

The Five Points

Why I for one believe in the doctrines of grace
(2010)

And as Isaiah said before: “Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah,”
Romans 9:29.

The short version (including introduction):

The following five statements on the five points (which will be introduced in the introduction) are some up-front reasons why I for one believe them. If you’re not familiar with these points of doctrine then you’ll have to read at least the introduction to this letter in order to see what they are. In the longer version below, I deal with these points in more detail as I see them in my own theology.

T- I believe this because I never demonstrated one bit of devotion to God before I was made alive in Him by His own free and loving mercy. I died in Adam. I sought after a god before I was born again, but it was for heaven, fortune, happiness or safety; it was not out of gratitude, love or in righteousness. I believe the “**T**” in TULIP because Scripture taught me that this nature was the same in the lives of all men. Men don’t want God at all, but I thank God that He wants men.

U- I believe this because God is in no way contingent. Nothing He does can be thwarted or distorted by men apart from His own knowledge and decrees. God chooses from sinful man and the clay has no rights to boast in their choices. God must be sovereign even over those who He sends to hell.

L- It has become obvious to me that Jesus is a Savior and not merely one who assists men in saving themselves.

I- To me, it isn’t merely that I believe God *can* overcome a man’s will, I believe this point of doctrine because it seems apparent to me that God *must* overcome a man’s fallen will or else that man will never believe. All men must come willingly to God or they don’t come at all, but I believe that the willingness to come is a free gift of grace.

P- Jesus is far too great a Shepherd to let His sheep walk out of the fold. Furthermore, they would never want to. Of course salvation is nothing other than eternal life; it is not temporary or probationary based on one’s performance. Who God saves, He keeps, without exception. I would not esteem His grace at all if I didn’t believe this.

Introduction:

As of 4 May 2010 I can safely say that the above citation is my most treasured passage in the Scriptures. It has profound meaning. It's a statement of God's complete faithfulness. By extension, Christians can say this same thing about the church that has persisted on earth since Jesus' day. God always keeps His flock. I believe that this passage is at the heart of a great many things in the Christian faith, and it serves as a great summary of the whole of my religion.

This letter has been a long time coming. Please understand from the outset that its intention is to share with you a bit about why I myself believe some of the doctrinal positions of the Reformed faith. I believe them to be blameless and worth fighting for. While I do believe that I understand them in the traditional sense, I have intended here to set forth why I affirm them, and am not necessarily looking to define or defend these points as they were recorded in history verbatim. This short letter isn't meant to be an exhaustive examination of these doctrines. It isn't by any means a lengthy critique of the opinions of them that disagree, nor is it a treatment of every verse that I find in support of Reformed Theology. I intend here only to treat some of the most powerful reasons why I believe in these truths, and to cite only a few of the most powerful verses that have built my theology. These truths changed my life. When the Scriptures opened to me the God of indescribable holiness it changed everything. Just seeing God in His word changed me instantly. Even now so many years later I can go right back to that first time I felt overcome by my God. I wish to share that with you if I can. I'm glad to write this letter. I pray that all the warmth and joy of a loving God uphold you and show you the hope of His calling. I pray that your hope is Biblical. I have come to believe in the doctrines of grace because I believe that God should be central to everything I believe. He is the center of everything I think. I want to funnel everything I believe about everything through what I believe about Him. God's absolute centrality and holiness is, I think, the true heart of the Reformed Faith.

I know that most people will never read this entire thing. Perhaps I could persuade you to only read some parts at a time then. I'll intentionally not set forth oodles of Scripture references. It's not that I don't want to, but it's my attempt to deliver this message in relation to only a few points while giving each some degree of attention. If I were to cite each Scripture that has impacted my understanding in these things I can honestly say that I could never finish writing. I would simply be citing all 1189 chapters of the Bible.

First, let's briefly look at some history. What are the five points? Why were they written and when? With good reason, the five points of Calvinism are inextricably linked to the doctrinal precision of the great Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). The five points, as they have come to be known, are depicted by an acrostic that aptly summarizes the beliefs written by a Dutch church council (or Synod) held in the Netherlands in the city of Dordrecht in 1619. This church was heavily influenced by Calvin's teaching. The council is known as the Synod of Dort and the acrostic as TULIP. An acrostic, unlike an abbreviation, is a word where each letter represents a phrase. TULIP is: T-Total depravity, U-Unconditional election, L-Limited

atonement, I-Irresistible grace, and P-Perseverance of the saints. The Synod's works, along with these points of doctrine were written some 55 years after the death of John Calvin as a point for point response to another five point statement of faith produced in 1610 by a Christian group known as the Arminians. Their statement was called the Remonstrance. Arminians were primarily influenced by the teachings of a man named Jacob Arminius (1560 -1609). The gravity behind these doctrinal positions has sparked no small amount of controversy in the church since the Remonstrance was written. The doctrinal positions held in that document continue to insight great passion on both sides of the argument as is fitting.

Calvinism is not a belief system simply of five points of theology. It's a rich tradition based on covenant theology. It's an entire worldview built from Scripture encircling one all-surpassing truth, that God Himself must be the center focus in everything in life and faith. Calvinism funnels every belief through its belief about the nature of God in a unique way. John Calvin is perhaps the most loved and yet most vilified scholar of the past millennia. Though I confess that I'm increasingly more comfortable in theological circles being known as Reformed or Calvinistic, I would take issue if I were to be labeled Arminian. Arminianism, in many points, is heresy; however, it is not heresy that I feel leads to death as I'm dealing with it here. Some heresies must disqualify a person or even an entire faith group from truth immediately; such as the heresies of the United Pentecostal church or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (a.k.a. the Mormons). There are other heresies, like those dealt with here in Arminianistic teaching, that are areas of needed correction, perhaps even in Christians. The term heresy can be used in both instances. The severity of the truth in question and its impact on the core of the Gospel determines the severity I'd say. I would argue that there are degrees in heresy. For example; heresy is to say that God is *not* completely sovereign over everything, that He is not in full control. God is sovereign, but there are many genuine Christians who, I feel, do not truly believe this. I know I didn't always believe it. They would likely say they do if asked, but their beliefs wouldn't remain consistent if really tested. This is heresy, but not one that disqualifies a man from Christ.

Let me say candidly that these points and the whole manner of the faith I now love did not come easily for me. I hated the Reformed Faith in nearly every way and fought against it vehemently at first. Such a response, while sinful, was only natural as I look back in time to a mind that in those days had just barely begun conforming to any resemblance of Christ. God waited years to open my heart, and I'm glad He waited. Great and noble truths can be as dangerous in the hands of a hot-headed man as a broadsword in the hand of a toddler. Grace, in some greater measure, at last came to me as I ran out to a field for a day with a book by Jonathan Edwards in one hand, the Scriptures in the other and the sweaty trembling frustration of being divided in joint and marrow by Romans nine. For me, to be opened to such powerful and humbling spiritual realities was earth shattering. Everything changed. The chaff began to be blown away. I saw God above the circle of the earth like never before. Now to the five points themselves, as they are in my theology, and why I personally affirm them.

The longer version (T.U.L.I.P. Seriatim):

And as Isaiah said before: “Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah,”
Romans 9:29.

T- Total depravity

This doctrine became the key to the rest. I think this is the case with most people. Once I understood God’s word regarding SIN the rest began to fall into place. Having a proper view of ourselves from Scripture is second only to having a proper view of God. Mankind is completely sinful. Through and through to the very core we are wholly depraved in our being and we deserve hell because of our sins. SIN is what best defines us. There is one unifying aspect in all our stony hearts that we as humans can sing about at the campfire, and it’s that we’re all wretched. Michael Jackson’s song *we are the world* was inaccurate! Jackson was not a theologian. God says we’re wicked. All of us break His law, the Ten Commandments, and prove our sinful natures daily. I came to see that we’re sinners not just because we break God’s law but that we break God’s law because we’re sinners. We’re bad people. This is what God says about us without ambiguity since Adam’s time in the Garden of Eden ended some 6,000 years ago. I believe that only grace makes the difference in the heart. Genesis 8:21 serves as a good summation of this fact as God sees it. As I have been journeying with Christ my mind has been changed in relation to all these truths about the nature of man stated in the Bible. I now agree with God that mankind is not well. We all died in sin when Adam sinned according to Romans five. Except for Jesus, who was born of the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary, we all, by created order, inherited Adam’s sin and were born spiritually dead. The overwhelming numerical evidence of my actual transgressions of God’s law proved original sin within me very clearly. I saw that sin came natural to me in life. I was good at it. I was an inventor of evil things, Romans 1:30. I completely dishonored my parents and God my creator. I lied so I was a liar, just as a murderer is a murderer for the rest of his life after the first act. I was a thief, a blasphemer, an idolater, an adulterer because I was full of lust in my thought life, Matthew 5:28. I knew that on God’s Judgment Day I was in serious trouble and I was afraid of God. Just as plain as I can speak Paul says, “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one,” Romans 3:10-12. He says this stringing together a montage of passages from the Old Testament to cogently present God’s anthropology. This is how God sees all of humanity. We know that Paul is referring to all men because in verse nine he uses the identifier “Both Jews and Greeks” thus indicting everyone. If this was all that was said on the topic it would be enough, but it’s by no means it. Scripture is replete with dreadfully clear statements about the sinful nature of man at his very core from birth. One writer commenting on this said, “While depravity is one of the most widely disputed and hated doctrines in Christianity

it is also the most empirically verifiable.” Just look around you and in the mirror. Sin is everywhere and everyone knows it. Just begin reading at Romans one and by the time you get to chapter four there’ll be no doubt that mankind is seriously wicked. This had a profound impact on me and God’s word changed me even in my opinion of myself. If someone had asked me years ago I’d agree that there was something wrong in humanity, but I thought that everything was alright down at the very core. I believed that people were good deep down inside and that God somehow still delighted in them there, but this isn’t true. I know it now. Jesus said that my heart was the source of the problem. Such truth is the essence of total depravity. The whole of a man in all of his constituent parts is affected by sin. This is the confession of Christians since the start. When I came to see this I was brought to the dust which is a very good place to begin. The heart is a veritable idol producing factory. In short, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23. Once my definition of ‘sinner’ became Biblical I feared God and His holiness. I saw that the title ‘sinner’ meant something much worse than being just less than perfect. I was much worse than that. A sinner in the way the Bible describes a lost person is a bad person, a law breaker, a criminal awaiting sentence. I feared God, not because He is evil, but because He was so very good and I was so very not. I knew that I had broken God’s law and that I had offended Him, 1 John 3:4. My conscience always spoke clearly on these matters even though I worked hard not to listen to it. The law condemned me personally and I didn’t need to look at anyone else’s heart to know that man’s problem was deeply rooted. The law condemns us all. That proved something to me. By His words I knew that God knew me very well and that I was fallen. Grace accompanied me into fear and showed me the way through to the cross. It was just like in that song *amazing grace* by the late great John Newton where he says, “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” God’s grace did both in me as well. One Christian said, “God creates from nothing and so until man becomes nothing God can make nothing of him.” I argue for the truth of total depravity because I believe that men can do absolutely nothing to save themselves. This goes to the heart of the Gospel. It is why I’m not Arminian. Sinners are not sick people needing medicine; they are dead people in need of life. Jesus did not come to make bad men good; He came to make dead men live. He didn’t say I am the Resurrection and the medicine.

Paul likens the saving knowledge of Jesus in the hearts of men to natural creation. What he means by it summarizes my short answer as to why I’m now saved. He says, “...It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” 2 Corinthians 4:6. God created *ex-nihilo*. It means “Out of nothing” in Latin. The entire natural universe was designed and created by a God who is Spirit. From nothing comes nothing without God. With God, every something came to be. Just like there was no-thing called universe, there was no life in my heart. Just as God spoke and created the light within which He worked, He spoke into the void that was my own heart and went to work. Why do I believe in Jesus? It’s because God spoke to me. Paul’s imagery here could not be clearer to me. I come from nothing, I am nothing. I am saved, I have everything. Man’s depravity is like the void of nothingness. There is no light there. Such

truth is why sin is referred to in terms of darkness. Satan is said to dwell in darkness. The works of the flesh are spoken of as having been done in darkness. Christians, the Bible says, were called out of that darkness into God's marvelous light. God shines in the hearts of His elect and they feel it.

Jesus said something that I could not get past regarding mankind's depravity. Often times it's the simplest things that have the greatest impact. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing," John 6:63. I feel that Romans 9:29 simply restates this truth from man's perspective. Jesus said this at a time and place in the Gospel that I think makes the meaning of this all the more clear. It showed me later why salvation must be by grace alone. With men salvation is impossible. Jesus did not speak about salvation as the sure result of decision. If John 6:63 is true, and it is because He's God, then there was nothing in me from birth that could "Profit" me before God. This included my will and freedom of choice as these were indeed natural attributes. I was free as a sinner only to choose sin. I was not free. I was a slave bound in and to sin. I was subject to death. I could only choose what was within my fallen nature to choose. Once God gave me a new nature, i.e. the new birth, then I could and did choose freely to follow Him most joyously. These are all spiritual realities. The flesh profits nothing. I needed God the Holy Spirit to give me life. This showed me total depravity like nothing else. No-thing in me from my natural birth profited me. Not one thing. My will was wholly defiled by sin. Even my conscience could not save me. It just accused me. Righteousness never appeared as a blip on my radar screen. I never sought God rightly because it was not in my nature to do so. After I was saved, I concluded that the same must be true in all men because Romans three proves it historically, empirically, and universally. 10 out of 10 people hate God. Disagreeing with God's word on this point only proves the point all the more. I have proven in my own life that the more men hear about God's righteousness and His demand on their lives the more they despise Him unless He has mercy on them, John 3:19. God says no one ever seeks Him and that the world isn't looking for Him. This seemed very unlikely to me long ago. I was taught from my youth that humans were fully autonomous beings capable of going in either direction at any time. How could it be then that not even one person is good among us all, and all who've ever lived? I thought that if we were morally neutral and free beings able to find God freely by choice that surely someone somewhere had done it. Someone was good. I'd never met that person, but I just assumed they were out there. If man has the ability to seek God by choice I thought that someone would have done it and taught his children to do the same thus spawning an honorable nation at least for some time in history somewhere. Surely some human would have had to come to God. The sheer volume of opportunity alone seemed to guarantee that someone found God, but God says otherwise. All should come even as all men know that God exists by looking at His creation and having their conscience, but still no one responds rightly. No one. This was very tough for me, but it is what God says in the Bible. Romans three crushed me because I saw that it was not just speaking of some distant tribe, but of me as well. In reflection, then, I think Romans 9:29 tells us why some men have come to God. If no one seeks after Him and yet there are the faithful, there must be a reason for their faithfulness. Romans 9:29 is that reason in my theology.

It tells me that no one comes to God unless God first comes to him. The doctrinal truth of total depravity works as a backdrop for understanding this. Why was Israel a nation that knew God? The nation of Israel alone walked with God in the First Covenant. Paul says that they too would have fallen but for God's faithfulness to His promises. And why was God faithful to His promises? Was it because one man among all men first came to God? No, God came to a non-seeking pagan Gentile named Abram because He's merciful, loving and gracious. Abram did not come to God, God came to him. God desires to save and so we're not all consumed. Men are not free and so they never come to God. I read Romans chapter one through three and I see this. Their wills are not neutral or free because of sin; they must not be because no one does good. Men are totally depraved. This is the quintessential truth behind the statement that the flesh profits nothing. All flesh profits nothing. It never did. Isaiah tells us how every man has turned each to his own way. No one can ever come to God because we're all dead before Him.

This is exactly what Jesus says in John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." He uses the word "Can" and not "May" here because He's aware that no man has the ability to come. May and can are very different words denoting very different things. It's like that school teacher who corrected your use of words when you asked, "Can I go to the bathroom?" She said, "I don't know, can you?" Then you'd assimilate and ask, "May I?" All men are permitted to come, but none *can*. They don't want to come because they're evil. The flesh profits nothing. This occupied my thoughts for a very long time. I drew a line on a board and listed below it as many attributes as I could that I believed I came with from my mother's womb. I listed things like my mind, will, emotions, reason, conscience, anger, humor, etc. Then above the line I put many godly attributes that I must have been given by the Holy Spirit at my second birth like faithfulness, joy, peace, wisdom, righteousness, love for the brethren, conviction, discernment, etc. I saw that my will had to sit below the line. If Jesus is right, and He is because He's God, then that which was with me at my first birth could not profit me a thing without the second. I had to be born again! Hence, my will, before salvation, is wholly of the flesh and useless. It must have played no part in my salvation. This isn't carrying the picture too far; this became the picture in its simplicity. There is no in between regarding the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit. I once argued that the wills of men might well be influenced by God, even heavily by God, but that they must of their own power first choose in order to be saved. This idea will be revisited later a bit in my understanding of the "I" in TULIP. I once argued that God must step back and not fully deliver or salvation cannot happen. The will must be wholly under its own influence at last and welcome God before the Spirit moves in. Without permission God cannot do a thing but woo, I'd say. Just like a child couldn't rightly be said to walk independently while the parent is still holding her hand, the will could be influenced, directed, cheered and guided by God but it must be totally free and independent nonetheless to be saved. God merely has His share I would say back then. I gave Him the vast majority of the credit, of course, but I sinfully held back some for me. I may not have even intended to defy God, but I was convinced, by natural presupposition mind you, that of course my will had to cross that heavenly line on its own strength. I was convinced that my choice

saved me along with and under God's grace. I thought, "Who else could save me but me?" Who's more responsible for me than me? Who's looking out for me more than me? Bear in mind that I had no comprehension of Romans one through three yet. No matter how assisted it may have been I had to walk that walk of my own free will to be saved. Here's the problem though; if my free will is what profited me, if it crossed the line, then my flesh profited me all things. If God put the power in my decision then the power was in me and not Him. That means the power was in my flesh. Essentially then, I was arguing not that Jesus saved me, but that I saved myself with His assistance. I would say then that He merely made it possible for me to do it. Today I say that this is neither a true view of salvation or of the Savior. My will, in my old view, was what made salvation work. I now think that this is something altogether different than what Jesus said. Neither the flesh, nor any attribute thereof, can profit me. It cannot and there's no exception to the rule in any man. I'm dead in sin and "unprofitable" from birth. It's the simplicity of this that has never left me. I'm increasingly more amazed at the disconnect in people who claim that it was their God given free-wills that gained them access to the gracious gift of God while claiming they don't boast of themselves. If men came of their own free wills then that would mean that their flesh profited them heaven. This, I protest, is fundamentally inconsistent with 1) theology and 2) the empirical evidence based on theology. We are totally depraved. There is nothing we take from our mother's womb that profits us eternally. The flesh from birth profits nothing hence we "...Must be born again," John 3:6, to have profit in our members. I believe that I began to "profit" when God regenerated me. Romans three teaches me that no one ever came to God of their own will. Who did I think I was, the only salmon heading upstream? All of the prophets, all of the disciples and the late born Apostle Paul urge us to affirm Romans 9:29. None of them "found" God by themselves; rather they were found by God. They were "found" by grace alone. Even those saved in Scripture during the Acts of the Apostles and beyond would boast only in what God did for them by His grace. I've read their biographies and autobiographies. They did not choose God, but God chose them. This is then why they chose God. None of them spoke of how they came to God in their own power. How arrogant was I to have believed any different. I say let us do away with this foolish hording of credit and give it all to God. He took the first step, not me. My decisions are my own, but they cannot save.

I believe Romans 9:29 with a happy face. God's faithfulness to Abraham is how I can explain those throughout history who were truly faithful. God is not only the reason there's a hard hearted Pharaoh; He is the only reason that there's a soft hearted Moses. We often miss the latter as we question God in the former.

I hear some preachers use the word freedom all the time in relation to non-believers, but it's wrong to do so. I saw that man is not free. Jesus said, "...Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin," John 8:34. Slaves are not free. They're slaves. They're bound. It's simple. Two verses later we see that Jesus sets men free. Until that happens there's nothing free in men before God.

Man is totally depraved. He is wholly inclined to evil. This doctrine is not meaning that he is as wicked as he could be, but it is in relation to God that he is totally dead in trespasses and

sins, Ephesians 2:1. Spiritually speaking, I think that men only make decisions consistent with their nature. A man born of Adam has only Adam's nature; a nature which *never* seeks God as I've seen it. This nature *cannot* seek. It will not seek! *Once a man has been born again* he can and will freely choose the good in his new "profitable" nature. Only then will he repent and be justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ in accordance with Romans 10:9-13.

The logic became simple. If we're dead in sin then what can dead men do? Answer: nothing at all. Dead in sin equals the flesh profiting nothing. We're dry bones. We're dust. This means that God cannot merely offer salvation in the way many analogize. This means it's not like a gift that He presents wrapped and that must be opened. Dead men cannot open gifts so it's odd to view salvation as such. Dead men need life. The gift they receive must be something else then. It must really be a special gift. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him because no one can. They're dead. I like the analogy one pastor used; He said, "The Scriptures don't view man like someone who has fallen from the first floor window. That he merely needs a cast or a bandage. Rather he's like a man who has fallen from the fortieth floor. He's dead and he needs life."

Because of the overarching reality of depravity, I saw clearly why the three metaphors used to describe my new found faith in the Bible were used. These are the examples of creation, birth, and resurrection. The Bible uses these pictures for a reason, friends, and this had a powerful affect on me when I saw it. When understood properly these truths humble a man to love and serve knowing that by grace alone he is loved by God. The Bible uses these three pictures because it becomes obvious that we cannot affect any of them at all. We would do well to relate the two. Just as creation came from nothing, so did I. Just as I had no input into my natural birth, so I did not cooperate with God for my spiritual one. Just as Lazarus was raised up so was I. I was dead. Amen, it's by grace alone through faith alone that I'm a Christian. Until I had been given life, or regeneration/new birth, I could not, nor did I want to see the kingdom of God. This is what it means to me to say that I'm saved by grace alone. I understand it now because I believe that total depravity means spiritual death. I once was lost but now I've found *myself*? No, dear reader, I once was lost but now *I'm found*. This is my story. This is my song:

*Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

– *Augustus Toplady.*

I believe that one of the best overall pictorial analogies of rebirth in a Christian in the Scripture can be drawn from the revival of Lazarus, John 11:1-44. I love this. Lazarus had nothing to contribute. He smelled just like I did. This passage perfectly symbolizes and summarizes my view of why I can wholly, joyously and consistently confess that I believe I'm truly saved by grace alone by Christ alone. I was dead and then He called me. God saved me and loved me before I ever loved Him. That has become the heart of my confession here. A man who feels he plays any part in his salvation, even if he claims his only part was opening the gift God made available, cannot confess this as I can. I would beseech you, brethren, to give all the glory to God. It was nothing in our flesh, not even our choices that saved us. I saw that I was dead like Lazarus and Jesus called me out of a tomb. It's just that simple. Lazarus was raised and it had nothing to do with him or his desires. All he contributed to his revival was rigor mortis.

So in short, because mankind has always gone away from God, I conclude that man is totally depraved as this first doctrinal point attests. We're sinful and our flesh profits us nothing. I conclude that the systemic nature of SIN is from the fall of Adam as it has unanimously affected all men born from him. Men are dust and we're all like the grass, 1 Peter 1:24-25. We're here today and gone tomorrow. We're sinful. Often this point is not met with much resistance.

U- Unconditional election

God saves men and chooses them for heaven without respect to them, their works or their decisions. I don't know exactly how He does it; I just know that He does all things according to His own good pleasure. I want to share with you just a bit about why I believe this to be true. I believe this in the greatest measure because of what I've already written on the "T" in TULIP, but there's of course much more. Scripture speaks of the plan for earth as complete in the mind of God from, "Before the foundation of the world," Revelation 13:8. God knew that men would fall and that the Son would come to raise many to life from before the dust was sculpted into Adam. Really knowing this changed a great many things in my theology. All men are predestined to be somewhere in the end from before the start. I am still rocked to the core by Romans 8:29-30 where Paul says, "Whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Everything here is monergistic. It is the work of God alone. Once I knew what the terms in this passage signified then this statement became absolutely amazing to me. In summary, God says here that those saved after the end are those predestined from before the beginning. It is an innumerable host, Jude 1:14; Revelation 5:11. These are those that I believe God is not willing should perish. These are the heirs according to

the promise made to Abraham that God is not slack concerning, 2 Peter 3:9. God knows their names. Paul begins a discourse here that assures the certainty of salvation in believers. From Romans 8:28, Paul begins a teaching that continues over three chapters where he shows God is totally sovereign over salvation in every way and at every point. I couldn't believe there was this much text devoted to a single teaching. I don't even find this in the essentials. Verse 30 is called the golden chain in theology because it can never be broken. I saw that if I'm involved in one place in this chain then I'm involved at some point in every other. If I've been predestined I'll be justified. If I'm glorified it's because I was called, etc. Why does God then choose to save anyone, I asked myself? Those who believe in a free will and yet know a good deal about the Bible and God's omniscience say that God simply knows what we'll do before the world began and so He acts based on that foreknowledge. They say this because it's obvious that God has always known who will come to Him by faith. They say that this is all that the word "foreknow" means here in the passage, but I respectfully disagree. Of course God foreknows, friends. He foreknows everything. That's a given. This foreknowledge here, however, is special and focuses in on the glorified. They're in the same sentence and the word "All" must be placed between each term. It's the same group. Not everyone on earth is glorified yet God foreknows all. This foreknowledge is something else. The glorified here (which is the consummation of the believer's hope) is for the elect alone. This verse focuses on those involved in these steps in the process listed. It's not a general statement about God's knowing all things. Of course He knows all things and therefore all people. This is something more and its position in the teaching of Romans affirms it, I think. God comes for these people. He saves them by the imputed righteousness of faith. This is not all the world, but only God's elect in view in all the saving graces. He sets His love upon some in a special way. That is what the word foreknow means here. It's a type of love in the language that's in view, not merely a type of information. It's personal. Is God's decision to save based simply on His omniscience? This was one explanation I found in the world, but it forgets an awful lot. No one worth their salt in Biblical theology can deny that God knows all things from all eternity. He is truly all-knowing or omniscient. In mature thinking, however, I don't think it's enough to say that God simply *knows* all things. I think we'd do better to say that He *ordains* all things. He has no crystal ball that tells Him what'll happen; He's in control. Things are not fixed by some external reality visible only to God. Nothing is at all random. Luck is a pagan view, not a Christian one. We should not merely view God as a divine visionary. He is to be beheld as dread sovereign over all. God is in control. He cannot just know that Jesus is going to be crucified; He must act to make it happen. He must intervene with Mary. Her pregnancy was not just something that was bound to happen that He had a heads up on. Therefore, our view of sovereignty in all these things will affect our view of everything. It will affect how we see salvation happening. If we see God as merely a passive observer full of knowledge of what will be then it will take us in one direction in Scripture. If we see Him as a personally intervening God who actively accomplishes His purposes in the world it'll take us somewhere altogether different.

I believe that God is sovereign over all things at all times. Man is evil and has his fallen intentions, yet God is provident over all. The question is can I trust Him in this? It really is an assurance to know that God is in charge. It's the type of non-worldly assurance that I think brought peace to Paul and Silas in prison, Acts 16:25. They knew God was in control. Christians should battle, if need be, to come to terms with this. It's only our sinful natures that deny God's place on the throne. God reigns and, in His providence, orders all things. He is as much God at the crucifixion as He is at the Resurrection. Whether we're speaking of Israel's kings, America's presidents, Joseph's sale, the canon of Scripture, Mary's pregnancy, the widow's jar, the serpent in Eden, Simeon's gift, Lucifer's rebellion, the arrows on battlefields, Paul's beheading, Jonah's fish, gold in the mouths of other fish, a lying spirit in Ahab's advisors, Peter's restoration, David's son's death, the birth of Isaac, the lot to Matthias, the brimstone in Sodom, the ram on Moriah, languages at Pentecost, Nebuchadnezzar's insanity, the number of rooms at the Inn, the Exodus from Egypt, the flood, smooth stones flying towards the foreheads of giants, Job's suffering, Job's recovery, Dagon's prostration, Israel's repatriation, Jesus' crucifixion, or, dare I say it, my faith, God is the commander over it all. He reigns! Who do I think I am? Yes, even my decisions are not merely known, they are ordained. I am not the sovereign. My choice was no surprise to God. I, a 'whosoever' to all men, was not a 'whosoever' to my all knowing God; I came by His mercy. He rules over it all without a single frustration. In light of the weight of these things, some believers have come to say that God only predestines to life those who He knows will "freely" choose Him in life. They realize that He knows all from all time so they say this, as I did, to affirm independence. Some see autonomy as the key to it all. They say that God can look down the corridors of time from before He made the universe and in His omniscience simply choose those who He sees will rightly respond to the Gospel and choose Him. I think that this goes astray, however, by making man into a sovereign and God into a responder. It puts man in control. I know that seeing God as the begging servant genie has become a fundamental tenant in Evangelicalism today, but I say that it's quite blasphemous. People don't come to Jesus; Jesus comes to people. The moment man is out of God's hands and in his own then God is not God, man is God. I say that it goes back to errors that stem from misunderstanding total depravity. Again, it is the key. Some say that God must first see men of their own God-given wills "freely" choosing Him before He'll choose them. This again demands that men turn the point. This can't happen in my own view as I've previously established how I see that the flesh profits nothing. We see by the evidence of history in Romans three alone that no one ever seeks God, so what's God "Looking down the corridors of time" to see if He's merely looking for the independent action of wills? There's nothing to see. He'd just be seeing a bunch of dead corpses. That's the point. If we're dead that's all we are unless God gives us life. It'd be like me going to the graveyard with a Gospel message. Who will hear? No one. They're dead. Dead people don't listen. Unconditional election then must be something outside of men. It is why men come to God. It must rest in God.

Nearly every denomination has developed some definition of election because of the multitude of Scripture passages that speak about God's eternal and immutable will in the matter.

It's not speculation. We simply can't avoid the terms dealing with predestination. It's not an Augustinian idea or a Lutheran idea or a Calvinistic idea; they're Bible ideas using Bible words. All of us read the same Ephesians 1:3-6: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." Paul wrote this to first century Christians who didn't have the disadvantage of bad Arminian teaching. How do you then define this predestining? I, for one, have come to say that God knew His elect personally and chose (or foreknew) them before the earth took its first spin. This is omniscience in all its far reaching simplicity. God ordains all things according to His perfect will. I say that there's no ambiguity here in Ephesians one that God knows who are His from all eternity and furthermore that He must have then predestined them that it would be so. Some believe that God's choice here is based only on His foreknowledge of man's. I don't think so because I believe in total depravity. The flesh profits nothing and God knows this. I can't escape the simplicity or the absoluteness of that. Ephesians one is the foundation for the statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 that says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." It is not of us. Who then is *it* of? It is of God. That's what I've been trying to say.

Election to life is unconditional because men don't meet any necessary criterion except that they're depraved sinners in whom God can demonstrate His kindness and mercy. Unconditional election is the ground of true humility as it eliminates all boasting from the Christian faith. Free will enthusiasts must retain some credit for choosing salvation. While this seems logical to fallen man it isn't Biblically pure. I for one cannot give myself any such credit because I know who I was when God found me. I was rotten. I have no idea why He loves me. I was Romans three. I am the wretch the song refers to. If the Bible had pictures God could have put my picture next to Romans three. To think I pulled myself up at all is just weird for me to say at this point in my life because I know a bit about what sin is. God chose me. This doesn't cause me to boast; it's most humbling. It makes me want to cry and to sing of His graciousness. It's like that old song by Lowry: "Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus; naught of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus." I can't even add my own choice to this or I'll sin against my own conscience. Such an addition would destroy the beauty of the melody as bad as if I'd stumbled on stage during the song and knocked over the drums. It is by grace alone that I have come to sing. I once thought I had a part in saving myself, but I pray that my mind is being renewed through the word of God and I can now give God all the credit for saving me. All this is not to say that I don't now joyously have a part and participate in my sanctification now that I've been saved. Sanctification begins after justification and goes until I die. I participate here though it too is only by the power God supplies. I know now that I had no part in my life in Christ before God made me born again. That is the point of unconditional election. It is not based on works or merely on foreseen faith. It is based on God's free and good

pleasure, but I digress. Some of my friends say that God can by grace alone only take a man 99.9999999% of the way to salvation, but that he must exercise faith “of his own free will” or else he will not be saved. I believe I once said this to rescue God from ever being responsible for anyone going to hell. In my theology, God had nothing to do with hell. It was like I thought Satan ran it or something. Those who believe in complete autonomy before God insist that man’s choice is the sovereign. I can’t comprehend this when I think of God’s remarkable providence through all of Scripture. He ordained everything and sustained one race through the worst of sins to bring about the New Covenant in and through Jesus. He did all that with perfect precision, but seems to have stopped and let everything go to us in the New Testament. I used to see salvation as random. Like some seed God had sown capriciously without any sure hope of harvest. I thought that men then made it work by an independent faith. I believed that until I understood what sin was and what it did to me. I cannot see a grace of unfinished work done on the cross anymore. I can’t see Jesus merely making it possible for me to save myself anymore. I cannot see Jesus just having a part in my salvation any longer. Such positions to me now are, as one preacher commented, like a really wide bridge that extends *most* of the way across a river. If election is only God’s response to completely free decisions then one, He *cannot* know the future, as I’m always free to change it and two, I still have a womb-given power in my flesh to profit me before God. This is then a conditional election. Men by faith would then meet the criteria for God to save them. This is impossible. No one seeks God. The flesh profits nothing. Martin Luther once commented that the nothing Jesus spoke of in John 6 was not even a *little* something; I believe he was right. I don’t believe in a mere prevenient grace, I believe in a plenary grace.

Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,” John 3:16. These “Whosoever will” statements cannot produce surprise in God. I’ve heard some passionate brothers say, “I believe in a whosoever kind of a God” in vehement denial of unconditional election. I respect them in their zeal as they feel this ensures that the Gospel be preached without restraint to all men everywhere, but they must be forgetting that their God is omniscient. It’s not as if one comes to God and He would ever say, “Oh, I didn’t expect you...Great...Bonus!” No matter what a man’s definition of predestination is, wouldn’t such a surprise-to-God mentality be forgetting Romans 8:29-30? I thought it was obvious that God *at least* foreknows, in the sense of omniscience, all those who’ll come, so even if one can’t yet make the jump to understand that He actually elects unconditionally, we must understand that the whosoever are totally fixed in His mind no matter what. That’s my point for now. It is that whosoever can’t equal random. Jesus is not teaching that it’s within the power of all who will to now come. They can’t. They’re dead. He knows this. I used to take the word “whosoever” and place it out upon humanity as a 50/50 as if God was not in view any longer. This forgets so much. I think the whosoever statements are primarily meant to convey to an exclusive Jewish audience that the Gentiles were welcome now as well. Nicodemus had to understand this along with the rest of Jesus’ disciples who were all Jewish. God was going to all the nations in the New Covenant in fulfillment of what He

promised in the Old Covenant. He showed them this in miraculous ways like the gift of languages for evangelism. It's not just the Jews but the Gentiles as well who are invited to the wedding feast. All are now whosoever. The Gospel is for the joy of men throughout the whole world. Secondly, these statements are written for us who know nothing of the hearts or destinies of men. Anyone demonstrating the fruits of repentance and faith in response to the Gospel are to be welcomed into the church despite who they are for God has welcomed them just as He did us. Whosoever will, as many continue to misapply the verse, denotes an inconsistent randomness within the character of God. It is fine when we keep a whosoever concept confined to the church. It's not fine when we act as if salvation is within the power of men and so God really doesn't know who'll respond to Jesus. I know that we as the sheep don't know who'll come, but if salvation is presented as randomness to God then this becomes a problem for me. The Shepherd knows His sheep. He goes out to find them. I know that salvation appears like the wind to us, but we are not God. The new birth, or regeneration, appears quite random to the eyes of men at times, but it is in no way random. It is an eternal, invisible and indissoluble almighty grace extended at the perfect time. It is invisible, but like wind its effects are clearly seen. We don't know what God's doing all the time. It may appear random to us, but the wind Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus in John three is not mindless; it is rather the work of God the Holy Spirit and He doesn't seem at all to do random in Scripture. If I preach the Gospel to a crowd of 1,000,000 people I have no certain insight into what God is doing in the hearts of the listeners. I'll preach it to them all. Those who come forward out of the crowd in faith and show forth the fruit in life are the elect. The doctrine of election is in no way removed. I preach without respect of person knowing that only the called will come. All will be called outwardly. My voice will strike the auditory nerves of everyone present, but the called in Romans 8:29-30 alone will have light shine in their heart like 2 Corinthians 4:6. I would be a fool to try to determine who God's elect are. He doesn't tell me. I just know that those who come and endure are they. A whosoever concept then, as many erroneously apply the idea to God, would mean that He doesn't know who'll come. Of course He knows. The whosoever will statement then is not applicable to God, but only to me in such respects. Whether I believe He ordains or simply knows who are His, as Ephesians one says, it's obvious that He knows perfectly well. He knows and I don't. This statement then is for my non-omniscient self. I call all outwardly, God calls some inwardly. I therefore believe in a whosoever kind of God as well, a sovereign one drawing every whosoever that comes.

Let me look at one election objection with you. It's the question of why? Why go preach if God's just going to save His elect? I had to answer this question for myself as well. Indeed it's often the first objection when these things are discussed. The following is a bit of my conclusion. Many years ago I found complete futility in evangelism if unconditional election was true. I asked, "Why go preach if God just has His elect?" I forgot that I was saved by evangelism. Someone came to me with the Gospel. No one gets saved without preaching/evangelism. Evangelism and prayer are the means God has established to accomplish salvation. These are a means to an end. Without someone obeying God there would not even be a Bible. Therefore even if a man reads it on a deserted island after God sent it out to him on the tide he is still saved

by evangelism in a written sense. God, who could do anything He wishes, uses men. He tells me to go. I need no more to go. All those who God calls from Romans 8:29-30 are preached to and prayed for by believers. The God of the ends is the God of the means. He alone can save; He uses us. What a privilege. I live for personal evangelism. It is my greatest joy and highest priority in life as a Christian. I will tell any man on earth without hesitation that if he will confess his sins to God, repent and turn from them placing his trust wholly in Jesus that he can be saved. "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household," Acts 16:31. I say this to people knowing that the power to do so must come from above. Salvation is not mine to give and it is not within them to simply choose. They must be born again. That birth is not the effect of my words or of their choice. It's first the effect of the Spirit of God. The way to the heart is always through the mind so I will call him to decision, but salvation isn't a work of the flesh; it's a work of the Spirit.

The will is not desirous of God as I've seen it in Scripture. Yet we must will to follow Him if we're truly to be saved. This is no contradiction to what I've already said. We must seek him of our own will. Christianity is not some try harder religion. It is not just some adherence to rules, regulations and doctrines that make one a believer. God gives the ability to love Him and to love ones neighbor in a way that is truly pure before God. He delights in our love toward one another. If our will is unwilling from birth, which it is, then it's God's unconditional election that makes the difference. From the first moment of my conversion it was God. "...God...works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure," Philippians 2:13. He does both. He has to. Scripture tells me that I wouldn't want Him otherwise. Because He works in me I now will to serve Him. This was Augustine's prayer over 1,500 years ago: "Lord, give what You command and command what You will." Lord you've told me to love others; help me to love them. You told me to go and share the Gospel; empower me to do so. Augustine knew he needed help. God saves by grace alone. That means I didn't help. My sanctification, however, or the life that I now live in relationship to Jesus is a joyous synergistic effort. God still alone supplies the grace, but I cooperate now having been made alive and willing to do so.

Unconditional election is the clean view. As in all things in a sound faith it invites men to base their trust in God alone and to find their answers in Him. God is no respecter of persons. His election then is of necessity His own decision without respect to us or any foreseen faith. It can't be based on performance even .000000001%. I came to see that grace is not with respect to one person's moral rectitude verses another's. It's not that this person was able to appreciate Jesus' sacrifice and this other wasn't. The doctrine says that God elects some to salvation and that it is most assuredly not based on any foreseen works done by them. I say that if it's based on any works or decisions, then men merited salvation and the following verse becomes awkward: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast," Ephesians 2:8-9. It's not of us. The flesh profits nothing. If it's of decision then there's room to boast because I chose and others didn't. It's important to see that it's not merely the works or choices of certain individuals that are foreseen in Romans

8:29-30, but they themselves that are the foreknown. These are the sheep for whom Jesus lovingly came to give His life, John 10:15.

There is no escaping the fact that God also predestines others to destruction. This, I confess, is a most difficult truth and one that I embrace and undertake here briefly seeking the utmost specificity in my dealings with it. It's more difficult to speak on than anything else for me. I am terrified to get all of these things wrong, especially this. I know that sometimes in my dealings with this doctrine I tend to shy away from God. When I feel myself conflicted by this I know that it's only my own remaining sin that I'm up against. God is holy and wholly to be praised. He is untainted by sin and my battle to trust Him fully is only temporary. One day I will know things better, even as I am known by Him. I don't want to speculate beyond what God gives me in the Bible. If I feel myself darkening reason by my own proclivities I must rest my mind on more simple things at times, but the topic must be examined. By the laws of rational inference alone I must believe that because God elects some to heaven then others are predestined to hell. If God predestines some then He predestines all. There's no other answer in my theology. Nothing is random and there are only two places to dwell after this life is over. Double predestination, as some call it, is true and to be dealt with most carefully as are all matters related to God's sovereign will. Again I beg anyone reading this to remember that no one can avoid the Bible's teaching on predestination. Even if you only say that God from all eternity merely foreknows all the elect in line with Romans 8:29-30 then this doctrine still emerges. Those who He knew would not come are still born into this world with their destinies completely known to God. No matter what nothing is any less fixed. He still then knows those who will be damned in the end from before the beginning. The question then becomes, why are they damned? I beseech you to seek your answers in God and His word and not in man. No matter how difficult this is for me I always return to the teachings of Scripture identified by the "T" in TULIP and relate the doctrine to myself. If I believe this Bible truth then I can never see it as wrong for God to hold me accountable for what I have done if He chooses to. I can try to say it's wrong, but I sinned of my own fallen will no matter what. I cannot blame anyone else. I offended God and broke His laws willingly. I was not "free" in sin, but I did most freely choose to sin. He did not force me or Adam to do this. Adam had a free will and in sin he lost it. I lost it in him. Our sin is ours, not God's. He is not the author of sin, Satan and we are. God is untainted in it all. He knew we'd fall and ordained all things over and in light of this. If God chose, of His own free will, to judge me and to send me to hell then it's never wrong. I deserve it. What I don't deserve is mercy. I don't know why God doesn't save everybody. Every time I ask myself this I hasten to remind myself that I don't know why He saves anybody. Why did He choose me? This is a good question to ask. Perhaps it's the best of questions. All I know is that His plan is perfect and that He is sovereign over both the good and the evil. He is sovereign over those He brings to heaven and over those He condemns to hell. This teaching is why many run from what they read in the Bible, but beloved, God is not asking us to re-write the Bible to save Him from any seemingly bad press. It isn't bad press, men are just biased reporters. Natural men hate this teaching, but don't worry they hate everything else about God as well. Some say that even if these things are

Biblical that we shouldn't discuss them because they're too difficult. I must humbly reply like Luther that nothing in Scripture is afraid of the light. It is written. God created man in His image; I won't attempt to return the favor even if I went about doing this by only avoiding certain places in Scripture. Double predestination, as I articulate and formulate it, must for many reasons be considered tangent to God's omniscience. It's in the light of God's perfect omniscience that I come to terms with both sides of predestination. The following detail work once helped me to begin to come to terms with the idea. It isn't that God needed to set out to create a race of people to condemn them. While He always knew this would happen and ordained it to be so we would do better to remember that God redeemed some to life out from the fallen lump of humanity. The Apostle Paul taught me that it's like a potter only selecting some of the clay out of the same lump. Men chose sin of their own. God did not force it. It is not then that God condemned from all eternity, but that He ordained to life from a creation that was fallen. He forbade Adam to eat of the fruit but he and his wife sinned. God was not the sinner, Adam was. He represented all of us. While God ordained this He did not place the necessity of rebellion on Adam. In light of God's perfect knowledge of man's rebellion He ordained some to life out from sin from before the foundation of the world. The rest are left to what they deserve for their sin.

Some say that hell was only made for fallen angels. I know that they mean no harm in this, but it's really a very bad statement. They seem to forget that God is omniscient. I fought to consider that God created hell before the seventh day, but I know that He did. Remember, He stopped all work on the seventh day and blessed it. All of creation was done. An eternal hell was made as well as an eternal heaven along with all the rest. Hell could not only be for the angels who fell. This would forget His omniscience. He knew men would go there as well and the world continues over 6,000 years later. God is not asking me to make this truth go away. Indeed, I can ignore the passages that teach it, but I shouldn't. I must either face it or begin fashioning an idol at this point in my life. God passes over people, choosing not to save them from all eternity, and leaves them to destruction. They were born to die and be in hell. I'm terrified to get this wrong, but I read it too clearly in the Bible. Immediately the hearts of many palpitate here, but I suppose such a response is only fitting. These are weighty issues dealt with in Scripture and faced in life with less and less bias only by mature men and women. As in all things we don't need boys and girls in the church here, we need sober men and women to teach these things. I must declare these truths head on and bluntly. It's difficult to introduce sometimes, but I have become increasingly consoled by the fact that it isn't for me to decide what's true. It's not for me to judge God or His word. I find it hard sometimes to teach that God killed all the people in the flood of Noah's day, but He did it. Babies drowned that day and their corpses were eaten by the sharks. If I don't face that then it's no different than not facing Jesus' love on the cross in many ways. This is Him and it's in His word. Should I not believe all these things? Am I ashamed of God? Perhaps I wouldn't teach on God's command to Israel to slaughter all the members of Ai during an evangelistic event knowing that there is a time and place, but here I am in writing. It's not that I as a Bible reader should be concerned with whether or not something is pleasing to me. I only care whether or not it's in the book. That's my consolation. Is it in the Bible clearly that God has

created some men for hell? If it isn't then my speculation here is quite dangerous and to be rebuked. Does God say it? Yes is the answer, and it's written just as plain as I can speak. Paul says, "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" Romans 9:21-24. This passage, in its context, rocked me and unsettled me to my boastful core when I first read it. Still today I cannot but beg God for more mercy to obtain to it. I'll not avoid it though as if it didn't exist and clearly say what it says. Let's spend time here letting Scripture interpret Scripture. Don't let anyone, including myself, convince you of an evil God in any of this. Don't embrace a God who you find nasty even when you see such things clearly written in your Bible. He's not nasty, we are. Our minds rebel and want to point our fingers at Him in anger. We side with men and oppose God by default. That's why I shy away. By grace, I won't. This world is fallen both by man's choice and God's providence. This doctrine, with all its difficulties, is to be taught. It's difficult because there are obstacles in our fleshly minds to overcome at the first. Paul and the others do *not* speak of God's redeeming and manifestly clear unconditional election with somber tones. They bless God for it and always speak of it in accordance with His good pleasure. The Israelites sang to their conquering king. They say God did it this way without the slightest hint of the reservation you're reading here. Paul rushes to teach it in Ephesians one that God elects believers from all eternity. It's nearly the whole first chapter of the book. No one can say God is unkind for having mercy on only some. No one is short changed. Romans 9:21-24 is partly why I believe in unconditional election. God chooses because He has determined to do it this way from before the foundation of the world. God is sovereign and I will not be His politician. In short, I no longer focus on whether such truths are acceptable to men or at first even to myself; I care whether or not it is in the book. If such truths take you away from loving God's holiness then leave them alone until they take you closer. I don't ever want to take men, even if they see these truths plainly written, to a God they think is wicked. God saves from this massive evil planet. Praise Him because it is the kindest thing anyone has ever done. He was under no obligation at all, yet He saved so many. Trust God; He is good. He is good in His complete sovereignty. God not only determines who goes to heaven, but who goes to hell. There is no alternative under a truly sovereign God.

A simple and classical proof of an unconditional (not based on works or foreseen self-wrought faith or decisions) election from Scripture that persuaded me was in Romans 9:10-13. Some opponents shout, "Oh, those Reformist types! They just love Romans nine. They just love it love it." I ask them, "Don't you?" If you don't love Romans nine like us Reformist types, perhaps you, like me at one point, are the type of objector Paul answers in the discourse. In chapter nine Paul straightforwardly says that God chose between two individuals from before they were even conceived in accordance with His predestination of these individuals. Paul then likens God's disposition towards the one not chosen as hatred. This is not the election of nations

as some have argued, but clearly of individuals. It is a predestination of two men from not only the same nation, but the same father, mother and womb. They're twins. Esau is later called profane in Scripture. God gave His church this example to make it crystal clear that He chooses and is not constrained by time, unknown factors or even social distinctions. Even if we were to assume (as I can't in light of all that comes before and after) that this passage only deals with nations, nations are only comprised of people so the effect is the same. God says, "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." God chose one child here and hated the other. Paul uses the Old Testament reference of nations to illustrate the facts of what he's been and is about to teach in the lives of these two children. The key to this choice and its relation to unconditional election is the clear indication that the choice was made by God before either of them were born. Some avoid the thrust of it all by saying that God's choice was merely because of what God knew Esau would later do in life. This is the "looking down the corridors of time" idea again. I say, of course God "knew" what Esau would do, but you're missing the whole point. It's before they're born and according to God's purpose of election that the choice here was made. There was no conditional election because the works (good or evil) were not yet done. It is not by any foreseen works at all that Isaac carried on the promise, but by the election of God. I'll show more clearly why I find this very clear as I move on in the chapter later.

I was as nervous as could be out in that field in Florida while reading Romans nine on that day I spoke of near the start of this letter. I would not go home without understanding. I begged God to help me. I had to be alone and went out early in the day to seek after God. I walked until I came to a large opening with several trees in the middle of the field providing shade for the day's battle. I read passage after passage. I dropped the book several times and paced in the shade and sun with my heart on trial through verbal arguments with myself. I had considered these truths for some time and was now made ready to hear some of the answer. I pounded on the writings of Paul and of Edwards for help. I thought, like most at first, that this choosing, or unconditional electing of God, was unfair. I was on man's side in and as part of myself. Surely men played a part by their works, I thought. I had been taught this all my life. How could grace be given to men if works have no role? If it's not works or even will then what do I have to assure myself before God that I'm even saved? I felt at times like I just wanted to quit and teach a prosperity gospel. I felt like I was on the verge of madness and looked around for Festus. What was my assurance? I didn't know that the answer to that question was only supposed to be Jesus Himself. He Himself is my assurance and not any works. This is that form of doctrine to which I began to be delivered. While it seems to strip the self righteous of assurance it is quite the opposite. He is the foundation of the whole of the faith. No other foundation can anyone lay. Christ was stripping me of self and from all boasting. By the truths of unconditional election, though I would not have used the term then, He taught me how the

excellence of this grace is not found in the vessels that contain it. I had fought this doctrine for a long time, but here I was on the verge of accepting it. I was going to have to tell a lot of people that I was wrong. I liken it to being pushed off a cliff finding God there to softly catch me. I thought I'd die, but He was not out to destroy me. God was showing me that it was always Him alone that I should trust. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. I was finally able to listen to Paul clearly without running to other verses in contradiction mode. In synthesis mode I was now able, by some greater grasp of the whole, to put together man's responsibility with God's sovereignty. I chose because He chose. I must then choose to prove His choosing. I must work to prove that I've entered into His rest. James now fully complimented Paul and vice versa. I saw that all my works and all my faith simply follow God's regenerating work. I was reading such things for some time, but God had not given me a sound understanding before that day. I simply could not yet carry total depravity with me into every Bible passage. It was like I was setting it down outside the door of many Bible verses. My objections showed my humanism. I was on man's side. I was the Devil's advocate.

What finally changed me was when I saw that my arguments against what I was reading were clearly anticipated by Paul. What grace this has been to so many throughout all the generations of the church. How perfect is God's word. This was overwhelming for me. I yielded to Paul when I saw this and this assured me that I was interpreting things rightly. The following is what swayed me over to believe everything I'm writing here. This, coupled with Jesus' statements in John six very soon after, was what struck the fatal blow to my boasting. It was Romans nine and John six. Now I'm only focusing on Romans nine though. Paul asks several questions in Romans nine that he knows readers will have if they understand what he is saying. I was the objector he kept answering. When I saw this, friend, I knew two things instinctively: 1) I was dead wrong, and 2) I really must have understood what Paul was saying. Friends, no one gets upset or charges God with unfairness for leaving salvation in the hands of man as some Christians say He does. If man is truly his own sovereign and decides his fate; if that's Paul's Gospel; if that's all Paul is teaching here in Romans; if he's just speaking of some national blessing then who gets upset at that and charges God with unrighteousness? I wouldn't have thought anything askew either and Paul would not be anticipating any arguments if this were it. If God, through the example of the twins, is simply teaching here that He blessed Israel more than Edom then I would not have been asking myself about God's righteous in and through it. I know the history of the two nations, but that's not what Paul's teaching here. He's teaching that God is sovereign over men. Marvel all ye nations. This teaching caused me, in my flesh, to question or even to accuse God of unrighteousness. I thought this was unfair. Paul doesn't answer such sinful objections softly. He answered my objections in rebuke as he should if he loves me, 2 Timothy 4:2. Paul rebuked me sharply on that day. The very next verse after God teaches us that He chose between Jacob and Esau before they were even born, had made any choices or had done any good or evil Paul asks, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" Do you see how he answers the natural objection that I had? I saw it and my body temperature rose along with my love for Paul. He then answers his own question to

my objection by saying, "Certainly not!" I read this and it floored me. Light began to flood my soul. Similarly, right after he teaches that Pharaoh, despite his own hardness, was hardened by God, Paul again answers my sinful, albeit understandable question. He says: "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" I asked this very question, but God was right there with me. If Pharaoh was used then I thought God was unfair. I was on Pharaoh's side in the hardness of my own heart. Instead of stepping down the reality of these often counter-intuitive truths as many preachers seek to do, Paul is in no way abashed. To finally set me straight he said to me that day, "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" I've quoted Romans 9:14 and 19-20. The whole center section of Romans is to communicate one culminating truth that some Christians will sadly not seek out. It's that, "...It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy," Romans 9:16. God softens and hardens whoever He chooses to. Sinners hate Him for it. Paul's saying that whether we like it or not, this is God. Trembling before Him is a most fitting response, Philippians 2:12; Job 4:14. Having come through a great time of testing I conclude that indeed God is sovereign in salvation. There is no way I can say that I'm not boasting under the weight of such noble truths if I must add my vote to my salvation. Paul answers my sinful objections here perfectly and I knew that God's word was teaching election. God is in no way unrighteous in any of it.

I was literally put on my face by these things, but I was able to lift it afterwards. This is my God. Let Him be true and every man a liar. He is the one who saves. I don't know why He doesn't save everybody; I don't know why He saves anybody. I urge you to read Romans 8:29 through chapter 11 ten times straight through. This is no magic formula. I'm just inviting you to spend some serious time there. Don't use any commentary or outside explanations. Just apply what you know and pray about it. I feel I'm often focused on this teaching simply because it is so neglected. I would venture to guess that 90% of the people who'll actually ever even read this letter have never been taught Romans 9-11 to any extent. Most Romans Bible studies end with chapter eight. Because of neglect I emphasize.

I was once challenged by the idea that some would be in heaven who didn't want to go and that some would be in hell that wanted heaven, but were not elect. Someone once raised this as an objection to God's sovereignty, but I now know that this was a very faulty premise. First of all no one wants heaven; they're totally depraved, Romans one through three teaches us this clearly. Also, no one is in hell who ever wanted Jesus. Jesus will never cast away those who truly come to Him. He said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out," John 6:37. Notice that they must first be given and then they come. These are the elect mentioned in Romans 9:29-30. They come to Jesus seeking Him because they've been awakened from death by grace alone. God comes to dead men and makes them born again. They then, by that spiritual nature, actually seek God. Whether they've five minutes from then or eighty-five years they'll seek Him more each day most willingly having a heart now bearing fruit, John 15:1-5. This is no chore, but their joy. Therefore, all those in

heaven are there having sought after God for as long as God had for them to seek Him on earth. Some He saved at age five at the start of a ninety year life; one He saved while being crucified. Election puts no one in hell. It simply puts a whole lot of people in heaven that wouldn't be there otherwise. This is the best way to understand it. Sin puts men in hell.

In short, I believe what one old preacher said with his tongue in his cheek: "God must have chosen me from before the foundation of the world because He never would have chosen me after I was born." No Christian, at their best moments in prayer, calls on God by virtue of their own goodness I think. Yet most of us cannot stick with our best moments because our minds are not renewed to the place where God in His sovereignty is something we actually trust. We simply fear that He is somehow not good. That there is an incident in history that tainted Him or made Him do something he did not intend to do. There wasn't. God has always been good. How can we not believe that after seeing what He did on the cross?

L-Limited atonement

Jesus died to save only some men. This seems to me to be a Gospel with authority and not the one preached in many places today. I'm tempted to call it the old fashioned Gospel. Perhaps I should deal with many objections here, but I will not. I remember how much I hated this doctrine when I first heard it, but I really can't understand why I hated it so much anymore. Limited atonement for me today seems rather easy. It's a belief in distinction from universal atonement. I, as a believer in this doctrine, while I do believe that Jesus' death was sufficient to save all men from their sins, do not believe that He intended to do so. This again goes back to the fact that God is not surprised when a man repents. Though this truth is not based solely on God's omniscience, rather on His free will, I believe I can prove the certainty of a limited atonement by the reality of God's omniscience alone. Omniscience, and my grasp of it, helped me a lot along the way. It's not that I want to exalt any one aspect of God's perfect nature above the others, but this one aspect helps in a lot of ways. I attempt to build on it because it serves as a great middle ground for many today just as it did for me. When we look at these truths through the lens of omniscience it helps bring things into focus. Applying it helps us move in our thinking towards a powerful view of the atonement. The logic for me went something like the following. Even if God only knows all those who would choose Him freely from before the foundation of the world by the "looking down the corridors of time" interpretation of reality, as some of my brothers assert, then nothing is any less fixed regarding the salvation of anyone. If God really is omniscient and knows who will be in heaven when it's all said and done then at least in one sense it becomes apparent that Jesus did not come to save everyone. This is massively obvious to me. I can't escape the clarity of it. In Jesus' mind, even before His incarnation, He was not a positive thinker in heaven hoping all men would come to Him after His death. In John 12:32 He

made this statement: "I...If I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." I don't think this can possibly mean all the men in the entire world. It means only the elect. I read that God's word cannot fail. If the Gospel is intended to save all then all would be saved. Scripture tells us in another place that the cross is foolishness to the lost. It's a joke to them. Rather these here are those given to Him by the Father. He is the offering for their sin, for His elect from all of the earth in all generations for as long as the world remains, 1 John 2:2. He knew who would come. Jesus is God. All those in heaven when it's all been said and done are those for whom He came to save. It really is very simple in light of omniscience. Jesus determined to die for sinners from before the foundation of the world. I believe that He, being God, foreknew those sinners in accordance with Romans 8:29-30. He did not come to save those who He knew would not believe because He did not choose them. Now, when only in light of omniscience, this sounds Arminianistic at first, but I don't see this as a reality based on man's autonomous decision. Rather, it's on God's election as we've been examining. In other words, I don't believe those people are there in heaven or hell of their own free will, but by God's predestination. That's the switch that I made from understanding this as reality based only on God's knowledge of everything to a reality based on God's providence over everything.

God's atonement through His Son is a covenant that Scripture says is far greater than the covenant previously based on the sacrificial system of the first covenant. However, the atonements themselves were always intended for a group within the whole. Israel's atonement was for Israel and those immediately involved with them. It was not for the whole world. The greater atonement made by Christ was not greater because it was for all, but greater in that it removes sin entirely. The first covenant could not make the beneficiaries perfect in regard to sin and conscience, but the second does. It needs to only be offered once unlike the first. The second is greater in that it is for people from every nation under heaven, but it is not a far off principal to see that God's atoning works are designed for certain people. It is not for all. It was always this way. No one has a problem when God only saves Israel in the Old Testament, but when some come to the New Testament it seems democracy must be God's system of government and men say God is nasty if He's not atoning for all mankind. I came to ask myself why that is? The atonement of the Old Testament in no way foreshadowed an atonement for everyone. It was always only for the people of God. I conclude then that the atonement is alone for God's people all over the world. Those people were always known by God because He calls them and makes them a people. If the first covenant shows us anything of the second, which I think it does, then it shows us that even God's provision for sin is not for all people everywhere.

Along the way in my own faith there have been Bible verses that required more work than others. I'm sure this is the case with everyone of us who truly seek after God in the Bible. There's no confusion why God calls us sheep. We're sometimes not the smartest of creatures. A question quickly arose in my heart regarding a limited atonement. If God did not intend to save some people from their sin then at least in one sense I must say that He does not want all men to be saved. How can I say this consistently? The Apostle Peter clearly says, "The Lord is not slack

concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,” 2 Peter 3:9. If this verse applies to every person in the whole world then limited atonement may be wrong and man’s salvation, being subject to decision and will, may truly be God’s only obstacle. If it applies only to the elect, then as with all Bible study, I simply have to rightly divide what’s being said and align it with the whole. I believe it’s the latter. Again, my whole reconciliation here revolves around depravity. If men are wholly defiled and no one comes to God on their own then God cannot be waiting for men to do their part. God’s not waiting for humanity to come in a massive wave so that He can get as many into heaven as possible in the end. He knows that’s not how it works and Scripture never speaks of some end times revival like all the charlatans in the word faith religion prophecy. Scripture says it’s just going to get worse. He must save men and He has not chosen to save everyone. The reason that some are saved cannot be by a universal atonement that just allows men to make it happen. It must be the work of God. Those who get saved must be those who were rescued by God according to His plan. They are the purchased possession and God has not purchased all unto eternal salvation. This was no overnight victory for me to grasp. I had to besiege my obstinacy and starve it out. Just like Christians have had to wrestle to reconcile the clear mentioning of a separate Father, Son and Holy Spirit all called God in the New Testament with its clearly spoken monotheistic claims thus emerging with the essential doctrine we call the Trinity, so I had to work to reconcile all that I was reading in this matter. I don’t think this verse in Peter can apply to all men in the world because they’re still dying every day and being sent to hell. This must be God’s will because it continues. God planned it this way whether we like it or not. No one would die and be sent to hell unless God, in some way, ordains it to be so. Evil itself only exists because God wills it to exist. I must find my theological answer in God. If God was not “willing” in any way to send men to hell then He would not allow the world to remain since that would necessitate Him doing that very thing daily. I can’t just say He allows such things though this is true. I must say that He desires them in some way that is in no way evil or subtracting from His goodness or holiness. I have to say that God wants these things. I can’t word it any other way even though I’m looking to do so. I have to use the word want because nothing else conveys the right mix of His sovereignty and justice over all these things. He is sovereign. “Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places,” Psalm 135:6. Does this include the damnation of the wicked, or is that the one place where God’s desires are in no way done? I must conclude that whatever the Lord pleases happens. I cannot say as some do that He is merely constrained by justice to punish for sin since justice is not some moral force that He Himself is bound to uphold. I would rather say that God delights to be just. Justice is bound by Him and defined by Him; it did not come before Him. Justice is His very nature, not a code He adheres to. I believe He is over everything and so I confess that all that happens, even the death of the wicked, though He takes no delight in it, only happens because He wishes it to. God’s pleasure is done even in things that do not please Him. I have come to understand that it did not please the Lord (or make Him happy) to bruise His Son, but I still know that God’s good pleasure was accomplished on the cross, Isaiah 53:10. I have to

say this same truth in light of Peter's statement in 3:9 as well. Though God does not delight to send men to hell His pleasure in upholding His just judgment is yet accomplished in doing so. Death and life must all be His plan and Scripture is in no way ambiguous in saying so. So, of course, God must be willing that some men perish. I cannot pretend that Scripture does not paint this tense picture. He is not in heaven wringing His hands wondering how He's going to fix things. I learned from Romans nine that part of God's overall plan with man is to demonstrate wrath. That wrath means hell. I wrote about this a little in dealing with unconditional election as well. Beloved, please forgive me for having to ask, but if God wants to demonstrate His wrath on sinners; if that's part of the plan along with the demonstration of His love, can we completely say that He does not *want* (there's that necessary word) anyone in hell? I can't phrase it any other way. Peter must mean something else in 3:9 since all things happen according to God's pleasure. The "us" that God does not want to perish will most certainly not perish because He is not willing that it should happen. God can do whatever He wants. Could He save everyone from hell and empty hell right now? Yes, I believe He could. So why doesn't He? The free will enthusiast has to answer this question as well as I do. If God wants to save everyone and He's all powerful then why isn't He doing what He wants to do? They say He's restrained by us; I say He is restrained by nothing. I say that there is more to God. I say that God's will is so large that we would do well to say He wills all things to happen by a permissive will and yet has a perfect will. Theologians have written a good deal on this that has helped me. It is His perfect will that will be seen in heaven. Regarding salvation it's this will that Christians are called to work out and prove in and by their lives. It's His permissive will that we see in the world in many respects. Peter simply must be saying that God is not willing that any of us (the elect) should perish. The "us" in view became very important to me wherever I saw it. It means different things and addresses different people in different places. Truly all of the most humbling "us" verses in the New Testament are never for the non-believer. The "Us" in view in such verses is the church, the elect. It's this way in 2 Peter 3:9. The elect are Peter's intended audience. The Bible's books are all written to churches, not pagans. They were read inside the churches from the start. Here's an example: Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Who's the 'us' here? The demonstration of God's love on the cross, though it is a demonstration before the whole world, is only for the "us" that is His church. It's only in the church that His love is truly seen in action in the crucifixion. Only Christians appreciate Jesus' sacrifice because they've been shown what sin is by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. These are the intended recipients of Jesus' sacrifice. They were the focus. Whatever peace the modified Calvinists rightly teach that Jesus brought to the whole of the world through His sacrifice, it didn't mean eternal peace with God for all. Romans one tells us that the world thinks the cross is foolishness. These are the perishing, 1 Corinthians 1:18. The redeemed find the cross most glorious after they're called. Can I truly, in every sense of the word, say that God was not willing for Herod to perish when it was God that killed him? How about Ananias and Sapphira? How about King Ahab or Uzzah? There are many that God Himself killed in the Bible long before they would have died by "natural causes." Some would argue that this only regards a

natural death and that God's preserving desires spoken of by Peter here are in regard to our spiritual perishing. What they'd say is that God is not, in the sense that Peter's arguing, willing that any go to hell. While there's a large sense that I can agree with that in regard to God's perfect will, I certainly can't just leave it there as I know that He has also determined to execute His terrible wrath. All of this plays into the understanding of God's plan and purpose in the atoning work of Jesus. God's redemption was specific. Jesus came to ransom His church. He cannot fail to redeem anyone He came to get. The unwillingness of men, though it greatly affected Jesus, never frustrated God's eternal plan of redemption in His elect.

A universal atonement says that Jesus died to make salvation possible for everyone if they'll only choose. This is a majority view today, it seems. This theology assumes a free will. This was the position of the Arminians, but I find free will nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture. It's simply not there at all. It is therefore the single largest presupposition in the church today in my opinion and many people are just lazy Bible students so they don't see it. It is at best implied in certain places in the Bible. I can understand why some brothers present the argument because God presents us with choice, but I don't think choice means freedom as they suppose. Death row convicts can choose mashed potatoes or corn for dinner but they cannot choose to exit the building. I've read Romans one through three. I know that choice never goes outside the will. I know that sin enslaves entirely, John 8:34, and it always has. Men are not free to choose God by their very natures. They cannot. Despite my love for my free will opponents here, the subject is nonetheless never one that a man can point to in the Bible as a teaching a specific writer set out to teach. It must be read into the text that men make salvation work by their free choices. Since the flesh profits nothing I've already proven why I can't agree with this philosophical pseudo-theological ideology. I weighed this subject alongside the idea of lives that God cut short. This part of the letter also still feeds into my dealings with 2 Peter 3:9. Many today assume that it's the *modus operandi* of God to allow men the maximum amount of time to choose Him because more time equals more opportunity for salvation. They assume this in a free will driven view of things. I think this plays into how we interpret Peter's statement in a very fundamental kind of way. If we believe in a free will and a universal atonement that makes salvation possible to all at any moment then it stands to reason that the longer a person has, the more time they have to choose and therefore be saved. God, to be consistent with some ideas of what is meant by Him not wanting anyone to perish, should then give the maximum amount of time to people. After all, tomorrow they "might" be saved as the argument goes. Therefore, if He ever cuts short the time they have available to choose then it lessens the likelihood of their salvation and goes against His desire for them to be saved.

Again, this is all based on a free will/universal atonement model. If universal atonement is true then I say that early death is something God must never do. Every early death then is bad for God to allow or certainly to execute. If God killed King Herod at, let's say, forty years old, then this we'd have to say is against His M.O. If God had preserved his life and given him a little more time to think then perhaps Herod would have chosen to follow Jesus. This is the sort of

fatalistic teaching that I think a free will ideology produces. It pits God against time and chance and assumes a randomness that isn't consistent with His sovereign nature. The point of all I'm trying to say here, though it isn't the most persuasive of arguments, is that in those Biblical instances where we're certain God killed someone before old age He is restricting their "chances" to be saved if you believe in a universal atonement. It also seems plain then that if He kills men in their insolence (like Herod) then He's obviously "willing" that they perish in some way. My point is that it's *not* simply a matter of more time for someone to possibly get saved. God already knows who'll be saved having predestined all things according to His own good pleasure. Salvation isn't random with people just needing maximum time to be afforded opportunity. Instead I read that God numbers our days. It's not a matter of more time and then "perhaps" someone will be saved. Unconditional election isn't concerned with time. I say that Jesus bought the salvation of everyone who will be saved on the cross in a definite or limited atonement. God will not let any of His elect perish because they were individually bought with His own life's blood. He is not willing that any of His elect be missed. For Him not to endure all things for the salvation of His elect number would be like me paying in full for a whole school year's worth of clothing for all my kids and then never going to the store to get the stuff. None of those He has elected unto salvation from the beginning will be missed. Once the last sheep is brought into the fold then the world will end. Not one second before. Peter addressed his first epistle to God's elect. He says, "...To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," 1 Peter 1:1-2. Peter addresses his audience as the elect. He acknowledges election and encourages his readers in his second letter to work out that election diligently.

Jesus' death does benefit the whole world in many ways, but it is not salvific for all men and, more importantly, was not intended for all men. This is obvious to me now even if God only knows all things. I believe Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for many, not all, as He says in Matthew 20:28. I see this same "some" language in Isaiah 53. Perhaps a better word to use is definite or specific atonement, rather than limited atonement, but the effect is the same. Everyone limits the atonement in some way. Arminians limit its power; Calvinists limit its intent. Some say that Jesus actually saves no one. They may not say this, but this is what they hold to. A universal atonement says that Jesus only makes it possible for men to be saved. This limits the atonement's power. Even though they'd conceded by God's omniscience that God knows the same number that'll be saved in the end as those who affirm a limited atonement, they still say that all that salvation is only by the choices of men. I say that when Jesus died He actually bought that same number of people. He came for them and their salvation was purchased in full. That's a powerful atonement with a limited or focused intention. I say that just like the high priest of Israel went in before God with the names of his people on his chest and shoulders, so Christ, the Great High Priest, went before God for His elect as well. I believe everything that the Arminian believes about the individual necessity of each man to choose Christ willingly; I just believe a whole lot more. I believe men must come of their own will, however, I believe that God makes those who come willing first. This is the calling in Romans 8:29-30. The first step in

my life was God's, not mine, and I don't just mean the cross; I mean in my living room that day in Tampa, FL, when He apprehended me. I love the way the Westminster Confession of 1647 puts it. It's a perfect articulation of my belief in this matter. In chapter 10 entitled *Effectual Calling* they said:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

I came most willingly because God regenerated or saved me by grace alone. He made me alive then suddenly I lived for Him. Let him who has ears to hear, hear. God gives ears, and not to all.

If my understanding of Peter in 2 Peter 3:9 means that God would never work against a man to be saved then I've got a lot of work to do with this next passage. I read in the Bible that God actually prevents some from being saved. He does not work to save them, but rather assures their destruction. This again is a hard truth, but since it's no mere speculation, it's more dangerous to assume that God would never do such a thing or to impugn Him with impropriety should a man say that He does. When I read this it was hard, but it did away with many of the universal atonement tendencies in me. It showed me that God is neither obligated nor intending to save all men from their sin. Jesus' death then was only for a group within the whole group. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 speaks of men who are in great rebellion against God. We read that, "...Because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved...God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Here at this point in time God sends people strong delusion in order that they might be damned. He is working against them. How can I fully say that God wants them to be saved? I was taught that He was always there for the taking. I thought He was always knocking no matter what just desperate to save all men no matter what and giving them all the time He could to facilitate the aid of their reason. That's not the case here. This is why I don't believe that God desires all men to be saved as some say. He doesn't want these men saved anymore. If He did I conclude that He would not send them damning delusions to blind them. While I do believe that there is a complexity in God that has to be considered here, the Scripture speaks plainly. God is against these people. I have to work to reconcile these truths then. Truly there's no conflict when we understand that God is only speaking of His elect in Peter's epistle. The complexity of God's will is that God, in the sense of His perfect will, *does* want all men to be saved. He doesn't delight in sending men to hell forever. Yet He has created this world and determined from before its inception that He would

allow it to sin and die. This is what some call His permissive will. So, in God's perfect will He would have all to be saved, but in His permissive will He does not save them. These people in 2 Thessalonians have already rejected Him, yes, but the point here is that God is against them at this point. The delusion God sends is after their rejection of truth to keep them on the road to hell. Friends, it's in the book. In a similar way God speaks of all mankind in Romans 1:28 saying He turns men over to their sin which inevitably leads to death. Such truths destroyed my image of the beck-and-call Jesus according to a free will model based on universal atonement. I now see that God's will is always done.

God desires to save men and so again it is true that election puts no one in hell. Men deserve their condemnation. This is again why I say that total depravity was the key. If you think that men don't deserve hell then you will side with Satan against God every time. By grace alone are men saved.

I-Irresistible grace

In Acts 9:1-22 we find the first account of Saul's conversion. Saul is the last Apostle; his name was changed to Paul. I'm going to paraphrase the story. Here goes: Jesus comes to one of His enemies, shoves him to the ground, physically blinding him for a time, converts his heart in that instant by grace through faith alone and calls him to a life of service for His glory. Saul, now Paul with his new heart, willingly follows having been called like Lazarus from darkness to light. Paul never complained. This sounds just like the Westminster Confession to me. That's irresistible grace to me. It's not to say that men do not resist God. They definitely do. In fact, Romans 1-3, along with every other chapter between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22, teaches us that resistance is precisely what men do. No, irresistible grace just means that God can and must overcome the hard hearts of sinners in order to save them. The logic for me is something like the following: I'm born a sinner with a heart in rebellion to God. My mind and heart are not subject to God and His law, as indeed they cannot be by my very nature, Romans 8:7. At what point then do I stop being who I am from birth? It isn't when my heart rights itself. That doesn't happen; I just sin and sin and sin. If I'm left alone I will only receive God's righteous justice when I die and this is good of God to ordain. I came to discover that it is when God overtakes me on my own Damascus road that I turn. This is the application of the Holy Spirit. Though the believer is predestined from before the foundation of the earth through unconditional election, he or she can't be said to be saved until the Holy Spirit calls them and justifies them personally in their own lives. This is done when God overcomes the sinner's rebellion by a grace irresistible. In short, the doctrine of irresistible grace simply tells me that God can do whatever He wants to do. When He reveals Himself to men, men want Him irresistibly. God cannot be frustrated. Nothing

happens that He does not will to happen. Not a sparrow or a martyr falls to the ground without Him appointing it.

John six was of the most influential chapters concerning predestination for me in the Bible. Jesus just didn't speak about salvation the way I was taught to. He seemed to be describing something altogether different. He spoke of it as a gift that is absolutely unattainable by men. With men salvation is impossible. I was taught to speak of it as a reality always ready for the taking simply by decision. God only needed a choice to be made and He came running. This was so certain that I was taught that if someone prayed a prayer I should declare them saved. John six deepened my appreciation for the Gospel and I stopped propagating such sinful carelessness. When many of Jesus' pretending disciples ceased following Him as the teaching got tough it did not surprise Him at all. He asked none of them to stay. He had not chosen them. The ones He had chosen, however, stayed. I asked myself why? Let's look at the passage:

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me... These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve. John 6:41-45, 59-71.

Jesus didn't teach just to keep men in His presence. Numbers were not His main concern. He was no pragmatist. These false converts could not see what Jesus was saying because the truths of God were not given to them, Mark 4:11. He let them go without restraint as they were

not His elect, not His sheep. He knew it. They turned to leave and Jesus immediately speaks about His choice of His own. The reason I cite this passage here, however, is not just to point out the sad resistance of those who went away, but the confession of Peter the spokesman for those who would stay. Peter knew where his hope lay. Jesus was irresistible to him in more ways than he could know at that point or ever. Peter, like the others, is not frustrated by the teaching and moving to leave. The reason for this is because God had chosen these men and was revealing Himself to them in a very special way. God would ultimately prove irresistible in these men and in these men alone at first. Jesus' grace is irresistible to me as well, but it's not because I chose Him. That's never the case. I was not there before the foundation of the world. Just like the disciples, it is because He chose me that I chose Him, John 15:16. I chose, but in response only. My choices are my fruit not my root.

Jesus said in one place to those who oppose Him that the reason they did not believe in Him was because they were not His sheep. He did not say that because they failed to believe they were not His sheep, but it was the other way around. This is how Jesus spoke of salvation. Not as something attained by making it so, but only as God determined. He says, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand," John 10:25-29. Jesus did not speak about salvation as something random at all. It was fixed from the Father from before the world began. It is given to the sheep. They know it and they follow Jesus.

I asked myself if God can only move men by permission. It seems that so much teaching today would rush to say yes. This played into my understanding of God's irresistible grace. Many teachers have a view of God that is like a vampire. Though He has tremendous power, He can't come in unless invited. This view bleeds into evangelistic messages where God is presented as an ineffectual affectionate standing outside of men's hearts powerless to save. He is like a genie who cannot save you unless you make the wish. This is exactly what the doctrine of irresistible grace refutes. In Exodus I read that the Jews were commanded to come together regularly for worship. They lived amidst pagan people at that time in the land of promise. When they went up to worship God their lands were left, for the most part, vulnerable to enemy attack. God made a promise to the Israelites to protect their land while they were away. He says, "...neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year," Exodus 34:24. God promises to remove covetousness for property from the hearts of unregenerate men while the Israelite land owner was away. I read this and began to realize that God can move in any way He chooses in any heart without invitation. This answers the question about whether God needs permission. Just like I don't believe that Paul had to invite Jesus to overcome his sin, I don't believe that God's work in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar was of Nebuchadnezzar's will. Was he in compliance and therefore giving God permission to move in

His life? Nebuchadnezzar is an interesting character in Scripture. In Daniel four I read of his boasting before God and where it appears that God had had enough. The Bible records that, "...a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws," Daniel 4:31-33. I began to see that Nebuchadnezzar, whether I liked it or not, had no say in these matters. God restored this king exactly when He said He would seven years later. That was the time God appointed to accomplish the task. In Daniel 4:34-35 we read what the king learned: "And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever..." He then goes on to utter a message of profound depth. His statements teach me much about God's ability to move men however He chooses without consulting them in the matter. This pagan king then declares, "For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" God sent this man into madness for seven years before everyone and then restored him just as quickly. The point of these citations is to show that God moves men however He sees fit and that this moving is amply seen in Scripture. It needn't be invited. God moves people. If He can move in the hearts of such men as Nebuchadnezzar and those pagans who inhabited ancient Israel then He can move anywhere. This is everywhere in the Bible. The doctrine of irresistible grace goes further though. It teaches not only that God can move in the hearts of men uninvited, but that He must. The word "grace" attached to the term is that God moves in the hearts of the elect for good.

The fact is that God's movements are irresistible. "For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.' Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens," Romans 9:17-18. God does it however He wishes. God's movements of grace are likewise possible without invitation. They must be. By the evidences of depravity it is painfully obvious to all Biblicists that if God were to have to wait for invitation to save someone then no one would be saved. If God had to wait for me to invite Him in before He moved on me then I would never be moved. Dead people make no invitations. The flesh profits nothing. Grace must then be irresistible because it is uninvited and overwhelmingly powerful when God determines it to be.

Now I come to one of the most astounding truths I've wrestled with yet. I believe that the new birth or regeneration is a gift given to men before they ever ask for it in any way. I'm

increasingly more convinced of this as the years move on. I believe I have to say this to profess that I'm saved by grace alone, beloved. It went something like this for me: 1) People are born of their mothers without profit. 2) They do nothing but sin. 3) God comes and breathes the breath of life into them. This is the new birth. They are therefore convicted of their sins having hearts of flesh. 4) They repent and place their trust in Jesus Christ. 5) They are assuredly justified in this most fitting response to what God has done. 6) They bear fruit all their lives steadfast to the end. 7) They are glorified. This is saving grace as God determines. Again, it is certain that God is resisted by men. I read this in many places. Irresistible grace is a treasure because it shows why there is no boasting in the Christian faith. The reason I can say that I'm saved by grace alone is because God did all the work. Salvation is monergistic, or the work of one. I used to view salvation as what God did because of what I did after what He did. I now see it as my response to all that God alone has done. I'm saved by works they're just *not* my own, they're His. This then in many ways is the heart of the Christian's hope. If God loved him and saved him when he did not love God or ask Him to, then how much more can he be assured of the promises to come now that he's been rescued?

In short I know that when God wishes to convert a man the grace first displayed becomes irresistible to that man. He does this through the power of His word every day in the world. I had such a love arise in my heart for Jesus after I first had my ears given to me. The Bible was the most sacred, interesting, fascinating, in-exhaustible, perfect, exciting subject in life. I was drawn by the Father to the Son by the Spirit and that grace alive in me was so powerful that I would never want to turn away, even after my favorite sins. Even now years later it is more alive than ever. Where did that come from, I asked myself? I was in the world only of the world, I heard the Gospel and suddenly everything's different. What happened to me? It's interesting that I can rightly use that wording, "What happened *to me*?" God's grace is what happened to me. I was born again. I saw Jesus and He was irresistible to me. No one turns unless God turns him. This is why there are faithful men in every generation. When God reveals Himself savingly men do not say no. They shout a lifelong "Yes!" They run the race. God can do it at any time and furthermore, because men are depraved, He must overcome their resistance.

P-Perseverance of the saints

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish," John 10:28. And they will never perish. If a person has received life from Jesus then they'll never perish. I need not say more. Some people think you can be un-saved or that you can forfeit your salvation through sin. Indeed there are passages that speak about certain sins clearly disqualifying men from grace even though they might profess it. If any man commits such acts then how can we but judge that they are dismissed? I came to ask

myself whether the strength of my hold on the hand of God is my own. If it was I'd have a very shaky relationship with Him. As it is I believe that the strength is in His hand. Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," 1 Peter 1:3-5. This is the kind of salvation I now believe in. If you believe or have heard as I have that this kind of teaching gives license to sin then you're wrong. Romans six tells us how to live before God now as Christians. It is not a life of sin.

How foolish to believe that God gives eternal life in a probationary way. I believe that Jesus saves completely. Jesus' purchased pardon sees the end and the beginning of our sinful lives. He doesn't give eternal life, then, on a temporary basis. That's not eternal at all. He paid for it all or for none. This seems obvious to me now. I am convinced that the struggle recorded in the last part of Romans seven is one against sin in the lives of every Christian. Paul was aware of the suffering Christians endure as he himself endured it. Despite the knowledge of that struggle Paul spoke in Romans eight that Christians are to have the highest confidence during the fight. He then goes on in chapter eight to speak about the assurance of hope that Christians have in their future glorification. Glorification is the physical resurrection of the body; it is the end of all Christians and that final stage in eternal election spoken of in Romans 8:29-30 in the golden chain. Paul says that the assurance of salvation is because of what Christ has already done. In one of the most sweeping passages dealing with the security of the believer he says, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Romans 8:31-35. If "God is for us" means that if we are those spoken of in verses 29 and 30 who were loved and predestined from the start then we shall not be lost we will be among those glorified in the end. This is the weight of a sure salvation in its best articulation. If God has foreknown, predestined, called and justified you then it is sure that He will glorify you. You will not be lost. Even Satan cannot rightly charge God's elect. Paul clearly glories in his own salvation knowing that he too cannot be charged by anyone for sin because it is Christ who died. Jesus paid for the sin and He only dies once. He will not die again for future sin. There is no double jeopardy in God's courtroom. God justifies men through the suffering and death of His Resurrected Son; who can overcome that in the lives of His sheep? Christ is risen. He is our intercessor now. We have this Great High Priest as an advocate in perfect righteousness and my plea before God is His mercy. What a sure salvation. Not even death can separate me from Him now. I was predestined, I am saved, and I know that I'll be glorified. This is assurance, not arrogance. Only arrogance assumes that salvation is within one's power to gain or lose. We cannot stick the word

“some” in Romans 8:29-30 in any place or it mangles the meaning of the passage; we must stick the word “all” between each term mentioned or else we’re just not getting it.

Earlier I cited part of the next passage. I saw here, a long time ago, that the glory of the Son is tied into the salvation of His sheep. I love how Jesus speaks about salvation as such a precious gift. So often today, salvation is spoken of like some ethic or club. Jesus spoke of it with great power. He said here, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day,” John 6:37-39. If God’s sovereignty means that His will is always done then this verse is astonishing. Did you catch that last part? This is the will...that I’d not lose one that He gives Me? That’s His elect. Judas Iscariot seemed to be of those whom the Father had given to Jesus. Jesus always knew different, but the others didn’t. Judas was not given to Jesus. If he was he would not have been lost. In another place I read Jesus assuring His own that the will of the Father will surely be done. He prays, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled,” John 17:12. He kept them all. Judas was not intended to be kept.

It is a balance in theology, however, that must be found between true assurance and false assurance. If you cannot be blotted out of the book, something Jesus promises us He will never do, then what does sin tell us about a person who says they’re saved? Indeed, those who live like devils are devils. Christians do not live lives marked by sin. They do not slave under it. Just as the fruit of sin evidences our rebellion, so the fruit of righteousness evidences our salvation. That’s just too simple. If I were to have a man in the church for twenty years who seemed to be fully alive in God’s grace. If I knew him well, prayed with him, hit the streets in evangelism with him, and witnessed his passion for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners and he were to be found with a prostitute I would rightly question his salvation. I would question it and call him to do so as well. Theologically, I know that it is he who endures faithful to the end that will be saved. We can all be fooled, but God cannot. All I know is the fruit. To that same man, I would call him to restoration as a brother should he find a place of repentance. If he were in a leadership position I would ask him to step down for a great time if not forever, depending on the position, but I know that God does not die merely to make bad men good. He dies to make dead men live. Sinners sin. Romans seven is written to Christians and so is Romans eight. We must walk worthy of the calling or else we prove that we’re not truly called at all. This being said, however, just as I can be deceived by the works of a false convert, so I can be deceived into thinking that the works of a true convert necessarily disqualify him from the faith. It is the consistency of the life that is weighed.

Some argue that while no one can “snatch you out of God’s hand,” John 10:29, that you can walk out. This is what I call, in my own Latin, *foolishnus maximus*. They maintain this because man must remain, in their foolish eyes, the all-sovereign. He must be able to frustrate

God or it is not the God they love. They then add more injury to insult and say that the same man who once “fell out” of grace can come back in at any time as many times as he likes. They make grace a mockery, I think, and call God a mere reactor running a self-help soup kitchen for souls who see their own need forgetting that God determines things from before the foundation of the world aside from our puny decisions. I cannot walk out any more then I can be snatched out. First, why would I want to? Don't I love Jesus with all I am? If I've been truly saved, how could I ever turn back to the filth of sin? Second, I think this means that I must keep myself in grace. Can't He keep me any better than this? If I can walk out it would mean that I have much to boast of as I'm keeping myself by the power of God's Holy Spirit while I'm in. I have come to be harsh with such foolishness as the years go on. If you think you can be lost then it's a pretty pathetic Savior and salvation you've got. God's grace is far greater than to be made so cheap.

So what of those who profess grace, or have at one time professed it, and now live obviously ungodly lives? Are they saved just because they say they've been? I don't think so. It's always the fruit that demonstrates the life of the tree. John speaks about antichrists that went out from the church in his day as well. We need not elevate the term antichrist as a descriptor here beyond any normal person. These are the people who blur the lines a little in our non-omniscient eyes. It's rightly these kinds of people that make the beauty of God's preserving graces a topic some don't even want to consider. Automatically it seems that if we say God saves and keeps that people hear us saying that men can live evil lives and still be saved. Or that they can deny major doctrinal tenets about Jesus and still be called Christian. This is not what I believe. I believe that if I live like I'm not saved then I'm not. John deals with this subject as well. He writes of those who departed that, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us,” 1 John 2:19. The context of this passage makes it abundantly clear that these people did not fall away from a genuine salvation. Notice that they went out from the church, but John doesn't say that they were once of us and then fell away. Rather he says that their going out proved something else. It proved that they were never of us at all. If they were of us they would have stayed faithful John says. This is what the perseverance of the saints means to me; it's that Christians continue serving Jesus if they've ever truly served Jesus. They grow in holiness steadfast to the end. The doctrine then serves as a way for us to test ourselves; do we persevere as saints must become the question? It isn't just that people are kept saved despite their sin, but rather the doctrine describes a holy and ever-sanctifying life. It is a statement about the life of the true and faithful believer. Such a life is never perfect. In fact it's far from it, but saints live saintly lives. This is what perseverance means. It is never detached from the fruit. It's certain that without holiness no one will see Jesus. That holiness remains and abides in the lives of believers. Those who seem to fall away, those we call backsliders, never slid forward in the first place. If they're ever known by God then they will remain known by God. This is just like what Jesus tells the “miracle” working false converts in Matthew 7:23. He says that He “never knew them.” It isn't that He once knew them in a saving sense, but they fell. He never knew them at all. John then continues after this teaching to give assurance to those who

are truly saved. Listen to the assurance Scripture gives to the faithful: “Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life,” 1 John 2:24-25.

We must find the balance on what it means to live worthy of the title Christian. If the man I fictitiously mentioned above who sinned in prostitution remained in such a lifestyle or went out from the church as a result of it committing the act unrepentantly then he would prove that he was never a Christian at all. He’d be put out of the church if he didn’t go out on his own. Understanding and finding the balance in this is like finding the difference between those who are dead *to* their sin though they sin and those who are dead *in* their sin. Scripture describes many works of unrighteousness as those that prove a man is not saved such as fornication and adultery. These sins, however, are the same sins that Scripture invites Christians to continually confess for cleansing. Who can make a list of sins and say, “Alright, these are the sins only non-Christians commit and these are the sins that Christians can commit?” Scripture doesn’t do that, yet it would only be appropriate for a man to sometimes examine, work out, or question his salvation when in sin, but which sin and how often? We can do that when we speak in terms of the life someone lives, but we can’t always reduce it down to individual acts. We tend to draw the line just below our level of sin and say that this much sin is acceptable because I’m not as bad as that guy, but we’re not to do this. John says, “Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him,” 1 John 3:6. Do you sin Christian? I do. Sadly, I sinned today. Does this verse mean then that I’m disqualified? What do I do with this verse? Friends, this is the tension between seeing what it means to live a life of sin or to sin as a Christian. I’m not trying to make excuses for anyone’s sin though some will not be able to see it otherwise. In truth the two things are universes apart, but our minds are so susceptible to error here that we fail to see the difference. The acts of sin themselves can cross the boundaries, but not repeatedly, I think. So I have to ask myself, can Christians commit fornication? Answer: Yes and no. Because Christians sin it is very possible that they can, yet we’re not to play with God. If this is your lifestyle or if you actually think you’ll pull the wool over God’s eyes by repenting every time you do it then you’re not saved. Christians hate their sin and they war with it. They make no provision for it, but there is a time for maturing as well. It is easy for me to say that a man who commits fornication is a non-Christian. I would say that without fear of error to someone arrogant in that sin, however, if two broken hearted Christians came to me two weeks before their wedding in tears because they were stupid and spent too much time alone in their apartment alone and sinned sexually I’d feel different. I’d ask them to consider giving themselves more time before they married to see if the marriage should continue and I’d ask them to get on their faces before God. I’d question the salvation of these two even if they were in the church and I knew them, but I would not dismiss them as false converts. Some would be outraged by such things, but I guess they’ll just continue excusing only their sin. I confess that writing this is hard for me. I want the lines to be drawn very clearly, but I know that Christians sin. Even grievously they sin, but Christianity is not a pedestal. We’re saved by grace and our sin

is our own, but God was not unaware that sin would be committed later in our lives. He redeemed us despite all of it. Repentance is the renouncing of all known sin. When a person gets saved it always includes genuine repentance. Despite the fact that many of our outward sins cease immediately, who of us could ever say that all of our sins ceased? I still struggle with lust intensely, but God has completely taken me out of pornography and fornication. I pray one day that my mind will renew even beyond my current struggles, but I know I'll always have some struggle in some area. If you were to observe me hourly regarding my sin you'd say I wasn't a believer. I'd say it about you as well I'm sure. The question is where do we draw the line? At which sin? How often do we have to commit that sin to be disqualified? No one knows in most instances. I will say that as long as I persisted in those sins that Scripture explicitly mentions as those that prevent a man from entering the kingdom of heaven that I ought not to play around with God. I will say that I was not saved when I did those things, but not all sin is the same. It's true that even the smallest of sins is infinitely offensive to God and that they all damn, but it's clear in Scripture that some sins are worse than others. So I can conclude that I have renounced all of my "big sins," but what of the more acceptable ones? If someone wanted to draw the line and say that if you get mad at people at the DMV then you're not a Christian how many of us would be out of the kingdom? The point is that we don't know where the line is. The only assurance we have and the only proof is constant faithfulness to God. It's a life that progressively becomes less and less sinful and more and more holy. It's a life that hates sin. It is a steady upward growth toward the image of Christ that proves a man's salvation, not necessarily a monthly exam. Christians sin, but they don't make provision for it or dive into it, they fall into it. Surely this gets more difficult to understand and becomes less excusable when talking about sexual sins. The only evidence of a Holy Ghost filled life is a holy life. Yet it's still the balance to find that we renounce all that we know is sin if we're in Christ. A preacher once painted a great picture for me that convicted me of a lot. It showed me my hypocrisy in regard to my sin. It revealed in me my own wicked heart. He painted a picture of something that shouldn't happen in genuine repentance. He said there's something wrong when someone comes to Jesus and says something like, "God, I'm done with lying. I'm finished with fornication and blasphemy. I hate those sins and I repent of them. And God, that pornography thing, I'm going to work on that." See we tend to do that with those sins we love, don't we? Oh, reader, I'm the last one who wants to blur the lines and start saying that any sin is acceptable before God. It isn't. God hates sin and so Christians hate sin as well. They war against it every day. They hate their sin and they long to enter heaven when that war will end, but I must confess that I think Christians are kept by God in salvation even through the most grievous of sins. It is that powerful. It has taken me some time to be able to say this and if I were to begin dealing with each individual sin and types of sin I think I'd have to be much clearer. There are some things like idolatry that are harder to imagine any Christian doing no matter how immature they are, but even here it's hard. See often times we think in terms of sins of the flesh and I agree that this is appropriate for most of us, but how about sins that are even greater? How often do we enter God's house and not worship Him with due reverence? How about all the sins committed closest to His house? What were Ananias and

Sapphira killed for? It was not for what most of us would measure as the “greatest” of sins. Despite the fact that I believe Christians are kept even through sin I hasten to add that it is only in light of a person’s whole life that they should be examined. If you’re reading this letter and it is in any way seemingly giving license for sin then you’ve missed the point. Sin is to be forsaken. I write this because I’m writing about perseverance in the Christian life. Truly, the question about how much sin is maybe acceptable and when is a question the Christian rarely even asks. They know they don’t want sin. I write this because I’ve thought on it a lot and my fruit in life assures me of God’s election in many ways. If anyone is asking how much sin they can get away with it’s a problem. Sin is not of God and so those who seek after God don’t seek after what they know is sin. This is the short answer and the most pleasing, but God sees it all. In truth, no matter how mature in Christ a man becomes he will always hate his ever-present sin when he examines himself next to the Savior. The branch then with the most fruit hangs lowest to the ground.

Peter says we are kept by the power of God. I not only confess that, but I sing about it. When a man wants to argue about whether or not God the Great Shepherd sleeps and allows his sheep to walk off cliffs I humbly disagree. The following story, though I heard it only comparatively recently, is a wonderful account which at the heart of it all epitomizes why I believe God will not lose anyone that He saves. It’s a quote from Joel Beeke’s book *Living For God’s Glory. An Introduction to Calvinism*:

The great Scottish preacher Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) once visited a woman on her deathbed and lovingly tested her readiness for heaven. When she assured him that she was ready to depart to be with Christ because she was in that hand from which no one could pluck her, Erskine asked, “But are you not afraid that you will slip through His fingers in the end?” “That is impossible because of what you have always told us,” she said. “And what is that?” he asked. “That we are united to Him, and so we are part of His body. I cannot slip through His fingers because I am one of His fingers. Besides, Christ has paid too high a price for my redemption to leave me in Satan’s hand. If I were to be lost, He would lose more than I; I would lose my salvation, but He would lose His glory, because one of His sheep would be lost.

The Reformed doctrine of perseverance means that God’s saints will endure. They will bear fruit and show their faith right to the end. I don’t believe that salvation is an inoculation that a man receives from hell by decision and that he can live however he chooses from then on. That’s an idea sometimes called “once saved always saved.” When someone says that I want to make sure we believe the same thing. I don’t believe that people can live lives like the world and still be saved because they assume they’ve once been saved. I think that would be a dangerous lie to tell anyone. I believe that saints live saintly lives. They will sin and even sometimes horribly, but they will not fall away. Sin in the lives of Christians doesn’t frustrate God any more than the sins they committed in life before their adoption. They may sin and suffer punishment by God in

this life, but it will be the chastisement of a loving Father, not the wrath of a holy judge. That is the confidence by which our consciences are made able to approach God. It is not our own goodness. It's God's work in us. Christians will not sin like they once did. They will hate their sin and war against it every day and in that war there will be many losses. God is not confused about this when He saved me at the start. He didn't save me and set me on the pedestal to see how I'd do or whether I could keep myself. He saved me so that His power might be manifested in me.

There's another stanza in the song *amazing grace* that I just love. I believe it can only be sang when assurance is in the heart of a man. Newton, who coined the phrase the doctrines of grace wrote, "Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far and Grace will lead me home." Can you sing of the assurance that God's grace will lead you home? I don't believe anyone can unless they believe they're kept by God's grace alone.

In Ephesians 1:17 Paul speaks about the hope of the Christian. He says that as Christians we should have great hope. I came to realize that the Bible's use of the word hope is very different than the world's use of it. Bible hope is a definite assurance of things not yet revealed. I use the word rightly then when I say that I hope in Jesus' Second Advent, or in my hope of Scripture's endurance in the world. I use it wrongly, in the Biblical sense, if I hope for a new job, a good parking spot at the store or good traffic on the way to church. What showed me this was that hope is what God has regarding the future restoration of all things in Romans 8:20. God hopes that He can restore all things. This is no guess; God will restore all things. Creation will be delivered it says in the same section. It is this absolute assurance in the work of God that I came to trust Him in as both my Savior and my Shepherd. It is this hope that I pray you'll see in this eternal plan of God if you're in Christ. The absolute security of it is partly what Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to see. He writes to them urging them to press in to God's grace. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory," Ephesians 1:13-14. To the praise of God's glory Christians are sealed until the redemption of the purchased possession. The purchased possession is them. God bought me on the cross. He just hasn't fully taken me to Himself yet. I'm a fully paid for layaway possession waiting for Him to come get me. This, I see, is why I can say with Paul that I now have peace with God, but am not yet fully delivered from sin's presence and influences.

My conclusion

I'd like to recommend just a few resources to take you further. They were of great benefit to me. *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2005. His sermon *God's*

Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men particularly influenced me. John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*. RC Sproul's *Chosen By God*. John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. John Piper's *The Pleasures of God*. Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*. Joel Beeke's *Living For God's Glory. An Introduction to Calvinism*. John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I'd also like to invite you to my recommended listening list in the articles section of Biblecia.com to find a great many teachers, most of whom also uphold these points of doctrine.

May God bless you and the reading of His word. It's my prayer that these doctrines should point us toward heaven. It's within the same stream of thought that Paul spoke of God's eternal election to the Christians in Ephesus that he rushed in chapter one to pray, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power." There is great hope here when we know what the Bible means by calling, and what the Bible means by hope.

All of these points work to summarize a bit about why I believe in a rich faith that is by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone. These statements served as rallying cries during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. I have no boasting as to why I believe in Jesus. While not a single point mentioned here is necessarily essential to one's salvation, they are essential to a mature one. Ultimately, I believe in these doctrines because I know my own heart. I am brought low by them and am made to confess my helplessness. Even as a New Testament Gentile looking back in history to that first gracious act of God with another pagan Gentile named Abram I fully confess: "As Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."

To God be the glory now and forever.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.