus.

Okay, here is where it's starts getting dicey, so we need to be careful to define our terms.

Romans 9:11: (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

It was not the natural order of the operation of man that brought forth the Savior, but, once again, God intervenes and chooses not the firstborn, but the younger child as the progenitor of the Christ.

Literally, the last half of verse 11 is translated, "in order that the according to election purpose of God might remain." The rest of the verse stands in apposition to the beginning, which is not out of the source of works, but out of the source of him who calls.

In other words, the elect purpose of God was and is to provide a grace way of salvation that has as its source the virtue of God and not the virtue of man.

So, what election is Paul talking about here? Well, it says in this context the election of grace; that is, God chooses to be glorified through those who are properly oriented to grace. God has chosen to save and prepare for heaven people according to the election of grace, as contrasted to the election of the law, if there was such a thing. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel maintained their servant status before God, with the blessings of that status, on the basis of their adherence to the law of Moses. Now the election, that is, the special person status before God, is maintained according to the election of Grace. Believers maintain their election, or special people status, (not salvation) as they continue to occupy themselves, not in law, but in grace.

Romans 11:5: Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

I guess we should say that God has elected the plan and invited participants. The plan is according to his grace and the participants are whosoever believes.

This verse does not sound a whole lot different than John 1:11-13:

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, 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.

One additional comment on Romans 9:11 is the word “stand” or in the Greek it is the word *μεινο* or “remain.” In other words, in order that “the according to the purpose of God election” might remain memorialized, Scripture records for us the diversion in what would have been the human geneology of Jesus.

All of these events, which were contrary to the normal course of human events, were intended to memorialize the lineage of the seed of promise, in order that events which transpired which brought forth the promised seed might remain a conspicuous event in human history.

Romans 9:12: it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."

This is another unique and conspicuous event in human history.

The purpose of God was and is to save people with a salvation that originates with His goodness and provision and not for the source of our works. His purpose was also to commend that salvation to as many people as possible. That purpose is aided in God’s memorializing those who were the progenitors of the Lord Jesus. His purpose is fulfilled by paying heed to Jacob over Esau because the promised Seed was in Jacob and not Esau.

By the way, God did not wish harm to Esau. It was just that through Jacob, the elect of God, that Christ would come.

It is very obvious in the case of Jacob and Esau that it was not works that gained Jacob preference, Jacob basically deceived his father into blessing him over Jacob.

Genesis 27:15-18: Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which *were* with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. So he went to his father and said, "My father.' And he said, "Here I am. Who *are* you, *my* son?"

There is a higher principle at stake here in Romans 9, a higher principle than a vindication of personal merit; and that is the purpose of God in His revelation of His plan of salvation. Moreover, righteous people are willing to trust God and subordinate themselves to that plan. Unrighteous Israelites would balk at God's plan because it did not favor physical descendants of Abraham.

The purpose of God in Salvation was to extend His blessings to the Gentiles.

We need to realize that Romans 9-11 are written to explain God's past, present and future dealings with Israel in light of the present reality of God's having preferred over Israelites a company of gentile believers.

Romans 9:13,14: As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

There is not unrighteousness with God; during the day of the Apostle Paul, selfish Jews put their own glorification over the well being of others. God says the greater good of His mercy is served,

on occasion, by doing some things that seem personally unfair. When such a thing occurs, righteous people look for the greater good in such an event. "If my demotion will cause more people to be saved, then so be it," should have been the attitude of the righteous Jewish saint. There is not unrighteousness with God, there is a lack of righteousness in men who will not trust the Lord with their own demotion.

Romans 9:15: For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

The argument being raised, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," in Romans 9 is raised against the objection of Jews who found unrighteousness with God because He had decreed that He would be merciful to whomever He wanted. How dare they object to the mercy of God shown to others!

Matthew 20:15: 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?'

Romans 9:16: So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

In other words, Israel, submit to God's plan to be merciful to others even if that mercy involves your demotion. If your demotion is able to accomplish a greater good, then rejoice in your demotion.

Psalms 118:22-24: The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the

day that the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Romans 9:17: For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

Long before God hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh had already exercised negative volition towards the God of Joseph, whom his predecessor knew.

Exodus 5:2: And Pharaoh said, "Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."

Let us talk about the process by which a person's heart is hardened. The hardening of a man's heart begins with his negative volition towards light and truth.

Romans 1:18-24: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the

incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

The next step is that man's heart is hardened by his own rebellion, because he is angry over the lack of joy and prosperity in his life caused by his rejection of the light. He decides to get even with the God who has revealed Himself to the rebellious light reject-er.

The person who has been hardened needs to go back to the initial revelation of the light of God and respond positively at that point. Hardness and blindness starts with a decision not to pursue the God who revealed himself to a person's conscience; such hardness is nurtured when such a person, from a frustrated heart, frustrated over the chaos in his life, lashes out at God. Rather than lashing out at the God, the person experiencing chaos needs to respond positively to the first light by allowing the judgment of God to humble his heart to hear the word of the Lord.

The Lord hardens the heart of a person through that person's own negative volition and stubbornness. A person in his stubbornness lashes out at God and experiences greater judgment in his life, which, unless that person repents at that point, will grow even more obstinate in His heart. Once a person has chosen not to pursue the God who has revealed Himself, God is free to utilize that person in any way he so desires. Occasionally, someone will become positive as a result of the judgment of God:

Daniel 4:30: The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

Romans 9:18: Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

The above verse is a contrast in the treatment of God toward the Gentiles and toward the Jews. This hardness does not prohibit a Jew from becoming a believer in Christ; it rather prevents an unbelieving Jew from being promoted to special person of God status. This, as we have already pointed out, is made clear from passages like Romans 11:14 and II Corinthians 3:15-16. The issue here is not whom God allows to respond to first light, believe and be saved; rather, the issue here is whom He allows to be used as a vessel of positive glorification unto the rest of the earth.

Romans 9:19: You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

In other words, the Jew is saying, "Okay, since God has hardened us, why does He still find fault?" The hardening was predicated upon what they already had done with the knowledge of God which He had placed within their midst. They had rejected it. Moreover, the hardening does not prevent the Israelite from believing the gospel; it prevents him from being able to assimilate truth which would enable him to continue as the ambassador of God to the world.

When a person rejects the light of God's revelation, and thus finds himself in a confirmed state of unrighteousness, God is free to get whatever glory He wants to from that vessel of wrath before He consigns that person to a place of eternal condemnation. I

mean, what is worse for a confirmed light rejecter: being allowed to continue on this earth in the relative comfort of this planet and become an example of what can happen to people who turn their backs on God, or for God to immediately transport such a person to the torment of Hell?

Romans 9:20: But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, "Why have you made me like this?"

This verse is of course alluding to several verses in the Old Testament:

Jeremiah 18:1-7: The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,

The above passage in Jeremiah is a pronouncement against the entire nation of Israel, which lends credence to the argument that Romans 9 is talking about national hardening and not personal exclusion from an opportunity to believe the gospel. Romans 9:20 is also an allusion to Isaiah 29:16:

Isaiah 29:16: Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, "He did not make me"? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

Here is a good way to understand the issue concerning blindness: Israel, as a whole, was not able to believe in a way which would save their nation because Israelites, as individuals, were not believing in a way which would result in the personal imputation of righteousness.

Romans 9:20 is definitely an allusion to Isaiah 29:16, which reads a little more like Romans 9:20 in the Septuagint

<sup>LXE</sup> Isaiah 29:16: Shall ye not be counted as clay of the potter? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Thou didst not form me? or the work to the maker, Thou hast not made me wisely?

Romans 9:22-24: *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

This verse presents a hypothetical case. What if you, Israel, were nothing more than a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction?

That is, what if God prepared you and had determined that at this time your nation would be destroyed? If it accomplishes the greater good. So be it!

“That He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessel of mercy” includes both Jews and Gentiles. A Jewish saint walking as he ought to have with the Lord would have rejoiced in the greater good that the Lord was about to accomplish, even if it meant a diminishing of the experience of his own nation.

“Prepared for glory” in this context does not necessarily mean made fit for heaven, if we follow the contrast presented in this verse, glory is opposite of destruction. The destruction of this context is the demotion from a position of special status; the glory is promotion to special status. The most common meaning of the word “glory” is “to publically promote to a higher position.” Paul is saying that God wants to be merciful to both Jews and gentiles by making no distinction between them and offering to promote members of either group to special person status through grace, and enrolling them in a new organization: the church.

Once again, the scenario in verses 22 through 24 is a hypothetical case: would not God have still been righteous if He fully intended never to implement plan A? Should you not still glorify God for His manifestation of salvation to the world even if the only reason He dealt with Pharaoh and the Jews was in order to manifest His power so that more people might come to know Him? Even if the only outcome He had for your nation was a negative one, you should still glorify God for his goodness.

Psalm 118:22-24: The stone *which* the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the  
LORD's doing; It *is* marvelous in our eyes. This *is* the

day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Romans 9:24: even us whom he called.

God invites all to hear the word and believe. God also invites believers to experience promotion in the age to come. So the Scriptures speak of two callings: A universal invitation to believe the gospel and an invitation for believers to experience the promotion unto useful vessel of honor. Obviously, in this context he has in mind vessels of honor.

Romans 9:24,25: *even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?* As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved."

Now we are getting into the explanation of what Paul really has in mind behind this line of teaching. Paul is explaining to a Jewish mindset, or at least people who are familiar with the Jewish dilemma, concerning Gentiles at this time becoming the favored people of God. Paul is here enumerating plan B in the will of God. Paul is saying, "Hey, God had always planned to saved the gentiles, so don't act all surprised!"

Romans 9:25-29: As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, '*You are not My people,*' There they shall be called sons of the living God." Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. For He will finish

the work and cut *it* short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah."

What we have in this passage are Old Testament predictions of an Israel in trouble, of an Israel of which few would be saved. Paul goes on in Romans 9:27, demonstrating that Isaiah predicted that a remnant of people would come through the Great Tribulation. Basically, what Paul is doing here is demonstrating that the salvation of Israel never was going to be the majority of Israelites; but, rather, a remnant. (Isaiah 10:20)

Romans 9:29 is a quote of Isaiah 1:9, which occurs in a context once again describing the judgment of God upon Israelites, resulting in the salvation of a very small remnant. Paul is saying, "Hey, Israel, don't be surprised by the relative few of you who are now going to experience blessing in the church." After all, this was predicted as a possibility in Scripture.

Romans 9:30-33: What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

So Paul, in a nutshell, identifies for us why Israel finds themselves in their present position of no longer occupying the position of special person status. They failed because, as a nation, they failed to embrace the concept of their righteousness being found in the sacrifice of their Messiah. Israel, as a nation, missed the boat because their concept of the Messiah did not embrace the concept of their righteous being derived from the sacrifice of Christ. Rather, the righteous they thought was going to forever establish them in the land of promise was personal obedience to the Law.

Notice in this verse that faith is contrasted to the Law. Of course, when this passage talks about the righteousness of faith, the author is not saying that it is the spiritual bravery that commends people to God, as if faith in and of itself was a meritorious exercise. We are not declared righteous on the basis of faith, we are declared righteous on the basis of the blood of Christ.

Romans 9:33: As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

We understand the prophecy behind this verse. We understand that most of Israel was put to shame, as they lost their status of elect nation before God.

## **Some Final Thoughts**

A Calvinist recently posted the question below on Facebook, to which I would like to briefly respond:

“How does the Arminian escape the reality that if God knows someone will ultimately end up in hell before he creates them (free will or not), then His very act of creating them has predestined what he knew would result from creating them, namely that they would end up in hell?”

My response to the question above would be as follows:

**1.** Each individual born into the world is not a special creation of God but rather is the result of human procreation. If each individual was a special creation of God, then why are not each of us created perfect? No, most of us have at least one or two flawed chromosomes which lead to all sorts of congenital defects.

Quite frankly, this is same argument that gays use: "Why did God make me gay"? While I don't believe people are born gay, we are all born sinners. So we could all ask, "Why did God make me a sinner"? The truth of the matter is, with the exception of Adam, Eve and the Lord Jesus, the rest of us are sinners because we are born of procreation and not special creation. We are born sinners because somehow the flawed traits of our depravity are inherited from our parents.

**2.** The accusation presupposes something about the foreknowledge of God which the Scriptures do not anticipate. It assumes that since God is an infinite omniscient being, then He is obligated to always and actively foreknow all things.

My position would be that God can choose to not foreknow all things. Even though God can foreknow all future events, he is not obligated to do so. It is like a computer programmer who has written subroutine to generate a random number. The programmer

could analyze all the registry setting of the computer and figure out before he presses the execute button what random number his computer was going to generate, but he doesn't have to do that. The computer programmer can, when he needs another random number, just call the subroutine and see what comes out. Likewise God, in his infinite knowledge can drill down into our future and anticipate our every action, but He is not obligated to do so. There are instances in the Scripture, as in Psalms 22, where clearly God did direct the power of his foreknowledge to foresee the future, as in the sufferings of Christ. On the other hand, we also have examples in Scripture, where it is obvious that He was not exercising that power.

God's chooses that his foreknowledge not participate in His salvific dealings with an individual. The invitations of God are genuine, a positive response is longed for and a negative response causes genuine grief with God. Such responses would be disingenuous if the individual's response to God had been foreordained or was certain.

The above deliberative process of God is made obvious by several considerations from Scripture:

Jeremiah 32:35 'And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

Why did it not come to God's mind that Israel would commit these things. Does He not foreknow all? Apparently God WAS surprised with the degree to which His children had forsaken Him.

Likewise why is God genuinely grieved in the below verse:

Genesis 6:6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.

Why was God sorry he made them? Did He not anticipate the outcome of His creative acts? Once again, the Calvinist is making assumptions about the foreknowledge of God which the Scriptures do not anticipate. Indeed, when it comes to men's responses to God, perhaps God chooses not to allow His foreknowledge to enter into His salvific dealings with men. We need to allow Scripture, and not our philosophy, guide our understanding the foreknowledge of God.

Or how about this context:

1 Samuel 15:10-11 Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, 11 "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night.

Once again the question must be asked, why did the Lord regret the choice he had previously made? Did He not, in His foreknowledge, anticipate the Saul would be a disappointment? Once again we are forced to conclude that we have been making general assumptions concerning God's foreknowledge which the Scriptures do not support.

**3.** If God looked forwarded into the future and "did it anyway", then why would God ever experience wrath? "So I swore in my wrath ""They shall not enter into my rest"" (Heb. 4:3). Why would God ever experience wrath over people's lack of response to Himself? That would be like a human programming his computer to put forth a response that the programmer did not agree with and then getting angry over the response. The very facts that God experiences emotion and sorrow over men's negative responses demonstrates men's responses to God are not foreordained. God's desires for people to respond positively are genuine and His sorrow when we don't is also genuine. Was Jesus "faking" His sorrow in the context below? Had He simply "gone through the motions" of offering the kingdom?

Luke 19:41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Jesus was not "faking" it. His desire that Israel respond was genuine, the invitation was genuine, and Israel's negative response grieved His heart. Such grief would not be genuine if God's foreknowledge fully participated in His salvific dealings with men.

God can choose, if it serves His plan, to set aside the utilization of His non-communicable attributes. For example in the Lords

cursing of the fig tree, in Mark chapter 11, we see the Lord not utilizing at least four of His attributes of deity:

Mark 11:12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

In the above passage, the Lord could have utilized his omnipotence and created His own food; He could have utilized his omniscience and known that it was not the season for figs; He could have exercised his foreknowledge and known that once he arrived at the tree He would find that it contained no figs; or He could have exercised His omnipresence and from a distance seen that the fig tree did not contain figs. But he chose during that time in His earthly ministry to not utilize any of those divine, non-communicable attributes. God can choose, for his own purposes, to set aside the utilization of His divine attributes, if it suits His ends.

The above might also explain why Jesus did not know the time of His return in the context below:

Mark 13:32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Notice in the above verse states that, at least at the time of its utterance by the Lord, the Lord did not know the timing of His return to this earth. Could it be that the verdict was still out, and God the Father had not yet decreed, that the appearance of the

Kingdom was going to be postponed? Or perhaps God had not yet decreed the duration or extent of a gentile contingency of priestly saints? Perhaps God had not yet decreed the duration of the time of the gentiles. We can only speculate.

The problem with the Calvinist's concept of foreknowledge is he makes a general assumption concerning the extent to which God knows the ends from the beginning, force that assumption to become a core component of his soteriology and then consider it an attack on the omniscience of God to believe otherwise. Moreover, through this series of assumptions the Calvinist develop an entire system of soteriology based on an assumption the Bible never develops.

Quite frankly, if the Bible does not develop this topic, then the believer should refuse to participate in the discussion.

NKJ Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.....

Dan Lash

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