

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION?

Has your ultimate destiny already been set?

Did God, before the foundation of the world was laid, unconditionally predetermine who would be saved and who would not? Has your ultimate destiny already been set? Is it true, as Calvinists claim, that the elect were not appointed on the basis of their faith, good works, character, or anything else God could see within them? What about the famous "Five Points of Calvinism"?

Do they square with Scripture? Let's not guess — let's seek answers from the Word of God!

Many believe that the ultimate destiny of each individual was determined before the world was made. Of those who accept this belief, some hold that all human beings, because of Adam's fall into sin, are deserving of everlasting punishment, but God, according to His eternal will, chose some from among Adam's children, and predestined them to eternal life. Thus, "predestination" pertains only to those fortunate enough to have been chosen for salvation from the foundation of the world. Others,

however, apply the term predestination to all human beings. Some, they claim, are predestined to eternal life, while others are predestined to eternal punishment. This is called double predestination.

According to some of the old, time-honored Protestant creeds, individuals are not predestined on the basis of God's foreknowledge of how they will respond to the gospel, but strictly according to God's predeterminate will. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), one of the most important documents in the history of Protestantism, puts it this way:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto

everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace (Section III. Of God's Eternal Decree).

Notice that God's selection of certain individuals for salvation is based solely on His "free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works." In other words, there is no freedom of choice where salvation is concerned; the matter was settled long ago, before the foundation of the world was laid, and cannot be

changed. If you are one of the fortunate ones-if you are among those whose names were put into the Book of Life before the world was made-then you have no choice but to be saved! God has decreed it! And His decree has nothing to do with His foreknowledge of faith or good works or outstanding character on your part.

On the other hand, if you are among the tens of thousands who make up the unlucky majority, you cannot be saved! You are destined to remain in your unregenerate state, and have only to look forward to a well-deserved fiery judgment.

But does such a belief fit the biblical

description of a loving, merciful God who "did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17)? Is the world God sent His Son to save only the "world" of those individuals He arbitrarily selected?

Let's now open the Bible and see what it has to say about predestination.

Who Are the Predestined?

Indeed, the Bible does speak of predestination. The term predestined is found four times in two of Paul's epistles. Here's what the inspired

apostle said about this subject:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Romans 8:28-30).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual

blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the

dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will... (Ephesians 1:3-11).

At first glance, one might think that the above passages are in full agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith. But a careful study of all biblical passages on the divine plan of salvation reveals that the authors of the Confession have wrongly interpreted the above

scriptures.

To correctly understand these passages, it is essential that we understand that eternal life in the Kingdom of God is the proper destiny of every member of the human race! This does not mean that every individual will arrive at the destiny God has set before the human race. Rather, it means that God's purpose for humankind was established before the foundation of the world was laid, and that all who cooperate with Him will reach their proper destination. Hence, He "chose us [all who, through exercise of their divinely bestowed free will, accept His universal offer] in Him before the

foundation of the world," and "predestined us [the whole race, potentially] to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ." Predestination, then, pertains to the purpose God had in mind when He decided to make creatures bearing His own image and likeness. It concerns the destination God established for the human race before He put humans on this planet.

The term predestination means "to mark out beforehand," and refers to the plan and goal of salvation itself, not to specific individuals. It should be understood in the corporate sense, rather than in the sense that each individual was predestined to either eternal life or eternal

condemnation.

In Romans 8:28-30 (quoted above), the Greek term translated whom is plural and therefore refers to a corporate body rather than individual persons. The passage tells us that God knew beforehand that there would be a body of believers, but does not say that He limited the membership of that body to a specific number. It further tells us that the destiny God had in mind for all who would cooperate with His will was "to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [the Son] might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Finally, the passage provides an

overview of the entire process, from beginning to end: Members of the race bearing God's image are called through the preaching of the gospel, and those who respond to the gospel in repentance and faith are justified and, at the consummation of the age, glorified. It is not Paul's intention to address the question of how God will deal with those who die without having heard the true gospel. For a full study of this subject, please request a free copy of our brochure, *Does God Love the World Enough to Save It?*.

The Five Points of Calvinism

The Westminster Confession of Faith

is a Calvinist document. It upholds the well-known "Five Points of Calvinism," or five points expounded by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) in response to the views of Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). The Five Points of Calvinism are easily remembered through the acronym tulip, which stands for: Total depravity; Unconditional divine election; Limitation of the atonement; Irresistibility of divine grace; and Perseverance in grace to the end.

These five points are crucial to the Calvinist view of predestination and election. In summary, they mean that all human beings are so corrupt that

they can do nothing toward their own salvation; that salvation is not open to all, but is granted only to those God elected from the foundation of the world; that the election of individuals is not in any way dependent upon the character or works of those elected, but is solely the result of God's sovereign will; that the elect are drawn to God through irresistible grace; and that loss of salvation is not possible.

Both John Calvin and Martin Luther drew heavily from the views of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), whose concepts of predestination and election were to some extent formed in defense against Pelagianism, a

system that overestimated the role of the human will in salvation. Unfortunately, Augustine went too far in the opposite direction. The Five Points of Calvinism are rooted in Augustinian theology.

Since these five areas are crucial to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, let's examine each in the light of God's revealed Word.

Are Humans Totally Depraved?

Protestant theologians do not always agree on the meaning of "total depravity." Some say that the term total does not refer to the depth of human corruption, but to the fact that

the whole person-body, mind, and will-has been adversely affected by the entrance of sin into the world. This definition seems considerably softer than the one provided by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Here's the way the Confession describes fallen human nature:

Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with

God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions (Section VI. Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof).

No rational person denies the existence of human depravity. This world is permeated with sin. Murder, rape, crimes of cruelty, lewdness, and every form of perverse behavior occur daily. By focusing exclusively on these things, by constantly calling attention to the evils of the world, and by absorbing as much bad news as possible from the media, one may easily accept the premise that humans "are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil"-that human nature is essentially evil.

Human evil exists, but the view that human nature is essentially evil lacks both biblical and experiential support.

What about the countless good deeds that are performed each day all over the world? Whole communities join in an effort to find and rescue a missing person. People risk their lives and make great sacrifices to help other people. And what about the many charity organizations created to help fill human needs? What about the volunteers who, for no pay, donate significant time and energy to such organizations, hoping to help those in need, and expecting nothing in return?

Yes, evil exists — but there is also a tremendous amount of selfless love and goodness in this world. To deny it

is to adopt a one-sided view of the state of the human condition.

Following Augustine, the leading Reformers of the sixteenth century expounded the total depravity of man. This doctrine, as expressed in the above quotation from the Westminster Confession, leaves the impression that human beings are not free moral agents, and are completely incapable of choosing good over evil. Of course, such a notion flies in the face of reason and experience, and, perhaps for this reason, many Calvinists today offer a more palatable interpretation of this part of the Confession, and tone it down somewhat by distinguishing

between "common" and "special" grace. The former is the favor God expresses toward all people everywhere, but does not pertain to salvation; the latter is reserved for the elect and is the impetus for salvation.

It's difficult to tone down the Confession's description of the human condition as "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." One would be more in line with the biblical picture of human nature by altering the language somewhat. For example, terms such as "indisposed" and "disabled" fit within the biblical picture of the human condition, provided they

are properly qualified; but "utterly indisposed," "opposite to all good," and "wholly inclined to all evil" are well outside the biblical picture of creatures who are told by God Himself that they are capable of choosing good over evil.

Those who have abandoned such extreme definitions for a more reasonable view of the human condition are often accused of "Pelagianism" or "rationalism" by hyper-Calvinists who insist upon the utter depravity and incapability of fallen man.

But let's not overlook what God has to say about His human creatures. To

ancient Israel He said:

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His

statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess (Deuteronomy 30:11-16).

Was God prevaricating when He told the Israelites that they were capable of keeping His commandments? Did God give His people commandments they could not obey? Was the choice He set before them not really a choice at all?

Let's not hide behind the old argument that the commandments, statutes, and judgments the Israelites were to keep were altogether "outward" and "physical" (and could

therefore be kept), but devoid of any spiritual dimension. The "great commandments" to love God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself are a fundamental part of the Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). The above command to "walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments" is preceded with the command to "love the Lord your God." The passage even speaks of the Word as being "in your mouth and in your heart." The spiritual dimension of the law is clearly present here.

God commands humans to submit to Him and obey His commandments in

literally scores of passages. The fact that men have not obeyed does not mean that they are completely incapable of obeying. It is unreasonable to think that God would make covenants with men and urge them to choose His way over the way of disobedience if He knew all along that man is by nature "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite of all good, and wholly inclined to all evil."

It is equally unreasonable to think that God "was pleased...to permit" our first parents to commit sin, or that He "purposed to order [man's fall] to His own glory." Such a view contradicts the Genesis 3 account of

God's displeasure with our first parents, and requires us to regard the Genesis 6 account of God's grief over the sinfulness of man as a mere "anthropomorphism." Verse 6 states, "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." It is difficult-no, impossible!-to reconcile this verse with the notion that God was pleased to permit man's fall, "having purposed to order it to His own glory."

It is interesting that many Calvinists, insisting upon a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, condemn "rationalists" for their allegorical interpretation of the creation narrative and account of man's fall; yet, the

same Calvinists seem to have no trouble with calling the Genesis 6:6 description an anthropomorphism which, by definition, cannot be taken literally.

Also unreasonable is the notion that the guilt of our first parents' sin was imputed to all their descendants, and their corrupt nature was passed along "by ordinary generation" to all their progeny. There can be no doubt that when sin entered the picture some very real changes took place. First, man's relationship with God changed. Certain divine blessings were withdrawn, and man was left to his own, as it were. Second, human relationships changed for the worse.

Sin always brings moral corruption, but it is important to realize that such corruption is learned, not passed on genetically.

If humans are evil from early childhood, having inherited the "fallen nature" of our first parents, it seem odd that Jesus would admonish His followers to "become as little children" (Matthew 18:3). The fact is, human beings are not born evil! They may become evil later on, but they are not evil from birth.

If man is so totally depraved that he cannot help but choose evil over good, then why are sinners so vigorously condemned in the Bible?

Doesn't it stand to reason that those who are capable of making the right choices but fail to do so are far more culpable than those who simply cannot help themselves?

Human beings in a world essentially cut off from God will inevitably commit sin. With the exception of Jesus Christ, every adult capable of thinking for himself has made wrong choices-and will most likely make many more. That's why Paul can declare emphatically that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But this is a long way from the doctrine of "total depravity."

The concept of total depravity is essential to the second of the Five Points of Calvinism. Let's now examine it.

Is Divine Election Unconditional?

Who are the elect? Jesus mentions them in His Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24:24,31). Peter, Paul, and John speak of them (Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 John 1,13). But who are they?

The words elect, election, and elected are from the Greek eklektos (picked out, selected, or chosen) and ekloge (a picking out, or selection). The elect are those chosen by God.

Election is God's act of choosing. Paul speaks of the "elect angels" (1 Timothy 5:21). Peter, quoting Isaiah 28:16, refers to Christ as a "chief cornerstone, elect, precious" (1 Peter 2:6). The elect, then, are those chosen of God. Christ is the "Elect One" (Isaiah 42:1), and members of His body-the church-are elected in Him.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is God's elect (Isaiah 45:4; 65:9,22). This shows that we should think of the elect as a corporate body, and that individuals may become a part of that body. God knew beforehand that there would be a corporate body known as Israel, but

this does not necessarily mean that He particularly specified the individuals who would make up that body. In fact, non-Israelites could, by agreeing to the terms of the Covenant, become a part of that elect body. It could be said that individuals joining the elect body were elected "in Abraham"-that is, they became partakers of the divine blessings God promised to the nation that descended from father Abraham. This is crucial to our understanding of the church as God's elect.

Just as God knew that there would be a corporate body called Israel, He knew that there would be a corporate body called the church. And just as

individuals wishing to become a part of God's elect nation could do so by agreeing to the terms of the Covenant, so individuals today may become a part of God's elect-the church-by complying with the terms of the New Covenant.

Here is where we part ways with the Calvinists. They say that the elect were particularly chosen, or marked out, for salvation long before they were born, and that God selected them unconditionally. This means that God's effectual calling is unrelated to anything foreseen in those He particularly selects. Unlike Arminians and the Greek fathers, Calvinists insist that God did not look into the

future to seek out (and elect) those who would voluntarily submit to His will, but arbitrarily chose a certain number of specific individuals. The Calvinist tends to think that if God's decision is ever the result of anything we think or do He somehow loses His sovereignty, or His control over history and the lives of men. Therefore, to the Calvinist, the specific number and names of those to be saved was indelibly set before the dawn of time-and no human being can do anything to change it.

This is clearly not the view presented in the Bible. God gives individuals the freedom to accept or reject His call. Divine election is unconditional only

in the corporate sense, but individuals must freely choose whether to become a part of the elect body. God forces His will upon no one. Rather, He is seeking God. Jesus said that the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). This tells us that God is looking for something in His human creatures, and implies that He responds favorably to their worship. This is a vastly different picture than the Calvinist depiction of a God who arbitrarily predetermined who would and would not worship Him in an acceptable manner.

Listen to the apostle Paul:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen (Romans 9:15).

Paul earnestly sought the salvation of his fellow Israelites, the majority of whom had rejected Christ. Does this

not suggest that Paul believed that proclaiming the good news of salvation could result in the salvation of those who would have remained lost had they not heard the gospel? If so, then doesn't this mean that membership in the elect body has not been predetermined, and is therefore conditional?

Calvinists may claim that the above passage indicates nothing of the sort. But listen again to the apostle Paul:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved (Romans 10:1).

For I speak to you Gentiles;

inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them (Romans 11:13-14).

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are not under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all

things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

These scriptures speak for themselves. Obviously, Paul believed that his preaching could make a difference; that his prayers to God for Israel could make a difference; that people who would otherwise remain lost could be "won" by the gospel; that God chooses (elects) those who, once enlightened, choose Him.

In the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:113), Jesus makes it clear that those who are "called" (invited) but not "chosen" (elected) are unchosen

because (1) they refuse to accept the invitation to be saved or because (2) they refuse to comply with the conditions for salvation. "For many are called," Jesus said, "but few are chosen." Many are invited, but only those who choose to accept the invitation (and all conditions attached to it) are chosen.

Calvinists restrict the elect body to only a certain percentage of mankind, claiming that the atonement-the saving work of Jesus Christ-pertains only to those elected (appointed) unto salvation. The atonement, therefore, is limited.

But is it? If it can be shown from the

Bible that God desires the salvation of all human beings, the question of whether divine election is conditional or unconditional becomes moot.

Let us now see proof from the Bible that God's plan of salvation is for all humankind, not just a select few.

Is the Atonement Limited?

Calvinism insists that the atonement is limited. This means that it was never God's purpose to bring all men to conversion and ultimate salvation, and that the redemption made possible by Christ's death and resurrection is not, and never will be, available to all men, but applies only

to the elect, those individuals fortunate enough to have been predestined before the foundation of the world was laid.

Yet, as we shall see, the Bible supports a universal atonement instead of a limited one. This biblical teaching leaves us with two options: Either (1) all humans will be saved by the sovereign decree of God, or (2) God lovingly interacts with humans, giving each of us the ability to choose whether to accept His provisions of salvation, and refusing to force salvation upon anyone. Since the first option flatly contradicts a host of scriptural passages, we are left with the second. We will see that the

second option is, in fact, the true scriptural teaching.

Let's look again at John 3:17. This time, let's start with verse 16, and notice especially how the term world is used in this passage:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16).

Does that sound like a limited atonement to you? Does the term

world really mean world? Obviously, it does! And it's in full harmony with other scriptures that speak of the universal nature of the atonement. Here are some of them:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him [Christ] the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

[Jesus said,] And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples [NIV; NASB: all men] to Myself (John 12:32).

[Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men,

resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18,19).

[Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is the good and acceptable will of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge

of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:16).

[For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10).

[But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:1,2).

Does "all" mean all? Does "everyone" mean everyone? Does "the whole world" mean the whole world? If

these terms are understood in their normal sense, then the limited-atonement theory is invalidated.

If the atonement is limited in the Calvinian sense, then it is pointless to say that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. If Christ tasted death for everyone, it is senseless to say that His sacrifice is efficacious for only a preset and specific number. If God desires all to come to repentance and wishes none to perish, it is unthinkable that He purposely, from the foundation of the world, excluded a portion of humankind from any hope of salvation. If God is the Savior of all men, no one has the right to say

that salvation is limited to a relatively small number of men. If God desires all to be saved, it is a serious mistake to say that Christ died only for the elect.

Calvinists often retort by saying that terms such as "all" and "all men" really mean "all classes of men." By interpreting "all men" in such a way, the Calvinist then argues that passages declaring God's desire to save "all men" really mean that the elect can be found among all classes-the rich and the poor, princes and paupers, males and females, the small and the great-and are without national or racial boundaries.

The passages above should be more than sufficient to dispel such a narrow interpretation. Notice that in 1 John 2:2, the "whole world" clearly includes more than the elect. Christ's propitiatory work is for "our [believers'] sins, and not ours [believers'] only but also for the whole world." Also, in 1 Timothy 4:10, "all men" includes more than "those who believe." God is the "Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." This simply means that God's saving power is meant for everyone, and is being experienced by "those who believe."

In John 3:16,17, the "world" God loved is the same "world" Christ was

sent into, not to condemn but to save. Are we to assume that the "world" of this passage is anything other than the world of humankind? If we were to define the meaning of the term world in order to make it consistent with Calvinism's limited-atonement theory, we might come up with something like this: "For God so loved the world [of the elect] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life [but, of course, the "whoever" are only those individuals predestined for salvation]. For God did not send His Son into the world [in this case, the world of the elect and the unregenerate] to condemn the world

[of the elect] but that the world [of the elect] through Him might be saved [and, in fact, would have no choice in the matter].

Most Calvinists today would probably object to such scripture-twisting; nevertheless, the limited-atonement theory, especially when accepted with the four remaining points of Calvinism, will inevitably result in such mangled monstrosities, as scriptures that are otherwise simple and easy to understand are twisted beyond recognition.

Now, let's proceed to the fourth of the Five Points of Calvinism: irresistibility of divine grace...

Is Divine Grace Irresistible?

If you have carefully read the above material, checking and studying each of the scriptural citations, then the answer to this question is already obvious: Divine grace is not irresistible. God's kindness, love, and favorable regard (grace) can be both resisted and rejected.

Calvinists distinguish between "common grace" and "special grace." The former is called "common" because its benefits are shared by the just and the unjust and consist of natural blessings. The latter is "special" because it is reserved for

the elect only and pertains to salvation. Special grace, the Calvinist says, is the love, mercy, kindness, and drawing power of God that causes an individual to desire and accept the gospel, and prevents him from rejecting salvation. It is irresistible in that the person drawn by such grace is made willing and responsive, so has no choice in the matter.

Calvinists may argue that since God makes sinners responsive to the Gospel, it cannot be said that He forces a person to be saved, for that would mean that a person is coerced against his will — but if he is made willing, he is not forced into

something that is against his will.

This may seem reasonable, but it is an argument of semantics. If a person, though unwilling and through no choice of his own, undergoes spiritual brain surgery (in a manner of speaking) and is made willing and responsive, then, in a very real sense, salvation has been forced upon him!

Don't misunderstand — God does draw people by his grace; He enlightens and enables us, and even works out events in our lives to help us realize the necessity of repentance. Through a miraculous intervention He brought Saul (later

called Paul) to his knees on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). As Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44), and, "...no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (verse 65). But make no mistake, the drawing power of grace can be resisted; the recipient of grace still has the power to choose between good and evil. This fact is brought out most clearly in the book of Hebrews:

For if we ["we" who have experienced the grace of God] sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful

expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29).

There can be no doubt about this one! The warning is clearly to those who have been enlightened by a knowledge of the truth and experienced the drawing power of

God's grace. It shows that any believer-anyone enlightened and drawn by the Spirit of grace-who returns to a sinful lifestyle is jeopardizing his very salvation! If grace is irresistible, then there is no purpose for such a warning.

Notice the next passage, also from the book of Hebrews, and as you read it see if you think there is enough evidence in this text to indicate that the writer is speaking of those who have experienced the drawing power of divine grace:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have

become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:46).

This passage speaks of those who (1) "were once enlightened," (2) "have tasted the heavenly gift," (3) "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit," and (4) "have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Can there be any question as to whether these are people who have experienced the drawing power of divine grace? Of

course not! Yet, the text informs us that these same people-those enlightened and drawn to God by His grace-are fully capable of falling away through returning to a life of sin! Grace, therefore, is not irresistible!

The above two passages from the book of Hebrews also shed significant light on the fifth and final item in the Five Points of Calvinism: perseverance in grace to the end.

Can the Saved Forfeit Their Salvation?

The last of the Five Points of Calvinism is expressed most clearly in the Westminster Confession of

Faith:

1. They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

3. Nevertheless they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve the Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and

comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves (XVII. Of the Perseverance of the Saints).

The authors of the Confession were fully aware of Hebrews 6:46 and 10:26-29 (quoted above). They were apparently aware that these passages teach that the elect can "fall away," but they attempt to qualify the meaning of "fall away" by stating that the elect "can neither totally nor finally fall away." In other words, the elect can only partially and temporarily fall away; they can experience momentary lapse, but are

assured that God will never permit them to reach the point of no return, and that salvation can never be forfeited. Further, the "fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" is really only a fearful expectation of "temporal judgments."

Read again Hebrews 6:46 and 10:26-29, and notice that the texts plainly say that it is not possible to renew those who have fallen away to repentance, and that those who wilfully return to a life of sin no longer have a sacrifice for sins. These scriptures clearly contradict the notion that the elect "can neither totally nor finally fall away from the

state of grace."

Calvinists and "once saved, always saved" advocates would do well to examine the many "if's" that appear in the Bible. The New Testament alone has well over 500 of them, and many of them pertain to conditions we must meet to avoid forfeiting salvation. For example, Jesus says, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31); and, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (John 15:10). Speaking to the gentile converts at Rome, Paul says that the goodness of God is expressed "toward you...if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut

off" (Romans 11:22). The book of Hebrews informs us that "we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Hebrews 3:14). John says that Christ's blood cleanses us from all sin and that we may experience Christian fellowship "if we walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

These are just a few of the "if" statements of the New Testament, and they plainly disallow any "once saved, always saved" teaching or Calvinist doctrine of infallible perseverance.

Is God Calling You?

Much more could be said about predestination and election, about the Five Points of Calvinism, and about many of the creeds and confessions of Christendom, but, hopefully, the contents of this booklet will be sufficient to show you that many traditional and widely accepted views simply do not agree with the plain texts of Scripture. Hopefully, you now know for certain that God's will-His desire-is that all come to repentance and accept His provisions for salvation.

That means you, too!

If you have not yet made a

commitment to God; if you have not yet repented of your sins and turned to God through Jesus Christ, asking for forgiveness for all your past sins; if you have not yet been baptized by immersion and received the laying-on-of-hands, as God's Word commands, then it's high time that you seriously consider the contents of this booklet.

But is God calling you at this time?
How can you know for sure?

The answer is simple: It is a mistake to assume that God is not calling you! Rather than think that God may not be calling you, be thankful that you are being invited to receive the

salvation He wants to give you-and make sure you don't fail to respond to the invitation!

You can be a member of the elect body. You can fulfill your destiny, which is the proper destiny of all humankind: eternal life in the Kingdom of God!

Don't put it off! It's a Free Ticket! And Tickets Are Still Available

Predestination and election can be easily understood with the following illustration: Bob Smith lives in Tyler, Texas. He has been invited to attend a banquet in Shreveport, Louisiana. The host for the banquet sent Bob a

ticket for a seat on a bus scheduled to leave Tyler at 9:30 a.m. on a Wednesday and arrive in Shreveport at 12:00 noon the same day-just in time for the party.

The destination of the bus has been predetermined. As soon as Bob steps onto the bus, he becomes a participant in this predetermined trip. His ticket assures him of a seat on the bus. His destination is certain.

However, if Bob throws away his ticket before departure, or if he gets off the bus between Tyler and Shreveport, he will not arrive at the destination originally intended for him.

The same is true of the predetermined journey God has set before us. If we use the free "ticket" He has given to us, get aboard the "bus" to the Kingdom, and stay on the bus until it arrives, we will arrive at our proper destination. But if we get off the "bus" before it reaches its destination, we will not enter the Kingdom. Or, if we throw away the "ticket" before boarding, we will forfeit our "seat" on the bus and lose the privilege of participating in the predetermined journey.

The host of the banquet invited many, offering them free tickets, but many of them declined the offer. The only

ones finally chosen for participation in the festivities were those who made the trip and showed up for the banquet.

Divine election is no different. God chooses those who choose Him. Many are invited, but those finally chosen for participation in the Kingdom are those who accept God's provisions for salvation. Jesus Christ is the Elect One chosen from the foundation of the world (Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 1:20). He is the Way into the Kingdom of God (John 14:6). When we accept Him, we are "in Christ," and become participants in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-11; 2 Corinthians 4:14). Similarly, by joining

ourselves to the Elect One, becoming members of His Body, we become participants in His election.