



TULIP

The Five Points of Calvinism



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for *his* glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary which are more fully explained at bcsmn.edu. At the Bethlehem College & Seminary website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism* 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.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully 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.

IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 6 lessons, ideally in 2 hours of in-class instruction and with approximately 2.5 hours homework each week. To achieve the kind of undistracted focus and academic rigor that maximizes learning, we recommend that this course be taught as a weeknight class. We anticipate, however, that this curriculum might be adapted for a Sunday school, small group, or discipleship setting. If this is necessary or most appropriate, we urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday school class would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

Before the first class session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled “Course Information.” You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson in the corresponding column or boxes. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student’s Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline to structure your time:

Welcome / Prayer (5 min): Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.

Personal Introductions (20 min): Ask each student in the room to briefly introduce themselves by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it? (In large classes, it may not be feasible to have everyone introduce themselves. Instead, it may be helpful for you to describe how you came to embrace the sovereignty of God in salvation. It is always helpful for students to see how the truth has affected your life.)

Syllabus and Workbook Review (25 min): Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have. Explain the various parts of the Student’s Workbook. If you choose, you may read the “Introduction from John Piper.” Draw attention to the “Further Up and Further In” section. Emphasize that the questions in this section are recommended, but not required. Be sure to point out the appendices in the back of the Student’s Workbook.

Break (5 min)

Introduction to Calvinism (60 min): Guide the class through Lesson 1. In preparation, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers in the *Instructor's Guide*. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. Then move on to the next question.

Overview of Next Week / Closing (5 min): Ensure that they understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can. It is essential to understand that **this Instructor's Guide is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.**

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2–6. Our recommendation is for you to open the class in prayer and then immediately proceed through each day's study, discussing how the students answered the three lesson questions and reflecting on the biblical passages. You then might want to cover the sermon or discussion questions. You will notice that **the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in an hour of thoughtful interaction.** This is not an oversight in design, and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material that is not included in the *Student's Workbook* in the form of Teaching Notes. Consult these notes after thoroughly reviewing the lesson on your own, but before you meet with the class.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an engaging environment in the classroom. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not talk for the majority of the lesson. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that are engaging and helpful:

- ▶ Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- ▶ Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a student's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- ▶ Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- ▶ Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- ▶ Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and they will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- ▶ The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however,

should attempt to cover the material. Avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.

- ▷ The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. If you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think inductive Bible study is worthwhile, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word!

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Lingering on certain questions, pursuing *helpful* digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

Questions or Comments?

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcsmn.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions! Thanks!



TULIP

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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

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- ▷ 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.¹

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.

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



TEACHING NOTES

The purpose of the material in lesson 1 is to provide an overview of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God so that the five points of Calvinism can be placed in their proper context. Depending on the theological background of your class, you may want to spend more time on the last few questions of this lesson rather than focusing on the first few questions. Be mindful of the amount of time you have to complete all ten questions and budget your time accordingly. You may choose to skip some of the questions and direct your students to complete them in their spare time.

As you introduce the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, be sure to stress that the primary goal of the class is to examine the biblical teaching on these issues. Encourage your students to approach this course with humility. Our aim should be to derive our theology from a close study of the Scriptures. To do so, it will be necessary to continually check our assumptions against the Bible. The Bible must remain the supreme authority in these matters.

This lesson contains three lengthy portions of Scripture (the story of Job, the story of Joseph, and the story of the crucifixion of Jesus). The purpose of including these three examples is to expose your students to the complexity of the relationship between the sovereignty of God and human beings, particularly as it pertains to evil in the world. Therefore, you should not feel compelled to solve the mystery of God's sovereignty in relation to people. Rather, you should endeavor to show the tension inherent in Scripture when dealing with these issues.

For each story, it may be best to divide your class into small groups and assign a few verses to each group. For example, one group might examine Job 2:6-12 and answer question 3. Another group could do the same for Job 2:13-19. Then each group could share what they discover with the whole class. This allows you to maximize your class time in the most efficient manner.

As you walk through the story of Job, highlight the complexity of discerning the proper cause of Job's misery. The text clearly indicates that God is ultimately responsible and sovereign over the calamity that befalls Job. However, Satan is also intimately involved, as are various other people groups. It is important to stress the various sources of Job's misfortune so that your students understand the difficulty of coming to clear and unambiguous answers regarding the relationship of God to evil.

The story of Joseph also displays the same ambiguity. Joseph's brothers are clearly responsible for his enslavement. At the same time, the Bible assigns

ultimate causality to God. He “sent” Joseph ahead of them. Joseph’s brothers meant “evil” against him, but God meant it (the “evil”) for good. Once again, stress the complexity of this question.

It may not be necessary to work through all of the texts for Question 7. It may be enough to simply list the various individuals and groups that were involved in the murder of Jesus. Draw out the human element in the crucifixion so that when this human element is set beside biblical affirmations of God’s involvement, your students will again feel the biblical tension that we are confronting.

Some students may not immediately grasp the material on the two wills of God. This is to be expected. You can revisit this concept in subsequent lessons. We introduce it now so that students will have some frame of reference as they work through the rest of the lessons. John Piper’s illustration on page 11 may help your students to grasp the distinction being made. Like the two wills of God, the analogy of the author and the story can be revisited throughout the course.

As you teach through the material, keep in mind that we have placed more material in the lessons than is possible to complete in one class session. This is intentional. Lesson 1 in particular contains a lot of information. Use discernment as you present the material to your students. Feel free to return to this material in later lessons. By intentionally packing each lesson with so much content, our hope is that this curriculum will be a resource for your students long after the class is completed.



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."²

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

⁸ Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ 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

³⁴ 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; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Psalm 115:3

³ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

² Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith Section 3.1.

Romans 9:18-19

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

Job 42:2

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

Psalm 33:8-10

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. ¹⁰ 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.
- **ANSWER.** *These verses teach that God’s purposes are unstoppable. All his purpose will be accomplished. No one can stop his hand. None of his purposes are thwarted. He does what he pleases. Thus, we are right to say that God is totally and absolutely free to do what he wants. No human being ever puts constraints upon him.*

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

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

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

⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. ⁷ 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

¹ 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

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

Proverbs 16:33

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

Proverbs 21:1

¹ 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

² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ 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." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ 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." ⁶ 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

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

Isaiah 45:7

⁷ 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

²⁹ *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

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

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

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

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?
- **ANSWER.** *From this sampling, we see that God is sovereign over the weather, human governments, the minds of men, “chance” occurrences like the rolling of dice, the heart of kings, the sin of kings, the disaster that comes to cities, light and darkness, the death of animals, the plans of merchants, and the unbelief of rebels. Proverbs 21:1, Genesis 20:6, and 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 all indicate that God exercises authority 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).”*³

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

¹ 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. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none

³ 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). 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?”⁹ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason?”¹⁰ 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.¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”¹² 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.

¹³ Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.²¹ 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.”

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Job 2:1—10

¹ 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.² 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.”³ 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.”⁴ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life.⁵ But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.”⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.”

⁷ 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.⁸ And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”¹⁰ 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?

· **ANSWER.** Job 1:12 indicates that God gives Job into the hand of Satan. Immediately after this, we are told of the theft of Job's oxen by the Sabeans (1:15), the destruction of his flock by fire from God (!) (1:16), the death of his servants (1:17), and the death of his children (1:19). The flow of the narrative indicates that we are to understand these disasters to be the result of Satan's work. In addition, after God puts Job's health in Satan's hand (2:6), Satan strikes Job with sores. Thus, Satan is responsible for Job's misery. However, Job attributes ultimate responsibility to God (1:21; 2:10). The LORD is the one who has taken away and the LORD is the one who has sent him evil.

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

· **ANSWER.** The limitations on Satan can be seen in three places in this text. First, the simple fact that Satan, by his own admission, is not able to harm Job because God has put a hedge around him (1:10) indicates Satan's limitations. Second, God initially restricts Satan's affliction to Job's property and family (1:12), refusing to let Satan touch Job himself. Finally, when God does allow Satan to afflict Job, he refuses to let Satan kill him. Therefore

we see that Satan must operate within the parameters set forth by God. As John Piper notes in the quotation below, Satan “is on a leash.”

“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.”⁴

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

Genesis 37:12-36

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” ¹⁶ “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” ¹⁷ And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his

⁴ 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.

brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ 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." ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² 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. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?" ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² 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." ³³ 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." ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

Genesis 45:1-8

¹ 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. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵ 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."
¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷ '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. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."
¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ 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

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

• **ANSWER.** *The Bible describes the enslavement of Joseph from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the text clearly and unambiguously says that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:27-28; 45:4-5; Psalm 105:17-18). On the other hand, the text also indicates that God sent Joseph to Egypt ahead of them (Genesis 45:5, 7-8; Genesis 50:20; Psalm 105:17). Thus the same action is described from two different perspectives.*

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?

• **ANSWER.** *As we noted above, the sale of Joseph into slavery is described in two different ways. Joseph himself recognizes both of these perspectives when he says "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). In the Hebrew the word for "evil" is a feminine singular noun. The word for "it" in the second half of the verse is a feminine singular pronoun, indicating that the same action is in view in both halves of the verse. Joseph's brothers may have had one intention for their act, but God had another, namely the preserving of his people during the famine. Therefore, while it was morally evil for his brothers to sell him into slavery, it was not evil for God to send Joseph ahead of them, because God's purpose was ultimately for good.*

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

¹ Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. ² 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.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will

therefore punish and release him.”

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”—¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²² 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.” ²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ 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!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ 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. ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ 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!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come

into your kingdom.”⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ 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.

- **ANSWER.** *The people involved in the crucifixion include Pontius Pilate (23:24), Herod (23:11-12), the Roman soldiers (23:36-38), the chief priests and rulers of the people (23:1-2), and the Jewish crowd (23:18-23). All of these people were complicit in the murder of the Son of God. This was an unspeakably evil act willfully perpetrated by the enemies of Jesus.*

Acts 4:24-30

²⁴ 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, ²⁵ 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? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set them-selves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’- ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ 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

¹⁰ 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

³² *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.

· **ANSWER.** *The prayer of the early church indicates that they understood that God's hand and God's plan were ultimately behind the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:28). The reference to Psalm 2:1-2 in 4:25-26 makes clear that they also viewed the actions of Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews as acts of rebellion and treason against God and against his anointed king. Isaiah 53 and Romans 8 both support this view of the crucifixion by highlighting the fact that God was the one who did not spare Jesus because it was the will of the LORD to crush him. Therefore, it is right to say that God did in fact plan that evil occur. These texts are clear: The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was unspeakably evil and divinely ordained. How it is possible for God to do this and yet not himself commit evil is incredibly mysterious. However, we must nevertheless affirm both aspects of the truth.*

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.⁵

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 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.⁶

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."⁷

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

⁵ 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).

⁶ Ibid.

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

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, yet he may will it, for the greater promotion of happiness in this universality.⁸

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.⁹

8 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.

9 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).

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?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

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 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.¹⁰

This analogy is not without its difficulties. For example, while Macbeth is merely a fictional character, we are very much real. Moreover, Shakespeare

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

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.”¹¹ 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 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.*¹²

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?

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary. One biblical text that provides some warrant to this analogy is Psalm 139:16. “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” All of our days were written in God’s book before one of them came to be.*

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

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

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

the doctrinal formulations of John Calvin or any other theologian (though we will read various articles and sermons by such men)¹³. 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
- 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.

¹³ 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.

•••••  **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 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).

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 DEFINITIONS¹⁴

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").

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



Before beginning the class discussion, it may be helpful to remind your students of the following points:

1. Approach these issues with humility. Acknowledge that we are creatures, not the Creator. We come to the Bible as learners, not dictators. Only after we understand our place in the universe should we begin to seek for understanding. As the Psalmist says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111).
2. Remember to continually check your assumptions and presuppositions against the Bible itself. It is often the case that unbiblical assumptions can creep into our thinking. We must seek for sanctified minds as well as hearts. Always be mindful of what your presuppositions are as you read the Bible.
3. Acknowledge that the Bible may not answer every question that we would like. The Bible is clear that “the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” (Deut 29:29) Such an attitude should lead us to joyfully embrace that which is revealed and to humbly recognize the limits of our knowledge.

As you begin to work through the class discussion, we recommend that you first focus on seeing what the texts are saying before trying to explain how such ideas can fit with certain conceptions of justice or freedom. In other words, before examining the difference between libertarian freedom and compatibilistic freedom (for more on this distinction, see question 16 in the “Further Up and Further In” section), you must first examine the biblical texts to see how they portray human beings in their natural state. Similarly, the distinction between moral inability and natural inability is a helpful one, provided that you first demonstrate that the Bible depicts human beings as unable to come to God. It is far more important that your students understand what the Bible says about the nature and extent of human sinfulness than that they can explain various philosophical distinctions about human sinfulness.

Throughout these lessons you should seek to demonstrate how these doctrines affect the way that we pray and the way that we evangelize. There is an unfortunate caricature among Christians that Calvinism harms prayer, evangelism, and missions. One of your goals in this course should be to explode this common misunderstanding. We recommend that you ask your students

questions like, “What is the difference between viewing unbelievers as merely spiritually sick and viewing them as spiritually dead? How does this distinction affect the way that you pray for them?”

When discussing the meaning of total depravity, it is important to carefully define “good” and “bad” according to the Bible. While it is self-evident that some natural human beings do “good” in some sense, when we are speaking of total depravity, we are referring to human beings as they relate to God. Thus, an action could be good when viewed from a human perspective, but could still be evil when placed in relation to God. The following analogy may be helpful to explain the difference:

Imagine a kingdom in which a group of people put considerable time, effort, and money into building hospitals and schools for the local population who is very poor. All of us would agree that such actions are virtuous. But what if the goal of this group in building the hospitals and schools is to win the population over so that they can overthrow the rightful king? What's more, the organization is using the funds and equipment of the rightful king in order to subvert his rule. Now their “virtuous” acts are seen to be, in actuality, acts of subversion and rebellion. Similarly, when unbelievers do “virtuous” things, while they may be good from one perspective, they are still actually manifestations of rebellion against God because they are not done in reliance upon him for the sake of his praise.

When you seek to explain the nature of human inability, it is helpful to distinguish between moral and natural inability (see the “Further Up and Further In” section). The following is a simple summary of what we mean by these terms, as well as a basic analogy to illustrate the point.

1. Put simply, we always do what we most want to do. That's what it means to choose something. We may not like our desires and thus, in one sense, not do what we would like to do (see Romans 7), but at the end of the day, we nevertheless do whatever we most want in any given moment. The only way we could have done differently was if our desires in that moment were different. Moral inability simply means that our desires are always sinful. Thus, while we always do what we want (and thus are free), we are not free to change our desires.
2. One way to illustrate this distinction is in terms of ignorance. There are two kinds of ignorance. If, on the first day of 10th grade, a student is commanded to complete upper-level calculus that he has not been taught yet, he is naturally ignorant. In that case, it would be wrong for the teacher

to punish him. But, if after six weeks of instruction in which the teacher has repeatedly demonstrated how to perform the problem, the student is still unable to perform the problem, and the reason for his ignorance is that he has slept through class or ignored the teacher's explanation, we would still say that he is ignorant, but he is now responsible for his ignorance. Similarly, unbelievers are ignorant of God, not in the sense that they don't know about him, but in the sense that they suppress the truth (Romans 1:18-21). As Paul says in Ephesians 4:18, their ignorance is due to the hardness of their hearts.

In sum, stress to your students that the Bible repeatedly portrays human beings as blind to beauty, dead in sin, ignorant of God's glory, and unable to obey. But our blindness is a willful blindness; our deadness is such that we still follow the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:1-3); our ignorance flows from our hardness; and our inability is a willing refusal to love God. Therefore, we are both totally enslaved to sin and completely responsible for our sin.



Day 1

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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

²⁶ 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."²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 2:7-8, 15-17

⁷ 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.⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed...¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Isaiah 43:6-7

⁶ "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,⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

1 Corinthians 10:31

³¹ 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?"

· **ANSWER.** *God originally designed human beings to exercise kingly dominion over the earth and to live their lives for his glory. We were meant to live under God's authority and word (Genesis 2:16-17) and over God's creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). Every aspect of our lives, from eating and drinking to working and playing, was meant to image forth God in the world.*

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

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where

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

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

- **ANSWER.** *Adam's sin brought guilt, condemnation, and death to all of his offspring. As the head of the human race, Adam acted on behalf of humanity. His transgression led to a judicial sentence of death for all men (Romans 5:12, 15, 17) as well as the spread of sin's power over all of his descendants (Romans 5:19).*

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.¹⁵

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

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

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *Sin is the willful suppression of God's truth and the foolish exchange of God's glory for created things. In this passage, sin is described in terms of truth-suppression, ingratitude, foolishness, and idolatry. It is the “de-godding” of God, the removal of his truth from its rightful place as*

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

our authority and the removal of his person from his rightful place as the supreme object of our affections. Modern examples will vary.

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

¹² “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ 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

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

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.”¹⁶

Romans 3:9-19

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” ¹³ “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” ¹⁴ “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” ¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.” ¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the

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

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?

- **ANSWER.** *To be “under sin” is to be under the power and dominion of Sin. It means that we are enslaved to Sin’s power (3:11) and judicially unrighteous (3:10). It means that we have a natural and perpetual inclination away from God and toward evil that expresses itself in our words (3:13-14), our actions (3:15), and our hearts (3:18). Romans 3:11 clearly teaches that human beings in their natural state do not seek for God.*

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.¹⁷

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

Day 2

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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

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

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

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

Romans 8:5-8

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

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.
- **ANSWER.** In Ephesians 2:1-3, sin is described in terms of death and life. On the one hand, we are “dead” (2:1) in our sins. On the other hand, we follow the course of this world, we follow Satan (2:2), and we live in the passions of our flesh (2:3). Thus, though we are capable of thinking, feeling,

and acting, we are nevertheless devoid of spiritual life. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, sin is described in terms of blindness to glory. Specifically, unbelievers are unable to see the glory of Christ in the gospel. In Romans 8:5-8, sin is described in terms of a mindset (8:5) that is at war with God (8:7). Such a mindset is not merely rebellious; it is intractable, totally unable to submit to God's law. Thus, if we are to be delivered from sin, we must be given spiritual life, we must have our eyes opened to see the glory of Christ, and we must have our hostility against God overcome.

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

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

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

- **ANSWER.** *In this text, the light is the Son of God (John 3:18). People do not come to the light because they love darkness and hate the light. In other words, their inability to come to Jesus flows from their deep and abiding hatred of Jesus. It is important to note that hatred of Jesus may manifest itself in a variety of ways, some of which are not obviously "evil." Nice, friendly, moralistic, American people that do not place Jesus Christ at the center of their affections are acting out of a truth-suppressing hatred of the Son of God.*

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

Hebrews 11:6

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

Romans 14:23

²³ 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.

- **ANSWER.** *Both of these texts indicate that everything an unbeliever does is sin. In Hebrews 11:6, faith is a necessary requirement for pleasing God. Therefore, anyone who does not have faith cannot please him. Romans 14:23 clearly states that everything a person does apart from faith in God is sin. Thus, a person with no faith in God cannot do anything except sin. The apparent good deeds of unbelievers will be considered in the Objections and in the Teaching Notes.*

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

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

John 8:34

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

Galatians 4:8

⁸ *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.

· **ANSWER.** *Being enslaved to sin does not mean that we are forced to sin against our wills. It is not the case that we really want to love, honor, and obey God, but some outside power called "sin" undercuts our wills and enslaves us. Rather, it is our will that is enslaved. We are willing slaves of sin. Our desires have been hijacked such that, rather than desiring and delighting in God above all things, we love other things more than God.*

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

²³ *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

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

Romans 2:5-10

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

Matthew 25:46

⁴⁶ *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?
 - **ANSWER.** *These texts all indicate that God will judge and punish sinners. This punishment will indeed be eternal. Romans 6:23 contrasts "death" with*

“eternal life.” 2 Thessalonians 1:9 refers to “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord.” Romans 2:7-8 contrasts “wrath and fury” with “eternal life.” Matthew 25:46 contrasts “eternal punishment” with “eternal life.” If we believe that the reward of the saints will be everlasting, then we must also conclude that the punishment of the wicked will be everlasting.

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.”

- **ANSWER.** *The following quotations answer this objection in detail. To summarize them briefly: because God is infinite in worth, value, and authority, sin against him is an infinite offense. Therefore, justice demands an infinite punishment. Because human beings are finite creatures, this infinite punishment is poured out over the course of an infinite period of time. In addition to this explanation, it is also important to note that sinners in hell do not cease to be in rebellion against God. In other words, it is not the case that people in hell suddenly realize the folly of their ways and embrace the beauty of God’s glory. While there will be regret and sorrow in hell, this will not flow from love for God, but from selfish motives. Sinners in hell will continue to hate God just as they did throughout their lives.*

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.¹⁸

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

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 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.¹⁹

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

Day 4

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

In this section, you will interact with common objections against the doctrine of total depravity. 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 human beings are totally depraved and unable to please God, then it is unjust for God to punish them for their disobedience. Justice demands that we must have the ability to do something if we are to be held accountable for failing to do it.”
 - **ANSWER.** *There is a distinction between moral inability and natural inability. Natural inability means that there is some physical constraint placed upon me such that I could not obey even if I desired to. Moral inability means that I am unable to obey because I don’t want to. Thus, while we do have the natural ability to please God, we do not have the moral ability. Natural ability is necessary for justice to be done; moral ability is not. For more on this question see the “Further Up and Further In Section” below.*

12. Respond to the following statement: “While mankind may be naturally sinful in the way that Calvinists describe, God has graciously given all men the ability to choose or reject his offer of salvation. This grace is given to every individual upon their entrance into the world.”
 - **ANSWER.** *The grace referred to in this objection is sometimes called “prevenient grace.” There are two main difficulties with such a notion. First, explicit textual support for such a doctrine is lacking. There are no texts which unambiguously teach that all human beings have been graciously given this ability. The concept of prevenient grace is a philosophical concept that is imposed upon the text. Second, this notion mutes all of the texts that we have discussed in this lesson that refer to human beings in their natural state as dead, blind, and hostile to God. This view argues that those texts*

are hypothetically true (if God left us to ourselves, we would be blind, dead, and hostile), but not actually true in reality. However, Scripture clearly indicates that human beings in their natural state are really and truly dead, blind, and hostile to God.

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *The key to this objection hangs on the definition of virtue. If virtue is defined solely in relation to other human beings, then many non-Christians are indeed virtuous. However, the Bible defines virtue and goodness in relation to God. By this definition, no one is “good” (Romans 3:10). Therefore, we are able to praise actions and deeds that are virtuous in the horizontal sense (in relation to other people) while still acknowledging that, because such actions do not flow from faith in Christ and love for the glory of God, they are not truly virtuous in the vertical sense. See the Teaching Notes for this lesson for an illustration of this distinction.*

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.²⁰

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

· **ANSWER.** *Our rebellion to God is total in four ways. We do not delight in God; everything we do as unbelievers is sin; we are completely incapable of submitting to God and his law; our rebellion is worthy of eternal punishment.*

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

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

²⁰ John Piper, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an online article at the Desiring God website (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.”²¹

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

²¹ 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.*²²

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

- **ANSWER.** *Libertarian freedom is the power of contrary choice, meaning we are able to choose contrary to all influences and forces that act on us or within us, including our greatest desire. Compatibilistic freedom is the freedom to act in accord with our greatest motive or desire. Compatibilistic freedom is compatible with belief in God's sovereign determination of all things; libertarian freedom is not. Compatibilistic freedom means that we always do what we most want to do at any given moment. Libertarian freedom means that we are able to choose against our greatest motive or desire at any given moment. If this last statement sounds strange, it is because this aspect of libertarian freedom seems to render it incoherent. If we choose against our greatest desire, then was it really our greatest desire?*

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, expostulations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not

22 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.

inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in his providence: either by positive efficiency, or permission' (258).

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.²³

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

· **ANSWER.** *Human beings always act according to their greatest desire or motive. This is what moral ability means. Moral ability is not a prerequisite for accountability. All that is necessary for accountability is that there are*

²³ 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). The page numbers throughout the article correspond to *The Freedom of the Will* by Jonathan Edwards (Indianapolis, IL: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1969).

no external constraints which prohibit us from acting according to our greatest desire. God has the right to command of us what we ought to give, even if, by virtue of our profound rebellion and corruption, we can't give it.

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

- **ANSWER.** *A person who is tied to a chair is naturally unable to stand up. To punish them for not getting up would be cruel. If a criminal puts a gun to your head and orders you to rob a bank, you are being coerced. This is an example of natural necessity. However, if a man kills another man and as his defense says, "I couldn't help myself. My desire to kill him was overwhelming," we don't absolve him of his responsibility, even though the greatness of his desire rendered him unable to resist it. If anything, a greater desire to do evil makes a person more guilty.*



SERMON

Read the sermon entitled "Human Inability" by Charles Spurgeon and answer the following questions.²⁴

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

- **ANSWER.** *Spurgeon locates our inability in our nature. He says that human nature is so debased, so depraved, so corrupt that we cannot come to Christ without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The corruption of man is such that his will is obstinate, his understanding is darkened, his affections are depraved, and his conscience is overpowered. He illustrates this inability by pointing to a mother's inability to stab her own child. She is unable to harm her baby because of her motherly nature.*

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?

- **ANSWER.** *These two statements are two different ways of saying the same*

24 This sermon may be accessed online at www.spurgeon.org and searching Spurgeon's Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link.

thing. Man cannot come because he will not come. That is, his will is so depraved that he has no desire to come and therefore is unable to come. At the same time, man will not come because he cannot come. That is, the reason for his unwillingness is a lack of spiritual power and vitality.

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).
- ▷ John Piper, "All Jews and Gentiles Are Under Sin," an online sermon at the Desiring God website (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.

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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."



As you teach through this material, continually bring the discussion back to the text of Scripture. Your primary goal should not be to argue or debate philosophical notions (as helpful as they may be). Rather, your goal should be to unpack the biblical text so that your students see what God has revealed in the Bible.

Keep in mind that terms like “irresistible grace,” “effectual calling,” “new birth,” and “regeneration” are all used interchangeably. While there may be slight differences in meaning, for the purposes of this curriculum, we are treating them as synonymous.

When you are discussing 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, help your students to see the difference between the two types of “call.” The general call is what Billy Graham does when he stands in front of an audience (though this call also occurs in personal evangelism or when an individual reads the Bible). The second call is what the Holy Spirit does in and through the preaching of Billy Graham (or the personal evangelism or Bible reading). Stress that these two calls do not cancel each other out, but instead they work in tandem to bring people to faith.

It may be necessary to spend some time walking through John 6:35-44 in order to help your students see the inseparable link between the Father’s giving, the Father’s drawing, our believing, and the Son’s raising us up on the last day.

When you come to the teaching on the new birth, you may want to pause and emphasize that the very terminology implies that we are passive in being born again. Being born is not something we do; it is something that happens to us. Likewise, being born again is something that the Spirit does to us. Like the wind, this work is not subject to human manipulation (“the wind blows where it wishes”).

Throughout this lesson, it will be important for you to emphasize that the doctrine of irresistible grace does not render our prayers and evangelistic efforts vain. In other words, no one can argue that, because God is the one who draws people, our preaching of the gospel to all men and our prayers for their salvation are superfluous. Rather, the doctrine of irresistible grace makes our preaching and praying hopeful. Like Ezekiel, we are preaching in a graveyard (Ezekiel 37). Our message is a stumbling block and foolishness to the natural mind that cannot understand the things of the Spirit. Therefore, the only hope that we have that someone might be saved is if God powerfully moves to take out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. God is able to raise men from the dead, both physically and spiritually (the story of Lazarus in John 11 may help illustrate

this). Therefore, the truth that God is able to overcome all of our rebellion and open our eyes to the glory of Christ should embolden us to preach the gospel faithfully and to pray boldly that God will do the work that only he can do.

It will also be important to stress that the doctrine of irresistible grace does not make human actions irrelevant. The quotation by Jonathan Edwards after question 9 is incredibly helpful in this regard. God's work stands beneath and upholds our faith and effort. The analogy of an author and his story from Lesson 1 may be helpful on this point. In the end, don't be afraid to appeal to mystery. God's relationship to the will of human beings is utterly unique and beyond our ability to fully comprehend. This doesn't mean that we should cease to seek understanding, but it should cause us to approach these questions with a sense of reverence and humility.

Finally, there will be some who find the teaching on God's sovereign grace to be incomprehensible and distasteful. Seek to humbly answer difficult questions by such people as best as you can. More than that, make it your aim to out-rejoice them. Celebrate God's sovereign grace. Help your students to see how this truth fills you with gratitude to God for changing your heart and emboldens you to pray for the lost and to evangelize the world. Truth is not merely meant to be known with the mind; it is meant to be delighted in with the heart. Model this before your students.



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

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *To the Jews, the cross is a stumbling block (Isaiah 8:14). The idea of a crucified Messiah who embraces the Gentiles is nonsense to them. Similarly, the Greeks regard the idea of a crucified deity as utter folly. Paul indicates in verse 24 that not all Jews and Greeks reject the cross. Instead what is a stumbling block to some is the power of God to others, and what is foolishness to some is the wisdom of God to others. What distinguishes these groups of people is that one group is "called." Thus in this text we see two "calls." The first is the general call given by the preacher ("we preach Christ crucified"). The other is the specific and irresistible call of God that results in a person embracing the gospel ("to those who are called").*

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

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

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”?

· **ANSWER.** *No one drops out of the Golden Chain. All those who are foreknown are glorified. More specifically, all those who are called are justified and glorified. But if all the called are justified (by faith; cf. Romans 5:1), then not everyone is called. Only some people are “called” in this sense. Therefore, we can conclude that there is something about the call of God that necessarily results in faith and justification. In other words, this is an effectual and irresistible call.*

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.²⁵

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

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** First, notice that "coming" to Jesus and "believing in" Jesus are parallel in this passage (6:35). The two things that are necessary for a person to come to Jesus are 1) a person must be given by the Father to the Son (6:37), and 2) the Father must draw a person to the Son (6:44). Though the text doesn't follow a strict chronological order, we would summarize the progression in this way: The Father gives a people to the Son (6:37); The Father draws these people to the Son (6:44); These people come to (i.e. believe in) the Son (6:37, 44); The Son never casts these people out (6:37); or loses those whom he has been given (6:39); The Son raises these people on the last day (6:40, 44). Because all those who are drawn are raised up on the last day (6:44), we can conclude that this drawing is effectual.

25 John Piper, "All Things For Good, Part 3," an online sermon at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

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

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

1 Peter 1:3-5

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *The new birth is a sovereign and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6-8) whereby he breathes new life into us and gives us a solid and firm hope in our coming inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-5). The significance of the birth imagery lies in the fact that we are passive in the new birth. We do not birth ourselves; God causes us to be born again. Just as we did not cause ourselves to be born the first time, so also we do not cause ourselves to be born again the second time. See the quotation by Doug Wilson below for more on the irresistible nature of the new birth.*

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.²⁶

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

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

1 John 5:1

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

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

• **ANSWER.** *Regeneration, or the new birth, precedes faith. John 1:13 says that children of God are not born of man's will. So our willing does not result in*

²⁶ John Piper, “What Happens in the New Birth?”, an online sermon at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

believing. Instead, God's will results in our being born again, which results in our receiving Jesus and believing in his name. Similarly, everyone who believes in Jesus has been born of God. Notice the perfect tense in 1 John 5:1. The new birth precedes our believing.

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.²⁷

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

1 Corinthians 4:7

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

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

²⁷ Doug Wilson, "Irresistible Life," an online article at www.dougwils.com

Philippians 1:29

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

Acts 11:18

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

2 Timothy 2:24-26

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ 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.

- **ANSWER.** Yes, repentance and faith are gifts of God. In Philippians 1:29, both belief and suffering are "granted" (i.e. given as a gift) to us. In Acts 11:18, following the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles, the church concludes that God has granted repentance unto life to Gentiles. Finally, 2 Timothy 2:25 indicates that God is the one who grants repentance that leads to the knowledge of the truth and escape from the devil. 2 Timothy 2 also indicates that this truth does not make teaching and evangelism irrelevant. The Lord's servant must teach in a patient and gentle manner, correcting the opponents of the gospel. Such teaching is the means God uses to grant repentance.

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

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *In this text, conversion is described as a resurrection from the dead (2:5-6). It is an act of sovereign love and mercy (2:4). This implies that God is the one who takes the initiative in salvation. We are not merely sick in sin. We are dead. Therefore, we must be raised by the power of another since we have no power to raise ourselves. The reason that salvation must come to us solely by sovereign grace is to undercut human boasting (2:8-9). What distinguishes a believer from an unbeliever is nothing in himself, but only the grace of God.*

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.”²⁸*

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

³ *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.* ⁴ *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* ⁵ *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.* ⁶ *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.

· **ANSWER.** *In this text, Paul compares the work of God in creation to the work of God in bringing us to salvation. Just as he sovereignly caused light to shine out of darkness in Genesis 1, so also, when we were blind to the beauty and glory of Christ in the gospel, he caused light to shine in our hearts so that we could see the glory of God in the face of Christ. This text does support the doctrine of irresistible grace because the darkness does not ask the light to shine. When God says, “Light!” there is light. Period.*

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

¹² *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear*

²⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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

· **ANSWER.** *No, human beings are not totally passive in salvation. We are the ones who must believe the gospel and embrace Christ. We are the ones who must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. However, beneath our willing and working is God's willing and working. That is the logic of Philippians 2:12-13. We work out because God is at work within us. See the quotation below by Jonathan Edwards for more on the relationship between God's will and our will.*

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.'²⁹

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.

29 Jonathan Edwards, "On Efficacious Grace," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 557.

Deuteronomy 29:2-4

² 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 servants and to all his land, ³ the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. ⁴ 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

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

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

³¹ “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, ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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

³⁹ “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. ⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ 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

¹⁹ “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *Jeremiah 31:31-34 indicates that the New Covenant will be different from the old covenant in that the old covenant could not effect the heart transformation necessary in order for people to obey it. The New Covenant, rather than being written on tablets of stone, will be written on human hearts. These texts do not express God’s requirements for us. Instead they are God’s promises to us. Therefore, it is ultimately impossible to resist the New Covenant because God overcomes our resistance and makes us willing. God will put the fear of him in us (Jeremiah 32:40). He will remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19). He will put his Spirit in us and cause us to walk in his statutes (Ezekiel 36:27).*

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

⁵¹ *“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

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

Romans 10:21

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

Matthew 23:37

³⁷ *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you 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.”
 - **ANSWER.** *These texts indicate that human beings can and do resist God. However, it would be wrong to conclude that human beings can ultimately resist God’s will. The doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is able, when he so chooses, to overcome our resistance and draw us to himself. As we saw in Lesson 1, no purpose of his can be thwarted (Job 42:1).*

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.”

· *ANSWER. Human beings are not mere puppets. We have real, genuine freedom and we make true, authentic choices that have real consequences. God does not force us against our will to believe in Jesus. He changes our hearts and makes us willing. We have a hard heart that is naturally in rebellion against God. God performs a heart transplant and gives us one that can obey him (Ezekiel 36:26-27). We must avoid the temptation to minimize either the sovereign and irresistible grace of God on the one hand, and the true, genuine responsibility of humanity on the other hand. For more on the nature of human freedom and responsibility, see the “Further Up and Further In” section of Lesson 2.*

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.’”

· *ANSWER. The text in John 12:32 literally says “I will draw all to myself.” Jesus speaks these words in the context of some Greeks seeking to see him (John 12:20-21). Therefore, the main thrust of this text is that all people groups, whether Jew or Greek, have access to Jesus. He is not merely the Jewish savior; he is the savior of the world. Furthermore, if this text does mean that Jesus draws every individual on the planet to himself, then why is every individual not raised up on the last day as John 6:44 indicates?*

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.”³⁰

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

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

· **ANSWER.** *The two types of call are the general call and the specific call of irresistible grace. The general call is what the evangelist gives to all those who are present. “Anyone who trusts in Jesus will be saved from the wrath of God.” This call should go out to all people without exception. When this general call of the gospel goes out, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those whom God has chosen in order to bring them to faith. This act of the Holy Spirit is the effectual call.*

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

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*



•••••  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

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ 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 ⁷ 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

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ 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."

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

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

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

³² 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."³³ 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.³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."³⁵ Jesus wept.³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.³⁹ 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."⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up

his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me." ⁴² 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." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ 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.

- **ANSWER.** *The story of the blind man illustrates irresistible grace because in our natural state we are blind to the beauty of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). We cannot see the glory of God in the gospel. But when God effectually calls us by his grace, our eyes are opened and we see Christ as he truly is and we are saved. The story of Lazarus illustrates the grace of God because in our natural state we are dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). When Jesus calls to us "Come forth!", we are raised to new life and we come forth. The call of God creates what it commands.*

§ SERMON

Read the sermon entitled "A Divine and Supernatural Light" by Jonathan Edwards and answer the following questions.³¹

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?

- **ANSWER.** *The Spirit works on the natural man by convicting him of sin and guilt and by assisting the conscience to do its natural work to a greater degree. The Spirit works on the natural man as an extrinsic, occasional agent. Edwards compares this to the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation (Genesis 1:2). In contrast, the Spirit works in the saints as a vital and indwelling principle. He doesn't merely assist natural principles, but*

³¹ This sermon may be accessed online at www.monergism.com by searching by the sermon title.

instead communicates his own proper nature directly to the saint. Put simply, the Spirit works on the minds of natural men and works in the hearts of the saints.

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

- **ANSWER.** *The divine and supernatural light is not any new truths or propositions or any impression on the imagination. It is “a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising.” In other words, the light is a sense of the beauty of spiritual things, not merely cognitive knowledge of them.*

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?

- **ANSWER.** *The first kind of knowledge of God is speculative and notional and concerns the mind or understanding. The second kind of knowledge is the sense of the heart. There is a difference between rationally knowing that honey is sweet because you are told so by another person and actually putting honey on your tongue and tasting it. Likewise there is a difference between knowing that God is holy and that holiness is a good thing, and having a sense of the beauty of God’s holiness. All human beings can have speculative knowledge, but only those who have received divine light can have the new sense of the heart.*

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.

- **ANSWER.** *Edwards would not agree with such a statement. If a person does not have the supernatural sense of the heart that has tasted the beauty of God’s holiness, then even if Christ were to visibly appear, they would not trust in him for salvation. On the last day when Christ returns, many people will know with their minds that Christ is Lord and yet still not embrace him as beautiful and glorious.*

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, “You Must Be Born Again,” an online sermon series at the Desiring God website (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

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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.



The first part of this lesson seeks to give a general understanding of the atonement of Christ. The work of Christ on the cross is multi-faceted and is explained by a diverse group of metaphors and images. It may be helpful to think of these metaphors as overlapping arenas or thought-worlds. These images include the legal, the market, the battlefield, and the familial.

- In the legal realm, sin results in guilt, condemnation, and wrath. Therefore, the cross accomplishes justification and acquittal.
- In the marketplace, sin is thought of in terms of slavery and bondage. The cross accomplishes redemption and liberation from sin's mastery.
- In the battlefield image, human beings are enslaved to Satan and demonic powers (the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places). On the cross, Christ triumphs over the powers of darkness and destroys the work of the devil.
- In the familial image, sin is conceived in terms of hostility, estrangement, and enmity. The cross then accomplishes reconciliation and peace between God and humanity.

These diverse metaphors are all different ways of unpacking the glories of the cross. Help your students to see the multi-faceted work of Christ on the cross so that they worship him accordingly.

In modern times, the most controversial aspect of the atonement is the idea that Christ absorbed the wrath of God against sinners. Historically, this has been called the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. This theory involves three stages. First, God is angry and wrathful against human beings because of their rebellion. Second, the Father sends the Son, who willingly goes to the cross as a wrath-bearing substitute for the sins of his people. Third, because Christ absorbs God's wrath, human beings are forgiven for their sins and accepted by God.

For a more detailed look at the work of Christ on the cross, we recommend *Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) and *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* by Leon Morris (Downer's Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

Central to the teaching of this lesson is the notion that the Arminian understanding of unlimited atonement and the Calvinistic understanding of

limited atonement are not at odds. They complement each other. The lengthy quotations by John Piper in this lesson outline this reasoning. In your teaching, emphasize that your students do not have to give up on the genuine, free offer of the gospel in order to embrace limited atonement. Seek to find common ground with students who struggle with the idea that Christ died to save only some people. Help them to see that both Calvinists and Arminians agree that Christ died to make salvation possible for all people, if they will only believe. The difference between Calvinists and Arminians is that Calvinists affirm something that Arminians deny, namely that Christ not only made salvation possible for the elect, but that he actually ensures that they will receive salvation. In other words, Calvinists affirm that for the elect, Christ purchases the new covenant blessing of the new birth.

One way to illustrate this truth is to note that, while a married man may love all women in a generic sense, he has a special, covenantal love for his wife. Similarly, Christ loves all human beings without exception in that he causes the sun to rise upon them every day (Matthew 5:45) and shows them great kindness in not judging them immediately (Romans 2:4-5). However, Christ loves his bride with a special, electing love (Ephesians 5:25). These two aspects of the love of God are not at odds; they are complementary.

Another way to put it is to say that rather than only having one intention in the atonement, God had multiple intentions. One intention was to make salvation possible for all humanity. Another intention was to ensure salvation for the elect. These two intentions are not at odds. By clearing up the relationship between these two intentions, the most controversial of the five points becomes far more understandable and attractive. Calvinists are simply arguing that when the Bible says that Christ reconciles a person to God, it means it. It does not mean *potentially* reconcile or *possibly* reconcile. Through the cross, we are truly and actually reconciled to God.

Throughout this lesson it will be important to keep in mind the previous three lessons. The five points of Calvinism hang together. For example, God does make salvation possible for every human being, if they will believe. But, as we've seen in Lessons 2 and 3, no one will believe because of their hostility to God (Total Depravity) unless they are born again (Irresistible Grace). Stress the interconnectedness of the five points to your students. We began with the total rebellion and moral inability of human beings. But if we are dead in sin, blind to beauty, and hostile to God, then how can anyone be saved? Our only hope is the sovereign and effectual grace of God that gives us a new heart and awakens faith. But where did this grace come from? It came from the cross of Christ, which actually accomplished the salvation of God's people.

Finally, repeatedly emphasize God's absolute sovereignty. He will accomplish all his purpose (see Lesson 1). None of his plans are ever thwarted. Therefore, if he intends to save a person, we can be sure that they will be saved. This does not render our prayers, our evangelism, and our faith unnecessary. Rather, it makes them hopeful. Direct your students to Question 18 and help them to see the glorious connection between the finished work of Christ on the cross and the ingathering of God's people throughout the world.



Day 1

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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

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

Romans 5:6-9

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

Romans 8:33-34

³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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

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

1 John 3:8

⁸ 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

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

Colossians 1:19-20

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

1 Peter 3:18

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

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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

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?

- **ANSWER.** *The Bible describes the plight of humanity in a number of different ways. We are enslaved to sin (Romans 8:2, Ephesians 1:7), enslaved to demonic powers (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8), legally guilty and condemned (Romans 8:1; Romans 8:33-34; Colossians 2:14), and hostile to God (Colossians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Accordingly, Jesus' work on the cross can be described in terms of the slave market (redemption from sin's power), cosmic battle (disarming demonic powers), the law court (justification), and the family (reconciliation with the Father). In each case, the work of Christ does not potentially redeem, potentially liberate, potentially justify, and potentially reconcile; it actually accomplishes all of these realities for those in Christ.*

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

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

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?

- **ANSWER.** *God's righteousness needed to be demonstrated because God had been patiently passing over sins for thousands of years. God had been doing Psalm 103:10: "He does not deal with us according to our sins" (as in the case of David's adultery and murder). The result was that God, the Judge*

of the universe, appeared to be unrighteous because he was sweeping sins under the rug. The cross demonstrates the righteousness of God in that it allows God to justly punish sin and yet still justify the ungodly. This text teaches that on the cross Christ really was put forward as a wrath-bearer. On the cross, God really and truly poured out his wrath upon his Son.

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.”³²

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

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

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).

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).³³

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"?

• **ANSWER.** Answers will vary. Look for some indication that the students understand that Christ died to actually accomplish the salvation of his people by absorbing the wrath of God, defeating Satan, and liberating them from slavery to sin.

33 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

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

John 1:29

²⁹ 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

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *These texts teach that God intended to save the whole world through the death of his Son. The question then becomes: What is meant by "the world"? The chief difficulty in understanding these texts to mean*

that Christ died for the sins of every individual in the world is that such a reading proves too much. If Christ is the propitiation for the sins of every individual and takes away the sins of every individual and reconciles every individual, then why are people punished in hell? Propitiated sins cannot be punished. 2 Corinthians 5:19 explains the reconciliation of the world by saying that God does not count their trespasses against them. But if Christ is the propitiation for the sins of every individual who has ever lived and thus their sins are not counted against them, then people in hell are being punished for sins that have already been punished on the cross.

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

1 John 2:1-2

¹ 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. ² 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

⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ 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.” ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² 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.)

- **ANSWER.** Notice that 1 John 2:2 is remarkably similar to John 11:52. “He is the propitiation for our sins” corresponds to “Jesus would die for the nation” (John 11:51). “Not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” corresponds to “not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” Therefore, the point of both texts is that the work of Christ is not limited to Jews only, but also extends to cover the sins of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

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

¹⁶ *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?

- **ANSWER.** *Answers may vary. A good restatement would be: "God loved the world with the result that he sent his Son in order that, if someone believes in Jesus, that person will not perish in hell, but have eternal life." As we will see in Question 9, John 3:16 does not contradict the doctrine that Christ died for the elect in a special way.*

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

⁸ But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

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

Ephesians 5:25

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

John 10:11-15

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Romans 8:31-34

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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.

· **ANSWER.** *All of these texts refer in some way to Christians. In Romans 5:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, the we/us refer to those who will not receive wrath. These texts also refer to the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25), the flock of Christ (John 10:11, 15), and the people who will receive every good thing from God (Romans 8:32). In other words, these texts refer to the elect (Romans 8:33). Therefore, these texts are limited in their extent. Romans 8:31-34 clearly demonstrates this fact. God is not "for" unbelievers in the same way that he is "for" his people (Romans 8:31). God has not justified all people (Romans 8:33). Christ does not intercede for all people, but only for his own (Romans 8:34).*

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

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

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

Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ 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?

- **ANSWER.** *Jesus said that the cup in the Lord's supper is the new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20). Therefore the blessings of the New Covenant come from the cross. Clearly the blessings of the New Covenant do not come to every individual in the world, but only to God's people. Not every person has their heart of stone removed. God does not put his Spirit within every individual. Therefore, the cross accomplished something for the elect that it did not accomplish for the whole world, namely the purchase of New Covenant blessings.*

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.

- **ANSWER.** *These two statements are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to believe that the atonement had multiple intentions. On the one hand, Christ died to make a free offer of the gospel to every individual in the world, on the condition of faith in Jesus. On the other hand, Christ died to ensure that some (the elect) would fulfill the condition and be saved. In other words, the atonement accomplishes more for the elect than it does for the entire world.*

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."³⁴

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

· **ANSWER.** According to Piper, the Calvinistic understanding of limited atonement is not at odds with the Arminian understanding of unlimited atonement. The problem with the Arminian view is not in what it affirms, but in what it denies. Calvinists agree with Arminians that Christ died to make salvation possible for all men. Calvinists simply believe more than this, namely that Christ died to secure the salvation of the elect by purchasing the new covenant blessings.

34 John Piper, *TULIP: The Pursuit of God's Glory in Salvation* booklet, available online at the Desiring God website (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."
- **ANSWER.** *This objection assumes that God must love all people equally if he is truly to be loving. However, such a conclusion is not warranted from the biblical texts. God's provision of sun and rain to the just and unjust is described as loving (Matthew 5:45). Moreover, it assumes that God is somehow obligated to love rebellious sinners. But God is also holy and he would be perfectly just to condemn all sinners. He is free to set his love upon those whom he desires (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Rom 9:15, 18). Finally, this same objection (if true) could be used against the doctrine of hell, which is clearly a biblical teaching.*

1 Timothy 2:1-6

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

2 Peter 3:8-9

⁸ 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. ⁹ The Lord is not slow

to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *From the fact that God desires all to be saved, it does not necessarily follow that all men will be saved (something that even Arminians admit). Therefore, we must ask, “if God desires all to be saved, then why are all not saved?” Both Arminians and Calvinists must answer this question. The Calvinist argues that God does desire all men to be saved, but he desires something else even more, namely the display of the full range of his perfections, including his wrath. For more on this issue, see the article by John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?”*

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *This analogy assumes that Christ purchases something for people. However, the biblical terminology is that Christ actually purchases us (Revelation 5:9-10). If Christ buys something (or someone), then it’s going home with him. Moreover, even if the analogy stands, the Calvinist agrees that Christ, in some sense, purchased salvation for all, but some reject it. The Calvinist simply believes more, namely that Christ purchased the grace necessary to change the hearts of sinners so that they accept God’s offer of salvation. In other words, Christ is the Savior of all men (in the sense that he makes it possible for all men to be saved), but he is the Savior especially of believers (1 Timothy 4:10).*

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. 1 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.³⁵

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

· **ANSWER.** All people are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in that because of the cross, the sun rises on all people (Matthew 5:45) and all people receive a genuine free offer of the gospel (John 3:16). The elect simply receive more. They receive the grace of the new birth, which causes them to turn from darkness and embrace the light.

15. Record any remaining questions or objections you have.

· **ANSWER.** Answers may vary.

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).



.....  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.”³⁶

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.

• **ANSWER.** *“Making the salvation of all possible” means that God provides a way so that, if a person accepts his offer of salvation, they will be saved. In other words, if a person fulfills the condition for salvation (faith in Christ), then they will be saved. On these terms, a Calvinist would not disagree with Walls and Dongell. The Calvinist would simply argue that, in the case of the elect, Christ does more than simply make salvation possible; he makes it certain. Moreover, even on Walls and Dongell’s view, God is not employing “all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss.” Walls and Dongell are not universalists; there will be people in hell. Therefore, in the case of some people, God did not drag unbelievers into heaven kicking and screaming. That is one means that God does not employ to save sinners from ultimate loss.*

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.

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary*

³⁶ 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

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

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

Revelation 5:8-10

⁸ *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. ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*

Revelation 7:9-10

⁹ *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, ¹⁰ 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?

· **ANSWER.** *These texts hold out the confidence that Christ has actually purchased people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Therefore, when we go to the nations, we can have confidence that the Holy Spirit will move in such a way that people are irresistibly and effectually drawn to Christ. Notice that Jesus already has other sheep not of this (Jewish) fold. He must bring them also. In other words, he bought them with his own blood. We must go get them through the preaching of the gospel.*

SERMON

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

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

· **ANSWER.** *No, Calvinism does not limit the merit of the blood of Jesus. Spurgeon argues that “In Christ’s finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed their Maker’s law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question. Having a Divine Person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms inapplicable to the Divine sacrifice. The intent of the Divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work.” Thus, because Christ is divine, there is infinite merit in his sacrifice. However, the intent of the divine purpose fixes the application of this infinite offering.*

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

· **ANSWER.** *Spurgeon argues that if Christ intended to save all men on the cross, then he must be severely disappointed because so many people reject the offer of the gospel and perish in hell. Moreover, Spurgeon argues that universal atonement conflicts with biblical conceptions of justice. “To imagine for a moment that He was the Substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of Divine justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever have been imputed to Saturn, to Janus,*

³⁷ This sermon may be accessed online at www.spurgeon.org and searching the Spurgeon’s Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link.

to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good!”



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.
- ▶ 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).



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!

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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.



The foundational question that all Christians must ask about salvation is this: ultimately, who determines whether a person is saved? The doctrine of unconditional election addresses this question head-on. Put simply, the ultimate reason why any person is saved is the unconditional choice of God in eternity past.

John Piper has written an entire book that carefully examines Paul's argument in Romans 9:1-23. The book is entitled *The Justification of God*. Though the book is very technical in parts, his summaries of the four different sections we have examined are reproduced below.³⁸

Romans 9:1-5

"In the preceding chapter we clarified the question Paul is trying to answer in Rom 9-11: Since Israel is the real heir of God's promises which include personal, eternal salvation (9:4,5), how is it that most of the Israelites of Paul's day are accursed and cut off from Christ (9:3)? Why are only 'some' being saved (11:14)? Has God's word fallen? We must stress very heavily that the problem Paul is grappling with is the condemnation of many within Israel. Most of his kinsmen are incurring 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 1:9), while only 'some,' the remnant of 11:5, have the hope of sharing the eternal blessings of Christ. The reason this must be stressed is that correctly understanding Paul's question in Rom 9:1-5 will guard us from impertinent and imaginary reconstructions of the first part of his answer in 9:6-13." (47)

Romans 9:6-13

"In answer to the question how it can be that many individuals within Israel are accursed, cut off from Christ (Rom 9:1-5), Paul says it is not because the word of God has fallen (9:6a); on the contrary, God's expressed purpose remains firm (9:11c). The reason this situation does not mean the failure of God's word is that his purpose expressed in that word never has been to guarantee the salvation of every Israelite. It is an 'electing purpose' by which God aims to preserve his complete freedom in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his saving promises, who will be the 'Israel' within Israel (9:6b). It is therefore a purpose maintained by

38 The following excerpts and page numbers are all from John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993).

means of the predestination of individuals to their respective eternal destinies.

The interpretation which tries to restrict this predestination or unconditional election to nations rather than individuals or to historical tasks rather than eternal destinies must ignore or distort the problem posed in Rom 9:1-5, the individualism of 9:6b, the vocabulary and logical structure of 9:6b-8, the closely analogous texts elsewhere in Paul, and the implications of 9:14-23. The position is exegetically untenable.” (73)

“Between Rom 9:13 and 14 we may imagine an objection being raised. It apparently sounded like this: if God, in determining who will be the beneficiaries of his mercy, does not base his decisions on any human distinctives that a person may claim by birth or effort, then he is unrighteous. The assumption seems to be that divine righteousness would require that God elect persons on the basis of their real and valuable distinctives, whether racial (Jewishness) or moral (keepers of the law).” (218)

Romans 9:14-18

“Paul responds that God is not unrighteous (9:14) and defends this assertion, as I have tried to show, by quoting two Old Testament texts (9:15,17) which show that God’s freedom from human ‘willing and running’ is at the very heart of what it means to be the all-glorious God. This Old Testament revelation is a justification of God because the divine righteousness consists in God’s unswerving commitment to preserve and display his glory.” (180)

“It can scarcely be overemphasized, for the sake of Paul’s justification of God, that in Romans 9:15 and 17 Paul employs Old Testament texts in which the exercise of God’s freedom, in mercy (Exodus 33:19) and in hardening (Exodus 9:16), is the means by which he declares the glory of his name! This is the heart of Paul’s defense: in choosing unconditionally those on whom he will have mercy and those whom he will harden God is not unrighteous, for in this ‘electing purpose’ he is acting out of a full allegiance to his name and esteem for his glory.” (219)

Romans 9:19-23

“Paul’s justification of God does not end at Rom 9:18, because someone registers another objection in 9:19: ‘Why does God still find fault since no one can successfully resist his sovereign will?’ That is, if God is in absolute control of whether men are hardened or not, then he has no right to condemn them for their hardness. ...God is our creator and as such has as much right to make of us what

he wills as a potter has over his clay to make from the same lump a vessel for honor and a vessel for dishonor (9:21). We have no right to dispute with God our maker. Yet Paul does not stop with a reprimand, for man is not asked to submit to God's sovereignty without seeing some justification for why he does what he does.

The final statement of this justification of God's ways is given in Romans 9:22,23. God's desire is 'to show wrath and make known his power.' But even more he desires 'to make known the wealth of his glory on his people, the vessels of mercy.' The ultimate aim of God is to show mercy. But to do this he must place it against a backdrop of wrath." (219-220)

It is interesting to note the two objections that are raised against Paul's teaching in the text. The first is that God is unrighteous to choose people without respect to ethnicity or morality (9:14). The second is that because God is sovereign in showing mercy and in hardening, he cannot blame us (9:19). The fact that these two objections are often raised against Calvinists indicates that Calvinists are faithfully rendering Paul's teaching in Romans 9.

Some have criticized Calvinists for stopping at Romans 9:23 and not following Paul's argument through Romans 11. They argue that while Paul may emphasize God's sovereignty in Romans 9, Romans 10 emphasizes human responsibility (Romans 10:9-17), and Romans 11 emphasizes the fact that God intends to have mercy on all (Romans 11:32). The response to this argument is two-fold. First, the doctrine of God's sovereign freedom in election does not undercut the responsibility of all men to believe the gospel or the offer of mercy to all people, both Jew and Gentile. The Bible clearly teaches both truths. In addition, the emphasis on God's sovereignty does not stop in Romans 9:23. Romans 9:32-33 indicates that Israel's rejection of the Messiah was foretold in the Old Testament. The Old Testament also predicts Israel's hard-heartedness (Romans 10:18-21). Romans 11:5 refers to "the remnant, chosen by grace." Romans 11:8-10 attributes Israel's blindness to God's hardening work. The argument of Romans 11:11-32 is that God has designed the hardening of Israel to lead to the salvation of the Gentiles, which will in turn lead to more blessing on Israel. The absolute sovereignty of God permeates all of Romans 9-11.

As you teach, repeatedly emphasize to your students that Calvinists have no right to boast over other Christians. The doctrine of unconditional election is uniquely suited to humble human pride. It is a great tragedy that those who hold to the doctrine of God's sovereign freedom often display an arrogant and mean-spirited attitude when interacting with other Christians who struggle with the sovereignty of God. Unconditional election was not mainly meant to be debated;

it was meant to be celebrated, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 1. It is designed to give comfort to Christians by assuring them of the unchangeable character of God's love. He has not loved us because of any goodness within us. He loves us because he loves us. He has mercy on us because he chooses to. So before we can faithfully argue Romans 9, we must first humbly sing Ephesians 1.



Day 1

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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.”³⁹

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

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ 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. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

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

- **ANSWER.** *The implied problem is that despite Israel’s lofty privileges, they are accursed and cut off from Christ. The surrounding context makes it clear that not all Israelites have been lost, but a majority has been. In other words, the problem is that individual Israelites are perishing in their*

³⁹ John Piper, “The Absolute Sovereignty of God,” an online sermon at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

unbelief. This in turn implies that God's promises to Israel have failed. And if God's word to Israel has failed, what confidence can Christians have that God will be faithful to his promises to us?

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

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

- **ANSWER.** *According to Romans 9:11, the purpose of God's choice of Jacob over Esau is "so that God's purpose of election might continue." So God has a purpose in election that must abide, and his choice of Jacob furthers this purpose. In addition, Paul makes it clear that this choice was made before the twins were born, and it was made without reference to either their good deeds or bad deeds. The timing of God's choice is significant because it demonstrates that God does not take our future actions into account when he chooses us unto salvation. In other words, election is unconditional.*

Romans 9:14-18

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will

have compassion on whom I have compassion.”¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

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.)

- **ANSWER.** *The unconditional election of Jacob, expressed in verse 11, prompts the objection. In other words, the fact that God elected Jacob and not Esau without reference to any human distinctives, whether good or bad, prompts the accusation that God is unrighteous or unjust. Paul’s defense is to quote two OT texts which demonstrate that God is free to show mercy to whomever he wills. He is not constrained in his ability to show mercy. As God, he has the right to show mercy to whomever he chooses. He is not unjust to do this, for his righteousness consists in his “unswerving commitment always to preserve the honor of his name and display his glory” (for more on this definition of righteousness, see the Teaching Notes).*

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

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

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

· *ANSWER. God created vessels of wrath in order to make known his power and wrath. But the “in order to” clause in verse 23 makes it clear that even God’s creation of vessels of wrath serves a greater purpose. God’s ultimate purpose is to make known his glory in vessels of mercy. God’s wrath provides the necessary “backdrop” to highlight his 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

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

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

Romans 11:1-2

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

Amos 3:1-2

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

Jeremiah 1:4-5

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 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."

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"?

- **ANSWER.** *These three texts indicate that one of the biblical meanings of the word “know” (or “foreknow”) is “to set favor upon” or “to choose.” Amos 3:2 clearly does not mean that God is not aware of other nations besides Israel; it simply means that he chose Israel out of all the families of the earth. The point of God’s words to Jeremiah is that God has chosen Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born. Romans 11:2 is even more important for the interpretation of Romans 8:29 because it comes a few chapters after the verse in question. The most likely meaning of “foreknew” in Romans 11:2 is that God has not rejected his people because he chose them. Thus, we are warranted in construing “foreknew” in Romans 8:29 to mean “those whom he set his favor upon beforehand.” It is problematic to interpret it to say “those whom he foreknew would believe” because 8:30 indicates that God only calls those whom he foreknew and predestined. As we saw in Lesson 3, the call of God is what creates faith. Therefore, God foreknows who would believe because he himself intends to call forth faith in their heart at the proper time, which means that there must be some prior decision on God’s part as to those whom he will call.*

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

³ 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, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard

the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

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

- **ANSWER.** *This passage is an extended doxology. It is a passage of worship and praise to God for the spiritual blessings that he has given us in Christ Jesus. The first spiritual blessing that he mentions is election. God's electing choice took place before the foundation of the world. In eternity past, God set his love and favor upon us in order to magnify the riches of his grace. Passages like this indicate that the doctrine of election should not merely be studied and debated, but should also be celebrated and sung. Reflection on this doctrine should inevitably lead us to joyful praise of God.*

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

²⁶ *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.*

²⁷ *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ 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?

- **ANSWER.** *The doctrine of unconditional election undercuts human boasting because it emphasizes the freeness of God's grace. The ultimate reason why any person is saved is that God chose us. Therefore, any distinction between human beings is owing solely to the sovereign grace of God.*

“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!”⁴⁰

40 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

²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. ²⁷ 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?

· **ANSWER.** *According to Jesus, the reason that people do not believe is that they are not a part of Jesus’ flock. Being a sheep of Jesus precedes faith (10:26). This is surprising because we might think that the way to become a part of Jesus’ flock is to believe in him. But this is exactly backwards. The way to become a believer is to already be a part of his flock. If a person is one of Jesus’ sheep, then he will listen to Jesus and follow him.*

“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."*⁴¹

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ 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?

- **ANSWER.** *The evidence that the Thessalonians had been chosen was their acceptance of the gospel. The fact that the gospel came in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction demonstrated that God had set his love upon them from before the foundation of the world. Therefore, the way to know if you are elect is to believe the gospel. Faith is the necessary fruit of election.*

Acts 13:45-48

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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.'" ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

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

- **ANSWER.** *The Gentiles believed because they had been appointed to eternal life. Many heard the gospel that day, but only those Gentiles who had been predestined by God to eternal life embraced it. Again, this stresses that the fruit of God's unconditional election is our faith.*

⁴¹ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 138-139.

Day 4

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

In this day's lesson, you will interact with common objections against the doctrine of unconditional election. 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: "God does indeed choose people to be saved, but Calvinists have misunderstood this doctrine. God does not elect unconditionally. Instead he chooses us because he knows that we will choose him. In eternity past, God looked down the corridors of time and saw who would believe in Jesus of their own free will. Then, based on that foreseen faith, he chose those individuals to be saved."
 - **ANSWER.** *The chief problem with this view is that it completely inverts the biblical texts. As you saw in Day 3, faith flows from election. Election does not flow from faith. What's more, this turns statements like "he chose us" into "we chose him." Finally, as you saw in Lesson 3, dead, blind and hostile sinners do not believe "of their own free will." In order for us to believe, God must cause light to shine into the darkness of our hearts. Therefore, even if election is based on foreseen faith, it is faith that God intends to create in our hearts by his effectual call. And he only intends to do this faith-creating work in the hearts of some people.*

12. Respond to the following statement: "Calvinists have misunderstood the doctrine of election. God does not choose individuals; he chooses groups. Election is corporate. God has chosen the church to be saved, but we must choose to become a part of the church."
 - **ANSWER.** *There is no conflict between the election of groups and the election of individuals because groups are made up of individuals. We should not set corporate categories against individual categories. The Bible talks both in terms of corporate entities (like Israel and the church) and in terms of individuals. Moreover, no one will choose to become a part of the church unless God first awakens their heart. And God only awakens those whom he has already chosen.*

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *On the contrary, the doctrine of election, rightly understood, emboldens evangelism. God has other sheep that are not of this fold; he must bring them also. When Paul met opposition to the gospel in Corinth, God encouraged him by saying, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:9-10). In addition, it is wrong to say that the elect will be saved whether we evangelize or not. God uses means to accomplish his ends. He has chosen some to be saved from before the foundation of the world. The means that he intends to use to accomplish this purpose is the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, if we don’t preach, no one will be saved. The means are as ordained as the ends are.*

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! Amen⁴².

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."

• **ANSWER.** *Because election is the first step in our salvation, it is completely unconditional. There is no condition that we must meet in order to be chosen. God has mercy on whomever he pleases. Final salvation is the last step in our salvation. It is conditional. In other words, there are conditions*

42 John Piper, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

that one must meet if they are to be saved on the last day. These conditions include faith, repentance, and the fruit of the Spirit that flow from a living faith. God not only chooses us unconditionally; he also acts to ensure that we meet the conditions for final salvation. In other words, he causes us to be born again and effectually calls faith into existence. Our meeting of the conditions for final salvation is rooted in God's unconditional election.

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

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*



•••••  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.⁴³

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

• **ANSWER.** *God’s moral will is his will as it has been revealed to us. In the words of I. Howard Marshall, this is “what God would like to see happen.” God’s moral will can be violated, as in the case of a person violating God’s command to not murder. His sovereign will is what he actually wills to take place. God decrees one state of affairs (sovereign will) while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass (moral will).*

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

• **ANSWER.** *On the one hand, it is a violation of God’s moral will for Herod, Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and the Romans to murder God’s Son. To use Piper’s example of the two lenses, when God looks at the cross through his narrow lens, he is angered and grieved at the wickedness of mankind. At the same time, the cross was designed, planned, and purposed by God. His hand and his plan predestined it to occur (Acts 4:27-28). So when God looks at the cross through the wide-angle lens, he is able to see how it relates to everything that flows to it and everything that flows from it. In seeing the cross through this wide-angle, God is pleased with what he sees.*

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

⁴³ 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).

- **ANSWER.** *God's revealed will to Pharaoh was that he let the Israelites go. Pharaoh's resistance and rebellion is a violation of God's will. On the other hand, God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the Israelites go. God even told Moses of his intent to harden Pharaoh's heart before Moses set foot in Pharaoh's court (Exodus 4:21). This statement of intent on God's part is repeatedly used to explain texts where Pharaoh hardens his own heart (Exodus 7:13; 8:15; 8:19), indicating that the same action (the hardening of Pharaoh's heart) can be described from multiple angles.*

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

- **ANSWER.** *1 Timothy 2:4 says that God desires all to be saved. We know from other texts that not all will in fact be saved. Therefore we must explain why God's desire does not come to fruition. One solution is to say that there is some power in the universe that is stronger than God. Both Calvinists and Arminians reject this. The other option is to say that God has a higher commitment than that all be saved. The Arminian says that God's higher desire is that human beings possess self-determining freedom so that they are able to authentically love God. Calvinists say that God desires to display the full range of his glorious perfections. In both cases, God has a higher desire than the salvation of all people.*

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

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

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).
- ▷ John Piper, “Predestination,” an online section of the Resource Library at the Desiring God website (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.

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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.”



Practically speaking, this lesson may well be the most relevant for the students in your class. The questions posed in the Introduction are some of the most common among professing believers. As noted in the Introduction, the aim of this curriculum is to balance two biblical truths: the necessity of persevering in faith and the promise of God's preservation. It is tempting to emphasize one of these to the neglect of the other. We strongly believe that maintaining the tension between these two truths is critical for the health of individual believers and for the church. In the same way that we may struggle to fully comprehend the tension between God's absolute sovereignty and man's genuine responsibility, we also struggle to balance the vital need for an enduring trust in Christ with the glorious provision of God's sustaining grace. Therefore, we encourage you to regularly remind your students of these twin truths as you examine the biblical texts.

We recognize that different truths will need to be emphasized depending upon the theological background and biblical literacy of your class. Some students may need to be shown that the Bible does require a heartfelt, enduring kind of faith. To such students, you may want to spend more time working through the texts in Day 1 of this lesson, especially the biblical warnings. Other students may question whether it is possible for genuine believers to lose their salvation. For them, you may want to focus on the promises of God's sustaining grace in Day 2. We encourage you to discern the best way to use your time in class so as to maximize the benefit for your students.

When you examine the texts on the necessity of perseverance, we recommend that you focus on the stakes in the fight of faith. In a number of these texts, eternal life, inheriting the kingdom of God, and final salvation are conditioned upon perseverance. At the same time, seek to be clear that the Bible does not require believers to be sinless in order to be saved. If it did, no one would make it. Indeed, it is hard to see how you could even call it salvation! Some biblical texts that indicate that believers still struggle with indwelling sin include Romans 7:14-15, 1 John 1:8-2:1, and Philippians 3:12-14. Peter's hypocrisy and sin as recounted in Galatians 2:11-14 also provides a biblical example of a godly saint who was clearly imperfect. Stress to your students that the call to perseverance is not a call to sinless perfection, but to a persevering fight.

When it comes to the question of justification by faith alone, it is crucial to stress that justification precedes and gives rise to sanctification. In other

words, being accepted by God is the root of our obedience to God. We do not obey in order to be accepted. We are accepted solely because of Christ's work and therefore, we obey God. The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith helpfully summarizes the relationship between justification and sanctification in sections 9-10.

9.1 We believe that in a free act of righteous grace God justifies the ungodly by faith alone apart from works, pardoning their sins, and reckoning them as righteous and acceptable in His presence. Faith is thus the sole instrument by which we, as sinners, are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God. This acceptance happens fully and permanently at the first instant of justification. Thus the righteousness by which we come into right standing with God is not anything worked in us by God, neither imparted to us at baptism nor over time, but rather is accomplished for us, outside ourselves, and is imputed to us.

9.2 We believe, nevertheless, that the faith, which alone receives the gift of justification, does not remain alone in the person so justified, but produces, by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of love and leads necessarily to sanctification. This necessary relation between justifying faith and the fruit of good works gives rise to some biblical expressions which seem to make works the ground or means of justification, but in fact simply express the crucial truth that faith that does not yield the fruit of good works is dead, being no true faith.

10.1 We believe that justification and sanctification are both brought about by God through faith, but not in the same way. Justification is an act of God's imputing and reckoning; sanctification is an act of God's imparting and transforming. Thus the function of faith in regard to each is different. In regard to justification, faith is not the channel through which power or transformation flows to the soul of the believer, but rather faith is the occasion of God's forgiving, acquitting, and reckoning as righteous. But in regard to sanctification, faith is indeed the channel through which divine power and transformation flow to the soul; and the sanctifying work of God through faith does indeed touch the soul and change it into the likeness of Christ.

10.2 We believe that the reason justifying faith necessarily sanctifies in this way is fourfold:

First, justifying faith is a persevering, that is, continuing, kind of faith. Even though we are justified at the first instant of saving faith, yet this faith justifies

only because it is the kind of faith that will surely persevere. The extension of this faith into the future is, as it were, contained in the first seed of faith, as the oak in the acorn. Thus the moral effects of persevering faith may be rightly described as the effects of justifying faith.

Second, we believe that justifying faith trusts in Christ not only for the gift of imputed righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, but also for the fulfillment of all His promises to us based on that reconciliation. Justifying faith magnifies the finished work of Christ's atonement, by resting securely in all the promises of God obtained and guaranteed by that all-sufficient work.

Third, we believe that justifying faith embraces Christ in all His roles: Creator, Sustainer, Savior, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Helper, Friend, Advocate, Protector, and Lord. Justifying faith does not divide Christ, accepting part of Him and rejecting the rest. All of Christ is embraced by justifying faith, even before we are fully aware of, or fully understand, all that He will be for us. As more of Christ is truly revealed to us in His Word, genuine faith recognizes Christ and embraces Him more fully.

Fourth, we believe that this embracing of all of Christ is not a mere intellectual assent, or a mere decision of the will, but is also a heartfelt, Spirit-given (yet imperfect) satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, the change of mind and heart that turns from the moral ugliness and danger of sin, and is sometimes called "repentance," is included in the very nature of saving faith.

In addition to stressing the need for perseverance, you must also repeatedly remind your students that they are to persevere in faith. In other words, they are to continually to look to Christ as the sole ground of their acceptance with God, placing all their hope in him and not in any of their own efforts. Remind them that they must look away from themselves and rely solely on Christ crucified and risen for sinners if they are to make any progress in holiness. In other words, the call to perseverance is a call to go deeper into the gospel. It is not as though we are saved by grace and then must add works by our own efforts. Rather, we grow in godliness by filling our hearts and minds with the gospel and then, out of that faith in the gospel, performing sacrificial acts of love. For more on the dynamics of the life of faith, we highly recommend *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God* by John Piper (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003).

When it comes to the question of the warning passages in Scripture, we recommend that you carefully read the article Thomas Schreiner in the "Further

Up and Further In” section of this lesson. Schreiner helpfully shows how the warnings serve the promises and function as one of the means by which God causes us to persevere in faith. The illustration he provides at the end of the article involving Paul’s shipwreck in Acts 27 may be particularly useful.

Finally, we find it helpful to distinguish between the question of salvation and the question of assurance. The question “Do I possess salvation?” is not the same as “Am I confident that I possess salvation?” There are people who are genuinely born again who doubt their salvation. Similarly there are professing Christians who possess a false security (see Matthew 7:21-23). By distinguishing between these two issues we are better able to help those who are struggling with assurance. Thus, it is important to stress that assurance may not be a static reality. In other words, it ebbs and flows; it grows and diminishes. There may be seasons of strong assurance followed by seasons of intense doubt. The important thing is that we continually look to, hope in, and rely on Christ for everything. God desires that we have assurance and has provided many strong encouragements for us in the Scriptures. Two articles by John Piper that provide practical help for those who doubt are “The Agonizing Problem of the Assurance of Salvation” and “Helping People to Have the Assurance of Salvation.” Both of these articles may be found at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org). In addition, for those wrestling with spiritual depression, we recommend *When the Darkness Will Not Lift* by John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).



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

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

Matthew 24:9-13

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 10:32-33

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

Colossians 1:21-23

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

Romans 2:6-10

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

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.

· **ANSWER.** *It is clear that salvation is at stake in these passages. Matthew 24:13 explicitly says that “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Salvation here cannot mean salvation from physical death because 24:9 says that some believers will be put to death. Moreover, continuing in the faith is the prerequisite for being presented before God holy and blameless (Colossians 1:23). Romans 2:6-10 contrasts eternal life with wrath and fury. So persevering in well-doing is necessary if a person is to receive eternal life from God.*

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

Hebrews 12:14

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

Romans 8:13

¹³ 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

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ 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.

- **ANSWER.** *Perseverance is a continual striving for holiness characterized by killing sin and cultivating the work of the Holy Spirit. These texts all indicate that perseverance does not mean perfection. We are to strive for peace and holiness. Romans 8:13 indicates that we must wage war on sin. And again, the stakes are very high. Without perseverance, we will not “see the Lord.” If we don’t kill sin, but instead live according to the flesh, we will die. Death in Romans often refers to eternal death (cf. Romans 6:23). Galatians 6:7-8 is even more explicit, contrasting “corruption” with “eternal life.” Our eternal salvation hangs on whether we persevere to the end.*

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

¹² *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.* ¹³ *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,* ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

1 John 1:8-10

⁸ *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *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*.”⁴⁴

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

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.

Romans 4:3-8

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

Galatians 2:16

¹⁶ ...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

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

Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ 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

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness

nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ 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

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ 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. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ 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? ²⁶ 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.
- **ANSWER.** *We are accepted by God solely by faith in Jesus Christ. His blood covers all of ours sins, past, present, and future. As we saw in Lesson 3, it is the sovereign grace of God that regenerates our dead hearts and effectually calls faith into being. The moment that we trust Christ, God declares us righteous in his sight. However, though we are justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies does not remain alone, but always works by love (Galatians 5:6). We are justified by a living faith that inevitably produces good works. Therefore, the life of the justified believer is marked by godliness and holiness. At judgment, the evidence that we have genuinely believed in Christ will be our good works. Thus, we will be judged*

according to our deeds, not based on our deeds. The basis of our salvation will always be the work of Christ alone. For more on this question, see the Teaching Notes.

“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.’⁴⁵

45 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

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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

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

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?
- **ANSWER.** *No one drops out of the chain of redemption in Romans 8:29-30. All those who are foreknown are glorified. Paul goes on to support this contention by appeal to the work of Christ in his death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession. Once a person has been justified by God, no*

one can bring any charge against them. Christ has died, been raised, is seated at the right hand of God, and presently intercedes for the ones who trust him. Therefore, nothing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

John 10:25-30

²⁵ 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, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

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?

- **ANSWER.** *First of all, Jesus is clear that his sheep hear his voice and follow him. Therefore, if we are a part of Jesus' flock, we will follow him. Second, if Jesus gives someone eternal life, then that person will never perish. To say that we are able to remove ourselves from God's hand implies that we will be given eternal life and yet, because of our removal, still perish. Finally, the purpose of this passage is to comfort believers with the sovereign keeping power of God. This encouragement is undermined by implying that we are stronger than God and able to remove ourselves from his hand.*

Jude 1:20-25

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

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

1 Corinthians 1:8-9

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

Philippians 1:6

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

Hebrews 13:20-21

²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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?

- **ANSWER.** All of these texts indicate that God is ultimately the one who causes us to persevere. Jude says that God is able to keep us from stumbling (1:24). Paul says that God is faithful to sanctify us completely (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) and sustain us to the end (1 Corinthians 1:8-9). God does not quit a job halfway. If he begins a good work, he will surely finish it (Philippians 1:6). And God is the one who works in us that which is pleasing in his sight (Hebrews 13:21; cf. Philippians 2:12-13). Therefore, the basis of our confidence is the sovereign, sustaining power of Almighty God.

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."⁴⁶

1 Peter 1:3-5

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

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.

- **ANSWER.** *This passage brings together the necessity of our faith and the promise of God's preservation. 1 Peter 1:3 indicates that God initiates our salvation by causing us to be born again to a living hope. Peter then notes that we are guarded by God's power through faith for our coming salvation. God does not guard us apart from our faith, but through our faith. So we must remain firm in the faith if we are to receive salvation. And God is the one who sustains our faith by his sovereign power. Just as he is the one who called faith into existence when we were born again, so also is he the one who upholds our faith throughout our lives.*

"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

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

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.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ 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

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

1 John 3:6-10

⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:14

¹⁴ 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

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ 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.

- **ANSWER.** John repeatedly stresses that there are certain ways that we can know that we have come to know him (2:3), that we are in him (2:5), that we are righteous (3:7), that we are the children of God (3:10), and that we have passed out of death into life (3:14). The evidence he provides includes keeping God's commands (2:3), walking as Jesus walked (2:6), practicing righteousness (3:7), loving the brothers (3:14), and loving God and obeying his commandments (5:2). All of these demonstrate that God has in fact saved us and that we are genuine believers.

2 Peter 1:5-11

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

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?

· **ANSWER.** *We make our calling and election sure by increasing in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. These qualities are the fruit of knowing Christ and testify to us and to the world that we have been chosen and called by God. In light of this, our assurance can increase or decrease depending on our growth in godliness. If we lack these qualities, we may begin to doubt that we have truly been converted. But if we press into Christ and trust him and begin to see the fruit of faith, we will grow in our conviction that we are genuine.*

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.”⁴⁸

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

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

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

1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ 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.

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

2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵ 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?

· **ANSWER.** *These texts clearly indicate that it is possible to possess false assurance, meaning that it is possible for a person to believe that he is saved when he is not. The people in Matthew 7 clearly expect a warm welcome from Jesus. They even call him “Lord.” Yet Jesus declares that he never knew them. It wasn’t that they possessed salvation and lost it; they never possessed it at all. Similarly, 1 John addresses the concerns of some who watched as professing believers left the church. John tells them that these “believers” may have appeared to belong to the church, but they were false converts. True assurance is distinguished from false assurance by doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21) and remaining in the fellowship of believers (1 John 2:19).*

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. In the end 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.”⁴⁹

49 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)."

- **ANSWER.** *The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints acknowledges that there will be those who profess Christ and yet will fall away and be lost. These "Christians" were never truly born again, for if they had been, they would have not fallen away (cf. 1 John 2:19). The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints seeks to strike a balance between the texts that warn professing believers about the consequences of falling away and the glorious promises that God will surely preserve his people.*

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."

- **ANSWER.** *The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints should be distinguished from some versions of eternal security. The notion that people can claim to believe in Christ and yet live in any way they please is contrary to biblical teaching. If the grace of God is powerful enough to bring us to faith, it is powerful enough to change our lives. Moreover, there are serious consequences for those who neglect obedience to God. Their disobedience gives evidence that they were never born again. Perseverance is the mark of the genuine believer.*

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.”

· **ANSWER.** *It is possible to pervert the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in such a way that one denies justification by faith alone. Some indeed may begin to view their good works as the basis of their justification. However, this is not what Calvinists believe. We do not perform good works in order to be justified. We perform good works in order to demonstrate that we already are justified. Good works are not the means of justification. They are the evidence of it. We do not obey to be accepted by God. We are accepted by God and therefore, we obey. This is a crucial distinction to keep in mind, lest we fall into a form of works-righteousness.*

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.⁵⁰"

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?

· **ANSWER.** *Piper argues that such professing believers demonstrate by their falling away that they were never truly born again. Those who fall away in this manner do not inherit the kingdom of God.*

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

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

⁵⁰ John Piper, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at the Desiring God website (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

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ 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, ⁴ 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

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Hebrews 6:4-12

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have

shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has 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?³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 12:25-29

²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.²⁶ 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.”²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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,²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

16. Who is being addressed in each of these warnings? What is being threatened in each passage?

- **ANSWER.** This entire letter is addressed to professing believers. The pronoun “we” indicates that the author is including himself in his warnings (2:1, 3; 10:26; 12:25). He also refers to his audience as “brothers” (3:12). The author to the Hebrews threatens them with eternal judgment if they fail to heed these warnings. Failure to heed these warnings means that they have an evil, unbelieving heart (3:12), that they will be consumed by fire (10:27), and that they will receive a punishment worse than death (10:29). Moreover, he compares them to a field that will be cursed and burned (6:8)

and says that they will not escape (2:3; 12:25). From this we can conclude that professing believers are warned that they will be condemned to hell if they fall away from the faith.

17. Attempt to explain how biblical warnings like these relate to the steadfast promises of God studied earlier in this lesson.

- **ANSWER.** *The warnings are meant to push us to the promises. Just as the threat of hell leads unbelievers to look to Christ for salvation, so warnings to believers lead us to continue to trust him throughout our lives. In this way, the warnings serve the promises. They are meant to lead us to look away from ourselves and trust wholeheartedly in Christ alone. The warnings are one of the means by which God preserves his people.*

“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.”⁵¹

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

⁵¹ Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 143.

*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, 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.*⁵²

Read the article “Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and Proposal” by Thomas Schreiner and answer the following questions.⁵³

18. List the four views that Schreiner critiques. Choose one of these views and summarize Schreiner’s reasons for rejecting it.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

19. Summarize Schreiner’s view (means-of-salvation view). How does this view differ from the tests-of-genuineness view?

· **ANSWER.** *Schreiner believes that those who are elect, called, and justified will surely be glorified. No one drops out. Warnings in Scripture are addressed to believers and serve to awaken believers from laziness and complacency so that they trust in Christ for salvation. Thus warnings are the means by which God preserves his people. Schreiner’s view differs from the tests-of-genuineness view in that the primary function of the warnings for Schreiner is to keep genuine believers in the faith, whereas on the tests-of-genuineness view, the function of warnings is to expose false believers. For more on this, see the Teaching Notes.*

20. Explain how the story of Paul’s shipwreck in Acts 27 illustrates the means-of-salvation view.

52 Charles Spurgeon, “Final Perseverance,” an online sermon at www.spurgeon.org (search Spurgeon’s Sermons under the Spurgeon Archive link).

53 This article may be accessed online by performing an internet search for the title and author.

- **ANSWER.** *In the story of Paul's shipwreck, Paul is given an absolute promise from God that no one on the ship will perish (27:20-26). Yet when the sailors attempt to escape from the ship (27:29-32), Paul warns the centurion that if the sailors leave, they will all die. God's promise did not undercut the need for the warning. The warning was the means by which the promise was fulfilled. Similarly, God has given us very great and precious promises that he will keep us in the faith and preserve us until the end (1 Corinthians 1:8-9, Philippians 1:6). He has also warned us of the consequences of falling away. Such warnings do not undercut God's promises. Instead, they awaken us to action and cause us to press on in the race to win the prize.*

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).
- ▷ 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."

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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.

¹ 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. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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."

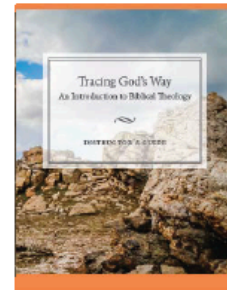
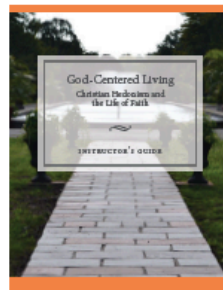
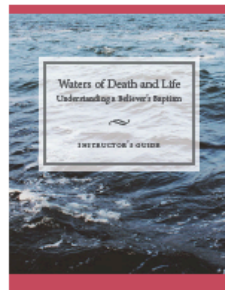
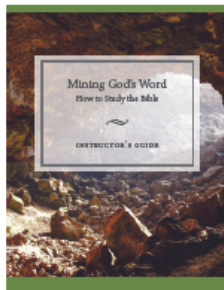
Putting them altogether: God gets the glory and we get the joy.

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.

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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.