



## Opening Comments

Lorraine Boettner has said:

“This is a doctrine which deals with some of the most profound truths revealed in Scripture and it will abundantly repay careful study on the part of Christian people. If any are disposed to reject it without first making a careful study of its claims, let them not forget that it has commanded the firm belief of multitudes of the wisest and best men that have ever lived, and that there must, therefore, be strong reasons in favor of its truth.”<sup>1</sup>

In this workshop, we will attempt to tackle a big and often confusing topic. This topic of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility is a very interconnected doctrine that could spread on forever into many different related topics. We will not be able to explore extensively all the intricate details and related topics in our limited time. As a result, for the purposes of this workshop, we will have to limit the scope of our efforts today to focus on what is the pertinent core of the doctrine. We'll keep 3 points in mind:

- **Our focus today is on the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility.** We'll be discussing this topic in relation to the text of Exodus which sparked this workshop. Did God harden Pharaoh's heart, or did Pharaoh harden his own heart? We must keep this in mind as we progress this evening to help guard from bunny trails we cannot pursue in our limited time together.
- **Our goal tonight is not to offer philosophical speculations, but rather, to see what the Bible clearly says about this topic.** We will see directly from several relevant texts that the Bible is not unclear on this topic. We want to go as far as the Bible goes on speaking about this topic, but we also want to go no further than it speaks. So, that will help to frame the scope of our discussion as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

We want to mine all that the Bible says to this topic, but also stop ourselves from speculating into the secret things which God has chosen not to reveal to us.

**Our cultural context probably helps us frame some of the difficulties we encounter when thinking about this topic.** We have been conditioned by a Western culture that prizes democracy - everyone gets a vote. However, the context of the Bible was a time and place where Monarchs ruled. A king was the uncontested sovereign over his territory. In parts of the world where there is still monarchical rule today, we find that there is a lesser struggle with the idea of sovereignty as there is a ready analogue in the experience of people. So, we must realize that while this is an important topic for us, we also have certain cultural influences that can make it more difficult for us.

"Our age, with its emphasis on democracy, doesn't like this view, and perhaps no other age liked it less. The tendency today is to exalt man and to give God only a very limited part in the affairs of the world." (Lorraine Boettner)

- **We are a loving family having a dialogue** - I am very happy that we get to tackle this topic together as a church family, and as I think about this workshop and the people in attendance, my heart is full of love and joy. I think this is such an appropriate context for these sorts of discussions. Often times, some topics of theological debate can be conducted in forums and forms which are not helpful towards gracious interaction and dialogue and can denigrate into unproductive quarrelling past each other. It is in the context of a loving church family, committed to one another, that we often find the most fruitful discussion and growth in these areas.

So ultimately, I want this to frame our discussion together this evening: We are a loving church family working through this challenging doctrine together, not theological enemies trying to one-up one another. With that, **let's pray and ask the Lord's blessing on us.**

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to have a fruitful discussion of this topic, we will need to clearly define our terms so that we're not speaking past each other.

## Divine Sovereignty

A.W. Pink said,

"To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purposes, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3) ... The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is sovereign, we affirm His right to govern the universe, which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that His right is the right of the potter over the clay... We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside His own will and nature, that God is a law unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any."<sup>2</sup>

**The doctrine of the sovereignty of God states simply that God sovereignly controls and directs all things in the universe and whatsoever that comes to pass according to His eternal decree.**

## Human Responsibility

**This is simply the concept that people freely make choices for which they are culpable or responsible.**

If someone freely chooses to kill someone else, they are guilty of that act - they are responsible for the act, and must be held accountable for it. This much is clear and uncontested by all. However, the struggle comes when we try to reconcile the fact that people are held morally responsible for their actions, yet also affirm that God is in sovereign control over everything.

On the surface, it seems like these two things are incompatible - and this is the reason for our workshop today.

## Calvinism & Arminianism

Many people throw around the terms 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism' without adequately understanding what they're talking about - particularly young twenty-something-year-old males who've just binged watched hours of John Piper and Paul Washer YouTube clips. I know because I used to be one. Of the many who will claim these titles of 'Calvinist' or

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<sup>2</sup> A.W. Pink, The Sovereignty of God, 13-15

'Arminian', few have actually read the works of those to whom these titles owe their name. How many have actually read Calvin's Institutes or other significant works to understand the totality of his thought, and similarly for Arminius?

**Many people tend to assume that only Calvinists believe in God's sovereignty, while only Arminians believe in human free will. This is plainly false and misrepresentative of both theological systems.** Both affirm these two concepts. However, they differ in how they understand the limit and nature of each. However, in popular culture, the misunderstandings and baggage associated with these theological terms remain due to the ignorance of many on the actual facts.

For this reason, we will not be focusing primarily on these two theological systems today - as it would be an unfair treatment of them to boil them down just to this topic of divine sovereignty and free will. Calvin wrote much more than just this. Even the so-called '5 points' of Calvinism were not written by Calvin himself (although they do reflect a summary of part his teaching). The baggage that these terms carry with those who are unfamiliar with them is often not helpful to the fruitful discussion. So, for the purposes of this workshop, we will not be framing it with these terms, but rather focusing on what the Bible has to say about the topic.

**Any theological system only stands or falls as far as it aligns with what God's authoritative, infallible, sufficient Word.**

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## **THE CHALLENGE OF LIBERTARIAN FREE WILL**

We will be using the phrase 'libertarian free will' in reference to a specific kind of understanding of free will in today's discussion. A common myth which many people believe is that Arminianism believes that people have 'free will' and Calvinism does not. However, this is overly simplistic and untrue. Both systems affirm some understanding of human free will. The difference is that Arminian systems of thought affirm what is called a 'libertarian' understanding of free will:

**Libertarianism believes that a person's will is so free that nothing decisively influences them to make a choice one way or another between several options.**

Ultimately, the reason for that choice lies solely in the person's will itself. The libertarian understanding of free will understands that if people are given two choices and chose one

choice in one instance, that if the same circumstances were to be repeated, they could choose something different. Their choice is unaffected by any external influence but rather springs up entirely from within themselves.

Roger Olsen, an Arminian theologian, says, "Free agency is the ability to do other than what one in fact does." He goes on to argue elsewhere that God exercises sovereign control of events by means of His strong persuasion or influence. But Olsen claims, "Free and rational creatures have the power to resist the influence of God. This power was given to them by God Himself."<sup>3</sup> So, the argument of Arminian theologians is not that God lacks the power to control our choices, but rather, that He doesn't choose to do so for the sake of maintaining our liberty. They believe this is especially true in regards to salvation. While they reject the idea that man can choose Christ without the aid of the Holy Spirit, they argue, "no matter how much or how strong the aid of the Holy Spirit may be, the 'yes' decision [to choose Christ] is still a decision that can be rightly called the person's decision. Also, he could have said no."<sup>4</sup>

"Libertarianism argues that some conditions (reasons, causes) may be necessary for a choice to be made, but they are never sufficient for that choice to be made; otherwise, we are not free."<sup>5</sup>

**Libertarian free will is often simplified as the ability of contrary choice.**

## The Case for Libertarianism

We don't want to caricature Libertarians. They do point to several passages in scripture which seem to support their position, as well as what seems to be sound reason. For example:

- Commands to 'choose whom you will serve' – e.g. Joshua 24:15
- Give as one has freely decided in their heart, not under compulsion – 2 Cor. 9:7
- "Whosoever" will believe in Jesus will be saved – e.g. John 3:16
- People resist God's commands and desires – e.g. Acts 7:15 (Stephen rebukes people as stiff-necked and always resisting the Holy Spirit)

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Olsen, *Arminian Theology*, p. 131

<sup>4</sup> Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, p.52

<sup>5</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p.19

- God seems to change His mind based on the actions & decisions of people – e.g. Exodus 32:14 (the Golden Calf rebellion - God relents from destroying the people after Moses intercedes for them).
- Jesus expresses his desire to gather Jerusalem to him like a mother hen, but they would not (Matt. 23:37).
- 2 Peter 3:9 says that God doesn't wish that any should perish, but that all would come to repent, and 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God desires all people to be saved.

With all of these passages and many others that libertarians point to, it seems like there is a pretty strong case for this understanding of free will!

Furthermore, libertarians argue that the commands of scripture imply the ability to fulfill them, otherwise it would be unjust of God to demand them. Ought implies can. Norman Geisler argues:

“Moral obligations imply that we have self-determining moral free choice. For *ought* implies *can*. That is, what we ought to do implies that we can do it. Otherwise, we have to assume that the Moral Lawgiver is prescribing the irrational, commanding that we do what is literally impossible for us to do.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, this idea of libertarian free will seems obvious and is assumed by us because we live in a culture where we're bombarded by a multitude of choices which we are free to choose from. For example, you go to a store to buy shampoo. What kind? Aveda or Aveeno, Neutrogena, Pantene? Organic? Vegan? There is a plethora of choices which you are free to make! You don't feel like you're under any compulsion to buy one or the other, and you could have chosen something else. How could it be any other way? It seems so intuitive to us.

## The Problems with Libertarianism

Firstly, although the idea of libertarian free will sounds logical, it proves that in fact, if it were true, it would be absurd.

If people truly had libertarian free will, we wouldn't really resemble persons at all. We'd instead be irrational and chaotic beings because the control they exercise over their choices would be severely hampered. This is because every choice we make is contingent—

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, p. 30

it is dependent on some or several prior factors and influences, both internal and external, which together provide sufficient reason or cause for your choice.

If, as libertarian free will supposes, no set of circumstances were sufficiently able to produce a person's choice and they can always choose otherwise, then we would never be certain of why we actually chose what we did. There'd never be a sufficient explanation for the cause of our choice. They'd just be random. Not only that, the basis for our judicial system would break down since it is based on establishing plausible and compelling motives for an act or crime – which would be impossible in a libertarian system where acts can truly spring up randomly without need for sufficient causes.

“If our choices have the possibility of being cut off from our circumstances, desires, motives, beliefs, and so forth, then in what sense can we say that choices come from ourselves at all?”<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the argument that *ought* implies *can* and that inability absolves guilt proves to be untrue.

For example, if Adam borrows \$4000 from Zack and was unable to pay him back, that certainly doesn't excuse him from his obligation. Just because he ought to pay him back, but cannot doesn't make him guilt-free. Likewise, God isn't obligated to dismiss our guilt simply because we cannot repay our debt or fulfill His moral commands perfectly. Furthermore, this also misunderstands what compatibilism actually believes. Compatibilists do not believe that we are incapable of fulfilling God's law perfectly because of our inability, but rather because we don't want to because our will is corrupted by our fallen nature. For example, every young man has the capacity to not look at porn, and just telling them that it is wrong doesn't solve the problem. Why? Is it that they don't know? No. Is it because they cannot not look at it? No. It is because their sinful desire is so compelling that it is as if they can do no other. But they are not forced in any way to sin. We sin willfully, and thus it is entirely just for God to condemn sin.

This brings up one of the major problems with the concept of libertarian free will: scripture tells us clearly that since the Fall, humanity's will is not free but rather in bondage to sin.

Finally, this is where we must stop and realize that many things which seem 'intuitive' to us may not necessarily be true. Much of our natural reasoning is intuitive, yet it is God's Word which brings truth to correct our distorted vision – and it is similar here. We must bring

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 32

God's Word to bear on this question, and not just default to our human and faulty intuitions. If left to our own intuitions, none of us would have thought of the Cross as the means of salvation. Many of God's ways go against our natural intuitions for His ways and thoughts are far higher than ours.

**Man is not the measure of ultimate truth; God and His Word are.**

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## **BIBLICAL COMPATIBILISM**

The term we will be using to describe the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility today is called 'compatibilism'.

**Compatibilism simply means that these two truths are not in disagreement or at odds with each other, but rather are compatible.**

"Biblical compatibilism says that our choices proceed from the most compelling motives and desires we have, which in turn is conditioned on our base nature, whether good or evil. The more voluntarily and unconstrainedly our choices are made, the more freedom and responsibility we have in making them."<sup>8</sup>

### **A. What It Is NOT**

Sometimes, it is useful to define what you are not saying - especially when there are common misunderstandings or presuppositions on a topic. So, we will start off briefly by defining what we're NOT saying.

#### **I. Compatibilism is NOT Fatalism**

**We are NOT teaching fatalism or what is otherwise called 'hard determinism'.**

This was actually one of the questions submitted for this workshop:

"Does the doctrine of Predestination align with the secular Philosophy of Determinism?"

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<sup>8</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 6



This teaching comes from pagan thought where blind, indifferent, impersonal fate directs the destinies of people. There is nothing that the person can do to avoid this fate. No matter what course of action they take, they end up at their fate - and so the validity of human choices and responsibility are destroyed.

The classic example is that of the tragic Greek myth of Oedipus:

Oedipus was born to King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes. Upon his birth, an oracle was given that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. The king wished to thwart the prophecy, so he sent a shepherd-servant to leave Oedipus to die on a mountainside. However, the shepherd took pity on the baby and passed him to another shepherd who gave Oedipus to King Polybus and Queen Merope to raise as their own. Oedipus learned about the prophecy that he would end up killing his father and marrying his mother. However, he was unaware of his true parentage, and so believed he was fated to murder Polybus and marry Merope, so he left for Thebes.

On his way, he met an older man and killed him in a quarrel. Continuing on to Thebes, he found that the king of the city (Laius) had been recently killed and that the city was at the mercy of a monster. Oedipus defeated the monster and won the throne of the dead king - and the hand in marriage of the king's widow, who was also (unbeknownst to him) his mother Jocasta.

Years later, Oedipus finds out he had killed his father, Laius. Jocasta, upon realizing that she had married her own son, hanged herself. Oedipus then seized two pins from her dress and blinded himself with them.

Terrible story and there are many other pagan myths like it, but it represents well the pagan form of fatalism. No matter how the king, queen and Oedipus tried, they could not thwart their fate. Their choices didn't matter. It is like the pagan saying, "Que sera, sera" - whatever will be, will be. We reject this form of determinism, and this is not the teaching of compatibilism or the bible, but rather a distortion of it.

The Bible's teaching of compatibilism between God's sovereignty and our responsibility is not about blind, cold fate or simply the product of material processes like secular determinism asserts. Instead it is the relationship of a Personal and loving God with His finite and created creatures. Instead of being fated to whatever is either blindly determined by fate or one's genes, Biblical compatibilism affirms the necessity and importance of choices and the reality of their consequences within the framework of the loving, wise and sovereign plan of God.

## II. Compatibilism is NOT God forcing someone against their will

This is often a misunderstanding of libertarians, that compatibilists believe God is forcing someone to do something against their will—that God forces otherwise good people to do bad things. However, this is not at all what biblical compatibilism teaches.

Biblical compatibilism teaches that every person always acts in accordance with their highest motive and desires in accordance with their nature. The problem is that since the Fall, our natures are fallen and our desires are sinful. So, God does not force anyone to sin, but rather we are lured away by our own sinful desires (see James 1:13-15).

Conversely, when God brings someone to Himself, He is not dragging them kicking and screaming against their will. Scripture teaches that God gives us a new nature that desires the things of God. This is the new birth, and the reason why we come to Him. We cannot produce the new nature in ourselves, it is given to us by God. Furthermore, God gives us His Spirit living in us that testifies to truth and to our adoption in Christ. It is by the Spirit that God's people live lives that are pleasing to Him.

We see this clearly in Philippians 2:12-13 where Paul tells believers to:

“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

God supplies the will and power to do His good pleasure in believers – this is the basis upon which they work out their salvation.

Consider this example: a lion will not eat a plate of vegetables no matter how appealing you try to make it to him, because it is not in his nature to desire that, and he will always devour a steak because that is in his nature to desire. The only way to change that would be to change the lion's nature. This is what happens to us in salvation—God gives us a new nature to desire the things that please Him.

Compatibilists believe in biblical free will—that is, that we always will act freely according to our compelling motives and desires of our heart based on our nature and character.

**God so acts through the will and desire of a person's nature (whether good or evil) so that they freely and willingly do that which He has purposed to come to pass.**

## III. Compatibilism is NOT a case of Either/Or

The truth that the Bible teaches about God's sovereignty and human responsibility is not a case of either one or the other. It is not that people who believe in God's sovereignty have

their set of verses, and people who believe in human responsibility have their set of verses. The Bible is a complete whole and cannot be ripped apart like that. God's word teaches both concepts, and sometimes even in the same verses and passages as we will see.

R.C. Sproul said:

"Though the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom may be mysterious, they are by no means contradictory. The antithesis to divine sovereignty is not human freedom, but human autonomy. Autonomy represents a degree of freedom that is unlimited by any higher authority or power. If God is sovereign, then man cannot be autonomous. Conversely, if man is autonomous, then God cannot be sovereign. The two are mutually exclusive concepts. Some argue that God's sovereignty is limited by human freedom. If this were the case, then man, not God, would be sovereign. God would always be limited by human decisions and would be lacking in the power or authority to exercise his will over against the creature's."<sup>9</sup>

So, to quote a verse out of context, 'what God has joined together, let no one tear asunder!'

## **B. What It IS**

### **I. A Display of Divine Order and Glory**

Perhaps helpful to clarify what is meant by Divine Sovereignty is the historic formulation of this doctrine from the Reformation, here taken from the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession:

"God has decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor has fellowship with any in sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree."

(See Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Numbers 23:19; Ephesians 1:3-5)

Loraine Boettner said that, "Order is heaven's first law." From God's point of view, He has decreed an unbroken order and progress of things from the beginning of creation to the

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<sup>9</sup> See R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*

end and consummation of all things in glory. His divine purpose and plan is nowhere defeated nor interrupted and what which seems to be defeat to us only seems that way because of our limitedness in wisdom and time.

“It is unthinkable that a God of infinite wisdom and power would create a world without a definite plan for that world. And because God is thus infinite His plan must extend to every detail of the world's existence.”<sup>10</sup>

Even we, as finite humans, develop a plan before we act. If someone doesn't develop a plan before acting and think through all of its implications, it is a sign of that person's foolishness not their wisdom. How much more so for the One who is infinitely wise? So, regardless of how people might oppose predestination in theory, we all operate as practical predestinarians in our everyday lives! The greater the task to be undertaken, the more important it is that we should plan out the details meticulously to ensure its accomplishment. How much more so for God's ultimate goal – the glory of His Name!?

## **II. BOTH the End AND the Means**

But how does the truth of God's ordering of all of time and the universe relate to the fact that we experience our lives as rational beings making choices, and we see a world in which there are immediate cause and effect? How can it be that God orders and decrees all things, but it also seems that things have a 'natural' explanation of causes?

We see this in scriptures that show us God's desired end and also His enactment of the means to accomplish that end. For example, Leviticus 20:7-8 says, “Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes and do them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you.” God commands His people to be holy and keep His, but then also says that He is the Lord who makes them holy. God gives to them the means by which He will work in them to accomplish His appointed end. This was indeed how Jesus taught us to pray in praying, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) We pray that God would accomplish His will in and through us. Paul said that he worked harder than any, but it was ultimately not him, but the grace of God working through him (1 Cor. 15:10). He says similarly that he toiled and struggled with all God's energy that He powerfully worked in him (see Col. 1:29 & Eph. 3:20).

God's sovereignty does not allow us to be passive in our obedience, but rather, our active obedience is empowered by God's work in and through us. We are not to “let go and let

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<sup>10</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

God" as if God will do all the work without our effort. Rather, we work 100% and God works 100%. We don't work like an Arminian and pray like a Calvinist. Rather, a consistent Calvinist works and prays like a Calvinist because he/she knows that God's means of sanctification is their Spirit-empowered diligent self-discipline and obedience. We don't get to blame God for our laziness, stupidity or inactivity because we neglected His prescribed means of spiritual growth. But likewise, we don't get to boast in any of our accomplishments because we know it is God working in and through us, and apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

**God decrees not only the end but also the means by which He will accomplish that end.**

### III. Concurrence: Dual Agency

There is perhaps a word that would help us in our discussion of the Biblical teaching regarding the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. That word is "concurrence."

**Concurrence simply means that the decisions and actions of created beings and the plans and decrees of God happen concurrently - or at the same time together.**

So, natural laws and the actions of created beings happen to bring about situations, and also at the same time God brings about these situations. They are the means by which He brings it about. God is the primary but remote cause, while the created beings are the secondary but proximate (immediate/close) cause. We see this clearly in passages such as Proverbs 16:9, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes/directs his steps."

Wayne Grudem defines concurrence as:

"God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do."<sup>11</sup>

Concurrence extends to:

- **Inanimate creation** - fire, hail, snow, wind, etc fulfill God's command (Psa. 135:6-7; 148:8 & Job 37:6-13). Jesus says that it is God who makes the sun to rise and rain to fall on both the evil and good (Matt. 5:45).

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<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 317

- **Animals** - scripture says God 'feeds' the wild animals (Psa. 104:27-29; Job 38:39-41) and Jesus says that not even a sparrow falls without the Father's will (Matt. 10:29).
- **Seemingly random events** - like the roll of a dice or the casing of a lot - "the lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." (Prov. 16:33)
- **People & the affairs of nations** - God "makes nations great and he destroys them" (Job 12:23), He rules over the nations (Psa. 22:28), He writes all the days of our lives even when we were not yet (Psa. 139:16), He determines and numbers our days (Job 14:5), and sets us apart before we were born for His purposes (Gal. 1:15; Jer. 1:5) and orders our steps (Prov. 20:24).
- **Everything** - God "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (see Eph. 1:11; Isa. 14:23 & 46:10; Job 23:13)

R.C. Sproul has said that,

"If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled."<sup>12</sup>

But wait - doesn't this mean that everything is rigged and that these choices don't really matter? Wayne Grudem warns us,

"...we must guard against misunderstanding. Here also, as with the lower creation, God's providential direction as an unseen, behind-the-scenes, 'primary cause,' should not lead us to deny the reality of our choices and actions. Again and again, Scripture affirms that we really do cause events to happen. We are significant and we are responsible. We do have choices, and these are real choices that bring about real results...

Just as a rock is *really hard* because God has made it with the property of hardness, just as water is *really wet* because God has made it with the property of wetness... so our choices are *real choices* and do have significant effects because God has made us in such a wonderful way that He has endowed us with the property of willing choice."<sup>13</sup>

Just because the divine and natural causes of events happen concurrently does not mean that either is any less real. The divine cause is actually the basis upon which the reality of the 'natural' causes rest!

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<sup>12</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Chosen By God: Know God's Perfect Plan for His Glory and His Children*

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 321

## **The Analogy of Scripture's Inspiration**

There is a ready analogy for this doctrine to us. It is the inspiration of scripture itself.

We believe that God is the Author of scripture. The scriptures are 'God-breathed'—the product of Divine expiration (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, we also affirm that God used people to write the scriptures and that in writing them, their personalities, style of writing and thinking were all preserved. They did not write like a sort of robotic dictation machine in a trance. God used their distinct personalities and skills, carrying them along by His Spirit to produce scripture which is a product of both Divine Sovereign direction and Human action and will (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Scripture was freely written by the human authors, yet Divinely superintended so that the final product was exactly what He wanted it to be—so much so that Jesus could affirm every 'jot and tittle' (cf. Matt. 5:18 & Luke 16:17)

If we do not believe in concurrence, we cannot logically affirm this orthodox view of scripture.

## **Two Clear Truths in Tension | One Ultimate Purpose**

The doctrines of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are two clear truths in scripture which are held in tension together. They don't contradict each other or cancel one another out, but rather, they happen concurrently and cooperatively.

Ultimately, the purpose of all things is the glory of God, not the glory of man, or any other created thing. God is the One by whom, and for whom all things were made - and His purpose in creation is His self-exaltation and praise because He is the highest object of praise. He says, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other..." (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). This is good news for us, because if God is so passionate and undeterred about His own glory, He will let nothing get in the way of accomplishing His good plans which are for His glory primarily, and our good as a result of that.

We will next turn to some key texts of scripture to see what the Bible plainly says about these truths.

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## KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

### The Litmus Test of True Theology

We've talked much about what Biblical compatibilism is, but we want you to see it from scripture itself.

The litmus test of whether a theology is biblical or not is whether or not it can deal honestly with the text of scripture and stay with the consistent argument of the text without jumping around. Theologies which cannot simply read and work through a relevant passage of scripture, but have to jump around to proof text or use imported categories of thought or concepts, cannot be considered biblical. So, this is what we are going to do here in Romans 9 and a few other scriptures. There are many texts of scripture which could be used to illustrate this dual truth of God's absolute sovereignty and our real responsibility. However, here will only look at a few most pertinent texts, and leave you with a list of other texts you can study on your own

### Romans 8-10 – The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

#### Context

The context of our passage in Romans 9 is all eight preceding chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. I'll provide a brief summary below to bring us up to speed:

- **Romans 1-3** – Shows us the wrath of God against sinful humanity and people's sinful rebellion. God 'gives up' to their sinful desires so that they reap the consequences of their rebellion. People are inexcusable for their rebellion because God's kind withholding of immediate judgment is supposed to lead them to repentance, and everyone is accountable because of the law – either written or in their conscience.  
God is righteousness in judging sin and no one is righteous in themselves because no one seeks God, and all are under condemnation. This is the current sinful state of people apart from God's grace. They are fallen in Adam, willfully sinning, and under just condemnation for their sin.
- **Romans 4-6** – due to man's sin and sinful nature, the only hope of justification (salvation) is not in their own works, but rather by faith in God's promise of salvation. We only have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who put



their faith in Christ are united to Him so that they are now dead to sin and blood-bought slaves to righteousness.

- **Romans 7-8** – However, the experience of the believer in this life is one of continued struggle with sin. The law reveals our sin to us, but also ends up increasing our sin because of our inability to keep it. Believers have two desires warring within them: the flesh and the spirit. However, because they are in Christ, there is no condemnation for them because He took our condemnation and fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law for us. God also gives them His Spirit to live in them through Whom they are able to cry out for help to live by the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the flesh.

## **Romans 8 - God's Sovereignty in Salvation**

In Romans 8:28-30 we read:

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

Paul says that the reason why we can be confident that “all things work together for good” is that for those who are called according to His purpose, He foreknew them, He predestined them to be conformed to the image of Christ, He called them, He justified them and He finally glorified them.

This passage is known as the “Golden Chain of Redemption.” It describes the believer’s salvation. Notice that the subject of all of those verbs is God. He does everything in salvation.

On the basis of this fact, that God has done everything in the salvation of those whom He foreknew, Paul writes a series of questions and answers where he affirms the solid and unshakeable confidence the believer has of ultimate salvation and the inseparability of their union with Christ and the love of God. Nothing can be against us (8:31-32), No one can bring a charge against us (8:33), no one can condemn us (8:34) and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (8:35). Paul goes to extraordinary lengths to make this point emphatically by listing “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor

things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (8:38-39).

Note – the basis of this rock-solid confidence for the believer is placed not on the believer's choice or any other work, but rather on the Sovereign God's free choice to elect to salvation those whom He has foreknown. This is the context of Romans 9.

It is in light of this that Paul foresees some questions that will come up in the minds of his readers, which will be very helpful to us today. In the next section, Paul expounds God's sovereign choice.

## **Romans 9 - God's Sovereign Choice**

After expressing his longing for the Jews to be saved, Paul says that the fact of their unbelief shows that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring" (9:6-7). Salvation—belonging to God's people—is not inherited genetically, but rather is through faith. To illustrate this, Paul uses the example of Jacob and Esau.

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom. 9:10-13)

Note that the text clearly says that God chose Jacob and not Esau before they were born, before they had any opportunity to do anything, for the reason that His purpose of election might continue. This is a truth that God repeats throughout scripture – His purpose counsel shall stand and His purposes will be accomplished (cf. Isa. 46:10; 44:26-28; Psa. 33:11; Prov. 19:21). The emphasis of the text is on God's sovereign purpose in electing one and not the other for His own ends.

### **That's not fair!**

At this point, Paul anticipates the objection in all of our minds:

"What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" (9:14a)

In fact, we received this very question in the Slido submissions:

God is sovereign and full of justice. If God didn't elect some people how would they get judged if God didn't choose them to be saved? (Romans 1:32 & 2:1)

Paul answers the question by explaining from Exodus 33:19 that God says that He will have mercy and compassion on whoever He chooses. This is because ultimately, mercy cannot be demanded. Mercy is not getting the punishment we deserve for our sins. If we got the punishment for our sin, that's not unfair, it's simply justice. However, mercy is given at the discretion of the One who is to deal out justice—God the Judge of all. "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." (9:16)

Paul's use of Old Testament examples in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Romans 9 is to show to the Jews that God's pattern of the salvation of His people has been on the basis of unmerited mercy. He chose them out of the many surrounding pagan nations, not because they were better, but because He is good and merciful (see Deut. 7:7).

**The clear takeaway here is that God's withholding of mercy from some is not unfair, because mercy cannot be demanded. It is freely given by God at His discretion.**

To illustrate this, Paul brings up the example of Pharaoh. This was the text that sparked this workshop. In Exodus:

- Three times God says that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3 & 14:4)
- Six times God actually hardens Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10 & 14:8)
- Seven times it says Pharaoh's heart 'was hardened' implying God as the subject of the verb (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35; 14:5)
- Three times we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34)

Paul explains that God clearly stated His purpose for this in Exodus 9:16,

"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

And Exodus 10:27 further explains:

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go."

Here we see the compatibilism and concurrence clearly stated. The two wills are set side by side. God hardens Pharaoh's heart, while simultaneously Pharaoh is *unwilling* to let the people go. Note that God's will doesn't override the human will, but rather, the two wills spring forth from each individual and yet at the same time work together to achieve God's purpose. God doesn't wrestle Pharaoh to do something he is unwilling to do. Pharaoh acts in full complicity with his own heart's desires and that's why he's culpable.

It certainly doesn't seem like Pharaoh had libertarian free will here! The text itself clearly says that the reason why God hardened Pharaoh's heart was so that God's power and glory might be shown. God's primary purpose in all things is His own glory. This leads Paul to reaffirm again, "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." (9:17).

**The purpose of God's free choice to show mercy on whom He pleases is His glory.**

### **A Dangerous Response**

Paul anticipates the reactions of his readers when he interjects: "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?'" (9:19)

This is probably the same objection many have in their minds when they think of the relationship between God's sovereignty and human will. We think it sounds like fatalism and instinctively question God's goodness and justice. We question whether the Judge of all the earth really will do that which is right (cf. Gen. 18:25). However, Paul's response here is perhaps shocking:

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?" (Rom. 9:20-21)

Throughout Paul's letter, he has anticipated questions and objections to what he is teaching and every time he has given reasons and answered those questions. However, with this question, there is no answer only rebuke. But it is not a mindless dismissal. Look at the content of the rebuke.

### **The Appropriate Response**

Paul's rebuke here is that it is inappropriate for the thing made to question its Maker's motives and purposes for creating it as such. The Potter has the right to create one vessel for honourable use, and another for dishonourable. This statement should floor us. The doctrine of God's sovereignty is one which squarely confronts us with the separation between Creator and created. He alone is God and we are not. He has total and complete rights to do whatever He wants and we do not. He alone actually has truly 'free' will—He can do and does whatever He pleases and this bare truth by itself scares us... and rightfully so! For it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God (cf. Heb. 10:31).

Why do we struggle with the fear of God? I believe one reason is because we have not rightly seen the truth of His sovereignty. The Bible presents to us a God who is so sovereign that He is absolutely unfettered and unconstrained by His creation and creatures. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." (Psa. 115:3; cf. Psa. 135:6) So much so that even the one of the most powerful pagan monarchs of ancient times, the king of Babylon, after the Lord had humbled him and made him to eat grass like a beast of the field because of the king's pride confessed:

all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

We cannot pass over this point too quickly and not let the full weight of this text resonate and shake us to our bones. The God who created you and Whom you serve is unchained and uncontainable! This is why the genuine fear of the Lord is entirely appropriate.

**In light of Romans 9:19-21, our appropriate response is to hold our hands over our mouths and marvel that God extends grace at all, since all deserve His wrath.**

### God's Purpose in Election

After demonstrating that God is not unjust in withholding mercy, and forcefully showing the inappropriateness of the created questioning its Creator's wisdom, Paul offers an explanation for God's sovereign election:

"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" (Rom. 9:22-24)

Again, note that the driving purpose for God's election is "to show His wrath and to make known His power." God's ultimate purpose is the display of His glory.

**God's glory is either displayed in His wrath against those on whom just condemnation falls, or His power on those who He saves.**

### Asymmetry in Salvation and Reprobation

Secondly, note how the text talks of these two vessels. The vessels of wrath were prepared for destruction – it is a passive construction. Although God is implied as the subject of the

verb, these vessels were passively prepared for destruction. God does not have to do anything to make sinful humanity worthy of judgment but just leave them to their sin. The world already stands condemned (cf. John 3:18) and the wrath of God remains on him (cf. John 3:36) because we all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

However, note how the text talks about the vessels of mercy which "He has prepared beforehand for glory". Here God is the active agent. Unlike the vessels of wrath, God actively prepares the vessels of mercy for glory. Here, God has to actively do something to save people. We saw in Romans 8 that He foreknew them, predestined them, called them, justified them and glorified them. All those were active verbs where God was doing everything.

### **God stands asymmetrically behind salvation and reprobation.**

In respect to the reprobate, scripture shows us that God does not have to tempt anyone to sin because they are tempted from their own evil desires (James 1:13-15), and that He gives them over to their evil desires (cf. Rom. 1:18-32)—takes His hand of grace off, so to speak—and lets them reap their just condemnation. Furthermore, scripture plainly tells us that God does not delight in the destruction of the wicked (see Ezek. 18:32; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

However, for those whom He saves, He actively accomplishes their salvation. While they were dead in trespasses, God makes them alive together with Christ and raises them up to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places so that He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness (cf. Eph. 2:1-7). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) Both salvation and faith are the gift of God's grace so that it precludes all boasting.

### **Romans 9 Takeaway**

This text of Romans 9 clearly tells us that God is sovereign in salvation – actively and solely accomplishing it for those He has chose according to His good purposes. It shows us that it is not unjust for God to withhold mercy because it cannot be demanded. It also warns us of an inappropriate response to God's sovereign choice—He is the Potter, we are the clay. It shows us that God's purpose in election and reprobation is to display His glory and that He stands asymmetrically behind them. Our appropriate response in light of all of this is awe and fear of this untamed God!

However, the question still hangs in the air: "Why is this good news?"

It is good news because God is not just uncontrollable sovereign power, but He is also good, just, true, merciful and gracious. "For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you." (Psa. 86:5) This is a truth that is echoed repeatedly throughout scripture (cf. Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Psa. 25:8; 100:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Num. 14:18) as if to remind us to not forget that:

**We must not divorce God's sovereignty from His other attributes.**

Many people tend to look at the doctrine of God's election as if God is stingy, cold and unloving—withholding His goodness from people. Yet we read just the opposite with the unwilling prophet, Jonah, who was called to go preach to sinful Nineveh though he hated them and didn't want them to repent. Notice Jonah's complaint:

So he prayed to the LORD, saying, "O LORD, is this not what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I was so quick to flee toward Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion--One who relents from sending disaster. (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah's complaint was that God was too gracious, compassionate and merciful!

**May we all remember that God is far more just than we realize and far more merciful and compassionate than we deserve!**

## **Romans 10 - A Correction to Fatalism**

At this point, Paul knows that many will object, "Doesn't the doctrine of God's sovereignty make evangelism and our 'seeking God' unnecessary?" So, Paul goes on to correct the misunderstanding of fatalism by showing that God not only determines the ends of salvation, but also the means by which salvation comes. Chapter 10 clearly states to us that, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10:9)

He goes on to show the necessity of evangelism:

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15a)

Boettner comments:

"The sinner's inability to save himself, therefore, should not make him less diligent in seeking his salvation in the way which God has appointed. Some leper when Christ was on earth might have reasoned that since he could not cure himself, he must simply wait for Christ to come and heal him. The natural effect, however, of a conviction of utter helplessness is to impel the person to make diligent application at the source from whence alone help can come. Man is a fallen, ruined, and helpless creature, and until he knows it, he is living without hope and without God in the world."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the Bible presents God's sovereignty as the basis for confidence in our evangelism. Hear what R.C. Sproul says about Acts 18:

"How cheering it must have been for [Paul] in Corinth to hear the words, "Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to harm thee; for I have much people in this city," Acts 18:10. What greater incentive to action could have been given him than this, that his preaching was the divinely appointed means for the conversion of many of those people? Notice, God did not tell him how many people He had in that city, nor who the individuals were. The minister of the Gospel can go forward confident of success, knowing that through this appointed means God has determined to save a vast number of the human family in every age. In fact, one of the strongest pleas for missions is that evangelism is the will of God for the whole world; and only when one acknowledges the sovereignty of God in every realm of life can he have the deepest passion for the Divine glory."<sup>15</sup>

Yes, God has elected from all eternity those who would be saved and glorified – but He has also from all eternity determined the means by which they would be saved in time! We cannot separate God's ends from His appointed means. This applies to salvation and everything else. God does certainly know the end because He has decreed it. But He has also decreed the means and process by which that end will be accomplished. Both the end and the means to that end are to glorify His wisdom, justice, mercy, goodness, and power.

Far from discouraging evangelism, the sovereignty of God in salvation actually is fuel for it. Many of the most important pioneers of modern missions were driven by Calvinistic theology of the sovereignty of God such as John Eliot, David Brainerd, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Robert Morrison, Charles Simeon, David Livingstone, John Paton and

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<sup>14</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

<sup>15</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*



Samuel Zwemer to name a few. Their confidence in the sovereignty of God and conviction that God has truly chosen people from *every* tribe, tongue and nation drove them to great risk and sacrifice for the sake of the spread of the Gospel. They were driven by the same passion for God's glory that He has and desired to see Christ have the fullness of that for which He died.

## **John 6 – The Sovereignty of God Over Who Comes**

Let anyone think that this doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation is an invention only of Paul, Jesus himself taught the same.

In John 6:37, Jesus clearly states that:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

Note the certainty of that statement: All that the Father gives Jesus (here in reference to the elect), WILL come to him. And whoever comes to him will not be cast out. But who are the ones who come to Him? It is the ones the Father gives to Jesus.

Jesus continues to explain that:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:39-40)

All those who are given to the Son by the Father will come to the Son, and the Son will lose none of them, but will raise them up on the last day. Here we see the same certainty we saw in the Golden Chain of Redemption in Romans 8. Those who are foreknown, predestined and elected will come to the Son for salvation and will be raised up (glorified). The Son loses none of them – this is the assurance of our salvation: that Christ's grip is secure.

Jesus continues:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44)

Here we have an affirmation of the inability of man to come to Christ for salvation, unless the Father draws him. As we saw previously, it is God who is active in salvation. This verb

used here for draw, some have argued means "woo" or "entice" – as if God woos the sinner and he/she freely chooses whether or not to accept the offer of salvation. However, if we look at other places this same verb is used, we see that this cannot be the meaning.

Here are all the NT uses of this same Greek verb (ἐλκύω):

- John 12:32 – Jesus says that when he is lifted up from the earth, he will draw all men. A similar use to 6:44. Let's look at the other uses to clarify what is meant.
- John 18:10 – when Peter 'draws' out his sword to strike the ear of the high priest's slave. Did Peter woo his sword out?
- John 21:6 – when the disciples were 'drawing' or hauling in the net. Were they wooing the net into the boat?
- Acts 16:19 & 21:30 use the verb for when the disciples are dragged into the market place and out of the temple. Was the text really meaning that they were being wooed?
- James 2:6 – about the rich dragging people into court. Certainly, they weren't wooing them to court!

Therefore, what Jesus is saying is not that the Father woos people to come to the Son, but actually brings them to Him.

Later in chapter 6 Jesus tells his disciples that it is the Spirit who gives life and the flesh is no help at all (6:63), and:

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

If John 6:44 was unclear, here in verse 65 we have a very clear statement that needs no explanation. No one can come to Christ unless it is granted to them by the Father.

## The Sovereignty of God Over Evil

Although we are sometimes shy to say that God is sovereign over evil, God himself is not so shy. He says, "I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things." (Isa. 45:7) <sup>16</sup>

- God sends natural catastrophes (see Amos 3:6; 2 Sam. 24:15; 1 Kgs 17:14; Job 38:8-11; Psa. 135:6-7; 147:15-18; Isa. 29:6; Jer. 10:13; 31:35; Nah. 1:5-6; Mk. 4:38-41; Luke 8:24; Rev. 11:13; 16:18).
- God uses calamity to execute His judgment (see Psa. 78:44-48; Jer. 18:11; 19:3, 15)
- God appoints evil rulers and armies to judge others (see Deut. 28:28; 2 Kgs 15:37; 24:2-4; 1 Chron. 5:26; 6:15; 2 Chron. 21:16; 24:24; 28:9; Psa. 78:60-62; Isa. 10:5-8; Jer. 43:10-13)

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is uncontestably the evillest act in history. Only Jesus was sinless and totally undeserving of any ill-treatment or judgment, yet he was betrayed, given a mock trial, and murdered at the hands of jealous hypocrites and pagan rulers. If there was ever an evil act, the mocking and murder of the Creator by His creation has to be the worst.

We read in Acts 2:23, in Peter's sermon on Pentecost to the Jews gathered there that,

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

We see here a plain affirmation that the Cross was not an accident or God's plan B. Instead, it was according to God's definite plan and foreknowledge. Yet Peter doesn't hold the human agents who perpetrated it innocent. He says "YOU crucified and killed" him and calls them "lawless men." The Cross was according to God's sovereign decree, yet the people who enacted it were still responsible.

Again, we read in Acts 4:27-28, the disciples praying to the Sovereign God:

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

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<sup>16</sup> See also Lam. 3:37-38; Gen. 38:7; Deut. 32:39; Psa. 90:3; 139:16; Jer. 15:2; Ezek. 24:16, 18; Luke 2:29; 12:4-5; Rom. 4:17; Heb. 9:27; Jam. 4:14-15; Rev. 1:18

They did what God's hand and plan had predestined to take place. Yet the scripture still holds them accountable.

"The crucifixion of Christ, which is admittedly the worst crime in all human history, had, we are expressly told, its exact and necessary place in the plan (Acts 2:23; 4:28). This particular manner of redemption is not an expedient to which God was driven after being defeated and disappointed by the fall of man. Rather it is "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," Ephesians 3:11. Peter tells us that Christ as a sacrifice for sin was "foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world," 1 Peter 1:20. Believers were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (or from eternity), Ephesians 1:4. We are saved not by our own temporary works, "but according to His purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal," 2 Timothy 1:9. And if the crucifixion of Christ, or His offering up Himself as a sacrifice for sin, was in the eternal plan, then plainly the fall of Adam and all other sins which made that sacrifice necessary were in the plan, no matter how undesirable a part of that plan they may have been."  
(Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*)

We see God's sovereignty in the Old Testament texts in Isaiah that describe His use of Assyria as the "rod of His anger". Yet, just because God uses Assyria to discipline His people, He still holds them accountable for their evil acts because of the intention of their hearts (see Isa. 10:7). The king of Assyria is thinks he is a powerful dictator sweeping up anyone in his way like some sort of super-villain, not knowing that he is actually just a tool in the hands of the only true Sovereign. Look at how God rebukes him in Isaiah 10:15:

"Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should life him who is not wood!"

"Only a fool thinks he is the wielder when in fact he is the wielded."<sup>17</sup>

In Genesis 45:5-8, we read of the story of Joseph that it was God who sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve life. Yet we read in the narrative that it was his brothers who sold him into slavery. Joseph himself acknowledges the dual agency at work in Genesis 50:20 saying, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." His brothers' acts were really evil because they meant evil in their hearts. But behind and above it all were God's plans which He

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<sup>17</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 122

meant for good. The text does not explain exactly how these fit together, but just that they are simultaneously true.

"Joseph's brothers acted with an evil *intention*... Yet God brought about the same result, but with a different *intention*. His motive was good—"God meant it for good." Culpability can be attributed to Joseph's brothers because they intentionally purposed evil. God sovereignly purposed the same event, but his intention was good, and therefore he has no culpability for the evil that occurred."<sup>18</sup>

Just because we in our finite wisdom cannot think of a good purpose for which God has allowed some evil does not mean that there cannot be one for an infinite and eternal God who is infinitely more wise than us.

God's stance behind good and evil are asymmetrical (as with election and reprobation). God stands directly behind what is good in such a way that it directly flows from Him (cf. Jam. 1:17). However, He stands behind evil only in a distant and secondary way—evil comes about through other primary causes such as the Devil, demons and people—so that it cannot be directly attributed to Him and only happens by Divine permission.

"Evil does not reside in a mysterious realm somehow untouched by God's plan, purpose and power. If it did, we would have reason to fear, for then God would not in fact be sovereign."<sup>19</sup>

"Even the fall of Adam, and through him the fall of the race, was not by chance or accident, but was so ordained in the secret counsels of God... Paul speaks of "the eternal purpose" which was purposed in Jesus Christ our Lord, Eph. 3:11. The writer of Hebrews refers to "the blood of an eternal covenant," 13:20. And since the plan of redemption is thus traced back into eternity, the plan to permit man to fall into the sin from which he was thus to be redeemed must also extend back into eternity; otherwise there would have been no occasion for redemption. In fact the plan for the whole course of the world's events, including the fall, redemption, and all other events, was before God in its completeness before He ever brought the creation into existence; and He deliberately ordered it that this series of events, and not some other series, should become actual.

The reason for the fall is assigned in that "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy on all," Rom. 11:32; and again, "We ourselves have had

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<sup>18</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 46

<sup>19</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 62

the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead," II Cor. 1:9; and it would be difficult to find language which would assert the Divine control and Divine initiative more explicitly than this."<sup>20</sup>

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## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

### The Challenge of Fully Grasping this Doctrine

God's Word clearly tells us these two truths; however, it does not tell us the mechanics of how they work together.

"But while the Bible repeatedly teaches that this providential control is universal, Powerful, wise, and holy, it nowhere attempts to inform us how it is to be reconciled with man's free agency. All that we need to know is that God does govern His creatures and that His control over them is such that no violence is done to their natures. Perhaps the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom can best be summed up in these words: God so presents the outside inducements that man acts in accordance with his own nature, yet does exactly what God has planned for him to do."

"Much of the difficulty in regard to the doctrine of Predestination is due to the finite character of our mind, which can grasp only a few details at a time, and which understands only a part of the relations between these. We are creatures of time, and often fail to take into consideration the fact that God is not limited as we are. That which appears to us as "past," "present," and "future," is all "present" to His mind. It is an eternal "now." He is "the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity," Isaiah 57:15. "A thousands years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, And as a watch in the night," Psalm 90:4. Hence the events which we see coming to pass in time are only the events which He appointed and set before Him from eternity. Time is a property of the finite creation and is objective to God. He is above it and sees it, but is not conditioned by it. He is also independent of space, which is another property of the finite creation. Just as He sees at one glance a road leading

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<sup>20</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

from New York to San Francisco, while we see only a small portion of it as we pass over it, so He sees all events in history, past, present, and future at one glance.”<sup>21</sup>

All of this to say that our appropriate response to the clear teaching of scripture on this doctrine shouldn't primarily be to try to fully comprehend it—our finite minds cannot contain the infinite—but rather to be in awe and wonder of our much bigger God than we sometimes realize.

## Application and Pastoral Considerations

Some of the resentment attached to this doctrine of God's sovereignty and human responsibility has to do with the way some have used it to beat down others who think differently. However, properly understood, this doctrine is not a hammer to smash people with, but rather a glorious truth to cling to in hard times and cause us to be in awe of our God. This doctrine, rightly understood, increases our worship of God and humbles us. Questions surrounding this doctrine often are not just intellectual, but especially as it pertains to the issue of pain and evil in this world, are also exceptionally personal. So, answering these questions of suffering and the sovereignty of God is not devoid of emotional weight and sensitivity.

In a scene from C.S. Lewis' classic novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, reads:

“Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh,” said Susan. “I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion”...“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver ...“Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

Is this not a beautiful image of our God? He is the Lord, the uncontested Sovereign of the universe - unmatched in power - and that makes Him dangerous! Like a wild lion, He's uncontrollable - uncaged. We cannot contain Him or manipulate Him for He has said, “my purposes shall stand and none can thwart them.” However, this very same Sovereign Lord is also good. And this is Good News!

If He were only all-powerful and sovereign without His goodness - He would potentially be a tyrant ruler. We could not trust that His purposes were good and beautiful. We could have no confidence that His plans are for a greater good than we can sometimes fathom. We'd have no reason to trust Him but rather would cower in fear of what malicious

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<sup>21</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

misfortunes He could send upon us, like a wicked child burning ants with a magnifying glass.

But our God is GOOD! Infinitely good! All His works are good because all His plans and purposes are good and flow out of His infinite perfection and goodness. To be under the rule of wicked tyrant is a terror, but to be under the loving rule of an Infinitely Good King is a blessing to those in His Kingdom! We know that anything which comes to pass is within His omnipotent control and His all-wise plan - even the things we don't understand and the difficulties we face - they are from the nail-scarred hands of a Loving Lord who has objectively shown us the extent of His love on the Cross when He stretched out His hands and said, "it is finished."

"Although the sovereignty of God is universal and absolute, it is not the sovereignty of blind power. It is coupled with infinite wisdom, holiness and love. And this doctrine, when properly understood, is a most comforting and reassuring one. Who would not prefer to have his affairs in the hands of a God of infinite power, wisdom, holiness and love, rather than to have them left to fate, or chance, or irrevocable natural law, or to short-sighted and perverted self? Those who reject God's sovereignty should consider what alternatives they have left."<sup>22</sup>

## Truths to hold in your heart

- 1. God is Good**
- 2. God is Sovereign, Evil is not**

"The calamities which befell Job, as seen from the human viewpoint appear to be mere misfortunes, accidents, chance happenings. But with further knowledge we see God behind it all, exercising complete control, giving the Devil permission to afflict so far but no farther, designing the events for the development of Job's patience and character, and using even the seemingly meaningless waste of the storm to fulfill His high and loving purposes." (Lorraine Boettner)

- 3. We are responsible, but not in absolute control**
- 4. Because God is sovereign, He will accomplish His good plan**

Charles Spurgeon once said in a sermon on the sovereignty of God:

"There is no attribute of God more comforting to his children than the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that Sovereignty hath ordained their afflictions, that

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<sup>22</sup> Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination



Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children of God ought more earnestly to contend than the dominion of their Master over all creation—the kingship of God over all the works of his own hands—the throne of God, and his right to sit upon that throne."<sup>23</sup>

**5. God's sovereignty is the basis for our effort and confidence of final victory**

Augustine of Hippo prayed, "Lord command what you will and grant what you command!" This is entirely Biblical: "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it." (Psa. 119:35 NASB) God's sovereignty is the only confidence we have for our continued sanctification and final glorification (cf. Phil. 1:6 & Rom. 8:30)

The truth is that on the surface, libertarianism seems appealing – however, when we think it through biblically, we realize that don't really want a God who is handicapped in His sovereignty. For then what reason would we have to pray if God were not actually sovereign to accomplish it? Why pray for the salvation of those we love if God could not actually change their hearts? What security would we have of our ultimate hope that God will set all things right? What confidence would we have that we would not fall away either now, or even in the age to come if it were not God Himself who holds us within His mighty hand?

A mentor of mine shared a quote with me this week from his late pastor. He said, "We should not let the things we don't know about God (a lot!) confuse us about the things we do know about God."

We know that God loves us - "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) And so we can take great comfort in the Cross as the demonstration of love well beyond what we're capable of fully understanding. This same great love also undergirds the whole topic of the sovereignty of God.

If we don't end there, we've totally missed the mark of how this doctrine should be understood and how it is applicable to us. God's sovereignty increases our awe, worship and trust of God. Human responsibility increases our care of how we are to act and think in accordance with ALL that God has revealed in His Word. Our choices matter because God

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<sup>23</sup> Spurgeon, C.H., 1856. Divine Sovereignty. In The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons. London: Passmore & Alabaster, p. 185.

has determined not only the end, but the means by which He will attain that end. These two truths together embolden and encourage the Christian.

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## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Below is a shortlist of recommended resources for further study:

- [\*\*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine\*\*](#) by Wayne Grudem - Chapters 16 & 32 deal specifically with these issues and give many biblical explanations as well as responses to common questions and objections.
  - [\*\*What about Free Will?: Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty\*\*](#) by Scott Christensen - a very helpful and readable modern treatment of the topic which clearly addresses many of the struggles people have with this doctrine.
  - [\*\*The Sovereignty of God\*\*](#) by A.W. Pink - this is a classic book on the topic and a great treatment of the relevant issues.
  - [\*\*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God\*\*](#) by J.I. Packer - a great book for those struggling with the question of how the doctrine of sovereignty and election pertain to evangelism.
  - [\*\*Willing to Believe: Understanding the Role of the Human Will in Salvation\*\*](#) by R.C. Sproul - a great book that looks at the history of this controversy and provides a biblical perspective of the role of the human will in salvation.
  - [\*\*The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen But Free\*\*](#) by James R. White - a good apologetic book defending the Reformed view of Divine sovereignty and the human will as a rebuttal to Norman Geisler's book.
  - [\*\*Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension\*\*](#) by D. A. Carson - brings clear, scholarly insights and finely-honed exegetical skills to this all-pervasive issue - examining the sovereignty-responsibility themes in the Old Testament, intertestamental literature and John's gospel and concluding with a reflection on the theological implications for ministry and mission today.
  - [\*\*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination\*\*](#) by Loraine Boettner - this classic work is now also available for [\*\*FREE as an eBook\*\*](#).
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## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

Some of these questions were emailed/submitted and were not able to be addressed in our Q&A section. Below are some responses to these questions.

### **What about scriptures that seem to talk about outcomes that are dependent on the actions of people?**

The fact that the Scriptures often speak of one purpose of God as dependent on the outcome of another or on the actions of men, is no objection against this doctrine. The Scriptures are written in the every-day language of men, and they often describe an act or a thing as it appears to be, rather than as it really is. The Bible speaks of "the four corners of the earth," Isaiah 11:12, and of "the foundations of the earth," Psalm 104:5; yet no one understands this to mean that the earth is square, or that it actually rests upon a foundation. We speak of the sun rising and setting, yet we know that it is not the motion of the sun but that of the earth as it turns over on its axis which causes this phenomenon. Likewise, when the Scriptures speak of God repenting, for instance, no one with proper ideas of God understands it to mean that He sees He has pursued a wrong course and changes His mind. It simply means that His action as seen from the human view-point appears to be like that of a man who repents. In other places the Scriptures speak of the hands, or arms, or eyes of God. These are what are known as "anthropomorphisms," instances in which God is referred to as if He were a man. When the word "repent," for instance, is used in its strict sense God is said never to repent: "God is not a man, that He should lie, Neither the son of man, that lie should repent." Numbers 23:19; and again, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent," 1 Samuel 15:29.

(Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination)

### **Doesn't this doctrine make God the Author of sin?**

"A partial explanation of sin is found in the fact that while man is constantly commanded in Scripture not to commit it, he is, nevertheless, permitted to commit it if he chooses to do so. No compulsion is laid on the person; he is simply left to the free exercise of his own nature, and he alone is responsible. This, however, is never a bare permission, for, with full knowledge of the nature of the person and of his tendency to sin, God allows him or allows him to be in a certain environment, knowing perfectly well that the particular sin will be committed. But while God permits sin, His connection with it is purely negative and it is the

abominable thing which he hates with perfect hatred. The motive which God has in permitting it and the motive which man has in committing it are radically different. Many persons are deceived in these matters because they fail to consider that God will righteously those things which men do wickedly. Furthermore, every person's conscience after he has committed a sin tells him that he alone is responsible and that he need not have committed it if he had not voluntarily chosen to do so."

(Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*)

"A ruler may forbid treason; but his command does not oblige him to do all in his power to prevent disobedience to it. It may promote the good of his kingdom to suffer the treason to be committed, and the traitor to be punished according to law. That in view of this resulting good he chooses not to prevent the treason, does not imply any contradiction or opposition of it in the monarch." [Tyler, *Memoir and Lectures*, p. 250-252.]

In one place we are told that God, in order to punish a rebellious people, moved the heart of David to number them (II Sam. 24:1, 10); but in another place where this same act is referred to, we are told that it was Satan who instigated David's pride and caused him to number them (I Chr. 21:1). In this, we see that Satan was made the rod of God's wrath and that God impels even the hearts of sinful men and demons whithersoever He will.

All of these things are summed up in that passage of Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I am Jehovah that doeth all these things," 45:7 and again in Amos, "Shall evil befall a city and Jehovah hath not done it?" Amos 3:6.

(Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*)

"Unless sin occurs according to the divine purpose and permission of God, it occurs by chance. Evil then becomes an independent and uncontrollable principle and the pagan idea of dualism is introduced into the theory of the universe. The doctrine that there are powers of sin, rebellion, and darkness in the very nature of free agency, which may prove an overmatch for divine omnipotence, imperils even the eternal safety and happiness of the saints in glory."

(Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*)

"As a matter of fact, we gain more through salvation in Christ than we lost by the fall in Adam. When Christ became incarnate, human nature was, as it were, taken into the very bosom of Deity, and the redeemed reach a far more exalted position through union with Christ than Adam could have attained had he not fallen but persevered and been admitted into heaven."

(Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*)

## Doesn't authentic love require free will?

Even C.S. Lewis answered the question, why would God make His creatures like this?

"Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automat—of creatures that worked like little machines—would hardly be worth creating."<sup>24</sup>

This is easily shown to be false in the fact that all Christians believe that in the eternal state, the saints will not be able to sin—they will have no 'choice', so to speak. But no one contests that we will not authentically love God in heaven.

"If mere free agency necessarily exposed a person to sin there would be no certainty that even the redeemed in heaven would not sin and be cast down to hell as were the fallen angels. The saints, however, possess a necessity on the side of goodness, and are therefore free in the highest sense."<sup>25</sup>

"God the Father and His Son, Jesus, do not have the freedom to hate each other. They love each other necessarily because their nature and character compel them to do no other. Both *willingly* love with *irresistible* intentions, and that is precisely what makes their relationship significant."<sup>26</sup>

The inability to sin does not destroy authentic love any more than the virtue of not cheating on your wife destroys an authentically loving marriage.

## How come the Early Church Fathers universally believed that mankind possesses free will?

**Prior to Augustine, all major church figures held to NONE of the five points of Calvinism, not one! Why is that? They are arguably much closer to the source (Clement of Rome may have known Peter personally).**

It is a bit anachronistic to impose on the Early Church Fathers the categories of the five points of Calvinism which were formally developed centuries later. So, inherent in this question is some impropriety of asking of the Early Church Fathers what had not yet been formally developed and expecting them to write about it. We shouldn't expect to find

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<sup>24</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 49

<sup>25</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*

<sup>26</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, p. 35

categories and ways of systematizing God's truth in His Word that were developed centuries later in the Early Church writings. However, I do think that it is improper to say that they didn't believe in God's sovereignty and man's creaturely free will.

Three things we must keep in mind with regards to how we use the Early Church Fathers:

**1. They were not infallible nor authoritative.**

We reject the Roman Catholic idea of Sacred Tradition being on par with the authority of scripture. The Early Church Fathers, while it is useful to read the writings of the Early Church Fathers to understand what the thoughts, context and teachings of the early church were, they are not writing scripture. Many of them erred in their theology. Many of us would disagree today with some of their beliefs and theology. Take for example their views on baptism – the majority of the Early Church Fathers believed in infant baptism. However, we believe from scripture that it teaches believer's baptism. We don't just default to adopting the views of the writers of the first few centuries, but rather we compare it to scripture to see if it holds validity.

Just because they were closer to the NT age, doesn't mean that they automatically got everything right. Although many of them were great thinkers, many of them also erred greatly and imported pagan ideas into their thought. Take for example Origen who brought a very mystic and allegorical approach to scripture. It is common knowledge that the Early Church Fathers, while they wrote many impressive things, also made mistakes in their writings. Their proximity in time to the events of the New Testament doesn't automatically make them perfect theologians, but it does give value to their testimonies – especially about the historicity of the New Testament and particularly in the essential message of the Gospel.

**2. They were not great Systematic Theologians.**

The context of the early church before emperor Constantine made Christianity a legal religion was fraught with persecution. The truth is that early Christians didn't have a whole lot of time to develop a perfectly coherent system of theology, especially after persecution intensified in the later second and third centuries. Even today we can realize that we don't have a perfect systematic theology, and we're not running for our lives!

So, it is not surprising that the Early Church Fathers didn't pull together all the threads of a system of thought on a particular doctrine from scripture to form a systematic understanding of it. This is work which takes much time to think deeply, often on the backs of previous generations that have likewise mined the riches of God's Word.

The Early Church Fathers simply didn't have the amount of time to develop that sort of expansive systematic theology, nor the luxury to do so. Many of them were great Biblical Theologians, but not many were great systematic theologians. Also, bear in mind that many of them didn't have a completed canon of scripture to work with. In the period of the Early Church, letters and gospels were being hand-copied and passed around. This process took a while before it was distributed everywhere. So, you would have some Church Fathers who had some NT books, but not others. For example, some scholars believe that Justin Martyr (writing c. 150-160 AD) didn't know of the Gospel of John and may not have had all the writings of Paul. This would severely handicap a person's ability to understand the whole council of God and develop a complete systematic theology.

We may not see full-formed 'Calvinism' per se, but we do see affirmations of the Biblical truths it affirmed and systematized. For example, Irenaeus writes in his work *Against Heresies* about the sovereignty of God:

"But He Himself in Himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, predestinating all things, formed them as He pleased, bestowing harmony on all things, and assigning them their own place, and the beginning of their creation."<sup>27</sup>

Tertullian writes:

"We have been predestined by God, before the world was, (to arise) in the extreme end of the times."<sup>28</sup>

Also, Clement writes:

...the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith—which results from the peculiar Testaments, or rather the one Testament in different times by the will of the one God, through one Lord—those already

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<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, 1885. *Irenæus against Heresies*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe, eds. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, p. 361.

<sup>28</sup> Tertullian, 1885. *On the Apparel of Women*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe, eds. *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second. The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, p. 23.

ordained, whom God predestinated, knowing before the foundation of the world that they would be righteous.<sup>29</sup>

And later in this same work, when he quotes Romans 8:28-30 and the Golden Chain of Redemption, he does so in relation to consolation in suffering persecution – which is entirely appropriate given that was Paul's concern also! So, it makes sense that Clement would use these verses not to argue about sovereignty and free will, but rather to comfort Christians under persecution. The focus of the Early Church Fathers was often a lot different to ours. You use and read scripture differently when you're under persecution as opposed to having the luxury to ask philosophical questions of a text.

Many of the early Reformers themselves (especially John Calvin – his commentaries and Institutes often cite many early sources) quote from the works of Early Church Fathers as they built and formalized their understandings on particular doctrines of theology. So, I think it fair to say that Reformed Theology does not stand apart from the historic theology of the Church, but rather sees itself as a continuation of the theology of the Early Church in as much as it was in accord with Holy Scripture.

### **3. Remember their context**

Lastly, remember the context of the Early Church Fathers. Most of the writings we have from them were occasioned documents – meaning that they were writing to answer or address a specific challenge or occasion. One of the citations used by the person asking this question was from Justin's First Apology – which was written in the context of providing an answer to pagan philosophy and a pagan understanding of fate. As we saw in the workshop, this is not what Biblical compatibilism is, and also Justin Martyr was arguing against that sort of pagan deterministic fatalism. When Justin writes against determinism and the reality of the human will, he is pushing back against pagan fatalism. So, I think we need to read the Early Church Fathers on their own terms, in their own contexts, bearing in mind the occasion for their writings if we are to do them justice.

In summary, reading the Early Church Fathers is very valuable to the Christian – they teach us so much and show such faithfulness under intense persecution. However, we must not put their writings on par with scripture. As with everything else, they stand or fall based on how well they accurately represent what scripture teaches.

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<sup>29</sup> Clement of Alexandria, 1885. *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe, eds. *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, p. 555.