

## **Passages Supporting the Sovereign Work of God in Relation to Man's Will in Salvation** (Verses in *italics* indicate key passages for study)

The following sections are intended to provide a comprehensive basis for the study of the topic in a systematic fashion. For that reason, a comprehensive (but by no means exhaustive) set of verses with some interjectory explanations at key points are provided to guide the study.

### **1. General passages indicating God's sovereign will and purposes stand with absolute certainty:**

Ex. 33:19; 1 Chron. 29:10-12; Job 42:1-2; *Psa. 33:8-11; 75:6-7; 103:19; 115:3; 135:6; 139:16; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 14:24, 27; 29:16; 37:16; 40:8, 13-17, 21-26; 41:2-4, 21-23; 43:13; 44:6-8; 24-28; 45:9-10, 21; 46:9-11; 48:3; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; 18:1-11; 32:17; Lam. 2:17; Dan. 1:9; 2:20-22, 37-38, 44, 47; 4:17, 25, 26, 32, 34-35; 5:21, 23; Matt. 3:9; 10:29; 19:26; 20:23; John 17:2; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28; 17:24-26, 28; Rom. 9:20-21; 11:34-36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:11; James 4:13-16; Rev. 3:7. All God's actions and future plans are 'freely' and unconditionally made. They are irrevocable by anyone or anything. Furthermore, they are made by an all-wise, all-good and all-powerful God. Anything less would indicate a lesser God and that would not be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe that the Bible describes (Col. 1:16-17; cf. Acts 17:24-28), but rather a god of the human imagination. Note that God is not working things out in history as He goes along, but He has established a plan from before creation according to His eternally wise counsels and good purpose (Num. 23:19; *Psa. 33:11; 139:16* [cf. Job 14:5; Jer. 1:5]; Isa. 14:24; 37:26; 46:10; Matt. 25:34; *Acts 2:23; 4:27-28*; 1 Cor. 2:7; *Eph. 1:4-5* [cf. vs. 9 & 11]; 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Heb. 4:3; 6:17). A truly sovereign God is the only basis of real hope, real confidence and the only object worthy of real worship.*

### **2. Passages indicating God's ultimate control over evil/ calamity and His purposes in it:**

*Gen. 50:20* (note in *Psa. 105:17* it states that it was God who sent Joseph to Egypt not his slave selling brothers – as well as the famine that plagued the region, vs. 16); 2 Sam. 12:11-12, 15-18; 16:11; 24:1 (cf. vs. 10, 12-17; 1 Chron. 21:1); 1 Kings 11:14, 23; 22:23; *Job 1:11, 21-22; 2:9-10; 42:10-11* (In these Job passages, note the relationship between God and Satan. Satan always answers to God [cf. Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36; 22:31]. Satan was the direct cause of Job's experience of evil/ calamity but ultimate responsibility for its purposes is attributed to God [cf. James 5:11]; compare also 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chron. 21:1); *Psa. 60:3; 66:10-11; 71:20; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 11:17; 15:2; 18:11, 17; 19:3-15; 21:5, 10; Lam. 1:12-13; 3:37-38; Amos 3:6; 9:4; Mark 14:30; John 9:1-2; Acts 2:22-23; 3:14-15, 17-18; 4:27-28* (Note in Acts, both the good and evil of the crucifixion was long ago planned by God [cf. Isa. 53:10]); *Rom. 8:28* (this verse is all inclusive [cf. Rom. 11:33-36; *Eph. 1:11*]); Rev. 17:17. Note God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8 (God also hardened the rest of the Egyptians – cf. Ex. 14:17; *Psa. 105:25*; as well as other peoples – cf. Josh. 11:20; Judg. 3:12; 9:23; Isa. 63:17; see also Judg. 14:4; 1 Sam. 2:25; 16:14). Paul says the purpose of this action toward Pharaoh was to display the power of God to the world (*Rom. 9:17* quoting Ex. 9:16). God also sends deluding influences – cf. *1 Kings 22:21-23* (note again the demonic answers to God)); *2 Thess. 2:11-12*; and gives people over to their sinful desires – cf. Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; see also Isa. 64:7. In this we gain a glimpse into part of God's purpose for ordaining evil in the world whether it be natural calamity or moral evil (cf. Prov. 16:4; *Psa. 76:10*). It forms sort of a black backdrop to enhance and magnify the brilliant glory of God's goodness. The death of Christ is at the same time the greatest evil perpetrated on anyone and the greatest display of God's grace to undeserving creatures. When we consider that God works all things for good (*Rom. 8:28*) it is an indication that He always has a good purpose in ordaining evil.

God is sovereign and yet not the direct cause of evil (Deut. 32:4; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; 2:16; cf. Gen. 18:25; Job 34:10) indicating the great mystery of His providence (Isa. 55:8-9; *Rom. 11:33-36*). God ordains the actions of evil doers and then holds them responsible for their sin (Compare Jer. 25:9

with vs. 12; cf. also Ezek. 14:9; Matt. 18:7; Luke 22:22 [cf. Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21]; *Acts* 2:23; *2 Thess.* 2:11-12; also compare Jonah 1:15 with 2:3 – God ordained the sailors to willingly throw Jonah overboard even as they cried to Him for forgiveness – cf. 1:14). Evildoers are always held responsible for their willing actions (Isa. 66:3-4) in light of God’s purposes even though they may unfairly complain (*Rom.* 9:19-20). People are warned not to do evil that good may come (*Rom.* 3:8). We must also consider that God always judges every person and situation righteously (*Gen.* 18:25; *Ex.* 34:6-7; *Deut.* 10:17-18; *Psa.* 9:4; 33:4-5; 89:14; 96:13; *Isa.* 9:7; 11:3-4; *Jer.* 11:20; *1 Pet.* 2:23; *Rev.* 19:11). The mystery of this relationship between the innocence of God and the culpability of man is beyond our capacity to fully understand; we must accept the paradox as it stands in Scripture (again take note of *Isa.* 55:8-9 & *Rom.* 11:33-36).

God is also the one who determines life and death (*Deut.* 32:39; *1 Sam.* 2:6-7; *2 Sam.* 12:15; *Job* 14:5; *Psa.* 90:3; 139:16; *Jer.* 15:2; *Ezk.* 24:16, 18; *Dan.* 5:23; *Luke* 2:29; 12:4-5, 20; *Acts* 17:24-26, 28; *Heb.* 9:27; *James* 4:14-15; *Rev.* 1:18). God is in control of physical ailments and diseases (*Ex.* 4:11; *John* 9:2-3). God controls the elements of creation and sends natural calamities (*2 Sam.* 22:8; *Job* 9:6; 38:8-11; *Psa.* 60:2; 78:26; 89:8-9; 104:4, 32; 105:16; 135:6-7; 147:15-18; 148:8; *Isa.* 13:13; 24:18-20; 29:6; *Jer.* 10:13; 15:2; *Nah.* 1:5-6; *Mark* 4:39, 41; *Luke* 8:24; *Rev.* 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Such natural calamity in another sense stems from the fall of man into sin that resulted in a cursed creation (*Rom.* 8:20). Note that God often sends calamity as a form of judgment as was often the case with Israel (*Jer.* 18:11, 17; 19:3, 15; 21:5, 10).

Many object to this understanding of God’s relationship to evil and calamity in the world, saying it makes God the author of evil and therefore culpable for it. Yet, if God merely allows evil to happen and does nothing about it, would He not be equally culpable? To suggest that God allows evil assumes that He can also disallow evil. If we say evil exists apart from God’s plan, then we must conclude that God was powerless to prevent its introduction into the world. Furthermore, it suggests that God has no control over the source from which evil came as well. That then suggests another power in the universe that has equal supremacy with God. Given that such a power would be evil presents the problem of dualism (i.e. two equal but opposite powers in mortal battle with one another) and the uncertainty of which power will ultimately triumph, good or evil. If God has no control over evil’s presence in the world we can have no certainty that good will triumph and that leaves us without hope.

### **3. Passages indicating man is spiritually dead & enslaved to sin and therefore powerless to obey God from the heart or obtain salvation on his own:**

*Gen.* 6:5; 8:21; *2 Chron.* 6:36; *Psa.* 14:1-3; 51:5; 53:1-3; 58:3; 130:3; 143:2; *Prov.* 20:9; *Eccl.* 7:2; 9:3; *Isa.* 53:6; *64:6*; *Jer.* 10:23; 13:23; 17:9; *Matt.* 7:16-18; 19:24-26; *Mark* 7:21-23; 10:26-27; *John* 1:13; 2:24-25; 3:19-20; 5:40; 8:31-34, 43-47; *Rom.* 1:21-25; 3:10-18, 20, 23; 5:6, 12, 19 (note we stand under a curse from Adam our representative and are therefore entrapped in the clutches of sin and death that he introduced to the human race – cf. *1 Cor.* 15:22); 6:16-22; 8:6-8; *1 Cor.* 1:18; 2:14; *2 Cor.* 4:3-4; *Eph.* 2:1-2, 5; 4:17-19; *Col.* 2:13; *Titus* 1:15; 3:3. The sinful depravity of human beings does not mean that people are as bad as they could be. Rather, it means sin has affected every aspect of our being – our hearts, minds, wills and bodies, such that we are powerless against it in our unconverted state. Spiritual death means a moral inability to seek after God, to please Him or otherwise desire reconciliation with Him in our estranged state of spiritual inertness (inertia refers to a state of perpetual rest or of perpetual movement in a single direction unless acted upon by an outside force). Fortunately, God’s “common grace” to all men prevents humanity from attaining a state of total anarchy and evil chaos even to the point of allowing the actions of unbelievers to be very beneficial in human relationships and society at large (cf. *Matt.* 7:11; *Rom.* 2:14-15; 13:1-4). God has endowed every human with a God-stamped conscience even though people suppress this reality by their sin (*Rom.* 1:18-20, 32; 2:14-15).

#### **4. Passages indicating that unbelievers are under the spiritually oppressive power of Satan:**

John 8:44; *2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 1 John 3:10; 5:19.* Satan powerfully tempts, blinds, deceives and motivates human beings toward evil, but he cannot coerce their will to sin. Sin springs solely from a sinful heart (Matt. 5:19; James 1:14-15). Also, all the activities of Satan are under God's control. Satan never does anything that God does not allow (cf. Luke 22:31-32). In addition to Job 1-2 compare 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chron. 21:1. Although Satan blinds the eyes of people, in an ultimate sense God Himself prevents people from seeing the truth (cf. Deut. 29:2-4; Isa. 6:9-10; 63:17; Matt. 11:25-27; 19:11; *Luke 10:21-22; 18:34; 19:42; John 12:37-40; 2 Thess. 2:11*). Note Jesus' response to why He taught the masses in parables that were often confounding and even completely un-understandable (Matt. 13:10-16). Likewise, God sovereignly controls who it is that will understand the truth (cf. Matt. 16:17; *1 Cor. 2:10, 12; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:10-11; Col. 1:27*).

#### **5. Passages indicating God directly enables man's will (especially in 'choosing' God):**

*Psa. 37:23; Prov. 16:9, 33; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1; Isa. 64:8; Jer. 10:23; 24:7; 31:3; Lam. 3:37; John 1:12-13; 6:37; 6:44, 65; Rom. 9:16-21; Phil 2:12-13* (note in vs. 13 here that the "work" of God "in you" includes supplying the "will" as well as the "work" necessary to the completion of salvation in us); *Rev. 17:17.* God changes our enslaved heart and thus our will so that we willingly believe and obey from the heart (cf. *Psa. 51:10; Jer. 32:39-40; Ezk. 11:19; 36:26; Heb. 13:20-21; James 1:18*). This means no one is ever dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom. All who enter desire to do so because their desires have been transformed (*Acts 16:14; Jer. 31:3*) although they may not be immediately aware of the divine source of their transformation. In this regard, from a strictly human perspective (note that much of the Bible is written this way), men 'freely' choose God for salvation, but can only do so because they have been divinely released from the bondage sin places upon the heart, mind and will. There is no sense of divine coercion (cf. *Jonah 3:10*). God's design in salvation includes the full satisfaction of participating in the transformation. It is not God's faith by which we believe, but our own (albeit supplied as a gift – see Section 7 on "faith") – secretly motivated by His gracious will. God's "electing grace" is irresistible in the best sense of that word. To say that someone can resist God's sovereign (decretive) will is to say he is more powerful than God. On the other hand, to say someone cannot resist God's will does not mean he is weaker than one who supposedly could resist it. Neither notion is Biblical. Rather, God draws men to Himself with cords of love (*Hos. 11:1-4; cf. also Hos. 3:1*). Note a distinction in the wills of God. Humans cannot resist the decretive will of God (i.e. unthwartable sovereign will); however, they can resist His preceptive will (i.e. that which He commands). See further discussion of this distinction in Section 8.

The relationship between God's will and man's will in salvation (and sanctification) is illustrated in the inspiration of Scripture (cf. *2 Tim. 3:16*). Scripture is the very Word of God right down to the tiniest letter (Matt. 5:18), yet God did not violate the intentions or personality of the individual writers He inspired. God moved their hearts and thus their wills to write precisely what He wanted while at the same time they each uniquely expressed themselves in words that can be identified as their own and not someone else's. This is referred to as a paradox (a mystery with only the appearance of a contradiction).

In further clarifying the issue of man's will it should be said that no one, neither God, nor Satan, nor any other entity violates the will of man. God created every human with a will and He does not coerce it to act against itself. In this limited sense we could say man's will is 'free.' However, man's will is not a supreme attribute that dominates over the faculties of his heart and mind. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The state of the heart and mind is what determines the choices of the will. In other words, man does not choose good or evil with equal ease as if his will is neutral and in a state of moral suspension free from the influences of any forces outside the will itself. A person will always choose according to his nature (the state of his heart and mind). If he has a corrupt nature, his choices

will be corrupt. If he has a regenerated (redeemed) nature, his choices correspond to his regenerated state. As a believer, if one walks by the Spirit his choices correspond to his regenerated state. If he walks in the flesh, his choices are rooted in what remains of his sinful state.

This is the argument of Jesus Himself in *Matt. 12:33-37* (cf. *Prov. 4:23*; *Ezk. 36:26-27*; *Matt. 7:16-20*; *15:18-20*). In this illustration a person is like a tree. Jesus implies that the root of the tree is the heart (and by further implication, the mind in Jewish thought). If the root is bad, the will can only choose or make bad fruit and vice versa. Again, the heart and mind is likened to a treasure box. If the treasure box has gold in it then gold will be brought forth from the will. If it has only rusty metal then only rusty metal choices can be made. Thus, as unbelievers, every person's will is only free to do that which most powerfully directs his will which is his sinful heart and mind (*Matt. 15:19*; cf. *Rom. 8:7*). Thus we can say that the unbeliever's will is in bondage to his sinful nature (*John 8:34*).

Men are not sinners because they choose to sin, they choose to sin because they are sinners. Sin is a root problem of the heart which is the person's Mission Control Center (*Prov. 4:23*) and which directs the will. The fact that a person chooses God for salvation is an indication that something more powerful than sin is at work influencing and enabling the will. That work is God's grace renewing the thoughts of the mind and changing the affections of the heart (*Psa. 51:10*; *Ezk. 11:19*; *36:26*), thus turning him from sin and towards God. The heart and mind must be changed if the will is to ever choose (i.e. believe) God.

#### **6. Passages indicating the election or predestination of believers by God:**

*Ex. 19:4*; *Deut. 4:37-39*; *7:6-7*; *10:14-15*; *14:2*; *Neh. 9:7*; *Psa. 33:12*; *139:16*; *Isa. 41:8-9*; *43:1, 15*; *44:1-2*; *45:4*; *64:8*; *Jer. 1:5*; *Matt. 11:25-27*; *22:14*; *Luke 10:22*; *John 5:21*; *6:37, 39*; *10:16*; *13:18*; *15:16, 19*; *17:2, 6, 9, 24*; *Acts 2:39*; *9:15*; *18:10*; *Rom. 4:17*; *8:29-30*; *9:11-13*; *10:20*; *11:5, 29*; *1 Cor. 1:26-31*; *Gal. 1:15*; *Eph. 1:4-5, 11-12*; *1 Thess. 5:9*; *2 Thess. 2:13-14*; *2 Tim. 2:10*; *Titus 1:1*; *James 1:18*; *2:5*; *1 Pet. 1:1-2, 3*; *2 Pet. 1:10*; *Rev. 17:8, 14*. These passages clearly teach that God elects or chooses men for salvation. He does not choose based on foreseeing that men will believe (see Section 10 on "foreknowledge"). It is simply an act of His 'freely' bestowing undeserved grace upon sinners otherwise destined for hell of their own accord (see Section 11 on "damnation"). In this sense, it is God's will that is truly 'free' not man's (see Section 1 on "God's sovereign will"). Note that *Eph. 1:4* indicates that people have been chosen in Christ before "the foundation of the world." This points to God's clear plan before Creation. This common phrase is also used in Revelation (*Rev. 13:8*; *17:8*) to refer to those whose names have been written in the "book of life" from "the foundation of the world" in distinction to those who either worship the beast or suffer the pains of God's judgments in the Tribulation period (*Rev. 4-18*). The term "election" in Scripture speaks directly of God's choosing believers whereas the term "predestination" speaks more of their divinely chosen destiny with respect to time (i.e. before the foundation of the world).

#### **7. Passages indicating that faith and repentance unto salvation is a gift of God:**

Passages indicating that repentance is supplied by God include *Psa. 80:3, 7, 19*; *Jer. 31:18-19*; *Lam. 5:21*; *Acts 5:31*; *8:22*; *11:18*; *Rom. 2:4*; *2 Tim. 2:25*. Passages indicating that faith is supplied by God include *Psa. 22:9-10*; *John 6:37*; *Acts 3:16*; *13:48*; *14:27*; *16:14* [cf. also *Luke 24:45*]; *18:27*; *Rom. 12:3*; *1 Cor. 2:5*; *2 Cor. 4:6*; *Phil. 1:29* [faith is a gracious gift]; *2 Thess. 2:13*; *Heb. 12:2*; *James 2:5*; *2 Pet. 1:1*; *1 John 5:1*. In this last passage being "born of God" is a passive verb, meaning that it was the result of God's action not the believer's. Furthermore, it is a perfect tense verb which indicates something that took place in the past and continues to have present ramifications. The first part of the verse indicates that "everyone [presently] believing" (a present participle) are those who have already been born of God. Compare this to *1 John 2:29* which has the same exact construction with 2 parallel verbs. Those who "[have been] born of God" (perfect passive) are said to "practice" (present participle) righteousness. No one would say that practicing righteousness is what makes one

born again. It is the other way around. The same is true for those who believe that Jesus is the Christ in 5:1 (see also 1 Cor. 12:3 where one's profession of Jesus as Lord is due to the Holy Spirit's enablement).

*Heb. 12:2* says Jesus is the "author and perfecter of faith." This statement comes on the heels of Heb. 11, which is written as a sort of 'Hall of Fame of Faith.' Thus, "faith" here is the kind of faith exercised by believers and does not refer to the content of faith. The word "author" here means, "originator" or "founder." This means the focus is on Jesus as the originator of faith itself (i.e. as an action) not 'the faith' as in the Christian Faith (i.e. set of truths to be believed). The context compares faith to running with endurance (vs. 1) and Jesus is given as an example of one who endured the cross faithfully. An enduring faith is necessary if one is not to "grow weary and lose heart" in the Christian life (vs. 3).

Note that in *Eph. 2:8* the pronoun "that/ this" must grammatically (according to rules of Greek grammar) refer to the whole first clause of the verse as the "gift" of God. Thus, salvation "by grace" including "through faith" is all part of the "gift." John 15:5 indicates that all spiritual fruit is a direct result of abiding in Christ. We are helpless without His spiritual power. *Phil. 1:6* indicates that God began a good work in us (at the moment of conversion) and will continue to perfect that work until the day of Christ. Note in this regard, believers have no room for boasting about freely coming to the Lord – for salvation is wholly a work of God (*Rom. 3:26-28; 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16* – especially 1:18; 26-31; 2:5; 2:14; *2 Cor. 3:5; 4:6-7*). Note that in *Rom. 3:26-28* faith is contrasted with works and forms the basis for no boasting in salvation. God purposely designed salvation to eliminate any thought of personal boasting, self-righteousness, self-glorification, self-sufficiency and pride and instead to cultivate absolute humility before a God upon whom we are wholly dependent (cf. *Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2; James 4:6*). God did not leave room for a slight degree of boasting. He seeks to exclude boasting altogether shutting it completely off in order to cultivate genuine humility. When a child is helplessly swept up by the waves along the shore and will be suddenly cast out into the treacherous sea, but his father reaches out and saves him in an instant the child does not boast; rather with heart palpitating he embraces his father with humble tears of joy and relief. Salvation by faith *alone* must be understood in light of salvation by grace *alone*. Grace involves the reception of a gift we did not deserve and one which we could never earn.

Some inadvertently and unwittingly view faith as a meritorious action freely expressed of our own accord in response to the call of the gospel. In order to clarify this notion consider the following questions. Why do some believe the gospel and some don't, especially if each person is equally given the same opportunity to believe based on the same information? For example, why did many people listen to the clear and perfect presentation of the gospel by Jesus, yet some believed and some did not? Were those who believed somehow better than those who did not? Did they have some inherent virtue that predisposed them to accept the message while others did not have the same capacity? Unless you take into account that *all* men are spiritually dead, enslaved to sin and to the Satanic power of this world, you must conclude that some are better than others. That is, some exercised faith because they were more personally compelled to do so; they acted according to their superior moral and intellectual instincts in contrast to the lesser instincts of the person who did not believe under the same circumstances. This assumes sin has no effect on our choices and responses to the truth as if we were a blank slate with regard to spiritual things (or in other words, our wills are neutrally inclined). If so, such people would have reason for boasting in themselves for believing. But if faith is a gift of God, we can only boast in Him with humble appreciation for extending His grace toward us while we were yet helpless sinners (*Rom. 5:6, 8*).

Note the connection between faith and election in *John 10:25-26*. People do not believe Christ merely because of some self-determining act not to (certainly this is true), but more pointedly because they are not one of His sheep that hear His voice (vss. 27-29; cf. vss. 3, 14, 16). Both *John 10:28-29 & 6:37-39* indicate that people "come" (i.e. believe) because they are "given" to Christ by the Father.

Subsequently they are secure, not due to any self-determination but due to the fact that they are given by a God who is “greater than all” (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5). Likewise, *John 12:39* indicates that the multitudes listening to Jesus “could not believe” because God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts (vs. 40).

Yet for the one who does believe, nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:31-39) because God freely choose them for justification and glorification (*Rom. 8:28-30*) simply because it was His sheer pleasure to do so (*Eph. 1:4b-5*; cf. also *Jer. 31:3*) and for no other reason. As an aside, *Rom. 8:29-30* is referred to as the golden chain of redemption. God foreknows those whom He predestines; then He calls them, then He justifies them, then He glorifies them. This is an unbreakable chain of events in election unto salvation. Since the calling of believers (i.e. responding to the voice of the Shepherd – John 10) automatically results in justification and we know justification is by faith (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24), it follows that saving faith must also be supplied in the calling. Thus, it is an effectual calling – effecting faith unto justification.

Those who seek to ground the eternal security of the believer in anything other than God’s gracious choice in election stand on unstable terrain. If man’s will is neutral so that it is free to choose one way or the other, what restrains that will to renege on any previous decisions? For example, if one holds to this libertarian view of man’s will, a man could choose to believe in Christ for salvation and then later choose not to believe in Christ, thus forfeiting his salvation. This is the consistent view of libertarian freedom of the will. However, some wish to maintain this view while at the same time holding that God causes all believers to be eternally secure (i.e. “once saved, always saved”). However, what would keep the believer from choosing to no longer believe in Christ for salvation? Would not God have to prevent unbelief in this case and thus restrain the will from freely choosing this option? Others would say the person can choose to disbelieve Christ and yet remain saved. However, does he not remain saved under protest? In other words, if the person completely rejects Christ and no longer wills to be saved, it logically follows that God would have to hold that person in his salvation against his will if his eternal security is to be maintained. Those who hold to libertarian freedom of the will are inconsistent in their views if they also hold at the same time to the eternal security of the believer.

A consistent understanding of God’s sovereignty grounds the eternal security of the believer in God’s gracious preservation of the believer’s faith and life. As *Phil. 1:6* says, “he who began a good work in you will perfect [complete] it until the day of Christ Jesus.” According to *Phil. 2:12-13* the believer is to persevere in the faith and work of his salvation (vs. 12). However, it is God who is powerfully at work in the believer so that he will most certainly persevere until the end. No one shall enter eternity with Christ without being conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 12:14); yet it is clear that although the believer fully participates in the responsible outworking of salvation in sanctification, it is God who truly sanctifies us through the work of the indwelling Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13; see also 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 2:11). This compatibilist view of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility is the only way to make sense of the believer’s eternal security as well as the impossibility of ever falling away from the genuineness of one’s salvation.

## **8. Passages indicating that man is responsible to obey/ believe/ repent:**

There are obviously innumerable passages inviting people to repent and believe or commanding them to do so (e.g. *Josh. 24:15*; *Isa. 1:18*; *45:22*; *55:1-7*; *Matt. 11:28-30*; *Luke 13:1-9*; *John 3:16*; *6:29*; *Acts 17:30*; *Rev. 22:17*). This is an indication that God’s sovereignty does not abrogate the responsibility of human beings to obey the commands of God from the heart as He desires and furthermore, indicates that we have a *natural ability* to do so (otherwise it would appear superfluous and impertinent for God to command us in the first place). However, due to the depravity of sin we have a *moral inability* to obey/ believe, etc... We have a *natural inability* to fly no matter how hard we may flap our arms. We cannot be held responsible for any *natural inability* we may

have. However, because we have a *natural ability* to obey/ believe but are enslaved by our own wills not to do so, we are therefore held responsible for our *moral inability* since this stems from our wills (albeit influenced by our corrupted hearts). Subsequently, the whole point of the Gospel is that we cannot obey God's commands from the heart because it is enslaved to sin and therefore we need Jesus to be our Savior who will rescue us from our *moral inability*.

True salvation is an acknowledgment that we are unable apart from God's power to believe and be saved (*John 6:44; 15:5; 2 Cor. 4:6*). God's command to believe and be saved is part of His revealed will to all people (sometimes called His "preceptive will" because He commands that we obey certain precepts) which men can and do resist (cf. Acts 7:51 – again take note of the unregenerate's moral inability). However, God's decretive will (i.e. His irresistible secret or sovereign will) in election/ predestination is hidden in His eternal counsels and only revealed when someone believes. Note that passages like 1 Tim. 2:4 and 2 Pet. 3:9 fall under the category of God's revealed or preceptive will. If they were part of His decretive will they would not make sense because obviously not all are saved for heaven or kept from perishing in hell. Another way of indicating the differences here is viewing the "whosoever" passages under the general "call" of God to repent and believe (*Matt. 22:14*). However, the specific (or effectual) "call" of God is His irresistible and irrevocable election of a few (*Acts 2:39; Rom. 8:30; 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 1:23-29; Gal. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:8-9; 2 Pet. 1:10*).

A remarkable illustration of compatibilism, that is, God's sovereign purpose mediated through the means of human responsibility is found in the shipwreck of Paul in Acts 27. God irrevocably promised Paul that he and all his sailing companions would be saved giving Paul great confidence (vs. 24-25). However, when the ship was running aground on the rocks several men began making an attempt to escape using the lifeboat (vs. 30). Paul warned that they must remain in the ship if they are to be saved (vs. 31). As a consequence of this admonition the sailors let the lifeboat fall into the sea (vs. 32). Paul then reassured them of their preservation (vs. 34). In the end, they were all brought safely to land according to God's purpose, yet not in violation of their need to persevere under the conditions Paul set forth. The certain and irrevocable promise of their preservation was paradoxically secured precisely through the means of the sailors' obedience. God does not accomplish His sovereign purposes in salvation apart from the human responsibility to heed His commands (e.g. exercising faith and repentance); the two always go together. God ordains the *ends* as well as the *means* to those ends. This unique design in God's providential dealings allows believers the joys, sorrows, tensions, etc... of direct participation in God's purposes that subsequently supplies for us an appreciation of the life God uniquely designed. Thus we are not indifferent automatons passively responding to divine deterministic forces with no credible experiences that distinguish us as truly human; each individual having unique and very personal responses to God's activity in our lives. Note again the illustration regarding the inspiration of Scripture under Section 5 dealing with "God influencing man's will."

## **9. Passages indicating that believers are responsible to preach the Gospel and evangelize:**

Note that God's sovereign purposes in salvation do not abrogate the responsibility to preach the gospel or evangelize. In commanding the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:18-20*), Christ promises His "authority" (can be translated "supernatural power") and presence (vs. 20) throughout the whole enterprise. In this regard, God chooses not only the 'ends' (salvation) but also the 'means' (steps to salvation). The 'means' by which God has chosen to spread the Gospel is through weak and powerless human vessels (*2 Cor. 4:7* – note story of Jonah). Without the humanly preached Word, God chooses not to save (cf. *Rom. 10:11-15*). Furthermore, without the personal exercise of faith and repentance, God chooses not to save. Notice that faith comes by "hearing" the Word (*Rom. 10:17*). The Word preached has divine power to change hearts and minds (*Rom. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:14-16; 2 Thess. 2:10, 13-14; 1 Pet. 1:23-25*; cf. also *Isa. 55:11*). It takes a power greater than that which resides in ourselves to achieve the miracle of new spiritual birth. This power comes directly from God and is

what effects salvation (*Rom. 1:16*). The regenerating power of God is mediated by the “word of truth” – *James 1:18*. We cannot save ourselves anymore than a man can choose to be born.

Read *John 3:5-8* carefully; see also *Tit. 3:4-6* and *1 Pet. 1:3* (note Spirit’s work in vs. 2). Note in these latter passages salvation is a work of God’s Spirit in the individual proactively regenerating him; that is, changing/ transforming the person. Note that we don’t regenerate ourselves, the Spirit of God does through applying the Word of God (cf. *1 Pet. 1:23*) to hearts and minds. Note that in each instance of the phrase “born of God/ Him” in *1 John* (cf. *2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18*), the verb “born” is a passive verb. This means it refers to action done on behalf of the regenerated individual by God, not as a result of anything done on his or her part. The inward secret and sometimes undetected (cf. *John 3:8*) regenerating work of the Spirit results in the corresponding conscious outward response of the converted sinner via faith and repentance (cf. *Acts 16:14*). While the preacher must call unbelievers to conversion (i.e. command and compel them to exercise faith and repentance), he does not call the unbeliever to be regenerated for that is a work of the Holy Spirit. Note the call to conversion in passages such as *Isa. 45:22; 55:7; Ezk. 33:11; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; John 14:1; Acts 2:38; 16:31; Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 5:20*, et. al. Though all recipients of the gospel message are indiscriminately called to conversion only those “appointed unto eternal life” actually believe (*Acts 13:48*). Believers are responsible to preach the gospel, but are not responsible for the response to the gospel. The latter is God’s responsibility.

#### **10. Passages regarding God’s foreknowledge and election:**

Note the passages indicating that God’s choice of those for salvation is based upon His “foreknowledge” (*Rom. 8:29 & 1 Pet. 1:1-2*; cf. “knowing” with the sense of choosing in *Gen. 18:19; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2*). The object of this “foreknowledge” is always persons and never actions (i.e. faith/ believing, etc...). Even if these passages were to refer to pre-knowledge of ‘free’ human actions, how can those actions be free in any genuine sense? If such actions are already known prior to their occurrence how could any other action conceivably take place? If man is truly free (libertarian freedom) God could not know what man chooses until he does so. Also, if God’s election is based on what is already known beforehand, there is no need for ‘freely choosing’ since the decision is already determined. In this sense, God’s choosing becomes redundant and therefore unnecessary. Furthermore, if God must first look into the future to see what choice man will make with regard to salvation then God must learn something He did not previously know. This would compromise God’s omniscience and perfect knowledge (*Isa. 40:13-14*). Again, those who hold this view of foreknowledge are inconsistent in their views. It is believed that God desires all men to be saved (no distinctions in God’s will are made here) and makes every effort to see that they are saved (even though in the end, it is their effort that saves them not God’s in this way of thinking). But why would God do this if He already knows who will choose Him and who will not? It would be wasted energy on His part and makes utter nonsense of foreknowledge.

A proper understanding of God’s foreknowledge shows it is in fact an aspect of His omniscience which in turn is tied to His omnipotence and thus to His sovereign purposes in history. In this sense, foreknowledge is simply a dimension of divine predestination. God, as the Master Architect of history, has a pre-determined, pre-known plan that will be carried out and cannot be thwarted by the common idea of man’s independent ‘free’ choices in spiritual matters (*Job 42:1-2; Isa. 14:24, 27; Dan. 4:35*). In *Romans 9* Paul anticipates the natural objections to this notion and shows that in our sinful nature we are man-centered (i.e. wanting to take credit for accomplishments in us) and not God-centered (i.e. giving God all the credit and glory – *Psa. 115:1; Isa. 48:11*). See *Rom. 9:14-21* in response to the whole argument of vs. 6-29.

## 11. Passages indicating God does not directly choose some for damnation:

Notice that the Bible never says that God *actively* chooses some for damnation as He does some for salvation. God's sovereignty is not based on 'determinism' which says we are merely robots or computers that God programs. This would be to say that man has *no* will. The Bible speaks of man's will, but never says it is 'free' in regard to moral and spiritual matters, rather it is enslaved to our own inner desires and corruptions (Matt. 5:19; James 1:14-15), having inherited the curse of our father Adam (*Rom. 5:12*). Also, remember that God cannot directly cause evil or sin since He Himself is without sin (James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; 2:16; cf. Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4; Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18). The unbeliever is condemned to hell not because God directly consigned him there, but because of his own natural rebellion against God (John 3:17-20; 36; Rom. 1:18). God is not obligated to save any since all deserve eternal punishment. Grace cannot be demanded otherwise it is not grace. Nonetheless, God *passively* obligates Himself to prepare sinful vessels for destruction whom He has not *actively* predestined for salvation (*Rom. 9:19-23*; see also John 17:12; 1 Pet. 2:8. Note that the term "prepared" in Rom. 9:22 with regard to vessels of wrath is a passive participle whereas the term "prepared beforehand" in Rom. 9:23 with regard to vessels of mercy is an active verb). God gives men over to their sinful desires (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:13-15; John 9:39) chiefly by not offering them the regenerating operations of the Spirit and abandoning them to their otherwise depraved sinful proclivities. This is why when God chooses to save some it is truly a work of His sovereign grace and love toward undeserving sinners and for no other reason. Divine Grace and sovereign election go hand in hand. God rescues those who were already dead in trespasses and sins and had the same status of being children of wrath as all sinners have (*Eph. 2:1-7*; cf. *Rom. 5:6, 8*).

To clarify the issue, election in Scripture is never spoken of outside the language of God's love, mercy and freedom. Thus, election *is* the display of undeserved favor upon sinful vessels effecting their salvation based on the freely bestowed good pleasure of God (*Eph. 1:5-6, 9*). On the other hand, Damnation is not the extension of favor but the rational and reasonable result of God's justice so there can be no cry of divine unfairness (*Rom. 9:20*). For this reason, damnation for the reprobate is not a matter of God's freely choosing, but the obligations of His justice. Note that Jesus came into the world not to judge it, but to offer it salvation (John 3:17; 12:47). Those who reject Jesus' offer are judged already because of willful unbelief (John 3:18, 36). Furthermore, God does not desire the death of the wicked (Ezk. 18:23; 31-32; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:8-9), rather that all men should repent (Acts 17:30), believe (John 6:29) and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). These passages speak of God's will for all men in the matter of salvation and corresponds to His preceptive will (i.e. God's revealed will concerning His commands and precepts for mankind which can be resisted) and not His decretive will (i.e. God's sovereign and secret will which cannot be resisted, rather always comes to pass such as in the matter of election). Therefore, it is not properly biblical to say that God purposely choose some for damnation. It is more appropriate to say He choose some for salvation and passed over others who are already condemned by their unbelief (John 3:18, 36).

Election then is the only way to make sense of divine grace. The lost sheep do not seek out the Shepherd; the Shepherd seeks them out and for joy of seeing the Shepherd free them from their lost estate and helpless bondage, they gladly go to rest in His loving arms of redemption rejoicing in His salvation. This is clearly indicated in 1 John 4:10 (note the context of vs. 7-11) in which we did not seek out God because we first loved Him and He then expressed His love for us in response. Rather it is the other way around. God first sought us out and extended His love toward us (see 1 John 3:1; cf. also Deut. 4:37; *Jer. 31:3*) that produced in us a desire to return that love (vs. 19) as new creations in Christ.