



# TULIP

The Five Points of Calvinism



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK



§ TULIP

# *The Five Points of Calvinism*

STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

**Bethlehem College & Seminary**

720 13th Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55415

612.455.3420

info@bcsmn.edu | bcsmn.edu

Copyright © 2007, 2012, 2017 by Bethlehem College & Seminary

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



## TULIP

### *The Five Points of Calvinism*

#### STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

---

#### Table of Contents

Course Syllabus		1
Introduction from John Piper		3
Lesson 1	Introduction to the Doctrines of Grace	5
Lesson 2	Total Depravity	27
Lesson 3	Irresistible Grace	55
Lesson 4	Limited Atonement	83
Lesson 5	Unconditional Election	113
Lesson 6	Perseverance of the Saints	137
Appendices		
Appendix A	Historical Information	167
Appendix B	Testimonies from Church History	169
Appendix C	Ten Effects of Believing in the Five Points of Calvinism	177





## TULIP

### *The Five Points of Calvinism*

#### SYLLABUS

---

##### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism* course is an attempt to carefully present biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Students will systematically study the five points of Calvinism (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints) by examining relevant biblical passages. The student's learning will be solidified through answering study questions, considering provocative quotations, and engaging in class discussions. Ultimately, our goal is that students who take this course will be awakened to the glory of God's sovereign grace.

##### OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ Magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ Understand the Scriptures more fully as a result of searching them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ Comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five points of Calvinism as they are presented in this curriculum. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions, respond to common objections, and formulate their own questions.
- ▷ Discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.
- ▷ Synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course's final project.

## 📖 REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- ▶ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version (ESV)* or *New American Standard Bible (NASB)*

## 📖 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2-6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction, the Lesson Objectives, and the Preliminary Definitions. Then the student should read the remainder of the lesson and answer the 15 questions contained therein. Each lesson's workload has been divided into five daily assignments for the convenience of the student. If time permits, students may complete the "Further Up and Further In" section of the lesson. (NOTE: The "Further Up and Further In" section of each lesson contains one article or sermon related to the topic for that lesson.)

As a final project, students will compose a summary (2-3 pages double-spaced) of their understanding of the five points of Calvinism (to be turned in at the end of the course). This paper may be emailed as an attachment to the instructor or mailed to the instructor's address. In this summary, students will:

- outline their understanding of the 5 points of Calvinism as presented in the workbook and class discussions.
- articulate any questions or objections that remain in their minds.
- express how the doctrines of grace are beginning to affect the way that they live, worship, pray, and evangelize.

## 📖 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Introduction to Calvinism
2		Total Depravity
3		Irresistible Grace
4		Limited Atonement
5		Unconditional Election
6		Perseverance of the Saints



# Introduction from John Piper

---

We love God. He is our great Treasure, and nothing can compare with him. One of the great old catechisms says, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” That is the One we love. We love the whole panorama of his perfections. To know him and to be loved by him is the end of our soul’s quest for eternal satisfaction. He is infinite; that answers to our longing for completeness. He is eternal; that answers to our longing for permanence. He is unchangeable; that answers to our longing for stability and security. There is none like God. Nothing can compare with him. Money, sex, power, popularity, conquest - nothing can compare with God.

The more you know him, the more you want to know him. The more you feast on his fellowship, the hungrier you are for deeper, richer communion. Satisfaction at the deepest levels breeds a holy longing for the time when we will have the very power of God to love God. That’s the way Jesus prays for us to his Father, “. . . that the love with which You loved Me may be in them.” That is what we long for: the very love the Father has for the Son filling us, enabling us to love the Son with the very love of the Father. Then the frustrations of inadequate love will be over.

Yes, the more you know him and love him and trust him, the more you long to know him. That is why we have written this curriculum. We long to know God and enjoy God. Another great old catechism says, “What is the chief end of man?” And answers: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.” We believe that enjoying God is the way to glorify God, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. But to enjoy him we must know him. Seeing is savoring. If he remains a blurry, vague fog, we may be intrigued for a season. But we will not be stunned with joy, as when the fog clears and you find yourself on the brink of some vast precipice.

Our experience is that clear knowledge of God from the Bible is the kindling that sustains the fires of affection for God. And probably the most crucial kind of knowledge is the knowledge of what God is like in salvation. That is what the five points of Calvinism are about. We do not begin as Calvinists and defend a system. We begin as Bible-believing Christians who want to put the Bible above all systems of thought. But over the years – many years of struggle – we have deepened in our conviction that Calvinistic teachings on the five points are biblical and therefore true.

Our own struggle makes us patient with others who are on the way. We believe that all the wrestling to understand what the Bible teaches about God is worth it. God is a rock of strength in a world of quicksand. To know him in his sovereignty is to become like an oak tree in the wind of adversity and confusion. And along with strength is sweetness and tenderness beyond imagination. The sovereign Lion of Judah is the sweet Lamb of God.

We hope you will be helped. If you aren't, well, then just return to the Bible and read it with all your might. That is where we want you to end up anyway: reading and understanding and loving and enjoying and obeying God's Word, not our word.

For the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Piper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Piper  
Chancellor  
Bethlehem College & Seminary  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

# Introduction to the Doctrines of Grace

# 1

---

## 📖 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this course is to provide an introduction and explanation of the five points of Calvinism. Sometimes called the Doctrines of Grace, these five points summarize the biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Though this study will primarily focus on the five points, Calvinism should not be restricted to them. J.I. Packer aptly explains this point:

*In the first place, Calvinism is something much broader than the “five points” indicate. Calvinism is a whole world-view, stemming from a clear vision of God as the whole world’s Maker and King. Calvinism is the consistent endeavour to acknowledge the Creator as the Lord, working all things after the counsel of His will. Calvinism is a theocentric way of thinking about all life under the direction and control of God’s own Word. Calvinism, in other words, is the theology of the Bible viewed from the perspective of the Bible—the God-centered outlook which sees the Creator as the source, and means, and end, of everything that is, both in nature and in grace. Calvinism is thus theism (belief in God as the ground of all things), religion (dependence on God as the giver of all things), and evangelicalism (trust in God through Christ for all things), all in their purest and most highly developed form. And Calvinism is a unified philosophy of history which sees the whole diversity of processes and events that take place in God’s world as no more, and no less, than the outworking of His great preordained plan for His creatures and His church. The five points assert no more than that God is sovereign in saving the individual, but Calvinism, as such, is concerned with the much broader assertion that He is sovereign everywhere.<sup>1</sup>*

Because “Calvinism...is concerned with the...assertion that [God] is sovereign everywhere,” we must first establish the larger point that God is sovereign over all of reality before we attempt to unpack the biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God in salvation.

---

<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay” in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by John Owen (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 5.



## THE ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

What do we mean when we say that God is sovereign? The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith offers this summary of the doctrine of God's sovereignty:

*"We believe that God, from all eternity, in order to display the full extent of His glory for the eternal and ever-increasing enjoyment of all who love Him, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely and unchangeably ordain and foreknow whatever comes to pass."<sup>2</sup>*

In the first part of this lesson, we will examine biblical texts that support the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty.

### Isaiah 46:8-10

*<sup>8</sup> Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, <sup>9</sup> remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose..."*

### Daniel 4:34-35

*<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*

### Psalm 115:3

*<sup>3</sup> Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith Section 3.1.

Romans 9:18-19

<sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

Job 42:2

<sup>2</sup> I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Psalm 33:8-10

<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! <sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. <sup>10</sup> The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

1. Summarize the teaching of these verses in your own words. In light of these texts, is it right to say that God’s purposes are unstoppable? Explain your answer.

While someone might agree that God is able to accomplish his purposes in the grand scheme of things, there may still be some skepticism as to whether God designs and governs everything that comes to pass. Ephesians 1:11 is one of the clearest texts that addresses this issue.

Ephesians 1:11-12

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

But what is included in “all things”? The following texts provide a sampling of the sort of things that fall under God’s exhaustive sovereignty.

Psalm 135:6-7

<sup>6</sup> Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. <sup>7</sup> He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

Romans 13:1

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Proverbs 19:21

<sup>21</sup> Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

Proverbs 16:33

<sup>33</sup> The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Proverbs 21:1

<sup>1</sup> The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

Genesis 20:2-6

<sup>2</sup> And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." <sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup> Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her."

Amos 3:6

<sup>6</sup> Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?

Isaiah 45:7

<sup>7</sup> I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Matthew 10:29

*<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*

James 4:13-15

*<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”*

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

2. In light of these texts, underline the areas of life over which God exercises his sovereign rule. Underline one example per text. Is it accurate to say that God is sovereign over the human will?

Here is John Piper’s summary of what is included in the “all things” of Ephesians 1:11.

*“This ‘all things’ includes the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33), the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11), the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1), the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the sickness of children (2 Samuel 12:15), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19), the completion of travel plans (James 4:15), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25), the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29), the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13), the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3), the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6),*

*and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28)."*<sup>3</sup>

The list of texts in the previous section raises some serious questions for students of the Bible. If God is able to restrain the sin of individuals (Genesis 20:6), then why does he not do it more often? If God brings forth winds from his storehouses (Psalm 135:7), then what are we to make of hurricanes and tornadoes that devastate cities and result in the loss of many lives? When disaster befalls a city, whether a tsunami, a bridge collapse, or an epidemic, should we really conclude that the LORD has done it (Amos 3:6)? How exactly should we understand the relationship between the sovereignty of God and evil, whether it is evil resulting from natural forces or evil resulting from the sinful actions of human beings and demonic powers?

To answer these questions, we will examine three biblical stories that give us valuable insight into the ways of our God. We begin with the story of Job.

Job 1:1—22

*<sup>1</sup> There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup> There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup> He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." <sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none*

---

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, "Why I Do Not Say 'God Did Not Cause This Calamity, But He Can Use It For Good'", an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide the sermon titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons at the Desiring God website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these sermons.



like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”<sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason?”<sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.<sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”<sup>12</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,<sup>14</sup> and there came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,<sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”<sup>16</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”<sup>17</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”<sup>18</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,<sup>19</sup> and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.<sup>21</sup> And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

<sup>22</sup> In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

#### Job 2:1—10

<sup>1</sup> Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.<sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me

against him to destroy him without reason.”<sup>4</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life.<sup>5</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”<sup>6</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.”

<sup>7</sup> So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.<sup>8</sup> And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

<sup>9</sup> Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”<sup>10</sup> But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

3. Underline every person or group that is in any way responsible for the theft of Job’s possessions, the death of his children, and his sickness? Be sure to wrestle with the complexity of this question. To whom does Job attribute ultimate responsibility?

4. What limits are evident on the activity of Satan? Be specific.

*“From the smallest thing to the greatest, good and evil, happy and sad, pagan and Christian, pain and pleasure—God governs all for his wise, just, and good purposes*

*(Isa. 46:10). Lest we miss the point, the Bible speaks most clearly to this in the most painful situations. Amos asks, "Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?" (Amos 3:6). After losing his ten children, Job says, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Covered with boils, he says, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10).*

*True, Satan is real and active and involved in this world of woe! In fact, Job 2:7 says, "Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." Satan struck him. But Job did not get comfort by looking at secondary causes. He got comfort by looking at the ultimate cause. "Shall we not accept adversity from God?" And the author of the book agrees when he says that Job's brothers and sisters "showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him" (Job 42:11). James underlines God's purposeful goodness in Job's misery: "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11). Job himself concludes in prayer: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). Yes, Satan is real, and he is terrible—and he is on a leash."<sup>4</sup>*

The next story that we will examine is the story of Joseph.

#### Genesis 37:12-36

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup> And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." <sup>14</sup> So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. <sup>15</sup> And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" <sup>16</sup> "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup> And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

<sup>18</sup> They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. <sup>19</sup> They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer.

---

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "Grounds for Dismay: The Error and Injury of Open Theism" in *Beyond the Bounds*, ed. Piper, Taylor, and Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 381.

<sup>20</sup> Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.”<sup>21</sup> But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.”<sup>22</sup> And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.”<sup>23</sup> So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.<sup>24</sup> And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

<sup>25</sup> Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.<sup>26</sup> Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?”<sup>27</sup> Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.<sup>28</sup> Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

<sup>29</sup> When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes<sup>30</sup> and returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?”<sup>31</sup> Then they took Joseph’s robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.<sup>32</sup> And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, “This we have found; please identify whether it is your son’s robe or not.”<sup>33</sup> And he identified it and said, “It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.”<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.<sup>35</sup> All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

#### Genesis 45:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.<sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.<sup>3</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could

not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

#### Genesis 50:15-21

<sup>15</sup> When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.”

<sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died, <sup>17</sup> ‘Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

#### Psalm 105:16-22

<sup>16</sup> When he summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, <sup>17</sup> he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. <sup>18</sup> His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron; <sup>19</sup> until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. <sup>20</sup> The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free; <sup>21</sup> he made him lord of his house and ruler of all his possessions, <sup>22</sup> to bind his princes at his pleasure and to teach his elders wisdom.

5. Underline every reference in these verses to the selling of Joseph into slavery. How does the Bible describe this action?

6. Was it evil for Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery? Was it evil for God to send Joseph ahead of his family into Egypt? How can we reconcile these two descriptions of the same act?

As we approach the issue of God's sovereignty in relation to evil, Christians must avoid two dangers. The first is to minimize the biblical truth that God is in fact absolutely sovereign over his creation. God is not an absentee landlord, indifferent to the cares of this world. Indeed, he is so intimately involved in his creation that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from him (Matthew 10:29). If first-century Jews had been aware of sub-atomic particles, then we would most likely have statements in the Bible reflecting the fact that not one of them is ever out of place. As it stands, we must be content with Scripture that unequivocally confesses that God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11).

On the other hand, we must also avoid the temptation to minimize the reality of evil, as if pain and wickedness were simply illusions. We must never give in to the fleshly logic that says "Because God ordains all things, there is really no such thing as evil." The Bible will have nothing to do with such logic. Christians do not shrink from calling evil "evil" (Genesis 50:20), or calamity "calamity" (Isaiah 45:7), or disaster "disaster" (Amos 3:6). Neither do we shrink from saying that God allows, governs, permits, and ordains that evil exist, including natural evil like monsoons and bridge collapses and moral evil like slavery and murder.

If we find ourselves straining to understand how both of these truths could exist at the same time, then we are simply experiencing the limits of our finite minds. We are not God. It is not for us to understand every mystery in the Bible. "The secret things belong to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Instead we must bow our knees in humble adoration and confess *that* both doctrines are true, even if we can't fully explain *how* they are true. Faith in the infinite God of Scripture requires no less.

The final story that we will examine is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Luke 23:1-46

<sup>1</sup> Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." <sup>3</sup> And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." <sup>5</sup> But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

<sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. <sup>9</sup> So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

<sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore punish and release him."

<sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"—<sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. <sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, <sup>21</sup> but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" <sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." <sup>23</sup> But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

<sup>26</sup> And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming

*in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.<sup>27</sup> And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.<sup>28</sup> But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.<sup>29</sup> For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’<sup>30</sup> Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’<sup>31</sup> For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”*

<sup>32</sup> *Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.<sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.<sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine<sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”<sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”*

<sup>39</sup> *One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”<sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?<sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”<sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

<sup>44</sup> *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,<sup>45</sup> while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.<sup>46</sup> Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.*

7. From this passage, list every person who was involved in the death of Jesus. Was it evil for these men to put the Son of God to death? In your opinion, is this the most evil act that has ever been committed? Explain your answer.



Acts 4:24-30

*<sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set them-selves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed' - <sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup> And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

Isaiah 53:10

*<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*

Romans 8:32

*<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

8. According to these passages, was the crucifixion of Jesus planned and ordained by God? If so, did God ordain and plan that evil occur? Explain your answer.

*The most compelling example of God's willing what he disapproves is the God-ordained death of Christ. Here we have a clear example of God's planning for something to come to pass which necessarily involved great sin, while at the same time disapproving of the sin involved. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas was a morally evil act inspired immediately by Satan (Luke 22:3). Yet in Acts 2:23 (RSV) Luke says, "This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan (boule) and foreknowledge of God." The betrayal was sin, and it involved the instrumentality of Satan; but it was part of God's ordained plan. That is, there is a sense in which God willed the delivering up of his Son, even though the act was sin.*

*Moreover, Herod's contempt for Jesus (Luke 23:11), Pilate's spineless expediency (Luke 23:24), the Jewish crowds' cry, "Crucify, crucify him!" (Luke 23:21), and the Gentile soldiers' mockery (Luke 23:36) were also sinful attitudes and deeds. Yet in Acts 4:27-28 Luke expresses his understanding of the sovereignty of God in these acts by recording the prayer of the Jerusalem saints:*

*Truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose (boule) predestined to occur.*

*Herod, Pilate, the soldiers, and Jewish crowds lifted their hand to rebel against the Most High, only to find that their rebellion was unwitting (sinful) service in the inscrutable designs of God.<sup>5</sup>*

In saying that God ordained evil to occur, Calvinists are not arguing that God is the author of evil or that he himself sinned. Rather, we are simply seeking to do justice to the fact that God rules the universe in such a way that he wills in one sense what he disapproves of in another sense. John Piper writes the following:

*There are at least 'two wills' in God, or, better, two ways of willing. It implies that God decrees one state of affairs while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass. This distinction in the way God wills has been expressed in various ways throughout the centuries. It is not a new contrivance. For centuries, theologians have distinguished between God's sovereign will and moral will, his efficient and permissive will, his secret will and revealed will, his will of*

---

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?: Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

*decree and will of command, his decretive will and perceptive will, and his voluntas signi (will of sign) and voluntas beneplaciti (will of good pleasure), etc.*<sup>6</sup>

The distinction between the two wills of God is made, not only by Calvinists, but also by some Arminians. For example, I. Howard Marshall argues, “We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God’s will.”<sup>7</sup>

In saying that there are two senses in which God wills something, we are not arguing that God is schizophrenic or contradictory within himself. Rather, we are arguing that the emotional life of God is infinitely complex and beyond our ability to fully comprehend. As Romans 11:33 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

Despite the ultimate incomprehensibility of God’s ways, it may be profitable to seek to illustrate this distinction between God’s revealed will and his secret will. Jonathan Edwards helpfully sets forth the distinction:

*When a distinction is made between God’s revealed will and his secret will, or his will of command and decree, “will” is certainly in that distinction taken in two senses. His will of decree is not his will in the same sense as his will of command is. Therefore, it is no difficulty at all to suppose, that the one may be otherwise than the other: his will in both senses is his inclination. But when we say he wills virtue, or loves virtue, or the happiness of his creature; thereby is intended, that virtue, or the creature’s happiness, absolutely and simply considered, is agreeable to the inclination of his nature.*

*His will of decree is, his inclination to a thing, not as to that thing absolutely and simply, but with respect to the universality of things, that have been, or shall be. So God, though he hates a thing as it is simply, may incline to it with reference to the universality of things. Though he hates sin in itself, yet he may will to permit it, for the greater promotion of holiness in the universality, including all things, and at all times. So, though he has no inclination to a creature’s misery, considered absolutely,*

---

6 Ibid.

7 I. Howard Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles” in *A Case for Arminianism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 56.

*yet he may will it, for the greater promotion of happiness in this universality.*<sup>8</sup>

John Piper illustrates Edwards' point by arguing for God's capacity to view the world through two lenses.

*He can look through a narrow lens or through a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin for what it is in itself and is angered and grieved...but when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it. He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts, he does delight in.*<sup>9</sup>

9. What questions, if any, do you have about the notion that there are two wills in God? Does this distinction fit the biblical data? Are there other possible solutions to the problem of God's relationship to evil that do justice to the biblical texts?

In the final section of this lesson, we will propose what we have found to be a helpful way to illustrate the relationship between God and his creation. Again, this analogy is just that, an analogy. Because God is absolutely unique in his holiness, no analogy can fully capture the way that he interacts with his creation. Thus, the nature of the relationship between the Creator and his creation is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. Nevertheless, God has

---

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Decrees in General, and Election in Particular," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 527f.

<sup>9</sup> John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?: Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

provided in the Bible and in creation pictures and illustrations that enable us to better understand the manifold ways of God. Wayne Grudem offers a clear presentation of this analogy:

*It seems better to affirm that God causes all things that happen, but that he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable. Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect or the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all of Scripture.*

*The analogy of an author writing a play may help us to grasp how both aspects can be true. In the Shakespearean play Macbeth, the character Macbeth murders King Duncan. Now (if we assume for a moment that this is a fictional account), the question may be asked, “Who killed King Duncan?” On one level, the correct answer is “Macbeth.” Within the context of the play he carried out the murder and is rightly to blame for it. But on another level, a correct answer to the question, “Who killed King Duncan?” would be “William Shakespeare”: he wrote the play, he created all the characters in it, and he wrote the part where Macbeth killed King Duncan.<sup>10</sup>*

This analogy is not without its difficulties. For example, while Macbeth is merely a fictional character, we are very much real. Moreover, Shakespeare never interacts with Macbeth, unlike God, who constantly interacts with his “characters.” As Michael Horton has noted, “In Scripture we are introduced to a divine drama in which God is tacitly recognized as the playwright but is focally known as the central, though not the sole, actor.”<sup>11</sup> Horton calls this a “mysterium tremendum”—a tremendous mystery. And, of course, there is the simple reality, already noted, that in all of reality the Creator-creature relationship is utterly unique.

Despite these shortcomings, the analogy of an author and his characters is helpful in illuminating how God relates to the world that he has made. John

---

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 321-322.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Horton, “Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method,” in *Beyond the Bounds*, ed. Piper, Taylor, and Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 229.

Frame unpacks this point:

*The author is always present in the drama, arranging it to fit the characters, and the characters to fit the drama. He blesses and judges, using his own standards of evaluation. He is committed to the world he has made. His characters take on lives of their own, lives of creaturely otherness. He does not treat them as robots, even though he has complete control over them. Rather, he interacts with them on a personal level, treating them as responsible individuals with whom he enjoys a certain communion.<sup>12</sup>*

10. Interact with the author-characters analogy. Is it helpful in illuminating God's relationship to the world, particularly his relationship to evil? Are there any significant problems with the analogy? Can you think of any biblical texts to support this illustration?

**NOTE:**

The origin of the modern formulation of the five points of Calvinism is explained in Appendix A. The focus of this course is not primarily to examine the doctrinal formulations of John Calvin or any other theologian (though we will read various articles and sermons by such men)<sup>13</sup>. Rather, the focus will be to search the Scriptures to determine what the Bible teaches about the sinfulness of humanity, the grace of God, the atonement of Christ, the sovereignty of God in eternity past, and the security of the believer. These five issues have been condensed into the popular acronym TULIP, which stands for:

- Total Depravity
- Unconditional Election

---

<sup>12</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 158.

<sup>13</sup> For your benefit, we have included testimonies from church history so that you can hear the impact that these truths have had on godly saints. See Appendix B.

- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

We are not going to follow this order in our presentation. There is a good rationale for this traditional order: it starts with man in need of salvation and then gives, in the order of their occurrence, the steps God takes to save his people. He elects, then he sends Christ to atone for the sins of the elect, then he irresistibly draws his people to faith, and finally, he works to cause them to persevere to the end.

We have found, however, that people grasp these points more easily if we follow a presentation based on the order in which we experience them.

- We experience first our depravity and need of salvation.
- Then we experience the irresistible grace of God leading us toward faith.
- Then we trust the sufficiency of the atoning death of Christ for our sins.
- Then we discover that behind the work of God to atone for our sins and bring us to faith was the unconditional election of God.
- And finally we rest in his electing grace to give us the strength and will to persevere to the end in faith.

This is the order we will follow in our presentation.

•••••  **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**From a Calvinistic Perspective:**

- ▷ Douglas Wilson, *Easy Chairs Hard Words* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1991).
- ▷ Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
- ▷ David Steele, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004).
- ▷ Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).
- ▷ [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com) contains thousands of articles from a Reformed perspective.
- ▷ The "Sovereignty of God" section of the Resource Library at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

**From an Arminian Perspective:**

- ▷ Jerry Walls and Joe Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).
- ▷ Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).
- ▷ Clark Pinnock, ed., *A Case For Arminianism: The Grace of God, the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).



# Total Depravity

# 2

---

## 📖 INTRODUCTION

Human beings were created with incredible dignity. In all of creation, only mankind was made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). The Bible highlights the perfection of God’s creation by noting that it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). But the first couple, Adam and Eve, did not remain long in their innocent state. Soon they would reject the word of God and rebel against the authority of their Creator. The ramifications of this first transgression are still felt today by every person on the planet.

All Christians believe that human beings are naturally sinful. Every parent knows that children do not learn how to sin. They come into the world with a rebellious inclination. But questions still remain. How pervasive is our sinfulness? Does any good remain? How serious are the consequences of our rebellion?

In this lesson, we will explore the nature and extent of humanity’s sinfulness. Calvinists are not optimistic about human nature. Calvinists believe that, apart from divine grace, human nature is totally depraved. This does not mean that every person is as wicked as he could be. Nor does it mean that human beings do not do good things in relation to other men. Rather, total depravity means that man is naturally in total rebellion against God, such that everything he does apart from divine grace is sin.

## 📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the origin and extent of human sinfulness.
- describe the nature of human freedom and human inability.
- respond to basic objections to the doctrine of total depravity.

## 🌀 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS<sup>14</sup>

**Eternal Conscious Punishment:** A description of the nature of punishment in hell, which will be unending and of which the unbeliever will be fully aware.

**Hell:** A place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.

**Image of God:** The nature of man such that he is like God and represents God.

**Inherited Corruption:** The sinful nature, or the tendency to sin, which all people inherit because of Adam's sin (often referred to as "original pollution"). This idea entails that (1) in our natures we totally lack spiritual good before God, and (2) in our actions we are totally unable to do spiritual good before God.

**Inherited Guilt:** The idea that God counts all people guilty because of Adam's sin (often referred to as "original guilt").

**Inherited Sin:** The guilt and the tendency to sin that all people inherit because of Adam's sin (often referred to as "original sin").

**Sin:** Any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.

**Total Inability:** Man's total lack of spiritual good and inability to do good before God (often referred to as "total depravity").

---

<sup>14</sup> All Preliminary Definitions in this curriculum are taken from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).



## Day 1

.....

### THE ENTRANCE OF SIN

Before we can understand the depth of our depravity, we must first understand the dignity we possess. Human beings are unique among God's creatures in that we bear his image. Read the following passages on the nature of human beings as God originally intended.

#### Genesis 1:26-28

*<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

#### Genesis 2:7-8, 15-17

*<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.<sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed...<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

#### Isaiah 43:6-7

*<sup>6</sup> "I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,<sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*

1 Corinthians 10:31

<sup>31</sup> *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

1. What do you learn about God's original design for human beings from these texts? What does it mean to be made "in the image and likeness of God?"

It is no small thing to be made in the image and likeness of God. We were created by God to image forth divine glory. The great design of our existence is to reflect the worth and value of our Creator through spreading joyful worship and exercising kingly dominion. In other words, we were meant to be priests who worship God in spirit and truth, and kings who rule over creation as God's vice-regents. We were meant to occupy the mediating position, living under God and over creation. Our great vocation and calling was to fill the earth with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the seas.

Genesis 3 records the fall of man from his privileged position. God had given Adam and Eve one command: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). The serpent subtly twisted God's word and tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation and immediately felt the consequences of their sin. Shame (Genesis 3:7), fear (Genesis 3:10), and division (Genesis 3:12) entered God's world for the first time.

The result of the first transgression is that Adam and Eve are cursed and driven from God's land, exiled from his covenant presence. But Adam's fall did not affect him alone. The effects of this first sin would be felt upon the offspring of Adam and Eve for all generations.

Romans 5:12-19

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—<sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. <sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup> And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

2. Underline every phrase that refers to Adam's sin in the passages above. Summarize the effect of Adam's sin on his offspring.

Traditionally, the teaching that all of mankind fell into sin in Adam has been called the doctrine of original sin. Anthony Hoekema elaborates on the meaning of original sin:

*The doctrine of original sin tells us what are the results of Adam's sin for us. Because of Adam's sin, every human being is now born in a sinful state...Original sin includes both guilt and pollution. Guilt is a judicial or legal concept describing one's relationship to the law—in this case, specifically to God's law. Guilt is the state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment because the law*

*has been violated. When we say that original sin includes guilt, we do not mean that each of us is considered personally responsible for what Adam did. You and I cannot be held directly responsible for something someone else has done. But the doctrine of original sin does mean that we are involved in the guilt of Adam's sin because he acted as our representative when he committed the first sin...*

*Another aspect of original sin is pollution. Pollution, in distinction from guilt, is a moral concept; it has to do with our moral condition rather than with our status before the law. We can define original pollution (the pollution involved in original sin) as the corruption of our nature that is the result of sin and produces sin. As a necessary implication of our involvement in Adam's guilt, all human beings are born in a state of corruption.<sup>15</sup>*

It's one thing to be able to say that Adam sinned and that all human beings are guilty in him. It's another to be able to define and explain the nature of human sin. Romans 1:18-25 provides one of the clearest discussions of the nature of our rebellion and corruption.

#### Romans 1:18-25

*<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

---

<sup>15</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 148-150.

3. Underline every reference to sin in this passage. Having done that, derive a brief definition of sin. Give two modern examples of this “dark exchange.”

This dark exchange is evident in other parts of Scripture as well. Jeremiah 2:12-13 express the dismay of the heavens at the two great evils committed by human beings.

Jeremiah 2:12-13

<sup>12</sup> “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, <sup>13</sup> for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

And lest we be confused about the origin of our sinful futility and darkness, Paul elaborates on the origin of our sinful inclinations in the letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:17-18

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

As John Ensor has noted, “Evidently there is something so excellent, so beautiful, so majestic, so winsome about God that not seeing it requires effort, a willful refusal to see it.”<sup>16</sup>

Romans 3:9-19

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All

---

<sup>16</sup> John Ensor, *The Great Work of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 42.

*have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”<sup>13</sup> “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.”<sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”<sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.”<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

4. Using this passage, explain the meaning of the phrase “under sin” (verse 9). In light of this text, do you believe fallen human beings ever seek for God on their own?

*One of the most important truths to hold up in the world is that all human beings, even though created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), are corrupted by the power of sin. We are not morally good by nature. We are morally bad by nature. In Ephesians 2:3, Paul says we are all “by nature children of wrath.” The attitudes and thoughts and actions that deserve the wrath of God come from us by nature. In Colossians 3:6, we are called “sons of disobedience.” We are so disposed to disobedience against God that it is as though “disobedience” is our father. We are chips off the old block of disobedience. We don’t just do sins, we are sinful. We are “under sin,” as verse 9 says. Sin is like a master or a king, and reigns over us and in us. Not that it coerces us to do what we don’t want to do, but makes us want to do what we ought not to do. We are not innocent victims of sin. We are co-conspirators with sin against God.<sup>17</sup>*

---

17 John Piper, “All Jews and Gentiles are Under Sin,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



## Day 2

---

### THE EXTENT OF SIN'S POWER OVER HUMAN BEINGS

Having established the universality of sin, we now turn to the extent of sin's control in the lives of human beings. Recall the question from the introduction: How pervasive is our sinfulness?

Ephesians 2:1-3

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

*<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Romans 8:5-8

*<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

5. How is our sinfulness portrayed in each of the passages listed above? Underline the relevant portion of each text. For each text, record your reflections on what must happen to us if we are to be delivered from our sinful state.

We're all aware that many children are afraid of the dark. Indeed, most children do not like the darkness at all. And if we are honest with ourselves, not many of us like the darkness either. But when it comes to spiritual things, the apostle John argues that human beings, far from being afraid of the darkness, actually love it. What's more, we hate the light.

John 3:18-21

<sup>18</sup> *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* <sup>19</sup> *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* <sup>20</sup> *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* <sup>21</sup> *But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*

6. Who is the light? Why do people refuse to come to the light?

Another way to assess the depth of our depravity is to biblically determine whether unbelievers are capable of pleasing God.

Hebrews 11:6

<sup>6</sup> *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Romans 14:23

<sup>23</sup> *But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

7. In light of these texts, is it accurate to say, "Everything that an unbeliever does is sin?" Explain your answer.

## Day 3

---

### GOD'S RIGHTEOUS RESPONSE TO HUMAN SIN

Thus far in this lesson, we have sought to demonstrate that our sinfulness is total and touches every aspect of our lives. As Genesis 6:5 says, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Such a view of our rebellion raises the question of human freedom and responsibility.

1 Corinthians 2:14

*<sup>14</sup> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

John 8:34

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."*

Galatians 4:8

*<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.*

Notice three things in these texts. First, natural people (that is, people who are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit) are unable to understand or accept the spiritual realities. Second, our acts of sin are rooted in a fundamental slavery to sin. Third, our enslavement to sin and idolatry occurs because we do not know God; in other words, we do not acknowledge him as God or give thanks to him.

8. If we are enslaved to sin, does this mean that we are forced to sin against our wills? Explain your answer.

Actions have consequences, and, in the case of our rebellion against God, the consequences are severe. The next section addresses the justice of God's response to our all-pervasive sinfulness.

Romans 6:23

*<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

*<sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

Romans 2:5-10

*<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

Matthew 25:46

*<sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

9. Underline every phrase that refers to God's judgment of human sinfulness. Is this punishment eternal? How do you know?

10. Interact with the following statement: “Eternal conscious torment is too harsh of a punishment for only a lifetime’s worth of transgression. It is unjust for God to punish someone infinitely for only a finite number of sins. While some punishment may be warranted, to consign an individual to eternal damnation for sins committed in a limited lifespan is an example of cosmic overkill.”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne was a Scottish pastor in the 19th century. He preached a sermon entitled “God’s Rectitude in Future Punishment.” In it he explains why it is just for God to punish the wicked for eternity:

*Sin is an infinite evil, because it is the breaking of an infinite obligation. I suppose there are none here who will say that God is not infinitely lovely; and therefore none will say that there is not an infinite obligation upon us to serve him. Then, if you and I do not this, we are breaking an infinite obligation; and if it be an infinite evil, then it demands infinite punishment. But how can man bear infinite punishment? If God were to put on infinite punishment who could bear it? Therefore it is eternal in duration.<sup>18</sup>*

In making this argument, M’Cheyne was building off of the similar argument made by Jonathan Edwards a century earlier. The following is a more extensive effort to defend the justice of hell from a sermon entitled “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners.”

*Every crime or fault deserves a greater or less punishment, in proportion as the crime itself is greater or less. If any fault deserves punishment, then so much the greater the fault, so much the greater is the punishment deserved. The faulty nature of any thing is the formal ground and reason of its desert of punishment; and therefore the more any thing hath of this nature, the more punishment it*

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert Murray M’Cheyne, “God’s Rectitude in Future Punishment” in *Sermons of Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 177.

*deserves. And therefore the terribleness of the degree of punishment, let it never be so terrible, is no argument against the justice of it, if the proportion does but hold between the heinousness of the crime and the dreadfulness of the punishment; so that if there be any such thing as a fault infinitely heinous, it will follow that it is just to inflict a punishment for it that is infinitely dreadful.*

*A crime is more or less heinous, according as we are under greater or less obligations to the contrary. This is self-evident; because it is herein that the criminalness or faultiness of any thing consists, that it is contrary to what we are obliged or bound to, or what ought to be in us. So the faultiness of one being hating another, is in proportion to his obligation to love him. The crime of one being despising and casting contempt on another, is proportionably more or less heinous, as he was under greater or less obligations to honour him. The fault of disobeying another, is greater or less, as any one is under greater or less obligations to obey him. And therefore if there be any being that we are under infinite obligations to love, and honour, and obey, the contrary towards him must be infinitely faulty.*

*Our obligation to love, honour, and obey any being, is in proportion to his loveliness, honourableness, and authority; for that is the very meaning of the words. When we say any one is very lovely, it is the same as to say, that he is one very much to be loved. Or if we say such a one is more honourable than another, the meaning of the words is, that he is one that we are more obliged to honour. If we say any one has great authority over us, it is the same as to say, that he has great right to our subjection and obedience.*

*But God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty. To have infinite excellency and beauty, is the same thing as to have infinite loveliness. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory; and therefore he is infinitely honourable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth, and highest angels in heaven; and therefore he is infinitely more honourable than they. His authority over us is infinite; and the ground of his right to our obedience is infinitely strong; for he is infinitely worthy to be obeyed himself, and we have an absolute, universal, and infinite dependence upon him.*

*So that sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving of infinite punishment.<sup>19</sup>*

---

19 Jonathan Edwards, "Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 669.



13. Interact with the following statement: “If human beings are as sinful as the Bible says, then how do you explain the virtuous actions of non-Christians? It is undeniable that many non-Christians are generous, caring, compassionate, and loving. Therefore, humanity cannot be as sinful as Calvinists claim.”



## Day 5

---

### SUMMARY

In this section, compare your conclusions from the previous four days with a short summary of the doctrine of total depravity.

#### **Total Depravity**

*When we speak of man's depravity we mean man's natural condition apart from any grace exerted by God to restrain or transform man. There is no doubt that man could perform more evil acts toward his fellow man than he does. But if he is restrained from performing more evil acts by motives that are not owing to his glad submission to God, then even his "virtue" is evil in the sight of God.*

*Romans 14:23 says, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." This is a radical indictment of all natural "virtue" that does not flow from a heart humbly relying on God's grace.*

*The terrible condition of man's heart will never be recognized by people who assess it only in relation to other men. Romans 14:23 makes plain that depravity is our condition in relation to God primarily and only secondarily in relation to man. Unless we start here, we will never grasp the totality of our natural depravity.*

*Man's depravity is total in at least four senses.*

(1) Our rebellion against God is total.

*Apart from the grace of God there is no delight in the holiness of God, and there is no glad submission to the sovereign authority of God.*

*Of course totally depraved men can be very religious and very philanthropic. They can pray and give alms and fast, as Jesus said (Matthew 6:1-18). But their very religion is rebellion against the rights of their Creator if it does not come from a childlike heart of trust in the free grace of God. Religion is one of the chief ways that man conceals his unwillingness to forsake self-reliance and bank all his hopes on the unmerited mercy of God (Luke 18:9-14; Colossians 2:20-23).*

*The totality of our rebellion is seen in Romans 3:9-10 and 18. "I have already*

*charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no not one; no one seeks for God....There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

*It is a myth that man in his natural state is genuinely seeking God. Men do seek God. But they do not seek him for who he is. They seek him in a pinch as one who might preserve them from death or enhance their worldly enjoyments. Apart from conversion, no one comes to the light of God.*

*Some do come to the light. But listen to what John 3:20-21 says about them. “Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.”*

*Yes there are those who come to the light—namely those whose deeds are the work of God. “Wrought in God” means worked by God. Apart from this gracious work of God all men hate the light of God and will not come to him lest their evil be exposed—this is total rebellion. “No one seeks for God...There is no fear of God before their eyes!”*

(2) In his total rebellion everything man does is sin.

*In Romans 14:23 Paul says, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” Therefore, if all men are in total rebellion, everything they do is the product of rebellion and cannot be an honor to God, but only part of their sinful rebellion. If a king teaches his subjects how to fight well and then those subjects rebel against their king and use the very skill he taught them to resist him, then even those skills become evil.*

*Thus man does many things which he can only do because he is created in the image of God and which in the service of God could be praised. But in the service of man’s self-justifying rebellion, these very things are sinful.*

*In Romans 7:18 Paul says, “I know that no good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” This is a radical confession of the truth that in our rebellion nothing we think or feel is good. It is all part of our rebellion. The fact that Paul qualifies his depravity with the words, “that is, in my flesh,” shows that he is willing to affirm the good of anything that the Spirit of God produces in him (Romans 15:18). “Flesh” refers to man in his natural state apart from the work of God’s Spirit. So what Paul is saying in Romans 7:18 is that apart from the work of God’s Spirit all we think and feel and do is not good.*

*NOTE: We recognize that the word “good” has a broad range of meanings. We will have to use it in a restricted sense to refer to many actions of fallen people which in relation are in fact not good.*

*For example, we will have to say that it is good that most unbelievers do not kill and that some unbelievers perform acts of benevolence. What we mean when we call such actions good is that they more or less conform to the external pattern of life that God has commanded in Scripture.*

*However, such outward conformity to the revealed will of God is not righteousness in relation to God. It is not done out of reliance on him or for his glory. He is not trusted for the resources, though he gives them all. Nor is his honor exalted, even though that’s his will in all things (1 Corinthians 10:31). Therefore even these “good” acts are part of our rebellion and are not “good” in the sense that really counts in the end—in relation to God.*

(3) Man’s inability to submit to God and do good is total.

*Picking up on the term “flesh” above (man apart from the grace of God), we find Paul declaring it to be totally enslaved to rebellion. Romans 8:7-8 says, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*The “mind of the flesh” is the mind of man apart from the indwelling Spirit of God (“You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you,” Romans 8:9). So natural man has a mindset that does not and cannot submit to God. Man cannot reform himself.*

*Ephesians 2:1 says that we Christians were all once “dead in trespasses and sins.” The point of deadness is that we were incapable of any life with God. Our hearts were like a stone toward God (Ephesians 4:18; Ezekiel 36:26). Our hearts were blind and incapable of seeing the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). We were totally unable to reform ourselves.*

(4) Our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment.

*Ephesians 2:3 goes on to say that in our deadness we were “children of wrath.” That is, we were under God’s wrath because of the corruption of our hearts that made us as good as dead before God.*

*The reality of hell is God's clear indictment of the infiniteness of our guilt. If our corruption were not deserving of an eternal punishment God would be unjust to threaten us with a punishment so severe as eternal torment. But the Scriptures teach that God is just in condemning unbelievers to eternal hell (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 5:29f; 10:28; 13:49f; 18:8f; 25:46; Revelation 14:9-11; 20:10). Therefore, to the extent that hell is a total sentence of condemnation, to that extent must we think of ourselves as totally blameworthy apart from the saving grace of God.*

*In summary, total depravity means that our rebellion against God is total, everything we do in this rebellion is sin, our inability to submit to God or reform ourselves is total, and we are therefore totally deserving of eternal punishment.*

*It is hard to exaggerate the importance of admitting our condition to be this bad. If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But if we humble ourselves under this terrible truth of our total depravity, we will be in a position to see and appreciate the glory and wonder of the work of God discussed in the next four points.<sup>20</sup>*

14. Derive a summary definition of total depravity from this article. In what ways is our rebellion total?

15. Record any remaining questions or objections in the space below.

---

<sup>20</sup> John Piper, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Compose a short story or illustration that would help you explain the doctrine of total depravity to a child.

## Further Up & Further In

In this section we will explore some of the issues presented in this lesson in greater detail and depth. **Completion of this section is recommended but not required.**

Discussions about Calvinism and the sovereignty of God often center on the nature of human freedom. Terms like “free will” and “moral responsibility” are consistently brought up when people discuss the Doctrines of Grace. However, it is rare that these terms are clearly defined by those who use them. Edifying discussion is hindered by the failure to offer clear definitions. The following quotations offer two very different notions of human freedom. Arminians hold to libertarian freedom. Calvinists hold to compatibilistic freedom.

### Libertarian Freedom

*“What I call ‘real freedom’ is also called libertarian or contra-causal freedom. It views a free action as one in which a person is free to perform an action or refrain from performing it and is not completely determined in the matter by prior forces—nature, nurture, or even God. Libertarian freedom recognizes the power of contrary choice. One acts freely in a situation if, and only if, one could have done otherwise. Free choices are choices that are not causally determined by conditions preceding them. It is the freedom of self-determination, in which the various motives and influences informing the choice are not the sufficient cause of the choice itself. The person makes the choice in a self-determined way. A person has options and there are different factors influencing us in deciding among them but the decision one takes involves making one of the reasons one’s own, which is anything but random.”<sup>21</sup>*

### Compatibilistic Freedom

*“Foundational to Edwards’s theory is that nothing comes to pass without a cause, including all acts of the will. The cause of an act of the will is that motive which appears most agreeable to the mind. The will, therefore, is determined by or finds its cause and ground of existence in the strongest motive as perceived by the mind. The will, therefore, always is as the greatest apparent good is. The will is neither self-determined nor undetermined but always follows the last and prevailing*

---

<sup>21</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 127.

*dictate of the understanding. The act of will is necessarily connected in a cause/ effect relationship with the strongest motive as perceived by the mind and cannot but be as the motive is. This type of necessity is moral, lies within the will, and is one with it. It is a necessity wholly compatible with praise and/or blame. If, on the other hand, the will is acted upon by external factors contrary to its desires, the individual is exempted from responsibility. Freedom is simply the opportunity one has to act according to one's will or in the pursuit of one's desires. This notion of freedom, contends Edwards, is not only compatible with but absolutely essential to moral responsibility.*<sup>22</sup>

16. Briefly summarize the main difference between compatibilistic freedom and libertarian freedom.

Closely related to the nature of human freedom is the nature of human inability. Calvinists argue that human beings in their natural state cannot come to God. So the question becomes, in what sense are human beings unable to come to God? The following excerpt from an article by John Piper explains the crucial distinction between moral inability and natural inability.

*"I will try to develop in the briefest possible way how Edwards attempts to show 'that God's moral government over mankind, his treating them as moral agents, making them the objects of his commands, counsels, calls, warnings, exhortations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in his providence: either by positive efficiency, or permission' (258).*

---

<sup>22</sup> Sam Storms, "The Will: Fettered Yet Free" in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 210.

First, Edwards argues that the thing which determines what the will chooses is not the will itself but rather motives which come from outside the will. More precisely, 'it is that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will' (9).

He defines motive like this: 'By motive, I mean the whole of that which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly' (9). By 'strongest motive' he means 'that which appears most inviting' (10). Or as he puts it later, 'the will always is as the greatest apparent good is' (10), in which case 'good' means 'agreeable' or 'pleasing' (11).

Hence the determination of our will does not lie in itself. It is determined by the strongest motive as we perceive it, and motives are given. Therefore all men are in a sense enslaved—as Paul says—either to righteousness or to sin (Rom 6:16-23), or as Jesus put it, 'Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin' (John 8:34). We are all enslaved to do what we esteem most desirable in any given moment of decision. We are enslaved to do what we want to do most. We are unable to do otherwise provided we are not physically hindered.

Edwards describes this situation with the terms moral necessity and moral inability on the one hand and natural necessity and natural inability on the other. Moral necessity is the necessity that exists between the strongest motive and the act of volition which it elicits (24). Thus all choices are morally necessary since they are all determined by the strongest motive. They are necessary in that, given the existence of the motive, the existence of the choice is certain and unavoidable. Moral inability, accordingly, is the inability we all have to choose contrary to what we perceive to be the strongest motive (28). We are morally unable to act contrary to what in any given moment we want most to do. If we lack the inclination to study, we are morally unable to study.

Natural necessity is 'such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes' (24). Events are naturally necessary when they are constrained not by moral causes but physical ones. My sitting in this chair would be necessary with a 'natural necessity' if I were chained here. Natural inability is my inability to do a thing even though I will it. If I am chained to this chair my strongest motive might be to stand up (say, if the room is on fire) but I would be unable.

This distinction between moral inability and natural inability is crucial in Edwards' solution to the so-called antinomy between God's sovereign disposal



*of all things and man's accountability. The solution is this: moral ability is not a prerequisite to accountability. Natural ability is. 'All inability that excuses may be resolved into one thing; namely, want of natural capacity or strength; either capacity of understanding, or external strength' (150).*

*But moral inability to do a good thing does not excuse our failure to do it (148). Though we love darkness rather than light and therefore can't (because of moral inability) come to the light, nevertheless we are responsible for not coming, that is, we can be justly punished for not coming. This conforms with an almost universal human judgment, for the stronger a man's desire is to do evil, the more unable he is to do good, and yet the more wicked he is judged to be by men. If men really believed that moral inability excused a man from guilt, then a man's wickedness would decrease in proportion to the intensity of his love of evil. But this is contrary to the moral sensibilities of almost all men.*

*Therefore moral inability and moral necessity on the one hand and human accountability on the other are not an antinomy. Their unity is not contrary to reason or to the common moral experience of mankind. Therefore, in order to see how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility perfectly cohere, one need only realize that the way God works in the world is not by imposing natural necessity on men and then holding them accountable for what they can't do even though they will to do it. But rather God so disposes all things (Eph 1:11) so that in accordance with moral necessity all men make only those choices ordained by God from all eternity.<sup>23</sup>*

17. Attempt to summarize the argument of these paragraphs in your own words.

---

<sup>23</sup> This excerpt is from an article entitled, "A Response to J.I. Packer on the So-Called Antinomy Between the Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility," which can be found at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)). The page numbers throughout the article correspond to *The Freedom of the Will* by Jonathan Edwards (Indianapolis, IL: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1969).

18. Provide your own examples of natural inability and moral inability.

 SERMON

Read the sermon entitled “Human Inability” by Charles Spurgeon and answer the following questions.<sup>24</sup>

19. Where does Spurgeon locate the inability of man in relation to spiritual things? How does he illustrate this point?

20. What is the difference in saying “No man can come to me” and “No man will come to me?” How would you relate these two statements?

---

<sup>24</sup> This sermon may be accessed online at [www.spurgeon.org](http://www.spurgeon.org) and searching Spurgeon’s Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1959).
- ▷ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1990).
- ▷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier, 2004).
- ▷ Sam Storms, "The Will: Fettered Yet Free" in *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).
- ▷ John Piper, "Why We Need A Savior: Dead in Sins," an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).
- ▷ John Piper, "All Jews and Gentiles Are Under Sin," an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



DOXOLOGY

To close each lesson, we will provide a hymn, song, or poem that celebrates some aspect of the material covered. In this way, our prayer is that both the mind and the heart will be awakened afresh to the glory of God in his Word.

**God, Be Merciful to Me**

**(Psalm 51)**

Christopher Miner, Richard Redhead

God, be merciful to me;  
On Thy grace I rest my plea  
Plenteous in compassion Thou,  
Blot out my transgressions now;  
Wash me, make me pure within;  
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

My transgressions I confess;  
Grief and guilt my soul oppress.  
I have sinned against Thy grace,  
And provoked Thee to Thy face.  
I confess Thy judgment just;  
Speechless, I Thy mercy trust.

I am evil, born in sin;  
Thou desirest truth within.  
Thou alone my Savior art,  
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;  
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,  
Wash me whiter than the snow.

Broken, humbled to the dust  
By Thy wrath and judgment just,  
Let my contrite heart rejoice,  
And in gladness hear Thy voice;  
From my sins O hide Thy face,  
Blot them out in boundless grace.

Gracious God, my heart renew,  
Make my spirit right and true.  
Cast me not away from Thee,  
Let Thy Spirit dwell in me;  
Thy salvation's joy impart,  
Steadfast make my willing heart.

Sinners then shall learn from me,  
And return, O God, to Thee  
Savior all my guilt remove,  
And my tongue shall sing Thy love  
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,  
And my mouth shall praise accord.

©1997 Christopher Miner Music.

# Irresistible Grace

# 3

---

## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

If it is true that we are dead in sin, blind to beauty, and enslaved to sinful passions, then the only hope of rescue lies outside of ourselves. If we naturally suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness and refuse to honor him as God or thank him, then what is needed is a radical change in the core of who we are. We don't just need assistance; we need resurrection.

But this raises a host of questions. If God is sovereign in salvation, what is the role of human faith? Are we merely robots? What is the relationship between the new birth and our faith? And does God give this sovereign grace to all men or only to some?

In this lesson, we will study the doctrine of irresistible grace. In advocating this doctrine, Calvinists are denying that salvation is a cooperative effort between God and man, as if God performs part of our salvation and we perform the rest. Rather, salvation is all of sovereign grace, from the beginning to the end. This does not mean that human beings are totally passive in this affair. However, the decisive action belongs to God.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the extent of God's sovereignty in the universe.
- describe the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.
- respond to basic objections to the doctrine of irresistible grace.

## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

**Born Again:** A scriptural term (John 3:3-8) referring to God's work of regeneration by which he imparts new spiritual life to us.

**Effective Calling:** An act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.

**External Calling:** The general gospel invitation offered to all people that comes through human proclamation of the gospel. Also referred to as "general calling" or "the gospel call," this call can be rejected by people.

**Internal Calling:** Another term for "effective calling."

**Irresistible Grace:** A term that refers to the fact that God effectively calls people and also gives them regeneration, both of which guarantee that we will respond in saving faith. This term is subject to misunderstanding since it seems to imply that people do not make a voluntary, willing choice in responding to the gospel.

**Regeneration:** A secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us; sometimes called "being born again."



## Day 1

### DRAWN BY THE FATHER

One of Paul's most common terms for Christians is "those who are called." Romans is addressed to those "who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:6). Galatians 1:6 refers to the God who "called you in the grace of Christ." Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to those who are "called to be saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2). But what does Paul mean by the term "call"?

#### 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

*<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

1. What is the reaction of Jews and Greeks to the word of the cross? Do all Jews and Greeks respond in this way? What distinguishes those who respond positively from those who respond negatively?

Romans 8:28-30 is one of the most central texts on the sovereignty of God. We will study this passage in more detail in lesson 5. For now we will simply focus on the use of the word "called" in verse 30.

Romans 8:28-30

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* <sup>29</sup> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* <sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

2. This passage has sometimes been called “The Golden Chain of Redemption.” Does anyone drop out of the chain? In other words, does anyone who is “called” fail to be “glorified”? What significance is there in the fact that “those whom he called he also justified”?

*In verse 30 he says, “. . . and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” In other words, all the called are justified, and all the justified are glorified. This is because when God predestines something to happen, it happens. And God predestined our final Christ-likeness and our being with Christ, and that means our glory. And so he undertakes to bring to pass what he predestined by calling us and then justifying us and then glorifying us.*

*What do we learn from this? We learn that God’s calling here is his sovereign action to bring us from the spiritual deadness of unbelief and hostility to God to the spiritual life of faith in Christ and love to God. We know this because all the called are justified. But only believers are justified. And so God’s calling secures the faith that it commands. It is effectual. It guarantees the effect of faith and love. God’s call is his omnipotent, creative word, like the word Jesus spoke to Lazarus when he was dead: “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43). The call created the life and Lazarus came out.<sup>25</sup>*

---

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, “All Things For Good, Part 3,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



The apostle Paul is not the only biblical writer to discuss the effectual calling of God. John 6:35-44 records the words of Jesus on this crucial matter.

John 6:35-44

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." <sup>41</sup> So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."*

3. What two things are necessary before someone can come to (i.e. believe in) Jesus? Is the "drawing" by the Father in v.44 always effectual? How do you know?

## Day 2

### YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

More biblical evidence for the doctrine of irresistible grace comes from the biblical teaching on the new birth. Sometimes called regeneration, both Jesus and Peter spoke of the necessity of being born again.

#### John 3:3-8

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

#### 1 Peter 1:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

4. From these passages, derive your own summary of the doctrine of the new birth. What is significant about the imagery of being born again?

*Teaching about the new birth is unsettling because it refers to something that is done to us, not something we do. John 1:13 emphasizes this. It refers to the children*

*of God as those who “who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Peter stresses the same thing: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3). We do not cause the new birth. God causes the new birth. Any good thing that we do is a result of the new birth, not a cause of the new birth. This means that the new birth is taken out of our hands. It is not in our control. And so it confronts us with our helplessness and our absolute dependence on Someone outside ourselves.*

*This is unsettling. We are told that we won’t see the kingdom of God if we’re not born again. And we’re told that we can’t make ourselves to be born again. This is unsettling.<sup>26</sup>*

Believing in the doctrine of the new birth is not controversial. Both Calvinists and Arminians affirm the necessity of being born again. The debate hinges on the relationship between the new birth and human faith. The issue can be seen most clearly by asking the question, “Which comes first: the new birth or our believing?”

John 1:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

1 John 5:1

*<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*

5. In light of these texts and what you’ve learned in this lesson, which comes first: regeneration or faith? Support your answer.

---

<sup>26</sup> John Piper, “What Happens in the New Birth?”, an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

*For some reason, no one wants to admit that the grace of the new birth is irresistible. But for all of us, our first birth was just as irresistible. Moreover, virtually no one complains about this. I was born in 1953, and I do not recall ever being consulted in 1952 about whether I wanted to be born or not. Life was simply thrust upon me, somewhat violently they tell me, and first thing I knew I was playing with toy trucks on the floor of this family's living room. The name was Wilson, they said, and the prison door clanged shut. No escape now, they said. That whole business was irresistible – makes your skin crawl to think of it. I was now someone's brother, not someone's sister, and I hadn't been asked about my preferences there either. I was an American, not an Englishman, and not a Chinese. I was a Wilson, and not a Williams or Smith. In short, there was good bit of tyranny all round.*

*Of course, the reason I was not consulted is that there was no "me" to consult. In order to consult me someone would have to create me without consulting me in order to ask me all the questions. And in what form would I be created in order that I might answer the questions? I would have to answer objectively, so it would be no fair making me with a preference for anything. This means I would have to be an androgynous, humanoid blob, a faceless, nameless orphan, with no love for any particular family, place, or nation. And the question would come, "Where and under what conditions would you like to be born?" "Huh?" I would have said.<sup>27</sup>*

It is clear from Scripture that everything we have is a gift from God.

1 Corinthians 4:7

*<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

All Christians would agree that salvation is a gift. But what about faith and its counterpart, repentance? Are these both gifts from God?

Philippians 1:29

*<sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...*

---

<sup>27</sup> Doug Wilson, "Irresistible Life," an online article at [www.dougwils.com](http://www.dougwils.com)

Acts 11:18

<sup>18</sup> *When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*

2 Timothy 2:24-26

<sup>24</sup> *And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by to do his will.*

6. In light of these texts, is it accurate to say that repentance and faith are gifts from God? If faith and repentance are gifts, does this make evangelism and teaching irrelevant? Explain your answer.

## Day 3

### THE GIFT OF FAITH AND THE NEW COVENANT

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a classic text that combines the teaching of Lesson 2 on Total Depravity with the teaching of Lesson 3 on Irresistible Grace.

Ephesians 2:1-10

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—<sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

7. How is conversion described in this text? What does this imply about our role in salvation? Why is it necessary that salvation come to us solely by grace?

There is some dispute as to the precise referent of “this” in v.8. Does it refer to “grace,” “faith,” or “salvation”? Wayne Grudem helpfully handles this tricky grammatical question.

*“The word translated ‘this’ is the neuter pronoun *touto*, which refers not to ‘faith’ or to ‘grace’ specifically in the previous clause (for they are both feminine nouns in Greek, and would require feminine pronouns), but to the entire idea expressed in the preceding phrase, the idea that you have been saved by grace through faith.”<sup>28</sup>*

Recall from Lesson 2 that our sinfulness is often described in terms of spiritual blindness. The following text addresses the solution to our sight problem.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

*<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

8. To what does Paul compare the conversion of sinners in this passage?  
Does this support the doctrine of irresistible grace? Explain your answer.

It is sometimes argued that the doctrine of irresistible grace makes all human actions irrelevant. “If God gives us the gift of faith, then how can faith be something that we do?” The following text is helpful in addressing this issue.

Philippians 2:12-13

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

---

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

9. Does the doctrine of irresistible grace mean that human beings are totally passive in salvation? Explain your answer using Philippians 2:12-13.

Jonathan Edwards helpfully explains the relationship between the action of God and the action of man.

*“In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what he produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active.*

*In the Scriptures the same things are represented as from God and from us. God is said to convert, and men are said to convert and turn. God makes a new heart, and we are commanded to make us a new heart. God circumcises the heart, and we are commanded to circumcise our own hearts; not merely because we must use the means in order to the effect, but the effect itself is our act and our duty. These things are agreeable to that text, ‘God worketh in you both to will and to do.’”<sup>29</sup>*

Throughout history, God has dealt with his people in terms of the covenant. One of the most prominent covenants in Scripture is the Mosaic covenant, or the Law. Though this covenant was a gracious gift from God, it was not sufficient to impart life. Deuteronomy 29:2-4 records the reason why the Mosaic covenant was unable to give eternal life.

Deuteronomy 29:2-4

<sup>2</sup> *And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his*

---

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “On Efficacious Grace,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 557.



*servants and to all his land, <sup>3</sup> the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. <sup>4</sup> But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.”*

Paul alludes to this weakness in the Law in Romans 8:3-4.

Romans 8:3-4

*<sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

In other words, our sinfulness weakened the Law such that it could not give us eternal life. God’s solution to the problem posed by our sinful hearts, blind eyes, and deaf ears is the New Covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

*<sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

Jeremiah 32:39-41

*<sup>39</sup> “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. <sup>41</sup> I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.”*

Ezekiel 11:19-20

*<sup>19</sup> “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I*

*will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”*

Ezekiel 36:26-27

*<sup>26</sup> “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”*

10. How does the New Covenant solve the problem of the Old Covenant?

Do these texts describe God’s requirements for us or God’s promises to us? Is it possible to ultimately resist the New Covenant? Why or why not?

## Day 4

---

### RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

In this day's lesson, you will interact with common objections against the doctrine of irresistible grace. Day 4 of each lesson is intentionally shorter than previous days to allow time for reflection and review. We recommend that you consult the previous three days of the lesson as you think through these objections.

Acts 7:51

<sup>51</sup> *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.”*

Ephesians 4:30

<sup>30</sup> *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Romans 10:21

<sup>21</sup> *But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”*

Matthew 23:37

<sup>37</sup> *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”*

11. Respond to the following statement: “The texts listed above clearly demonstrate that human beings can in fact successfully resist God’s will. Therefore the doctrine of irresistible grace is false.”

12. Respond to the following statement: “The doctrine of irresistible grace teaches that human beings are mere puppets. God forces people against their will to believe in Christ. Therefore this view destroys genuine human freedom.”

13. Respond to the following statement: “God does indeed draw human beings to himself. The Spirit takes the initiative in salvation. But God does not draw only a select few. As Jesus says in John 12:32, ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’”

## Day 5

---

### SUMMARY

In this section, compare your conclusions from the previous four days of study with a short summary of the doctrine of irresistible grace.

#### **Irresistible Grace**

*The doctrine of irresistible grace does not mean that every influence of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. It means that the Holy Spirit can overcome all resistance and make his influence irresistible.*

*In Acts 7:51 Stephen says to the Jewish leaders, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.” And Paul speaks of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). God gives many entreaties and promptings which are resisted. In fact the whole history of Israel in the Old Testament is one protracted story of resistance, as the parable of the wicked tenants shows (Matthew 21:33-43; cf. Romans 10:21).*

*The doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is sovereign and can overcome all resistance when he wills. “He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand!” (Daniel 4:35). “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). When God undertakes to fulfill his sovereign purpose, no one can successfully resist him.*

*This is what Paul taught in Romans 9:14-18, which caused his opponent to say, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” To which Paul answers: “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me thus?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (Romans 9:20f).*

*More specifically, irresistible grace refers to the sovereign work of God to overcome the rebellion of our heart and bring us to faith in Christ so that we can be saved. If our doctrine of total depravity is true, there can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace. If we are dead in our sins, totally unable to submit to God, then we will never believe in Christ unless God overcomes our rebellion.*

Someone may say, "Yes, the Holy Spirit must draw us to God, but we can use our freedom to resist or accept that drawing." Our answer is: except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always use our freedom to resist God. That is what it means to be "unable to submit to God." If a person becomes humble enough to submit to God, it is because God has given that person a new, humble nature. If a person remains too hard hearted and proud to submit to God, it is because that person has not been given such a willing spirit. But to see this most persuasively we should look at the Scriptures.

In John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." This drawing is the sovereign work of grace without which no one can be saved from their rebellion against God. Again some say, "He draws all men, not just some." But this simply evades the clear implication of the context that the Father's "drawing" is why some believe and not others.

Specifically, John 6:64-65 says, "'But there are some of you that do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that should betray him. And he said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'"

Notice two things.

First, notice that coming to Jesus is called a gift. It is not just an opportunity. Coming to Jesus is "given" to some and not to others.

Second, notice that the reason Jesus says this, is to explain why "there are some who do not believe." We could paraphrase it like this: Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would not believe on him in spite of all the teaching and invitations he received. And because he knew this, he explains it with the words, No one comes to me unless it is given to him by my Father. Judas was not given to Jesus. There were many influences on his life for good. But the decisive, irresistible gift of grace was not given.

2 Timothy 2:24-25 says, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth."

Here, as in John 6:65, repentance is called a gift of God. Notice, he is not saying merely that salvation is a gift of God. He is saying that the prerequisites of salvation

are also a gift. When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance, he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance, it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God “irresistible grace.”

NOTE: It should be obvious from this that irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to believe against our will. That would even be a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, irresistible grace is compatible with preaching and witnessing that tries to persuade people to do what is reasonable and what will accord with their best interests.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 says, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jew and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Notice the two kinds of “calls” implied in this text.

First, the preaching of Paul goes out to all, both Jews and Greeks. This is the general call of the gospel.

It offers salvation to all who will believe on the crucified Christ. But by and large it falls on unreceptive ears and is called foolishness.

But then, secondly, Paul refers to another kind of call. He says that among those who hear there are some who are “called” in such a way that they no longer regard the cross as foolishness but as the wisdom and power of God. What else can this call be but the irresistible call of God out of darkness into the light of God? If ALL who are called in this sense regard the cross as the power of God, then something in the call must effect the faith. This is irresistible grace.

It is further explained in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God...It is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Since men are blinded to the worth of Christ, a miracle is needed in order for them to come to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, “Let there be light.” It is in fact a new creation or a new birth. This

*is what is meant by the effectual call in 1 Corinthians 1:24.*

*Those who are called have their eyes opened by the sovereign creative power of God so that they no longer see the cross as foolishness but as the power and the wisdom of God. The effectual call is the miracle of having our blindness removed. This is irresistible grace.*

*Another example of it is in Acts 16:14, where Lydia is listening to the preaching of Paul. Luke says, “The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.” Unless God opens our hearts, we will not heed the message of the gospel. This heart-opening is what we mean by irresistible grace.*

*Another way to describe it is “new birth” or being born again. We believe that new birth is a miraculous creation of God that enables a formerly “dead” person to receive Christ and so be saved. We do not think that faith precedes and causes new birth. Faith is the evidence that God has begotten us anew. “Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God” (1 John 5:1).*

*When John says that God gives the right to become the children of God to all who receive Christ (John 1:12), he goes on to say that those who do receive Christ “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” In other words, it is necessary to receive Christ in order to become a child of God, but the birth that brings one into the family of God is not possible by the will of man.*

*Man is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot make himself new or create new life in himself. He must be born of God. Then, with the new nature of God, he immediately receives Christ. The two acts (regeneration and faith) are so closely connected that in experience we cannot distinguish them. God begets us anew and the first glimmer of life in the new-born child is faith. Thus new birth is the effect of irresistible grace, because it is an act of sovereign creation—“not of the will of man but of God.”<sup>30</sup>*

---

30 John Piper, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



14. What are the two kinds of “call” that John Piper mentions in this article?  
Explain the difference between them.

15. Record any remaining questions or objections in the space below.



§ INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The doctrine of irresistible grace should produce in us great optimism as we pray for the lost. Using some of the biblical texts in this lesson, compose a series of prayers that you can use when you are praying for the salvation of an unbeliever.

## Further Up & Further In



In this section we will explore some of the issues presented in this lesson in greater detail and depth. **Completion of this section is recommended but not required.**

Two stories in the Gospel of John provide helpful illustrations of the power of God's sovereign grace.

### John 9:1-7

<sup>1</sup> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

### John 11:1-44

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." <sup>11</sup> After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but

they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died,<sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."<sup>16</sup> So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

<sup>17</sup> Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.<sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,<sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.<sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.<sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.<sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."<sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."<sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.<sup>31</sup> When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

<sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.<sup>34</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up

his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”<sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”<sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

16. How could you use these two stories to illustrate the doctrine of irresistible grace? Be specific in your answer.

## SERMON

Read the sermon entitled “A Divine and Supernatural Light” by Jonathan Edwards and answer the following questions.<sup>31</sup>

17. According to Edwards, what is the difference between the way that the Holy Spirit works on the minds of natural men and the way that he works on the minds of saints?

---

<sup>31</sup> This sermon may be accessed online at [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com) by searching by the sermon title.

18. According to Edwards, what is “the divine and supernatural light”?

19. Edwards uses honey to explain the difference between two kinds of knowledge. What are these two kinds of knowledge and what is the difference between them?

20. Some unbelievers say that they would trust in Christ for salvation if he visibly appeared to them from heaven. Would Jonathan Edwards agree with such a statement? Explain your answer.

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

---

- ▷ John Piper, “You Must Be Born Again,” an online sermon series at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).
- ▷ John Piper, “Conversion: The Creation of a Christian Hedonist” in *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003).



DOXOLOGY

**O Great God**

Bob Kauflin

O great God of highest heaven  
Occupy my lowly heart  
Own it all and reign supreme  
Conquer every rebel power  
Let no vice or sin remain  
That resists Your holy war  
You have loved and purchased me  
Make me Yours forevermore

I was blinded by my sin  
Had no ears to hear Your voice  
Did not know Your love within  
Had no taste for heaven's joys  
Then Your Spirit gave me life  
Opened up Your Word to me  
Through the gospel of Your Son  
Gave me endless hope and peace

Help me now to live a life  
That's dependent on Your grace  
Keep my heart and guard my soul  
From the evils that I face  
You are worthy to be praised  
With my every thought and deed  
O great God of highest heaven  
Glorify Your Name through me

© 2006 Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI).



# Limited Atonement

# 4

## § INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the atonement refers to the accomplishment of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection on behalf of sinners. This doctrine is the heart of the gospel. Apart from the work of Christ, sinners have no hope of being accepted by a holy God.

All Christians agree that Christ died *for* us. But what does it mean that he died for us? And who is included in “us”? Did Christ make salvation possible for all men? Or did he actually accomplish salvation for some men? And if the latter is true, does he only love those whom he died to save?

The doctrine of limited (or definite) atonement is probably the most controversial of the five points of Calvinism. The reason is not hard to see. The very name is controversial. Who wants to limit the atonement? Doesn't the Bible teach that “God so loved *the world* that he sent his only Son to die?” However, unless we are prepared to say that all human beings throughout history will be saved, then we must put some “limits” on the atonement. In other words, all Christians who are not universalists limit the atonement. Either we limit the efficacy of atonement or the extent of the atonement. Arminians limit the former; Calvinists limit the latter.

## § LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the meaning of the atonement from the biblical text.
- describe the differences between limited and unlimited atonement.
- respond to basic objections to the doctrine of limited atonement.

## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

**Atonement:** The work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation.

**Limited Atonement:** The Reformed view that Christ's death actually paid for the sins of those whom he knew would ultimately be saved. A preferable term for this view is "particular redemption" in that the power of the atonement is not limited, but rather it is fully effective for particular people.

**Penal Substitution:** The view that Christ in his death bore the just penalty of God for our sins as a substitute for us.

**Propitiation:** A sacrifice that bears God's wrath to the end and in so doing changes God's wrath toward us into favor.

**Unlimited Atonement:** The view that Christ's death actually paid for the sins of all people who ever lived.



## Day 1

---

### THE WORK OF CHRIST

Before we address the question of the extent of the atonement, we must first examine the nature of the atonement. What did Christ accomplish on the cross?

In order to understand the atonement, we must understand a little more about the nature of sin and its consequences. In the Bible, sin is described in terms of condemnation (John 3:18), enslavement to the power of Sin and the Devil (Ephesians 2:1-3; John 8:34-35), and hostility against God (Romans 8:7-8; Romans 5:10). The cross of Christ addresses each of these disastrous effects.

The following texts describe the work of Christ on the cross from different perspectives.

#### Romans 8:1-4

*<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

#### Romans 5:6-9

*<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

#### Romans 8:33-34

*<sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who*

*was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

**Colossians 2:13-15**

*<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

**1 John 3:8**

*<sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

**Ephesians 1:7**

*<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...*

**Colossians 1:19-20**

*<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

**1 Peter 3:18**

*<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...*

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1. Select a few of these texts and describe how the cross addresses the problem of sin. How is sin described in each passage (slavery,

condemnation, enmity, etc)? Does the cross actually accomplish what is described in these verses, or does it only create the potential for these benefits to occur?

The greatest danger faced by all human beings is that we are all by nature sinners under God's wrath. The following text addresses this very problem.

Romans 3:21-26

*<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

2. How does the cross demonstrate the righteousness of God? Why was such a demonstration necessary? The word "propitiation" in verse 25 means "to absorb God's wrath." Does this text teach that the cross makes propitiation possible, or does it teach that the cross actually absorbs God's wrath?

Many today scoff at the idea that God poured out his wrath on his own Son. They ridicule the penal substitution of Christ for sinners, calling it “cosmic child abuse” and scorning the notion that God’s wrath needed to be propitiated. Leon Morris adeptly identifies the source of such scorn.

*“We do not like the concept of the wrath of God and we are happy to accept an argument that enables us to get rid of it. But the wrath of God is real and the writers of the New Testament books no less than the Old make this clear. We must reckon with that wrath. Unpalatable though it may be, our sins, my sins, are the object of that wrath. If we are taking our Bible seriously we must realize that every sin is displeasing to God and that unless something is done about the evil we have committed we face ultimately nothing less than the divine anger. God has given us every opportunity, but we have sinned. His wrath is the consequence.”<sup>32</sup>*

Thankfully, many in the church are rising to trumpet the reality of God’s wrath against sinners and the glory of Christ’s wrath-absorbing work on the cross.

*“When a person says that God’s ‘punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed’ would be as evil as child abuse, I am angered and grieved. For if God did not punish his Son in my place, I am not saved from my greatest peril, the wrath of God...Jesus said, ‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey . . . the wrath of God remains on him’ (John 3:36; italics added). Wrath remains on us as long as there is no faith in Jesus.*

*Paul puts it like this: We ‘were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind’ (Ephesians 2:3). My very nature made me worthy of wrath. My destiny was to endure ‘flaming fire’ and ‘vengeance on those . . . who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . [and who] suffer the punishment of eternal destruction’ (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 ESV). I was not a son of God. God was not my Father. He was my judge and executioner. I was ‘dead in . . . trespasses and sins’, one of the ‘sons of disobedience’ (Ephesians 2:1-2 ESV). And the sentence of my Judge was clear and terrifying: ‘because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience’ (Ephesians 5:5 ESV; italics added).*

---

32 Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 176.

*There was only one hope for me – that the infinite wisdom of God might make a way for the love of God to satisfy the wrath of God so that I might become a son of God.*

*This is exactly what happened, and I will sing of it forever. After saying that I was by nature a child of wrath, Paul says, ‘But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ’ (Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV). What a grievous blindness when a teacher in the church writes that the term ‘children of wrath’ cannot mean ‘actual objects of God’s wrath . . . [because] in the same breath they are described as at the same time objects of God’s love’. On the contrary. This is the very triumph of the love of God. This is the love of God – the ‘great love with which he loved us’. It rescued me from his wrath and adopted me into sonship.*

*‘But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons’ (Galatians 4:4 ESV). God sent his Son to rescue me from his wrath and make me his child.*

*How did he do it? He did it in the way one writer slanderously calls ‘cosmic child abuse’. God’s Son bore God’s curse in my place. ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV; emphasis added).’<sup>33</sup>*

3. In light of the texts you’ve studied so far and any additional texts that you know of, what do you think is meant by the phrase “Christ died for us”?

---

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, foreword to *Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 14-15.

## Day 2

### EXPLORING UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

As we noted in the introduction, both Calvinists and Arminians reject universalism, the notion that all human beings will ultimately be saved. In addition to this, they also agree that the gospel should be preached to all human beings without exception. In other words, both Calvinists and Arminians believe that a genuine, free offer of the gospel can and should be made to every individual in the world.

Arminians go on to argue that if this free offer is to be genuine, then it must flow from an unlimited atonement. The following texts are often brought forward as evidence for unlimited atonement.

#### 1 John 2:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

#### John 1:29

*<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

#### 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

*<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

4. Summarize the teaching of these passages. What is the chief difficulty in understanding these texts to teach that Christ died for the sins of every single individual in the world?



Note the following juxtaposition of 1 John 2:1-2 and John 11:49-52.

1 John 2:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

John 11:49-52

*<sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup> Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” <sup>51</sup> He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*

5. How does the second text help to illuminate and explain the first text? (Recall that both passages were written by the same author.)

One of the most beloved passages in the whole Bible is John 3:16. Many who do not hold to the doctrine of limited atonement appeal to this text to explain their rejection of this doctrine.

John 3:16

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

6. Restate John 3:16 in your own words. In your view, does this text conclusively prove that the doctrine of limited atonement is false? Why or why not?

## Day 3

### BEYOND UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Thus far in this lesson we have explored the nature of the atonement and examined biblical texts which indicate a universal dimension to the work of Christ. In this lesson, we will seek to determine from Scripture whether certain aspects of Christ's work are limited in their extent.

Romans 5:8

<sup>8</sup> *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

<sup>9</sup> *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

Ephesians 5:25

<sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

John 10:11-15

<sup>11</sup> *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Romans 8:31-34

<sup>31</sup> *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

7. Who are the objects of Christ's sacrificial love in these verses? In terms of the *extent* of the atonement, are these texts limited or unlimited? Explain your answer.

Recall the discussion of the New Covenant in Lesson 3. Ezekiel 36:26-27 is given below by way of reminder.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

*<sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Jesus referred to the New Covenant on the night that he was betrayed.

Luke 22:14-20

*<sup>14</sup> And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

8. According to this text, from where do the blessings of the New Covenant come? Are these blessings given to every individual in the world?

The following two statements are patterned after John 3:16. (Note: Though these statements are patterned after John 3:16, we do not believe that the second statement interprets John 3:16. We simply adopt the sentence structure from John 3:16 in order to make a point.)

**God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that if anyone believes in him he will not perish but have eternal life.**

**God so loved the elect, that he gave his only Son, so that they will believe in him and not perish but have eternal life.**

9. Are these two statements mutually exclusive? In other words, is it possible that someone could believe both of them without contradiction? Explain your answer.

The following excerpt from John Piper seeks to address the dispute between Calvinists and Arminians on the extent of the atonement. Read the excerpt and answer the question that follows.

*“Arminians take all the passages which say the death of Christ is ‘for us’ (Romans 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:10) or for ‘his own sheep’ (John 10:11, 15) or for ‘the church’ (Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28) or for ‘the children of God’ (John 11:52) or for ‘those who are being sanctified’ (Hebrews 10:14) and say that the meaning is that God designs and intends the atonement for all people in the same way, but that God applies it as effective and saving only for those who believe and become part of ‘us’ and ‘the sheep’ and ‘the church’ and ‘the children of God.’*

*In this view, then, the sentence, ‘Christ died for you,’ means: Christ died for all sinners, so that if you will repent and believe in Christ, then the death of Jesus will become effective in your case and will take away your sins.*

*Now, as far as it goes, this seems to me to be acceptable teaching. But then Arminians deny something that I think the Bible teaches. They deny that the texts about Christ's dying for 'us' or 'his sheep' or his 'church' or 'the children of God' were intended by God to obtain something more for his people than the benefits they get after they believe. They deny, specifically, that the death of Christ was not only intended by God to obtain benefits for people after they believe (which is true), but even more, Christ's death was intended by God to obtain the very willingness to believe. In other words, the divine grace that it takes to overcome our hardness of heart and become a believer was also obtained by the blood of Jesus.*

*There is no dispute that Christ died to obtain great saving benefits for all who believe. Moreover, there is no dispute that Christ died so that we might say to all persons everywhere without exception: 'God gave his only begotten Son to die for sin so that if you believe on him you may have eternal life.'*

*The dispute is whether God intended for the death of Christ to obtain more than these two things: 1) saving benefits after faith, and 2) a bona fide invitation that can be made to any person to believe on Christ for salvation. Specifically, did God intend for the death of Christ to obtain the free gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8) and repentance (2 Timothy 2:25)? Did the blood of Jesus obtain both the benefits after faith, and the benefit of faith itself?*

*Does the historic Arminian interpretation of any of the 'universal' texts on the atonement necessarily contradict this 'more' that I am affirming about God's intention for the death of Christ? (Texts like: 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19; John 1:29; 2 Peter 2:1.)*

*I don't think so. Arminians historically are just as eager as Calvinists to avoid saying that these texts teach 'universal salvation.' So they do not teach that the death of Christ 'for all' saves all.*

*Rather, they say, in the words of Millard Erickson, 'God intended the atonement to make salvation possible for all persons. Christ died for all persons, but this atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual.' Erickson then says, 'This is the view of all Arminians' (Christian Theology, p. 829, emphasis added). What has come clearer to me as I have pondered these things is that Arminians do not say that in the death of Christ God intends to effectively save all for whom Christ died. They only say that God intends to make possible the salvation of all for whom Christ died. But this interpretation of these 'universal' texts does not*

*contradict the Calvinist assertion that God does intend to obtain the grace of faith and repentance for a definite group by the death of Christ.*

*Arminians may deny this assertion, but they cannot deny it on the basis of their interpretation of the 'universal' texts of the atonement. That interpretation simply affirms that all may have salvation if they believe. Calvinists do not dispute that. They only go beyond it.*

*Here's the rub: if he did this 'more,' he didn't do it for everyone. So at this level the atonement becomes 'limited.' And this is what Arminians stumble over: is there anything that God would do to get some unbelievers saved that he would not do for all?*

*This 'limitation' implies a choice on God's part to save some and not all."<sup>34</sup>*

10. In Piper's view, is the Calvinistic understanding of limited atonement at odds with the Arminian understanding of unlimited atonement? Explain your answer.

---

34 John Piper, *TULIP: The Pursuit of God's Glory in Salvation* booklet, available online at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

## Day 4

.....

### RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

In this day's lesson, you will interact with common objections against the doctrine of limited atonement. Day 4 of each lesson is intentionally shorter than previous days to allow time for reflection and review. We recommend that you consult the previous three days of the lesson as you think through these objections.

11. Respond to the following statement: "If the doctrine of limited atonement is true, then God does not love the non-elect. Since 'God is love' (1 John 4:16), the doctrine of limited atonement must be false."

#### 1 Timothy 2:1-6

*<sup>1</sup> First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

#### 2 Peter 3:8-9

*<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

12. Respond to the following statement: “In order to hold to the doctrine of limited atonement, Calvinists must deny the clear teaching of Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. God desires all people to be saved. Therefore, the doctrine of limited atonement is false.”

13. Respond to the following statement: “Calvinists misunderstand the way that the atonement works. Here’s an analogy. A man buys 10 ice cream cones which he intends to give to 10 children. However, only five children accept the ice cream. The other five reject it. Similarly, Christ purchased salvation for all human beings, but only those who accept the free gift will enjoy its benefits.”



## Day 5

---

### SUMMARY

In this section, compare your conclusions from the previous four days of study with a short summary of the doctrine of limited atonement.

#### Limited Atonement

*The atonement is the work of God in Christ on the cross whereby he canceled the debt of our sin, appeased his holy wrath against us, and won for us all the benefits of salvation. The death of Christ was necessary because God would not show a just regard for his glory if he swept sins under the rug with no recompense.*

*Romans 3:25-26 says that God “put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood... This was to demonstrate God’s righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*

*In other words, the death of Christ was necessary to vindicate the righteousness of God in justifying the ungodly by faith. It would be unrighteous to forgive sinners as though their sin were insignificant, when in fact it is an infinite insult against the value of God’s glory. Therefore Jesus bears the curse, which was due to our sin, so that we can be justified and the righteousness of God can be vindicated.*

*The term “limited atonement” addresses the question, “For whom did Christ die?” But behind the question of the extent of the atonement lies the equally important question about the nature of the atonement. What did Christ actually achieve on the cross for those for whom he died?*

*If you say that he died for every human being in the same way, then you have to define the nature of the atonement very differently than you would if you believed that Christ only died for those who actually believe. In the first case you would believe that the death of Christ did not actually save anybody; it only made all men savable. It did not actually remove God’s punitive wrath from anyone, but instead created a place where people could come and find mercy—IF they could accomplish their own new birth and bring themselves to faith without the irresistible grace of God.*

*For if Christ died for all men in the same way then he did not purchase regenerating grace for those who are saved. They must regenerate themselves and bring themselves to faith. Then and only then do they become partakers of the benefits of the cross.*

*In other words if you believe that Christ died for all men in the same way, then the benefits of the cross cannot include the mercy by which we are brought to faith, because then all men would be brought to faith, but they aren't. But if the mercy by which we are brought to faith (irresistible grace) is not part of what Christ purchased on the cross, then we are left to save ourselves from the bondage of sin, the hardness of heart, the blindness of corruption, and the wrath of God.*

*Therefore it becomes evident that it is not the Calvinist who limits the atonement. It is the Arminian, because he denies that the atoning death of Christ accomplishes what we most desperately need—namely, salvation from the condition of deadness and hardness and blindness under the wrath of God. The Arminian limits the nature and value and effectiveness of the atonement so that he can say that it was accomplished even for those who die in unbelief and are condemned. In order to say that Christ died for all men in the same way, the Arminian must limit the atonement to a powerless opportunity for men to save themselves from their terrible plight of depravity.*

*On the other hand we do not limit the power and effectiveness of the atonement. We simply say that in the cross God had in view the actual redemption of his children. And we affirm that when Christ died for these, he did not just create the opportunity for them to save themselves, but really purchased for them all that was necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith.*

*We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense. <sup>1</sup> Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is “the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way. All of God's mercy toward unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross.*

*This is the implication of Romans 3:25 where the cross is presented as the basis of God's righteousness in passing over sins. Every breath that an unbeliever takes is an act of God's mercy withholding judgment (Romans 2:4). Every time the gospel*

*is preached to unbelievers it is the mercy of God that gives this opportunity for salvation.*

*Whence does this mercy flow to sinners? How is God just to withhold judgment from sinners who deserve to be immediately cast into hell? The answer is that Christ's death so clearly demonstrates God's just abhorrence of sin that he is free to treat the world with mercy without compromising his righteousness. In this sense Christ is the savior of all men.*

*But he is especially the Savior of those who believe. He did not die for all men in the same sense. The intention of the death of Christ for the children of God was that it purchase far more than the rising sun and the opportunity to be saved. The death of Christ actually saves from ALL evil those for whom Christ died "especially."*

*There are many Scriptures which say that the death of Christ was designed for the salvation of God's people, not for every individual. For example:*

*John 10:15, "I lay down my life for the sheep." The sheep of Christ are those whom the Father draws to the Son. "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." Notice: being a sheep enables you to become a believer, not vice versa. So the sheep for whom Christ dies are the ones chosen by the Father to give to the Son.*

*In John 17:6,9,19 Jesus prays, "I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to me...I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom Thou hast given me, for they are thine...And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." The consecration in view here is the death of Jesus which he is about to undergo. His death and his intercession is uniquely for his disciples, not for the world in general.*

*John 11:51-52, "[Caiaphas] being high priest that year prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." There are children of God scattered throughout the world. These are the sheep. These are the ones the Father will draw to the Son. Jesus died to gather these people into one. The point is the same as John 10:15-16, "I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice." Christ died for his sheep, that is, for the children of God.*

*Revelation 5:9, "Worthy art Thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for Thou wast slain and by Thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." In accordance with John 10:16 John does not say that the death of Christ ransomed all men but that it ransomed men from all the tribes of the world.*

*This is the way we understand texts like 1 John 2:2 which says, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." This does not mean that Christ died with the intention to appease the wrath of God for every person in the world, but that the "sheep," "the children of God" scattered throughout the whole world, "from every tongue and tribe and people and nation" are intended by the propitiation of Christ. In fact the grammatical parallel between John 11:51-52 and 1 John 2:2 is so close it is difficult to escape the conviction that the same thing is intended by John in both verses.*

*John 11:51-52, "He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."*

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

*The "whole world" refers to the children of God scattered throughout the whole world.*

*If "the whole world" referred to every individual in the world, we would be forced to say that John is teaching that all people will be saved, which he does not believe (Revelation 14:9-11). The reason we would be forced to say this is that the term propitiation refers to a real removal of wrath from sinners. When God's wrath against a sinner is propitiated, it is removed from that sinner. And the result is that all God's power now flows in the service of his mercy, with the result that nothing can stop him from saving that sinner.*

*Propitiated sins cannot be punished. Otherwise propitiation loses its meaning. Therefore if Christ is the propitiation for all the sins of every individual in the world, they cannot be punished, and must be saved. But John does not believe in such universalism (John 5:29). Therefore it is very unlikely that 1 John 2:2 teaches that Jesus is the propitiation of every person in the world.*

*Mark 10:45, in accord with Revelation 5:9, does not say that Jesus came to ransom*

all men. It says, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Similarly in Matthew 26:28 Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Hebrews 9:28, "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." (See also 13:20; Isaiah 53:11-12.)

One of the clearest passages on the intention of the death of Christ is Ephesians 5:25-27. Here Paul not only says that the intended beneficiary of the death of Christ is the Church, but also that the intended effect of the death of Christ is the sanctification and glorification of the church. This is the truth we want very much to preserve: that the cross was not intended to give all men the opportunity to save themselves, but was intended to actually save the church.

Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor."

Similarly in Titus 2:14 Paul describes the purpose of Christ's death like this: "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." If Paul were an Arminian would he not have said, "He gave himself to redeem all men from iniquity and purify all men for himself"? But Paul says that the design of the atonement is to purify for Christ a people out from the world. This is just what John said in John 10:15; 11:51f; and Revelation 5:9.

One of the most crucial texts on this issue is Romans 8:32. It is one of the most precious promises for God's people in all the Bible. Paul says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"

The crucial thing to see here is how Paul bases the certainty of our inheritance on the death of Christ. He says, "God will most certainly give you all things because he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you." What becomes of this precious argument if Christ is given for those who do not in fact receive all things but instead are lost? The argument vanishes.

*If God gave his own Son for unbelievers who in the end are lost, then he cannot say that the giving of the Son guarantees “all things” for the those for whom he died. But this is what he does say! If God gave his Son for you, then he most certainly will give you all things. The structure of Paul’s thought here is simply destroyed by introducing the idea that Christ died for all men in the same way.*

*We can conclude this section with the following summary argument. Which of these statements is true?*

1. *Christ died for some of the sins of all men.*
2. *Christ died for all the sins of some men.*
3. *Christ died for all the sins of all men.*

*No one says that the first is true, for then all would be lost because of the sins that Christ did not die for. The only way to be saved from sin is for Christ to cover it with his blood.*

*The third statement is what the Arminians would say. Christ died for all the sins of all men. But then why are not all saved? They answer: because some do not believe. But is this unbelief not one of the sins for which Christ died? If they say yes, then why is it not covered by the blood of Jesus and all unbelievers saved? If they say no (unbelief is not a sin that Christ has died for) then they must say that men can be saved without having all their sins atoned for by Jesus, or they must join us in affirming statement number two: Christ died for all the sins of some men. That is, he died for the unbelief of the elect so that God’s punitive wrath is appeased toward them and his grace is free to draw them irresistibly out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>35</sup>*

14. According to Piper, in what sense are all men the intended beneficiaries of the cross?

---

35 This excerpt is from “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

15. Record any remaining questions or objections you have.



.....  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write a short note to a Christian friend who struggles to believe in the doctrine of limited atonement. This person embraces the other four points of Calvinism but simply can't embrace limited atonement. Seek to convince this friend that this doctrine is indeed biblical.



## Further Up & Further In

In this section we will explore some of the issues presented in this lesson in greater detail and depth. **Completion of this section is recommended but not required.**

In the book *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, Jerry Walls and Joe Dongell make the following argument.

*“If love will not employ all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss, it is hard to hear the announcement of universal love as good news. Indeed, it is hard to hear it as love at all. In our judgment, it becomes meaningless to claim that God wishes to save all while also insisting that God refrains from making the salvation of all possible.”<sup>36</sup>*

16. What do you think Walls and Dongell mean by “making the salvation of all possible”? From your studies this week, would Calvinists deny that God makes the salvation of all possible? Explain your answer.

17. Do you agree with the argument of Walls and Dongell? Must love employ all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss? Explain your answer.

---

<sup>36</sup> Jerry Walls and Joe Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 55.

Calvinism is often accused of undermining missions and evangelism. “If the atonement is limited in any way, then why preach the gospel to all men?” But does limited atonement undercut world evangelization?

John 10:14-16

<sup>14</sup> *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

<sup>16</sup> *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Revelation 5:8-10

<sup>8</sup> *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*

Revelation 7:9-10

<sup>9</sup> *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

18. According to these texts, how does the doctrine of limited atonement provide incentive for world missions and evangelization?

 SERMON

Read the sermon entitled “A Defense of Calvinism” by Charles Spurgeon and answer the following questions.<sup>37</sup>

19. According to Spurgeon, does Calvinism limit the merit of the blood of Jesus? Why or why not?

20. How does Spurgeon refute the doctrine of universal (unlimited) atonement?

---

<sup>37</sup> This sermon may be accessed online at [www.spurgeon.org](http://www.spurgeon.org) and searching the Spurgeon’s Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).
- ▷ Simon Escobedo III, “2 Peter 2:1 and Universal Redemption,” an online article at [www.aomin.org](http://www.aomin.org).
- ▷ Steve Jeffrey, Michael Overy, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).
- ▷ John Piper, “For Whom Did Jesus Taste Death?,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



**Man of Sorrows**

Philip Bliss

Man of Sorrows! what a name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
“Full atonement!” can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;  
“It is finished!” was His cry;  
Now in Heav’n exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew His song we’ll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Public Domain



# Unconditional Election

# 5

---

## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, you learned that there are multiple intentions in the atonement. Christ died so that any person can be saved, if they will only believe, and he died so that the elect will assuredly come to faith in him and be saved. In other words, while God loves all human beings in one sense, there is a deeper love that he reserves only for his elect.

Immediately, a host of questions arises. What does it mean to be elect? How does a person become elect? Are there any criteria that we must meet? Does God foresee who will one day have faith and, based upon that, choose people to be his own? Or is election completely unconditional? And if election is unconditional, how is God just to choose some and not others?

This lesson will unpack the doctrine of unconditional election. The word “unconditional” means that there are no prior conditions which a person must meet if they are to be chosen by God. In other words, God’s choice of an individual is rooted solely in his sovereign will. As you work through this material, you may want to refer back to the explanation of God’s sovereignty set forth in Lesson 1.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the basis upon which God chooses the elect to be saved.
- describe the relationship between God’s choice of the Christian and the Christian’s choice of God.
- respond to basic objections to the doctrine of unconditional election.

## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

**Common Grace:** The grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.

**Election:** An act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.

**Foreknowledge:** Relating to the doctrine of election, the personal, relational knowledge by which God thought of certain people in a saving relationship to himself before creation. This is to be distinguished from the mere knowledge of facts about a person.

**Predestination:** Another term for “election”; in Reformed theology generally, this is a broader term that includes not only election (for believers), but also reprobation (for nonbelievers).

**Reprobation:** The sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins and thereby to manifest his justice.





## Day 1

.....

### THE TIGER OF ROMANS 9

In his early days as a theological student, the doctrine of unconditional election was distasteful to John Piper. Here is how he describes his early encounters with God's sovereignty.

*“When I entered seminary I believed in the freedom of my will, in the sense that it was ultimately self-determining. I had not learned this from the Bible; I absorbed it from the independent, self-sufficient, self-esteeming, self-exalting air that you and I breathe every day of our lives in America. The sovereignty of God meant that he can do anything with me that I give him permission to do. With this frame of mind I entered a class on Philippians with Daniel Fuller and class on the doctrine of salvation with James Morgan.*

*In Philippians I was confronted with the intractable ground clause of chapter 2 verse 13: ‘Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure,’ which made God the will beneath my will and the worker beneath my work. The question was not whether I had a will; the question was why I willed what I willed. And the ultimate answer—not the only answer—was God.*

*In the class on salvation we dealt head on with the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. Romans 9 was the watershed text and the one that changed my life forever. Romans 9:11-12 said, ‘Though they [Jacob and Esau] were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ And when Paul raised the question in verse 14, ‘Is there injustice on God’s part?’ He says, no, and quotes Moses (in verse 15): ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ And when he raises the question in verse 19, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ He answers in verse 21, ‘Has the potter no*

*right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?*

*Emotions run high when you feel your man-centered world crumbling around you. I met Dr. Morgan in the hall one day. After a few minutes of heated argument about the freedom of my will, I held a pen in front of his face and dropped it to the floor. Then I said, with not as much respect as a student ought to have, 'I [!] dropped it.' Somehow that was supposed to prove that my choice to drop the pen was not governed by anything but my sovereign self.*

*But thanks be to God's mercy and patience, at the end of the semester I wrote in my blue book for the final exam, 'Romans 9 is like a tiger going about devouring free-willers like me.' That was the end of my love affair with human autonomy and the ultimate self-determination of my will. My worldview simply could not stand against the scriptures, especially Romans 9. And it was the beginning of a lifelong passion to see and savor the supremacy of God in absolutely everything."<sup>38</sup>*

In the next section, we will walk through Romans 9:1-23 and seek to follow Paul's train of thought.

Romans 9:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

1. What is the implied problem that is causing Paul so much grief?

---

38 John Piper, "The Absolute Sovereignty of God," an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

This implied problem raises an objection—“the word of God has failed”—that Paul quickly dismisses. Then he supports the assertion of Romans 9:6a with Romans 9:6b and the following verses.

Romans 9:6-13

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

2. One might argue that Isaac was chosen over Ishmael because Isaac was the son of Sarah, while Ishmael was the son of Hagar, her servant. But Jacob and Esau were twins. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau? Why is the timing of God’s choice significant?

Romans 9:14-18

*<sup>14</sup> What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup> So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

3. What in Romans 9:6-13 would prompt the accusation that God is unjust (or unrighteous)? How are verses 15-18 a defense of God's righteousness? (Notice the word "for" at the beginning of verse 15.)

The plain inference stated in verse 18 is hard to reinterpret. There are some, however, who still continue to assert that God's mercy and hardening is based upon what he foresees people with "free will" will choose. Leaving aside whether it is actually (philosophically) possible for totally "free choices" to be foreseen, notice what Paul doesn't say in verse 20 and following. If Paul really believed that God's will was determined by human free-will choices, he would have had the perfect rebuttal to the objection of verse 19.

Romans 9:19-23

*<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...*

4. What is the ultimate purpose of God in choosing some to be vessels of wrath and some to be vessels of mercy?

## Day 2

---

### BEYOND ROMANS 9

Romans 9 is not the only place in Paul's letters that he discusses the doctrine of unconditional election. Romans 8:28-30 teaches the same truth. As you read this passage, ask yourself what Paul means by the word "foreknew."

#### Romans 8:28-30

*<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Now look at some other texts where the words "foreknow" or "know" occur.

#### Romans 11:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.*

#### Amos 3:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: <sup>2</sup> "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."*

#### Jeremiah 1:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>5</sup> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

5. In light of these passages, provide your own explanation of the meaning of "foreknow." What is problematic about interpreting Romans 8:29 to say "those whom he foreknew would believe"?

One of the central goals of this curriculum is that people would not only come to affirm the doctrines of grace with their minds, but that they would embrace them with their hearts. In other words, our hope and prayer is that theology leads to doxology. With that in mind, examine the opening chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:3-14

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

6. What is the tone of Paul's words in this chapter? Why is this significant for our theological study?

The doctrine of unconditional election is uniquely suited to humble the pride of human beings. The following text reminds us of the effect the doctrine of God's sovereign election should have on us.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

7. Underline every reference to God’s choice in this passage. How does the doctrine of election undercut human boasting?

*“God chooses freely who will belong to his people. God does not simply elect Christ and then wait on human self-determination, to govern who will be ‘in Christ.’ Paul says very explicitly, ‘From God are you in Christ’ (v. 30). Your union with Christ is the choice and work of God. Election is not God’s choice of an unknown group of people who come to Christ by their own self-determining power. Election is the act of God by which he determines who will be in Christ...”*

*And there is a reason for this kind of election. An utterly crucial reason. God is not acting willy-nilly. He has a very definite goal in mind to accomplish in election. And this goal is accomplished by choosing who will be in Christ, not just by choosing Christ. His goal has two parts, one positive and one negative. Negatively, his goal is ‘that no human being might boast in the presence of God’ (verse 29). The goal of God in election is the elimination of all human pride, all self-reliance, all boasting in man. Positively, his goal is that boasting would be in the Lord: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’ (verse 31). In other words, the goal of election is to take all boasting off of man and focus all boasting on God. Humble man and exalt Christ. Make man see his utter dependence on God’s mercy and magnify the glory of God’s free grace. That’s why God has pleasure in election—it magnifies his name!”<sup>39</sup>*

---

<sup>39</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 136-137.

## Day 3

---

### UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION AND HUMAN FAITH

Thus far in this lesson, we have seen that election is unconditional. There are no conditions that we must meet in order to be elect. But the Bible clearly teaches that there are conditions for salvation. When Paul was asked by the Philippian jailor, “What must I do to be saved?” he answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:30-31). So how should we connect unconditional election to human faith?

John 10:24-27

*<sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”*

8. According to this passage, what is the relationship between believing and being a part of Jesus’ flock? Why is this surprising?

*“For many people today, it is astonishing that Jesus puts such a value on the sovereign rights of God’s electing freedom that he would speak the way he does to those who refuse him. He speaks in such a way as to prevent them from boasting that they can overrule the ultimate purposes of God. For example, in John 10:25-26 Jesus responded to the skeptics who demanded more and more proof: ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.’ Think about this for a moment. Think about what it means, and think about the fact that Jesus would dare to say it to unbelievers.*



*Jesus does not say, 'You do not belong to my sheep because you do not believe.'*

*Belonging to the sheep, in this text, is not dependent on believing. It's the other way around. Believing is dependent on being a sheep. Belonging to the sheep enables a person to believe."<sup>40</sup>*

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

9. How did Paul know that the Thessalonians had been chosen? What does this tell us about the relationship between election and faith?

Acts 13:45-48

*<sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. <sup>46</sup> And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" <sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*

10. According to this passage, why did these Gentiles believe?

---

<sup>40</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 138-139.



13. Respond to the following statement: “The doctrine of unconditional election undercuts missions and evangelism. For if God has chosen who will and who will not be saved, then there is no point in sharing the gospel. The elect will be saved whether we evangelize or not.”

## Day 5

### SUMMARY

In this section, compare your conclusions from the previous four days of study with a short summary of the doctrine of unconditional election.

#### **Unconditional Election**

*If all of us are so depraved that we cannot come to God without being born again by the irresistible grace of God, and if this particular grace is purchased by Christ on the cross, then it is clear that the salvation of any of us is owing to God's election.*

*Election refers to God's choosing whom to save. It is unconditional in that there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no condition he can meet before God chooses to save him from his deadness.*

*We are not saying that final salvation is unconditional. It is not. We must meet the condition of faith in Christ in order to inherit eternal life. But faith is not a condition for election. Just the reverse. Election is a condition for faith. It is because God chose us before the foundation of the world that he purchases our redemption at the cross and quickens us with irresistible grace and brings us to faith.*

*Acts 13:48 reports how the Gentiles responded to the preaching of the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Notice, it does not say that as many believed were chosen to be ordained to eternal life. The prior election of God is the reason some believed while others did not.*

*Similarly, Jesus says to the Jews in John 10:26, "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." He does not say, "You are not my sheep because you do not believe." Being a sheep is something God decides for us before we believe. It is the basis and enablement of our belief. We believe because we are God's chosen sheep, not vice versa. (See John 8:47; 18:37.)*

*In Romans 9 Paul stresses the unconditionality of election. For example, in verses 11-12 he describes the principle God used in the choice of Jacob over Esau: "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that*

*God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, [Rebecca] was told, "The elder will serve the younger." God's election is preserved in its unconditionality because it is transacted before we are born or have done any good or evil.*

*NOTE: Some interpreters say that Romans 9 has nothing to do with the election of individuals to their eternal destinies. They say that the chapter only relates to the historical roles that are played by the peoples descended from Jacob and Esau.*

*We recommend The Justification of God by John Piper (Baker Book House, 1983) which was written to investigate this very issue. It concludes that Romans 9 not only relates to the historical roles of whole peoples, but also to the eternal destinies of individuals, because among other reasons (Justification, pp. 38-54), verses 1-5 pose a problem about the lostness of individual Israelites which would be totally unaddressed if the chapter had nothing to say about individuals.*

*The unconditionality of God's electing grace is stressed again in Romans 9:15-16, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy."*

*We really do not understand mercy if we think that we can initiate it by our own will or effort. We are hopelessly bound in the darkness of sin. If we are going to be saved, God will have to unconditionally take the initiative in our heart and irresistibly make us willing to submit to him. (See Romans 11:7.)*

*Ephesians 1:3-6 is another powerful statement of the unconditionality of our election and predestination to sonship.*

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He predestined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace."*

*Some interpreters argue that this election before the foundation of the world was only an election of Christ, but not an election of which individuals would actually be in Christ. This simply amounts to saying that there is no unconditional election of individuals to salvation. Christ is put forward as the chosen one of God and*

*the salvation of individuals is dependent on their own initiative to overcome their depravity and be united to Christ by faith. God does not choose them and therefore God cannot effectually convert them. He can only wait to see who will quicken themselves from the dead and choose him.*

*This interpretation does not square well with verse 11 where it says that “we were predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”*

*Nor does the literal wording of verse 4 fit this interpretation. The ordinary meaning of the word for “choose” in verse 4 is to select or pick out of a group (cf. Luke 6:13; 14:7; John 13:18; 15:16,19). So the natural meaning of the verse is that God chooses his people from all humanity before the foundation of the world by viewing them in relationship to Christ their redeemer.*

*All election is in relation to Christ. There would be no election of sinners unto salvation if Christ were not appointed to die for their sins. So in that sense they are elect in Christ. But it is they, and not just Christ, who are chosen out of the world.*

*Also the wording of verse 5 suggests the election of people to be in Christ, and not just the election of Christ. Literally it says, “Having predestined us unto sonship through Jesus Christ.” We are the ones predestined, not Christ. He is the one that makes the election of sinners possible, and so our election is “through him,” but there is no talk here about God having a view only to Christ in election.*

*Perhaps the most important text of all in relation to the teaching of unconditional election is Romans 8:28-33.*

*“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose, For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”*

*Often this text is used to argue against unconditional election on the basis of verse 29 which says, “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined...” So some say*

*that people are not chosen unconditionally. They are chosen on the basis of their faith which they produce without the help of irresistible grace and which God sees beforehand.*

*But this will not square with the context. Notice that Romans 8:30 says, “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Focus for a moment on the fact that all whom God calls he also justifies.*

*This calling in verse 30 is not given to all people. The reason we know it’s not is that all those who are called are also justified—but all men are not justified. So this calling in verse 30 is not the general call to repentance that preachers give or that God gives through the glory of nature. Everybody receives that call. The call of verse 30 is given only to those whom God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son (v.29). And it is a call that leads necessarily to justification: “Those whom he called he also justified.”*

*But we know that justification is by faith (Romans 5:1). What then is this call that is given to all those who are predestined and which leads to justification? It must be the call of irresistible grace. It is the call of 1 Corinthians 1:24 which we discussed above on page 60.*

*Between the act of predestination and justification there is the act of calling. Since justification is only by faith the calling in view must be the act of God whereby he calls faith into being. And since it necessarily results in justification it must be irresistible. There are none called (in this sense! not the sense of Matthew 22:14) who are not justified. All the called are justified. So the calling of verse 30 is the sovereign work of God which brings a person to faith by which he is justified.*

*Now notice the implication this has for the meaning of foreknowledge in verse 29. When Paul says in verse 29, “Those whom he foreknew he also predestined,” he can’t mean (as so many try to make him mean) that God knows in advance who will use their free will to come to faith, so that he can predestine them to sonship because they made that free choice on their own. It can’t mean that because we have seen from verse 30 that people do not come to faith on their own. They are called irresistibly.*

*God does not foreknow the free decisions of people to believe in him because there aren’t any such free decisions to know. If anyone comes to faith in Jesus, it is*

*because they were quickened from the dead (Ephesians 2:5) by the creative Spirit of God. That is, they are effectually called from darkness into light.*

*So the foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is not the mere awareness of something that will happen in the future apart from God's predetermination. Rather it is the kind of knowledge referred to in Old Testament texts like Genesis 18:19 ("I have chosen [literally:known] Abraham so that he may charge his children...to keep the way of the Lord"), and Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations") and Amos 3:2 ("You only [Israel] have I known from all the families of the earth").*

*As C.E.B. Cranfield says, the foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is "that special taking knowledge of a person which is God's electing grace." Such foreknowledge is virtually the same as election: "Those whom he foreknew [i.e. chose] he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."*

*Therefore what this magnificent text (Romans 8:28-33) teaches is that God really accomplishes the complete redemption of his people from start to finish. He foreknows [i.e. elects] a people for himself before the foundation of the world, he predestines this people to be conformed to the image of his Son, he calls them to himself in faith, he justifies them through that faith, and he finally glorifies them—and nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ for ever and ever (Romans 8:39). To him be all praise and glory! Amen<sup>41</sup>.*

14. Explain how Piper can simultaneously affirm the following two statements:

- "Election refers to God's choosing whom to save. It is unconditional in that there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him."
- "We are not saying that final salvation is unconditional."

---

41 John Piper, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



15. Record any remaining questions or objections you may have.



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Spend some time meditating on the reality that the ultimate reason why you are saved is that God chose you before the foundation of the world. Reflect on the fact that he set his favor on you, not because of anything within you, but because of his own freedom and mercy. Record your reflections in the space below.

## Further Up & Further In



In this section we will explore some of the issues presented in this lesson in greater detail and depth. ***Completion of this section is recommended but not required.***

Read the article by John Piper entitled “Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved” and answer the following questions.<sup>42</sup>

16. Explain the distinction between God’s sovereign will (or will of decree) and his moral will (or will of command).

17. How is the crucifixion of Jesus an example of the two wills of God?

---

<sup>42</sup> John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?: Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved,” an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

18. Explain how the hardening of Pharaoh provides an illustration of the two wills of God.

19. Explain how Piper can argue that “both Calvinists and Arminians affirm two wills in God.”

20. In light of what you’ve read, how would you answer the question, “Does God delight in the death of the wicked?”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

---

- ▷ Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).
- ▷ R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1994).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in Election” in *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Freedom and Justice of God in Unconditional Election,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).
- ▷ John Piper, “Predestination,” an online section of the Resource Library at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).
- ▷ Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).



## DOXOLOGY

### **The Love of Christ Is Rich and Free**

Sandra Webb, William Gadsby

The love of Christ is rich and free;  
Fixed on His own eternally;  
Nor earth, nor hell, can it remove;  
Long as He lives, His own He'll love.

His loving heart engaged to be  
Their everlasting Surety;  
'Twas love that took their cause in hand,  
And love maintains it to the end.

Chorus: Love cannot from its post withdraw;  
Nor death, nor hell, nor sin, nor law,  
Can turn the Surety's heart away;  
He'll love His own to endless day.

Love has redeemed His sheep with blood;  
And love will bring them safe to God;  
Love calls them all from death to life;  
And love will finish all their strife.

He loves through every changing scene,  
Nor aught from Him can Zion wean;  
Not all the wanderings of her heart  
Can make His love for her depart.  
(Repeat chorus)

At death, beyond the grave, He'll love;  
In endless bliss, His own shall prove  
The blazing glory of that love  
Which never could from them remove.

©2001 Same Old Dress Music (ASCAP).

# Perseverance of the Saints

---

# 6

## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

One of the most common struggles among professing Christians concerns the security and perseverance of the believer. The Bible contains both glorious promises of eternal security and terrifying warnings of final judgment. How can we put these two realities together?

Can Christians lose their salvation? Can Christ lose a Christian? If we are eternally secure, is perseverance necessary? If we must persevere, then can we have genuine assurance in this life? What does it mean to persevere to the end? Can we ever truly know if we are saved?

The final lesson will seek to address these questions. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is sometimes referred to as the preservation of the saints because God is the one who preserves us in faith. However, it is important to stress both preservation and perseverance so that we don't fall into error. Marginalizing God's sustaining work can result in fearful saints and an undue emphasis on our efforts. Marginalizing the necessity of endurance can result in presumption and false confidence among professing Christians. This lesson seeks to avoid both of these errors by emphasizing both God's preservation and our perseverance.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the need for endurance and the security of the believer.
- describe the relationship between the promises of God, the warnings of Scripture, and the believer's assurance of salvation.
- respond to basic objections to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.



## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

**Assurance of Salvation:** The internal sense we may have based upon certain evidences in our lives that we are truly “born again” and will persevere as Christians until the end of our lives.

**Eternal Security:** Another term for “perseverance of the saints.” However, this term can be misunderstood to mean that all who have once made a profession of faith are “eternally secure” in their salvation when they may not have been genuinely converted at all.

**Perseverance of the Saints:** The doctrine that all those who are truly “born again” will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly “born again.”





## Day 1

.....

### THE NECESSITY OF PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is not optional. It is essential. The following texts address this essential feature of the Christian life.

#### 2 Timothy 2:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*

#### Matthew 24:9-13

*<sup>9</sup> Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

#### Matthew 10:32-33

*<sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

#### Colossians 1:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

Romans 2:6-10

<sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

1. Underline every phrase that refers to the necessity of perseverance in the above passages. Is salvation at stake in these passages? Explain your answer.

The following texts provide insight on the nature of perseverance. Once again, note what is at stake in perseverance.

Hebrews 12:14

<sup>14</sup> Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Romans 8:13

<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Galatians 6:7-8

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

2. From these passages, derive a definition of perseverance. What is at stake in perseverance? Explain your answer.

It is crucial to emphasize that the doctrine of perseverance does not mean that we must be completely perfect. The Bible is clear that human beings do not obtain perfection in this life.

Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

1 John 1:8-10

<sup>8</sup> *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* <sup>9</sup> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* <sup>10</sup> *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

So though we can say with confidence that Christians still struggle with sin throughout their lives, nevertheless we maintain that Scripture teaches that we must remain faithful to Jesus if we are to be saved on the last day. As John Piper says, “I do not mean that our faith produces a *perfect flawlessness* in this life. I mean that it produces a *persevering fight*.”<sup>43</sup>

The doctrine of justification by faith alone has been called “the article on which the church stands or falls.” The following texts teach this crucial doctrine.

---

<sup>43</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 332.

Romans 4:3-8

<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Galatians 2:16

<sup>16</sup> ...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

The following texts describe the consequences of sinful disobedience to God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Galatians 5:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:3-5

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

James 2:14-26

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

3. Underline every phrase in these passages that refer to the consequences of failing to persevere. Attempt to resolve the tension between the texts on justification by faith and the texts on perseverance.

*“We are justified by grace alone through faith alone (Romans 3:28; 4:5; 5:1; Ephesians 2:8f); and all those who are thus justified will be glorified (Romans 8:30)—that is, no justified person will ever be lost. Nevertheless, those who give themselves up to impurity will be lost (Galatians 5:21), and those who forsake the fight against lust will perish (Matthew 5:30), and those who do not pursue holiness will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14), and those who surrender their lives to evil desires will succumb to the wrath of God (Colossians 3:6).*

*The reason these two groups of texts are not contradictory is that the faith that justifies is a faith that also sanctifies. And the test of whether our faith is the kind of faith that justifies is whether it is the kind of faith that sanctifies. Robert L. Dabney, the nineteenth century southern Presbyterian theologian, expressed it like this: ‘Is it by the instrumentality of faith we receive Christ as our justification, without the merit of any of our works? Well. But this same faith, if vital enough to embrace Christ, is also vital enough to ‘work by love,’ ‘to purify our hearts.’ This then is the virtue of the free gospel, as a ministry of sanctification, that the very faith which embraces the gift becomes an inevitable and a divinely powerful principle of obedience.’”<sup>44</sup>*

---

<sup>44</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 332.

## Day 2

---

### THE PROMISE OF PRESERVATION

In the last section, we saw that perseverance in faith is necessary if a person is to obtain final salvation on the last day. But this is only part of the picture. The Bible not only contains exhortations to finish the race, it also contains promises of God's sovereign preserving power. Such texts are meant to instill great confidence in the hearts of God's people.

Romans 8:28-34

*<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

Romans 8:38-39

*<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

4. Read Romans 8:29-30 closely. Does anyone drop out of the chain of redemption? How does Paul support God's preservation of believers in this passage?

John 10:25-30

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

5. How would you respond to someone who said that, while no one can snatch us out of God's hand, we are able to remove ourselves from God's hand?

Jude 1:20-25

<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. <sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

1 Corinthians 1:8-9

<sup>8</sup> He will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.



Philippians 1:6

*<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 13:20-21

*<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

6. How do these texts provide a rock-solid foundation for the doctrine of the preservation of the saints? What is the basis of our confidence that we will persevere?

*This strong admonition from Jude where he exhorts his readers to keep themselves in God's love prepares us for the concluding doxology: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25 NIV). On the one hand, Jude exhorts the readers to keep themselves in God's love. They must certainly exert effort and diligence to do so. Yet finally and ultimately those who escape from apostasy do so because of the grace of God. He is the one "who is able to keep you from falling."<sup>45</sup>*

---

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 258.

1 Peter 1:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

7. How does this text bring together the two truths that you have studied in this lesson: the perseverance and preservation of the saints? In light of what you've studied, summarize the relationship between our perseverance and God's preservation.

*"We must finish the race to obtain the prize. No believer who quits the race halfway through will receive the prize. We cannot deceive ourselves with the thought that disobedience and faithfulness are idle matters. When we see what is at stake we tremble (and well we should), since many have gone before us who have been heedless of divine warnings. Yet we also may feel intimidated when we consider our own resources in finishing the race. We keenly realize that our strength is slight and our willpower inadequate. At this juncture in the race we take courage from the promises of God. He pledges that all those who are called and chosen will obtain the prize. He will provide the strength needed to finish the race. He will fortify our weakened knees and faltering resolve so that we do not apostasize. We will most certainly obtain the crown that is set before us, for the same God who propelled us onto the racetrack will complete the good work he has started. He is faithful to us as his covenant people, and thus we receive strength and encouragement to continue our journey to the heavenly city."<sup>46</sup>*

---

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 267.

## Day 3

---

### FINDING ASSURANCE

One of the practical questions that inevitably arises when studying the doctrine of perseverance is this: how do I know that I am one of the elect whom God will keep to the end? In other words, if perseverance is necessary for final salvation, can I have assurance of present salvation?

Before we seek to address this question, we must first make a crucial distinction regarding the relationship between possessing assurance and possessing salvation. There are two questions involved. The first is “Do I possess salvation?” The second is “Am I confident that I possess salvation?” These are not identical questions. Someone may genuinely be saved and yet struggle with assurance. Likewise there are people who do not possess salvation and yet are convinced falsely that they are saved (Matthew 7:22-23). As we move forward, it will be important to keep this distinction in our minds.

The book of 1 John repeatedly emphasizes the evidence of genuine, saving faith.

1 John 2:3-6

*<sup>3</sup> And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

1 John 3:6-10

*<sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

**1 John 3:14**

*<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.*

**1 John 5:1-4**

*<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

8. Underline every evidence of genuine conversion that John provides. Summarize the evidence below.

**2 Peter 1:5-11**

*<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

9. According to this passage, how can we make our calling and election sure (1:10)? What does this imply about the basis of assurance?

When we are seeking assurance that we are genuinely born again, it is common for us to resort to introspection and self-examination. While there is certainly a place for such self-examination (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5), the texts we have studied indicate that there are better ways to gain assurance. Jonathan Edwards helpfully summarizes this point.

*“It is not God’s design that men should obtain assurance in any other way than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercise of it. And although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected, yet it is not the principal means by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action.”<sup>47</sup>*

Just because someone says that they have assurance is no guarantee that they are genuinely saved. The Bible contains a number of texts that describe individuals who believe themselves to be saved and are regarded by other Christians as being born again and yet prove to be false brothers.

Matthew 7:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”*

---

47 Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 123.

1 John 2:18-19

<sup>18</sup> *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.*

<sup>19</sup> *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

2 Corinthians 13:5

<sup>5</sup> *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

10. In light of these texts, is it possible to possess false assurance? What distinguishes false assurance from genuine assurance? Should texts like these produce fear in the hearts of professing Christians?

The notion that our assurance may be false can cause great doubt to rise in the hearts of some saints. Periods of spiritual darkness may lead us to question our salvation. It is crucial to remember that the ultimate ground of our assurance is Christ himself. He is the one who has promised to keep us until the end.

*“This is the way Paul thought of his own strivings. He said, ‘Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own’ (Phil. 3:12). The key thing to see in this verse is that all Paul’s efforts to grasp the fullness of joy in Christ are secured by Christ’s grasp of him. Never forget that your security rests on Christ’s faithfulness first.*

*Our faith rises and falls. It has degrees. But our security does not rise and fall. It has no degrees. We must persevere in faith. That’s true. But there are times when our faith is the size of a mustard seed and barely visible. In fact, the darkest experience for the child of God is when his faith sinks out of his own sight. Not out of God’s sight, but his. Yes, it is possible to be so overwhelmed with darkness that you do not know if you are a Christian—and yet still be one.”<sup>48</sup>*

---

48 John Piper, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 37-38.

## Day 4

---

### RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

In this day's lesson, you will interact with common objections against the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Day 4 of each lesson is intentionally shorter than previous days to allow time for reflection and review. We recommend that you consult the previous three days of the lesson as you think through these objections.

11. Respond to the following statement: “The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints teaches that genuine believers will surely persevere to the end. This doctrine is contradicted by the clear fact that Christians like Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20), and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17-18) did not persevere to the end. Even Paul himself was not sure whether he would make it to the end (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).”
  
12. Respond to the following statement: “The doctrine of eternal security tends to promote laziness on the part of Christians. They believe ‘once saved, always saved’ and therefore neglect obedience to God because there are no serious consequences for sin.”

13. Respond to the following statement: “If you believe that a Christian must persevere to the end in order to receive final salvation, then you are threatening the doctrine of justification by faith alone. For if we must perform works in order to receive final salvation, then we are not truly justified by faith alone. Perseverance of the saints introduces a subtle form of works-righteousness into the Christian life.”



## Day 5

---

### SUMMARY

In this section, compare your conclusions from the previous four days of study with a short summary of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

#### **Perseverance of the Saints**

*It follows from what was just said that the people of God WILL persevere to the end and not be lost. The foreknown are predestined, the predestined are called, the called are justified, and the justified are glorified. No one is lost from this group. To belong to this people is to be eternally secure.*

*But we mean more than this by the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. We mean that the saints will and must persevere in the obedience which comes from faith. Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not hold fast to Christ can be lost in the end.*

*The following seven theses summarize our understanding of this crucial doctrine:*

1) Our faith must endure to the end if we are to be saved.

*This means that the ministry of the word is God's instrument in the preservation of faith as well as the begetting of faith. We do not breathe easy after a person has prayed to receive Christ, as though we can be assured from our perspective that they are now beyond the reach of the evil one. There is a fight of faith to be fought. We must endure to the end in faith if we are to be saved.*

*1 Corinthians 15:1, 2, "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain."*

*Colossians 1:21-23, "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel..."*

*2 Timothy 2:11, 12, "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him..."*

*Mark 13:13, "But he who endures to the end will be saved."*

*See also Revelation 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 25, 26; 3:5, 11, 12, 21.*

2) Obedience, evidencing inner renewal from God, is necessary for final salvation.

*This is not to say that God demands perfection. It is clear from Philippians 3:12, 13 and 1 John 1:8-10 and Matthew 6:12 that the New Testament does not hold out the demand that we be sinlessly perfect in order to be saved. But the New Testament does demand that we be morally changed and walk in newness of life.*

*Hebrews 12:14, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."*

*Romans 8:13, "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

*Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God." (See also Ephesians 5:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:10.)*

*1 John 2:3-6, "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (See also 1 John 3:4-10, 14; 4:20.)*

*John 8:31, "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" (See also Luke 10:28; Matthew 6:14, 15; 18:35; Genesis 18:19; 22:16-17; 26:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:19.)*

3) God's elect cannot be lost.

*This is why we believe in eternal security—namely, the eternal security of the elect. The implication is that God will so work that those whom he has chosen for eternal*

*salvation will be enabled by him to persevere in faith to the end and fulfill, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the requirements for obedience.*

*Romans 8:28-30, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." What is evident from this passage is that those who are effectually called into the hope of salvation will indeed persevere to the end and be glorified.*

*John 10:26-30, "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (See also Ephesians 1:4-5.)*

4) There is a falling away of some believers, but if it persists, it shows that their faith was not genuine and they were not born of God.

*1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made plain that they all are not of us." Similarly, the parable of the four soils as interpreted in Luke 8:9-14 pictures people who "hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in a time of temptation fall away."*

*The fact that such a thing is possible is precisely why the ministry of the Word in every local church must contain many admonitions to the church members to persevere in faith and not be entangled in those things which could possibly strangle them and result in their condemnation.*

5) God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained, as it were, like a seed in that first act.

*What we are trying to do here is own up to the teaching of Romans 5:1, for example, that teaches that we are already justified before God. God does not wait to the end of our lives in order to declare us righteous. In fact, we would not be*

able to have the assurance and freedom in order to live out the radical demands of Christ unless we could be confident that because of our faith we already stand righteous before him.

Nevertheless, we must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith. The way these two truths fit together is that we are justified through our first act of faith because God sees in it (like he can see the tree in an acorn) the embryo of a life of faith. This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable fruit of obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine.

The textual support for this is that Romans 4:3 cites Genesis 15:6 as the point where Abraham was justified by God. This is a reference to an act of faith early in Abraham's career. Romans 4:19-22, however, refers to an experience of Abraham many years later (when he was 100 years old, see Genesis 21:5, 12) and says that because of the faith of this experience Abraham was reckoned righteous. In other words, it seems that the faith which justified Abraham is not merely his first act of faith but the faith which gave rise to acts of obedience later in his life. (The same thing could be shown from James 2:21-24 in its reference to a still later act in Abraham's life, namely, the offering of his son, Isaac, in Genesis 22.) The way we put together these crucial threads of biblical truth is by saying that we are indeed justified through our first act of faith but not without reference to all the subsequent acts of faith which give rise to the obedience that God demands. Faith alone is the instrument (not ground or basis) of our justification because God makes it his sole means of uniting us to Christ in whom we "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

6) God works to cause his elect to persevere.

We are not left to ourselves and our assurance is very largely rooted in the sovereign love of God to perform that which he has called us to do. 1 Peter 1:5, "By God's power we are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Jude 24, 25, "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of

*our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”*

*Philippians 1:6, “And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Corinthians 1:8-9, “Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end; guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

7) Therefore we should be zealous to make our calling and election sure.

*2 Peter 1:10, “Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>”*

14. How does Piper explain the fact that some professing believers do in fact fall away from Christ? What happens to those who fall away?

15. Record any remaining questions or objections you may have.

---

49 John Piper, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the following assignments:

- Write a letter to a friend who is struggling with doubts about their salvation. Seek to encourage them to persevere in the faith. Use what you've learned in this lesson to offer comfort to this friend.
- Write a letter to a professing Christian who is living in sin. Using what you learned in this lesson, warn this person of the dire consequences of rebelling against God. Impress upon them the need for perseverance. Set forth the serious warnings in Scripture in hope that they will be drawn back to Christ.

## Further Up and Further In

In this section we will explore some of the issues presented in this lesson in greater detail and depth. **Completion of this section is recommended but not required.**

No discussion of perseverance would be complete without a discussion of the warning passages in the book of Hebrews. Though discussions of warnings normally center on Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-31, there are actually five main warning passages in the letter. All five are included below.

### Hebrews 2:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

### Hebrews 3:12-14

<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

### Hebrews 6:4-12

<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup> For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. <sup>9</sup> Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have

*shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.<sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,<sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

**Hebrews 10:26-31**

*<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?<sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”<sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

**Hebrews 12:25-29**

*<sup>25</sup> See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.<sup>26</sup> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”<sup>27</sup> This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.<sup>28</sup> Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,<sup>29</sup> for our God is a consuming fire.*

16. Who is being addressed in each of these warnings? What is being threatened in each passage?



17. Attempt to explain how biblical warnings like these relate to the steadfast promises of God studied earlier in this lesson.

*“We believe that God’s promises of assured salvation have their proper function to ground our faith in God and to assure us that God faithfully keeps his promises to his children. We also believe that God’s admonitions and warnings have their distinctive function to evoke faith that perseveres in holy devotion to God’s heavenly call on us in Christ Jesus. Thus, God’s warnings do not conflict with God’s promises. His warnings serve his promises, for his warnings elicit belief and confidence in God’s promises.”<sup>50</sup>*

Listen to Charles Spurgeon ably articulate the function of warnings in Scripture.

*“If God has put it in, he has put it in for wise reasons and for excellent purposes. Let me show you why. First, O Christian, it is put in to keep thee from falling away. God preserves his children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means... There is a deep precipice: what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. In some old castle there is a deep cellar, where there is a vast amount of fixed air and gas, which would kill anybody who went down. What does the guide say? ‘If you go down you will never come up alive.’ Who thinks of going down? The very fact of the guide telling us what the consequences would be, keeps us from it. Our friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic; he does not want us to drink it, but he says, ‘If you drink it, it will kill you.’ Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it. No; he tells us the consequences, and he is sure we will not do it. So God says, ‘My child, if you fall over this precipice you will be dashed to pieces.’ What does the child do? He says, ‘Father, keep me; hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.’ It leads the believer to greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution,*

---

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 143.

*because he knows that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed, and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he know that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.*<sup>51</sup>

Read the article “Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and Proposal” by Thomas Schreiner and answer the following questions.<sup>52</sup>

18. List the four views that Schreiner critiques. Choose one of these views and summarize Schreiner’s reasons for rejecting it.

19. Summarize Schreiner’s view (means-of-salvation view). How does this view differ from the tests-of-genuineness view?

---

51 Charles Spurgeon, “Final Perseverance,” an online sermon at [www.spurgeon.org](http://www.spurgeon.org) (search Spurgeon’s Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link).

52 This article may be accessed online by performing an internet search for the title and author.

20. Explain how the story of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27 illustrates the means-of-salvation view.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).
- ▷ John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003).
- ▷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001).
- ▷ John Piper, "The Agonizing Problem of Assurance of Salvation," an online article at the Desiring God website ([www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).
- ▷ D.A. Carson, "Reflections on Assurance" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* ed. Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).



**How Firm a Foundation**

*Rippon's Selection of Hymns,*

*Traditional American Melody*

How firm a foundation,  
ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith  
in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say  
than to you He hath said,  
You, who unto Jesus  
for refuge have fled?

In every condition,  
in sickness, in health;  
In poverty's vale,  
or abounding in wealth;  
At home and abroad,  
on the land, on the sea,  
As thy days may demand,  
shall My strength ever be.

"Fear not, I am with thee,  
O be not dismayed,  
For I am thy God  
and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen thee,  
help thee, and cause thee to stand  
Upheld by my righteous,  
omnipotent hand."

"When through the deep waters  
I call thee to go,  
The rivers of grief  
shall not thee overflow  
For I will be with thee,  
thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee  
thy deepest distress."

"When through fiery trials  
thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient,  
shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee;  
I only design  
Thy dross to consume,  
and thy gold to refine."

"The soul that on Jesus  
hath leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not  
desert to his foes;  
That soul, though all hell  
should endeavor to break,  
I'll never, no never,  
no never forsake."

Public Domain

# Historical Information

---



John Calvin, the famous theologian and pastor of Geneva, died in 1564. Along with Martin Luther in Germany, he was the most influential force of the Protestant Reformation. His *Commentaries* and *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are still exerting tremendous influence on the Christian Church worldwide.

The churches which have inherited the teachings of Calvin are usually called Reformed as opposed to the Lutheran or Episcopalian branches of the Reformation. While not all Baptist churches hold to a Reformed theology, there is a significant Baptist tradition which grew out of and still cherishes the central doctrines inherited from the Reformed branch of the Reformation.

The controversy between Arminianism and Calvinism arose in Holland in the early 1600s. The founder of the Arminian party was Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). He studied under the strict Calvinist Theodore Beza at Geneva and became a professor of theology at the University of Leyden in 1603.

Gradually Arminius came to reject certain Calvinist teachings. The controversy spread all over Holland, where the Reformed Church was the overwhelming majority. The Arminians drew up their creed in Five Articles (written by Uytenbogaert) and laid them before the state authorities of Holland in 1610 under the name Remonstrance, signed by forty-six ministers. (These Five Articles can be read in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, pp. 545-547.)

The Calvinists responded with a Counter-Remonstrance. But the official Calvinistic response came from the Synod of Dort which was held to consider the Five Articles from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619. There were eighty-four members and eighteen secular commissioners. The Synod wrote what has come to be known as the Canons of Dort. These are still part of the church confession of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. They state the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants. (See Schaff, vol. 3, pp. 581-596.)

So the so-called Five Points were not chosen by the Calvinists as a summary of their teaching. They emerged as a response to the Arminians who chose these five points to oppose.



# Testimonies from Church History

---

# B

It is possible to believe all these things in your head and go to hell. So easily deceived and hypocritical are we by nature! Therefore our concern in writing these things is not merely to convince the mind but also to win the heart.

We want for others the sweet experience of resting in the massive comfort of these truths. We want others to feel the tremendous incentive for righteousness and for missions flowing from these truths. We want for others the experience of knowing and trusting the sovereign grace of God in such a way that He and He alone gets the glory.

To this end we have gathered here some testimonies of what these truths have meant to some great Christians of the past. For those who have known them truly, they have never been mere speculation for the head, but have always been power for the heart and life.

## Augustine

Augustine was resoundingly converted by the irresistible grace of God after leading a dissolute life. He wrote in his *Confessions* (X, 40):

*“I have no hope at all but in thy great mercy. Grant what thou commandest and command what thou wilt. Thou dost enjoin on us continence...Truly by continence are we bound together and brought back into that unity from which we were dissipated into a plurality. For he loves thee too little who loves anything together with thee, which he loves not for thy sake. O love that ever burnest and art never quenched! O Charity, my God, enkindle me! Thou commandest continence. Grant what thou commandest and command what thou wilt.”*

*“These are the words of a man who loves the truth of irresistible grace, because he knows he is utterly undone without it. But also in his doctrinal letters he drives this beloved truth home” (Epistle ccxvii, to Vitalis):*

*“If, as I prefer to think in your case, you agree with us in supposing that we are doing our duty in praying to God, as our custom is, for them that refuse to believe, that they may be willing to believe and for those who resist and oppose his law and doctrine, that they may believe and follow it. If you agree with us in thinking that we are doing our duty in giving thanks to God, as is our custom, for such people when they have been converted...then you are surely bound to admit that the wills of men are preveniently moved by the grace of God, and that it is God who makes them to will the good which they refused; for it is God whom we ask so to do, and we know that it is meet and right to give thanks to him for so doing..”*

For Augustine the truth of irresistible grace was the foundation of his prayers for the conversion of the lost and of his thanks to God when they were converted.

### **Jonathan Edwards**

Jonathan Edwards, the great New England preacher and theologian of the eighteenth century, had an equally deep love for these truths. He wrote when he was 26 about the day he fell in love with the sovereignty of God:

*“There has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, from that day to this...God’s absolute sovereignty...is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of any thing that I see with my eyes...The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God...God’s sovereignty has ever appeared to me, a great part of his glory. It has often been my delight to approach God, and adore him as a sovereign God” (Personal Narrative).*

### **George Whitefield**

Edwards wept openly when George Whitefield preached in his church, because of how much he loved the message he preached. Whitefield was a great evangelist in the 18th century. He said, “I embrace the Calvinistic scheme, not because Calvin, but Jesus Christ has taught it to me” (Arnold Dalimore, *George Whitefield* 1, p. 406).

He pleaded with John Wesley not to oppose the doctrines of Calvinism:

*“I cannot bear the thoughts of opposing you: but how can I avoid it, if you go about*



*(as you brother Charles once said) to drive John Calvin out of Bristol. Alas, I never read anything that Calvin wrote; my doctrines I had from Christ and His apostles; I was taught them of God” (Dalimore, p. 574).*

It was these beliefs that filled him with holy zeal for evangelism:

*“The doctrines of our election, and free justification in Christ Jesus are daily more and more pressed upon my heart. They fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Saviour.*

*I hope we shall catch fire from each other, and that there will be a holy emulation amongst us, who shall most debase man and exalt the Lord Jesus. Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformation can do this. All others leave freewill in man and make him, in part at least, a saviour to himself. My soul, come not thou near the secret of those who teach such things...I know Christ is all in all. Man Is nothing: he hath a free will to go to hell, but none to go to heaven, till God worketh in him to will and to do his good pleasure.*

*Oh, the excellency of the doctrine of election and of the saints’ final perseverance! I am persuaded, til a man comes to believe and feel these important truths, he cannot come out of himself, but when convinced of these and assured of their application to his own heart, he then walks by faith indeed!” (Dalimore, p. 407).*

## **George Mueller**

George Mueller is famous for the orphanages he founded and the amazing faith he had to pray for God’s provision. Not many people know the theology that undergirded that great ministry. In his mid-twenties (1829), he had an experience which he records later as follows:

*“Before this period [when I came to prize the Bible alone as my standard of judgment] I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption (i.e. limited atonement), and final persevering grace. But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the Word of God. Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely an instrument; and being made willing to receive what the Scriptures said, I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths.*

*To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines.*

*As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state for God's glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might be, and as I ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before" (Autobiography, pp. 33-34).*

### **Charles Spurgeon**

C.H. Spurgeon was a contemporary of George Mueller. He was the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for thirty years, the most famous pastor of his day—and a Baptist at that. His preaching was powerful to the winning of souls to Christ. But what was his gospel that held thousands spellbound each week and brought many to the Saviour?

*"I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel...unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the Cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called" (Autobiography 1, p. 168).*

He had not always believed these things. Spurgeon recounts his discovery of these truths at the age of 16:

*"Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me...I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John*

*Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron...*

*One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "How did you come to be a Christian?" I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God" (Autobiography, pp. 164-5).*

Spurgeon started a college for pastors and was intent that the key to being a worthy teacher in the church was to grasp these doctrines of grace.

*"Arminianism is thus guilty of confusing doctrines and of acting as an obstruction to a clear and lucid grasp of the Scripture; because it misstates or ignores the eternal purpose of God, it dislocates the meaning of the whole plan of redemption. Indeed confusion is inevitable apart from this foundational truth [of election].*

*Without it there is a lack of unity of thought, and generally speaking they have no idea whatever of a system of divinity. It is almost impossible to make a man a theologian unless you begin with this [doctrine of election]. You may if you please put a young believer to college for years, but unless you shew him this ground-plan of the everlasting covenant, he will make little progress, because his studies do not cohere, he does not see how one truth fits with another, and how all truths must harmonize together...*

*Take any county throughout England, you will find poor men hedging and ditching that have a better knowledge of divinity than one half of those who come from our academies and colleges, for the reason simply and entirely that these men have first learned in their youth the system of which election is a centre, and have afterwards found their own experience exactly square with it."*

## A Final Appeal

It is fitting that we close this account of our belief in the doctrines of grace by appealing to you, the reader, to receive the magnificent Christ who is the eternal Author of these doctrines. Give heed to the beautiful entreaty extended by J.I. Packer, a great contemporary advocate of these truths:

*“To the question: what must I do to be saved? the old gospel [Calvinism] replies: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. To the further question: what does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? its reply is: it means knowing oneself to be a sinner, and Christ to have died for sinners; abandoning all self-righteousness and self-confidence, and casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace; and exchanging one’s natural enmity and rebellion against God for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of one’s heart by the Holy Ghost.*

*And to the further question still: how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things? it answers: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him. Turn to Him and trust Him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him; watch pray read and hear God’s Word, worship and commune with God’s people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you” (Introductory Essay to John Owen’s The Death of Death in the Death of Christ, p. 21).*

**Let Charles Spurgeon lead you in prayer:**

*“Join with me in prayer at this moment, I entreat you. Join with me while I put words into your mouths, and speak them on your behalf— ‘Lord, I am guilty, I deserve thy wrath. Lord, I cannot save myself. Lord, I would have a new heart and a right spirit, but what can I do? Lord, I can do nothing, come and work in me to will and to do thy good pleasure.*

*Thou alone hast power, I know,  
To save a wretch like me;  
To whom, or whither should I go  
If I should run from thee?*

*But I now do from my very soul call upon thy name. Trembling, yet believing, I cast myself wholly upon thee, O Lord. I trust the blood and righteousness of thy dear Son...Lord, save me tonight, for Jesus’ sake.”*

From Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973) pp. 101f.



# 10 Effects of Believing in the Five Points



by John Piper

---

These ten points are my personal testimony to the effects of believing in the five points of Calvinism. I have just completed teaching a seminar on this topic and was asked by the class members to post these reflections so they could have access to them. I am happy to do so. They, of course, assume the content of the course, which is available on tape from desiringGod Ministries, but I will put them here for wider use in the hope that they might stir others to search, Berean-like, to see if the Bible teaches what I call “Calvinism.”

**1. These truths make me stand in awe of God and lead me into the depth of true God-centered worship.**

I recall the time I first saw, while teaching Ephesians at Bethel College in the late ‘70s, the threefold statement of the goal of all God’s work, namely, “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

It has led me to see that we cannot enrich God and that therefore his glory shines most brightly not when we try to meet his needs but when we are satisfied in him as the essence of our deeds. “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him the glory forever” (Romans 11:36). Worship becomes an end in itself.

It has made me feel how low and inadequate are my affections, so that the Psalms of longing come alive and make worship intense.

**2. These truths help protect me from trifling with divine things.**

One of the curses of our culture is banality, cuteness, cleverness. Television is the main sustainer of our addiction to superficiality and triviality.

God is swept into this. Hence the trifling with divine things.

Earnestness is not excessive in our day. It might have been once. And, yes, there are imbalances in certain people today who don’t seem to be able to relax and talk about the weather.

Robertson Nicole said of Spurgeon, “Evangelism of the humorous type [we might say, church growth of the marketing type] may attract multitudes, but it lays the soul in ashes and destroys the very germs of religion. Mr. Spurgeon is often thought by those who do not know his sermons to have been a humorous preacher. As a matter of fact there was no preacher whose tone was more uniformly earnest, reverent and solemn” (Quoted in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, p. 57).

### **3. These truths make me marvel at my own salvation.**

After laying out the great, God-wrought salvation in Ephesians 1, Paul prays, in the last part of that chapter, that the effect of that theology will be the enlightenment of our hearts so that we marvel at our hope, and at the riches of the glory of our inheritance, and at the power of God at work in us – that is, the power to raise the dead.

Every ground of boasting is removed. Brokenhearted joy and gratitude abound.

The piety of Jonathan Edwards begins to grow. When God has given us a taste of his own majesty and our own wickedness, then the Christian life becomes a thing very different than conventional piety. Edwards describes it beautifully when he says,

“The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires: their hope is a humble hope, and their joy, even when it is unspeakable, and full of glory, is humble, brokenhearted joy, and leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, and more like a little child, and more disposed to a universal lowliness of behavior” (*Religious Affections*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, pp. 339f).

### **4. These truths make me alert to man-centered substitutes that pose as good news.**

In my book, *The Pleasures of God* (2000), pp. 144-145, I show that in the 18th century in New England the slide from the sovereignty of God led to Arminianism and thence to universalism and thence to Unitarianism. The same thing happened in England in the 19th Century after Spurgeon.

Iain Murray’s *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 454, documents the same thing: “Calvinistic convictions waned in North America. In the progress of the decline which Edwards had rightly anticipated, those Congregational churches of New England which had embraced Arminianism after the Great Awakening gradually moved into Unitarianism and universalism, led by Charles Chauncy.”

You can also read in J. I. Packer’s *Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 160, how Richard Baxter forsook these teachings and how the following generations reaped a grim harvest in the Baxter church in Kidderminster.

These doctrines are a bulwark against man-centered teachings in many forms that gradually corrupt the church and make her weak from the inside, all the while looking strong or popular.

<sup>1</sup> Timothy 3:15, “The church of the living God [is] the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”



**5. These truths make me groan over the indescribable disease of our secular, God-belittling culture.**

I can hardly read the newspaper or look at a TV ad or a billboard without feeling the burden that God is missing.

When God is the main reality in the universe and is treated as a non-reality, I tremble at the wrath that is being stored up. I am able to be shocked. So many Christians are sedated with the same drug as the world. But these teachings are a great antidote.

And I pray for awakening and revival.

And I try to preach to create a people that are so God-saturated that they will show and tell God everywhere and all the time.

We exist to reassert the reality of God and the supremacy of God in all of life.

**6. These truths make me confident that the work which God planned and began, he will finish – both globally and personally.**

This is the point of Romans 8:28-39.

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?<sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.<sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?<sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**7. These truths make me see everything in the light of God's sovereign purposes – that from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be glory forever and ever.**

All of life relates to God. There's no compartment where he is not all-important and the one who gives meaning to everything. 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Seeing God's sovereign purpose worked out in Scripture, and hearing Paul say that "he accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11) makes me see the world this way.

**8. These truths make me hopeful that God has the will, the right, and the power to answer prayer that people be changed.**

The warrant for prayer is that God may break in and change things – including the human heart. He can turn the will around. "Hallowed be thy name" means *cause people to hallow your name*. "May your word run and be glorified" means *cause hearts to be opened to the gospel*.

We should take the New Covenant promises and plead with God to bring them to pass in our children and in our neighbors and among all the mission fields of the world.

Ezekiel 11:19

*God, take out of their flesh the heart of stone and give him a new heart of flesh.*

Deuteronomy 30:6

*Lord, circumcise their hearts so that they love you.*

Ezekiel 36:27

*Father, put your spirit within them and cause them to walk in Your statutes.*

2 Timothy 2:25-26

*Lord, grant them repentance and the knowledge of the truth that they may escape from the snare of the devil.*

Acts 16:14

*Father, open their hearts so that they believe the gospel.*

**9. These truths reminds me that evangelism is absolutely essential for people to come to Christ and be saved, and that there is great hope for success in leading people to faith, but that conversion is not finally dependent on me or limited by the hardness of the unbeliever.**

So it gives hope to evangelism, especially in the hard places and among the hard peoples.

John 10:16

*I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also. They will heed my voice.*

It is God's work. Throw yourself into it with abandon.

**10. These truths make me sure that God will triumph in the end.**

Isaiah 46:9-10

*I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand that I will accomplish all my purpose."*

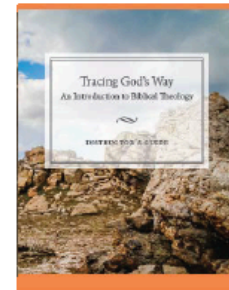
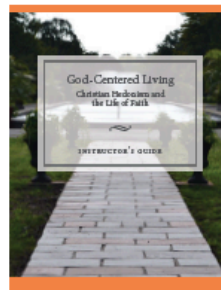
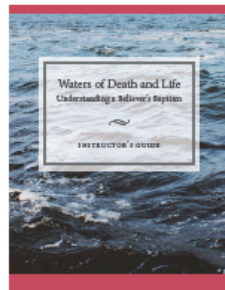
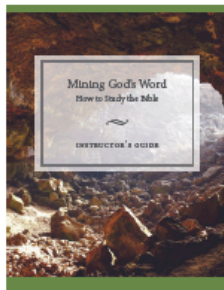
Putting them altogether: God gets the glory and we get the joy.

# TULIP

## The Five Points of Calvinism

*TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism* is a six-week course designed to introduce students to the doctrines of grace, exalting in God's sovereignty over all things, including salvation. This course is an attempt to carefully present the biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Students will systematically study the five points of Calvinism (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints) by examining the relevant biblical passages. The student's learning will be solidified through answering study questions, considering provocative quotations, and engaging in class discussions. Ultimately, our goal is that students who take this course will be awakened to the glory of God's sovereign grace.

### ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BETHLEHEM COLLEGE & SEMINARY



 **Bethlehem**  
*Education in Serious Joy*

Bethlehem College & Seminary | [bcsmn.edu](http://bcsmn.edu) | [info@bcsmn.edu](mailto:info@bcsmn.edu)



JOHN PIPER, CHANCELLOR

Spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping local churches with God-centered, theologically sound resources.