

MAN

BEFORE

GOD



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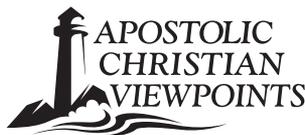
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL	<i>Page 4</i>
2. MAN IN HIS INNOCENCE	<i>Page 5</i>
3. THE FALL	<i>Page 6</i>
4. MAN'S FALLEN STATE	<i>Page 9</i>
5. MAN'S FREE WILL	<i>Page 12</i>
6. MAN RESTORED	<i>Page 16</i>
GLOSSARY & APPENDIX	<i>Page 18</i>

This booklet is part of the Apostolic Christian Viewpoints series, a collection of writings prepared by a committee of the Elder Council of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean).

These booklets are not intended as exhaustive works on their respective subjects. Rather, they are offered as an encouragement to those who currently embrace these views; and to those who do not, a call to consider these topics in the light of scripture ... and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7).



EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the first in a series of three booklets addressing aspects of Reformed theology that differ from doctrinal understandings of the Apostolic Christian Church. These booklets are not intended to be a systematic rebuttal of Calvinism, but rather an exploration of God's plan of salvation, in which the distinguishing concepts of Reformed theology are addressed as they arise.

*The first booklet, "**Man before God**" addresses Man's spiritual condition before his Creator: spiritually deformed and polluted by sin (depravity) and yet retaining the volition with which God created him. This booklet also contains a glossary of theological terms that are often used when discussing Reformed theology. The second booklet, titled "**Sovereign God**", relates the story of God's love for all; a love that is integral to His holiness and does not jeopardize His sovereignty in any way. The third booklet, "**Grace & Perseverance**", focuses on how salvation is experienced in man: God's enabling grace reaching out to lost mankind is a gift that must be received and cultivated. The third booklet also contains a list of commonly asked questions about salvation.*

1. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

A quick scan through the day's news headlines will confirm what each of us knows intuitively: there is something wrong with humanity. Every day brings fresh evidence of mankind's propensity for "badness", from the seemingly trivial to the bone-chillingly wicked, from disparaging comments on social media to horrific acts of domestic violence. Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Does the fault lie with societal structures or with individuals (as if society were made up of anything other than individuals)? Is a certain portion of society morally maladjusted, while the rest of us are (relatively) good? Or is the problem of evil both more universal and more personal than we might want to admit?

An honest examination of our own thoughts and actions will reveal something curious and very telling: we all have a moral code, and we all fail to live up to that code. Each of us has an innate sense of fairness that clearly detects infringements of our own rights but loses some of that sensitivity when it comes to the rights of others. At one time or other, we all break the law of right and wrong within us and, when we do, we are experts at generating excuses to justify our behavior. Nevertheless, try as we might, we cannot escape the fact that we are lawbreakers—even by our own standards—let alone breakers of any law imposed by a higher moral authority.¹

This problem of evil around us and within us (called sin, by its proper name) prompts several questions: How did we get this way? Who is the ultimate moral arbiter, anyway? And what is the solution to the problem of sin?

The answer to that last, and most pressing, question will only come once we have dealt with the first two questions; more specifically, once we understand who man is before God.

¹ See Romans 2:12-16 for what the Bible says about this topic.

2. MAN IN HIS INNOCENCE

Humanity's propensity for evil is deeply engrained, but it was not always that way. The first chapter of Genesis records how in five days, God created everything in our universe—time, energy, and matter—from the incomprehensibly vast to the minutely small. Then, on the sixth day, God created man:

And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

On this final day of creation, God does something expressly personal and special by creating something—someone—in His image. What does this mean?

One way this can be understood is that the infinite God made Adam and Eve in His image by giving them some of His own attributes (attributes already clearly exhibited in the preceding verses of the creation account), but in a reduced or limited form:

Autonomous: Free to do as they will, although constrained by their finite nature (even possessing the ability to disobey God).

Sovereign: Appointed by God to have dominion over the earth.

Creative: Able to imagine and create (Adam gives names to all the creatures).

Loving: Able to respond to divine love with their own love. This is connected to their autonomy, given that love cannot be coerced.

Wise: Able to learn (from God), reason, understand, and teach.

Immortal: Possessing a spirit that will not die.

Joyful: Able to discover God's character and delight in Him.

God's design was that man's limited godly attributes would find full expression in his discovery and experience of God. God created man

in His image as the crowning glory of an entire creation created for God's pleasure: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* (Revelation 4:11) In all of this, man was created perfect and sinless.

God's will was that man would delight in Him, and because God is infinite, this experience could continue without end—the very definition of eternal bliss. However, in being made apart from God, man had the ability to either choose or reject Him. To choose God was life and goodness, and to reject Him was death and evil. Because God is Love, and love by its very nature cannot be coerced, man had to exercise his own will to love God. To give man the opportunity to love God, man had also to be given the opportunity not to love Him. For this reason, God created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and placed it in the garden. Note that the tree itself was not evil: in God's creation, everything was “very good”. (Genesis 1:31) However, to seek anything apart from God—even knowledge—is sin. Therein lies the explanation for mankind's present state.

3. THE FALL

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, they chose a life apart from God. In doing so, they chose death. God is the source of life, and He had made the consequences of their choice explicit: *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* (Genesis 2:17) God clearly warned them that the penalty and result of sin is immediate death.

Although God pronounced that Adam would return to the dust from whence he was created (Genesis 3:19), Adam and Eve did not experience physical death immediately after they ate that fruit. In fact, Adam lived for another 900+ years (Genesis 5:5); therefore, physical death must have been the lesser part of the penalty. The

death they experienced in the day that they first sinned was not physical, but *spiritual*.

What then is the nature of this spiritual death? Is it a “corpse-like” unresponsiveness to God as some claim? A state of total depravity with no consciousness of the Creator, or no understanding whatsoever of Him? Or does it mean something different? Take a close look at what God Himself said immediately after the fall of our first parents:

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24) [Emphasis added]

He did *not* say that man had now become unresponsive to God. He says the exact opposite: man has become *like* God—able to know good and evil! However, there is a supreme irony in all of this: In desiring to be like God, he chose to disobey God and found himself driven out from the very presence of the one he was trying to emulate, and cut off from the source of life. Man, in fact, died that day—and so death passed upon all men. (Romans 5:12)

The fundamental truth about death in the broadest sense is that it is a separation, and never a final cessation of existence or consciousness. To die is to be separated from the living, but not to an unconscious state. Scripture is abundantly clear on this point:

Job: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (Job 19:26)

Saul speaking with Samuel after his death via the witch of Endor: And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? ... to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me. (1 Samuel 28:15a, 19b)

David and his first son from Bathsheba: *And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*
(2 Samuel 12:22-23)

There is not only consciousness on the other side of physical death, but also a realization of the consequence of our response to God in this life. Christ Himself laid this out in no uncertain terms:

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Christ to the Sadducees: *And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.* (Mark 12:26-27)

Christ's prophecy to the Pharisees: *Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.* (John 8:21)

Christ's judgment: *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (John 5:28-29)

The Second Death, which is actually a resurrection, but not to eternal life, instead, is a resurrection to eternal separation from God: *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power... And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20:6,14-15)

What Adam and Eve experienced when they ate the forbidden fruit was a separation and alienation from God, which persists to the present day in the lives of all who are captivated and dominated by sin.

4. MAN'S FALLEN STATE

Fallen man is a “dead man walking” with the sentence of death upon him, one who can never quite forget the approaching grave (Hebrews 2:15) even if he does not acknowledge what lies beyond. (Matthew 10:28) However, to understand the nature of mankind’s state of spiritual death or separation from God, we must return to the idea of man as the bearer of God’s image.

When our first parents left Eden, they did not cease to be image bearers. That image, however, had become badly marred. The godly attributes with which God had endowed man (discussed in Section 2 above) were instead warped by sin²:

Man’s autonomy, which God had intended to find its proper expression in submission to Him, was instead twisted toward **rebellion**;

Man’s limited sovereignty was turned from its rightful use for stewardship of God’s creation and service to others, toward **service of self**;

Instead of generating only the benign and beautiful, Man’s creativity began to produce **evil inventions**;

Man’s heart, designed by the God of Love as a home for love, became tainted by **hatred**;

Instead of acquiring true wisdom directly from God, man sought **imperfect and limited knowledge** from other sources; and

Man’s joy in his Creator dissolved into **restlessness** and dissatisfaction with his sinful life apart from God.

In every instance, man’s God-given attributes were distorted as they became dissociated from the Giver—the One who had intended those same attributes to be fully expressed and developed in relationship with Him.

² Genesis 9:6; James 3:9

Many scripture passages attest to the sinful nature of a fallen humanity separated from God:

Genesis 8:21 - ... *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;*

Psalms 51:5 - *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Isaiah 59:2 - *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

Isaiah 64:6 - *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

Romans 3:12,23 - *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. [...] For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

Romans 5:12,19 - *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: [...] For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*

Ephesians 2:1 - *And you... were dead in trespasses and sins*

Does this mean that fallen humanity is incapable of doing anything that aligns with the nature or commands of God? No, of course not. Aside from examples from our own life experiences and the pages of history, an honest survey of scripture will also produce a list of those who even God called righteous, just, or good. Christ Himself went farther than that: He pointed out that even *evil* men are capable of good actions: "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children...*". (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13) However, occasional good deeds or even a life that is characterized by righteous behavior is only good compared with the rest of fallen humanity.

The inescapable truth is that Fallen man without God is depraved: he is morally corrupt compared with God's character and standards, and when compared with the innocent state from which he fell (and even compared with the innocence that all children possess). He is a slave to the sin that is the natural inclination of his flesh, which is clearly shown by a consistent pattern of sinful behavior and thoughts.

This is the awful weight of the curse of sin that separates man from a good God: Fallen man retains the knowledge of good (and evil), but lacks the ability to live out the good to God's standard. The Apostle Paul, through the Holy Spirit, lays out this problem in his letter to the Romans:

- God has plainly revealed Himself, His character, and our lost condition—but most of fallen humanity has chosen to suppress this knowledge in unrighteousness, resulting in wickedness, perversion, and pain. (Romans 1:18-32)
- Not all have suppressed this knowledge: Some, from both the Jewish nation and the Gentiles, have responded to its promptings, and even chose the good over evil. (Romans 2:7-15)
- Despite this, the curse of sin is an ever-present reality. God sent His law to expose sin and show that reconciliation with a Holy God through our own works of righteousness is impossible. All are guilty before Him. (Romans 3:9-23)

Does the fact that Man is depraved and inherently sinful mean he has no free will? Is his will non-functional? Can he or can he not respond to the call of God?

5. MAN'S FREE WILL

Some people explain the human condition apart from God as one of "total depravity" or total inability, in that even man's will is so corrupted that he cannot choose God. Moreover, while it is true that we can never bridge the gap ourselves, that we can never by our own willpower attain a righteousness that would permit communion with a holy God, it is also true that God expects us to respond to His divine overtures to close that gap.

The Bible is clear that mankind is responsible (i.e., "response-able") to obey the call of God. Time and again in scripture, God reaches down from heaven to interact with men and women; He expects a faith response from them, and treats them according to how they respond:

Deuteronomy 30:19 - I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Isaiah 1:18-20 - Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Isaiah 55:1 - Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Ezekiel 18:30 - Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Matthew 11:28 - Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 23:37 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often

would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

John 1:12 - But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

John 3:18 - He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 5:40 - And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

John 8:24 - I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

Romans 1:19, 21 - Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them... Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Romans 2:6 - Who will render to every man according to his deeds.

Romans 14:12 - So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

The view that fallen mankind has absolutely no ability to respond to God, and that God must first somehow enable one before he can answer (with the obvious implication that some are enabled by God and some are not), is not true to God's character of fairness, justice and love, nor is it true to Man's nature as a bearer of God's image. Fallen man is a slave, not a robot. Moreover, God's love is real love, not caprice or coercion.

While not having the same authority as the Bible, the following quotes from early church fathers show that they also believed in man's free will:

Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.): "Let some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever occurs happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold

it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Now, if this is not so, but all things happen by fate, then neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it is predetermined that this man will be good, and this other man will be evil, neither is the first one meritorious nor the latter man to be blamed. And again, unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions."³

Tatian (120-180 A.D.): "We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it."⁴

Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.): "But Man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff."⁵

If being spiritually dead means we cannot respond to God's call, then regeneration (being made spiritually alive) must precede faith. This, however, runs counter to the many invitations in scripture to sinful men and women to believe the Gospel and experience new life.⁶ We cannot repair or restore God's marred image within ourselves, but we can respond to God's loving invitation to a restored relationship as the basis for His regenerating work in us. It must be acknowledged that, even in our responding to and believing in God, we are dependent on His patience and grace.⁷

³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 43

⁴ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, chapter 11

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 4

⁶ In the book of Acts alone, examples include Acts 2:37-40; 3:16,19,26; 5:32; 10:35,43; 11:18; 13:38-41,46; 14:15; 16:30-31; 17:30; 26:18-20.

⁷ Acts 16:14; 18:27; Romans 2:4; Philippians 2:13, 2 Peter 3:9.

If our actions, and even our thoughts, are hobbled by our sinful nature so that none are able to live according to God's perfect standard, what is the response that God is seeking?

Before we even begin to consider the nature of our response to God, we need to acknowledge that any answer to our state of death must come from the Author of life. God, out of His goodness, is always the initiator: He graciously pursues even those who are fleeing and hiding from Him. He calls to them and seeks them out, and extends the covering of His grace to those who humbly realize their nakedness before Him.⁸ God gives grace out of His goodness (Luke 18:13-14) and provides not only a sacrificial covering for those who recognize the insufficiency of their "aprons of fig leaves", but ultimately the One who will set all things right once more.

How does this humility (which is the key to God's amazing grace) manifest itself? The answer can be summed up in one word: faith. Without this response, it is impossible to please Him. (Hebrews 11:6) In the fertile soil of the humble heart, God's grace begins to work and the seed of faith sprouts, turning its tender leaves to the Light.

⁸ Proverbs 3:34; Isaiah 66:2; 1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6.

6. MAN RESTORED

When that aged, faithful man of God Simeon held a newborn in the temple and proclaimed, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel", (Luke 2:34) his words echoed for all humanity.

That child became the man Jesus Christ, the only one who:

Never sinned (...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, Hebrews 4:15);

Is not an image-bearer, but is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15);

Was completely one with His Heavenly Father (John 10:30) except for that separation on the cross ("*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Mark 15:34) when He tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9); and

Is the means by which God can restore and sanctify a fallen mankind to Himself. (Colossians 1:20-22)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about falling and rising again. Jesus Christ came so that, in the words of Simeon, "the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35), so that we might see just how far we've fallen and how bankrupt we are. However, this realization is only the necessary prelude to rising again. Let us return to Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans as he continues to unfold God's plan for man's salvation:

- Faith is what justifies us before God, independent of the works of the law. (Romans 4:1-22) This faith is in the character of God, the power of God, and the Word of God, which was finally and fully revealed in Christ Jesus—the final object of our faith. (Romans 4:23-25)
- Through the response of faith in Christ and His atoning work, we experience justification and peace with God. (Romans 5:1-5) Christ's death and resurrection was the means by which we could also be resurrected to spiritual life from our former state of spiritual death—and brought about the restoration of the relationship with God. (Romans 5:6-21)

- The sixth chapter of Romans is an exposition on the reality of the new state of spiritual life in Christ. Paul explains that through Christ's death we are also "dead to sin" (Romans 6:7-8)—once again showing that death is not an unresponsiveness to sin (we must be on guard against temptation), but a *separation* from sin.
- The seventh chapter explains the nature and place of God's law, and its effect on fallen man. Though the law reveals the holiness of God and the evilness of sin, it can do nothing for fallen man except reveal his condemnation. His mind, through the knowledge of good and evil, delights in the good (v. 22), but he sees that his sinful nature holds him captive, preventing him from doing what is right. This crushes him completely so that in abject humility he cries out to God: "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" (v. 24) The answer comes to him in the form of the Savior: "*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*". (v. 25a) Paul sums up the seventh chapter in the final half of the verse: "*So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*" (v. 25b)
- As the seventh chapter explained the state of the "dead" old man under the law, the eighth chapter expounds on the state of the "living" new man in Christ: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" (Romans 8:1) The restoration of the relationship with God results in what was once paradise and spiritual life for Adam: the freedom for man to exercise his will in accordance with God's will, in loving relationship with Him.

The wonderful news is that the Gospel's invitation to rise again is extended to *all* of fallen mankind. (Acts 17:30; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) God is calling *all* to Himself, and will provide all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) to those who believe in His Son. The only fitting response of fallen man, who now fully knows his wretched state of separation from God, is to cry out to Jesus: "*Lord, I believe! Help thou my unbelief.*" (Mark 9:24)

GLOSSARY & APPENDIX

Death

“By willfully disobeying God and breaking fellowship with Him, man brought physical and spiritual death and eternal condemnation on the whole human race.” *ACCN - We Believe, page 6.*

Some believe that because man is dead in his sin (Ephesians 2:1,5), he is therefore unable to respond to the call of the Gospel. An illustration from Scripture used to support this claim is found in the death of Lazarus, whom the Lord Jesus rose up from the dead (John 11). This illustration is misapplied inasmuch that the Lord Himself described Lazarus’s death by saying “our friend Lazarus sleepeth”. Death is not a cessation of all existence, it is a separation. This is brought out in this same text of Ephesians 2, where we read that those who were dead in their trespasses and sins still walked, had desires, and conducted themselves (Ephesians 2:2-3). This is better illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). He had left his Father and journeyed far away, wasting his life in sin and was essentially *dead* to his Father⁹, yet he still could *come to himself* and return to his Father in repentance.

Determinism

A theory or doctrine that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social or psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events or natural laws / A belief in predestination (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

The philosophical doctrine that every state of affairs, including every human event, act, and decision, is the inevitable consequence of antecedent states of affairs (*The American Heritage Dictionary*)

The philosophy of determinism did not originate in Christianity, but predates it and exists in many world philosophies and religions past and present. Determinism in its purest form applied to Christianity

⁹ Luke 15:24,32

states that due to God's omniscience and sovereignty, all events are predetermined by Him, including one's salvation or damnation. The polar opposite of Christian determinism is *Open theism*, a theological movement which points to God's nature of love as the source of man's free will. Because God allows man the freedom to choose, the future is open or undetermined—He must react to man's choices and, therefore, His sovereignty is of a general, not a specific nature.

Both of these approaches fall short because of a similar error: The attempt to explain, in human terms, the mystery of the interaction between an all-powerful infinite God who encompasses space and time, and finite man who is constrained by both. Both approaches view man's choices as problematic for God: The determinist says that God's sovereignty requires that every action of man must be predetermined—therefore, man is not free to choose. The open theist says that God's love requires that every action of man must be a free choice—therefore, God does not fully know or control the future, so He is neither truly omniscient or sovereign. The full picture is that God is so great that He allows man the freedom to choose, but He uses those choices to bring about His perfect will. His love and sovereignty cannot be limited by our choices in time, which is why Scripture tells us that His Son was "slain from the foundation of the world"¹⁰, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."¹¹

Elect & Election

Strong's 1588 - ἐκλεκτός (eklektós)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - picked out, chosen

Strong's 1589 - ἐκλογή (eklogé)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - the act of picking out, choosing

¹⁰ Revelation 13:8

¹¹ John 3:16

The words "chosen", "elect" and "election" are used in the New Testament to translate the Greek words, which simply means to be chosen or selected, usually by God. However, for which purpose are they chosen? It should not be assumed that when the Bible speaks of election, it is always speaking of being chosen for salvation.

Often the Bible teaches that God has selected someone for a particular purpose but with no reference to their eternal salvation. Examples of those who were chosen for a particular purpose or service include: the Apostles, to bring forth fruit (John 15:16); Matthias, to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:24-25); Paul, to bring the name of Jesus unto Kings, Gentiles, and Jews (Acts 9:15; 22:14-15); and the Apostles, to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 10:41). Even the choosing of Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau (Romans 9:7-13) was a calling for the special honor and privilege of being chosen as the lineage through whom God's revelation to mankind would be carried and through whom the Messiah would come. This election was not in reference to their soul's salvation. Jacob and his descendants were not assured of eternal life because of this choice, neither were Esau and his descendants eternally condemned because God chose to use Jacob for this purpose instead. Similarly, when God chose to use the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Scriptures do not speak of his being chosen with reference to the eternal state of his soul. Rather, God chose to use this cruel, ungodly ruler to show forth His own glory and power as the Lord who delivered Israel from Egypt's bondage (Romans 9:17-22).

With regard to passages that do speak of being chosen or elected for salvation, a foundational passage is Isaiah 42:1-4. This is a prophecy of the Messiah being the servant whom the Father had elected, chosen, for the purpose of bringing salvation to the world (Matthew 12:18-21; 1 Peter 2:4-6). Our election unto salvation is in Christ, who is the Elect of God. Those who are the children of God have been chosen in Him, in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:4). They were not individually selected or chosen in advance to be put into Christ, but they are part of the chosen because they are in Jesus Christ. The

elect are those individual men and women who belong to the body of Christ.

Moreover, the election of God is not an unconditional guarantee of salvation to any individual. The Scriptures state that we are chosen in Christ to be "holy and without blame" (Ephesians 1:4). This will be fulfilled in those who remain in the body of Christ as we see a few chapters later that He will present His Church to Himself, "holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27). This same point the Apostle also made when he wrote to the Colossians. Paul taught that the Lord Jesus "will present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight...if ye **continue** in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:21-23). Similarly, the Apostle Peter exhorts us individually to "give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for IF ye do these things ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

Thus, we see the election of God unto salvation is certain with respect to the entire body of Christ, but for the individual believers it is contingent upon their continuing in the faith, continuing as part of the body of Christ. The election of individual men cannot be in isolation from the body of Christ, any more than it can be in isolation from Jesus Christ, the head of the body. This truth is found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus on the vine and its branches (John 15:1-6).

Faith

Strong's 4102 -πιστις (pistis)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the New Testament of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it.

A. Relating to God - the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ

B. Relating to Christ - a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God

C. The religious beliefs of Christians

D. Belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same

We are taught in Hebrews 11:6, "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]". Continuing in this same verse, we learn that personal faith is essential for salvation as those who come to God "must believe that he is" and that He rewards those who "diligently seek him". Where does faith come from? To this question, the Apostle answers in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

The context of Romans 10 makes it clear that one must confess the Lord Jesus with their mouth and believe in their heart that God has raised His Son from the dead (10:9). This personal response to the Gospel message, a response in faith, is necessary for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness (10:10). Moreover, we see that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11), for the Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him (10:11). In fact, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (10:12). This text explains how this proceeds. Preachers must be sent so that people may hear the Gospel message. The reason they need to hear the Gospel message is that it will give them opportunity to believe ("how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"). Those who hear and believe will call on the name of the Lord (10:14-15). Such will be saved.

We see that faith comes to those who believe the Word of God when they hear it. Unfortunately, not all who hear the Gospel are willing to obey it (10:16). The reason why some believe and others do not is not because God arbitrarily gives faith to some but not to others. Rather, the fault is found in the individual hearts, even as we find Israel described in this passage as being disobedient to God's

call (10:21). All of this makes plain that one must have a personal response of faith and that faith precedes regeneration (Heb. 4:2).

Foreknow & Foreknowledge

Strong's 4267- προγινώσκω (proginōskō)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - to have knowledge beforehand

Strong's 4268- πρόγνωσις (prōgnōsis)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - foreknowledge, forethought

These words mean what they say—to know beforehand. The Bible makes clear that God is omniscient (knowing everything), He knows all there is to know (Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 46:9-10; Hebrews 4:13). Therefore, the Scriptures that speak of God's foreknowledge are simply teaching that He knows all, past, present, future. With regard to man's salvation, He foresees everything, but forces no one.

God's Love and the Atonement

The well-known statement of the Lord Jesus, found in John 3:16, clarifies the extent of God's love toward humankind: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". His love for *all* people in this world means that *whoever* believes in Him can be saved. No one is excluded, no one is overlooked. The Scriptures affirm repeatedly that Jesus Christ died and shed His blood for all, even those who ultimately will reject the gift of salvation (Mark 10:45; John 1:29; 3:14-17; 6:51; 12:32-33; Romans 5:6-8; 18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2; 4:14).

Immutable

Strong's 276 - ἀμετάθετος (ametáthetos)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - not transposed, not to be transferred, fixed, unalterable.

Invariable, unalterable, not capable of or susceptible to change
(*American Dictionary of the English Language - Webster 1828*)

Monergism vs. Synergism

Monergism: the theological doctrine that regeneration is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

Synergism: the [theological] doctrine that individual salvation is achieved through a combination of human will and divine grace (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

Monergism is the idea that God decides to save individual men and women without any regard or consideration for anything in their heart and will. It effectively removes all responsibility from man. It is contrary to the Scriptures that show that God does examine the heart and holds man responsible. One of the numerous examples that show that God considers man's response is how He withheld judgment on Nineveh after they repented at the preaching of Jonah (3:10). This Old Testament example is used by the Lord Jesus of true repentance (Luke 11:32). Another Old Testament passage that shows the nature of God's expectations of mankind is found in the prophet Ezekiel's urgent warnings that Israel escape judgment by turning from their sin to God (Ezekiel 18:20-32). New Testament examples include the teachings of the Lord Jesus that repentance is essential (Luke 13:1-5); how God considered the heart of Cornelius (Acts 10:31; 34-35); and the mission statement of the Apostle Paul (Acts 26:16-21). These are but a few of countless examples found in the Scriptures that make very clear that God considers the response of men and women to His call.

Predestination

Strong's 4309 - προορίζω (proorízō)

Thayer's Greek Lexicon - to predetermine, decide beforehand.

The word predestinate (or predestinated) occurs four times in the New Testament (Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 11). The underlying

Greek word occurs two additional times and is translated as "determined before" (Acts 4:28) and "ordained" (1 Corinthians 2:7).

The word predestination is often confused with the word election. While both words are found in the New Testament, they do not mean the same thing. With regard to predestination, it is important to note the Bible never speaks of men and women being predestinated for salvation. Instead, the Bible speaks of predestination as pre-determining the destination of those who believe. Please notice how this word is used in each of these four instances:

Romans 8:29 - *"Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son..."*

God has predetermined that those who would believe will be conformed to the Lord Jesus, they will be as He was on this earth.

Romans 8:30 - *"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified"*.

This "destination" (being like His Son Jesus) is accomplished through calling, justification, and glorification.

Ephesians 1:5 - *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself..."*

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has predetermined that the followers of Jesus Christ shall be adopted into His family.

Ephesians 1:11 - *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"*.

As God gathers together all who belong to Him, He gathers them together in Christ Jesus. He has also pre-determined that all such will partake of the eternal inheritance together with Christ.

In summary, the Bible does not speak of anyone being predestined to salvation, or that God has pre-determined to save some but not others. Instead the Bible teaches that for those who believe on the

Lord Jesus, God has pre-determined that they should be conformed to the image of His Son and that they will be joint heirs with the Son in the eternal inheritance He receives from His Father.

Sovereignty & Free Will

We believe that God is “sovereign over all things” but we also affirm that “He has endowed humankind with the power of self-determination, and He holds us responsible for our moral choices”. We believe “He created all humankind in His own image” which includes “free will” but we also affirm that “He is not the author of sin”. (*Quotations taken from the ACCN - We Believe, page 4*)

The term “God’s Sovereignty” refers to His being supreme in power and authority. He is superior to all others and has full autonomy (Psalm 115:3). His Sovereignty alludes to His omnipotence, meaning He is all-powerful, the Almighty. Some are concerned that if we concede that man has free will, this implies that God is not fully sovereign. This concern is misplaced. God is sovereign, it is inherent to who He is, and this fact does not depend on whether man’s will be free or bound. God’s sovereignty is not contingent.

In His sovereign will, God has not deterministically controlled who will accept or reject Him. Rather, God has determined that man must freely respond to Him. God has created man to have the freedom to make moral choices; however, these choices are limited by the consequences that God has set. Man must choose, but he cannot choose the consequences of his choices.

Transcendent

Surpassing others; preeminent or supreme / Being above and independent of the material universe. Used of the Deity. (*The American Heritage Dictionary*)

