

The Logical Sovereignty of God.
On the Notion of Freedom

“Known to God from eternity are all His works,” Acts 15:18 (NKJV).

I don't believe you can uphold a proper view of God's sovereignty in relation to our salvation without a sound understanding of man's freedom. We must grasp after the relationship between our freedom and God's. Some won't have any interest in this subject. Others will see in it how much is really at stake in the purity, consistency and power of the Faith. Theology is very much like your skeleton. You have some bones that are indispensable to you and others that you can do without. As important as it is, what I'm writing about here in this text is *not* an indispensable bone. Christians disagree on this subject. Let each man be convinced in his own mind. I think perhaps our jobs in this is more to wonder after it than pretend the matter should be settled for all! Each generation must align itself. Still, we are called to teach what is right to others in order that they might be edified. My goal is edification.

The Arminian/Wesleyan/semi-Pelagian understanding of how people are saved by Jesus absolutely hinges on man's complete freedom of will. On free will. On human autonomy. On ultimate self-determination. We must work to define what's meant by "free will" because the Bible does not anywhere define this concept for us. With most people, I think the more one tries to define it the more elusive it can become. I'd like to practically define it simply as an individual's natural ability to respond to the gospel as they please and therefore decide whether or not they'll go to heaven or hell when they die. The complete freedom of man's will is as essential to salvation in these systems as both vertical legs are on a ladder. God does one part in salvation in these views, but men must do the other part by believing, or whatever God has done will not benefit them. Their view of salvation is the epitome of an "it takes two to tango" approach. Such views are called "synergistic" or "synergism". A bit of language on the term. It comes from "syn"- two or more, and "ergo" - work; "synergism" therefore means "the work of two or more." This ideology is disparate to "monergism" or the work of God alone (mono meaning "one") in salvation. I am what's called a monergist when it comes to this. I believe men play no active role in their regeneration. It does not take two to tango when it comes to being born again. Salvation is the work of God alone in my understanding. It is monergistic. "Regeneration" is a specific term in theology and is a direct synonym for "born again". In my theology, John 3:3 could be read: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is [regenerated], he cannot see the kingdom of God." I'll use the term "synergism" throughout this letter to refer to all belief systems that function on the presupposition that man's freedom of will plays an essential part in being born again. Such views span denominations, but is often linked as is fitting in the western world to men like Jacob Arminius who was the forefather of Arminianism, and John Wesley who later was the founder of the Methodist Denomination. Semi-Pelagianism is in many ways the ideological root of it all. Pelagius was a man condemned in the 5th century. His views on the freedom of man were that mankind was essentially a clean slate as they entered the

world. That Adam's sin affected only Adam. Pelagianism isn't semi-Pelagianism, but semi-Pelagianism relates to my letter here very closely in direct relation to the doctrine of salvation. Arminian theology shapes Wesleyan (and similar) theologies in a great many ways. Human freedom or free will, as they teach, is that men are the ones who decide where they will spend eternity. This is what it means to be autonomous. That you alone decide your eternal fate. That you are free, at all times, to do so. Is this your assumption I wonder? In many ways this reasoning is true, but theologically we should not deny God's claimed sovereign role here. Free will (as defined briefly in a few ways already above) is sacrosanct to many Christians and is regarded by many as that which actually makes us human, or that which actually makes love possible. Free will is therefore the sine qua non of true human existence for most Christians today. This ideology is the predominant teaching of many Baptists today. I'm a Baptist reverend so this denomination is of particular interest to me. It is not the theological history of the Baptist Faith, but it prevails today. I would argue how the original SBC charter and the 1925 BFAM were both Reformed confessions to lessening degrees chronologically. Anyway, I want to challenge just one part of the thinking that goes into this ideology here in this letter because I believe that there is a limitation to our freedom that we must recognize if we're serious about the Bible's command to fully trust in Jesus. *Reader, I'm writing this letter because I'm serious about a "grace alone" confession in the Christian Religion. This is my motive!*

It's been my experience that most of us don't really think through our biblical beliefs or presuppositions in this area very much. We just sort of assume them. I've learned not to trust my natural assumptions in most every way from the Bible. We also don't like to be challenged very much on it. We shy away from it. It is hard. It tests us. We only want people who agree with us to tell us about any other sides of the argument. The debate on the nature of man's will is not new, and all sides work to base their views in Scripture. There's obviously something to it that keeps us up at night. In my attempts to wrestle with the freedom of the will, along with many years of direct Bible study and talks from those on "my side" of the argument like Calvin, Martin Luther, Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Grudem, James White, Piper, Sproul, Mohler, Matt Chandler, Dever, MacArthur, etc., I have also made it a concerted and protracted effort to learn from notable synergistic preachers, teachers and apologists as well. Arminius and his followers, Wesley, Erasmus, Geisler, Walls, McGee, Chuck Smith, Rogers, Vines, Flowers, Caner, Joel Osteen (sorry, had to throw him in as a joke), and more, are all men I've sought the opinions of in great length on this matter as well. I want educated and impassioned advocates of a view to explain it to me and not just someone that I agree with who, while they might give an accurate or charitable description of it, won't try to "sell me" on it. I want someone to try to sell it to me. The same could be said of false religions like Islam, Mormonism or Catholicism. If you allow a learned communicator who really supports something to explain a thing to you it's then that you can really expect to get the gist of it. I have actively sought out these and many more synergistic teachings through countless books, personal interactions of varying kinds, debates, videos, audio files, blogs, synergistic confessions of faith, and online sermon transcripts of men before there was any audio visual equipment. This brought me back time and time again to Scripture. I am also a former ardent synergist. My hope in this letter is to cause you to go back to the Scriptures with some things to keep in mind. It was the presentation of ideas that prompted the famously noble Bereans to go back to the text to verify the claims made by the Apostles, Acts 17:11.

That's what all good teaching is supposed to do. On all sides, I pray that you would let it. And thanks for allowing me to be a part. Again, for me this is about understanding grace.

I think the following will help a lot of people here as we begin. Understanding God's work in our hearts in salvation is not just to be understood in our perceived experience of it. We do well to remember that when it comes to God's works in the world there's often far more to them than what meets the eye. For example, it's only after most of us came into the Faith that we learned with any depth at all that our salvation was directly based upon or linked to a covenant promise made with the primary patriarch of the Nation of Israel, Abraham, over four thousand years ago. How many Christians "experienced" that they were children of Abraham even as Gentiles when they trusted in Jesus? Romans 4:16. Yet it's a strong underlying truth. If you're in Christ today your faith started with Abraham in a different language on a different continent over four millennia ago. How many of us knew that in day or month one of our walk with Christ? Yet all in Christ are indeed children of Abraham by faith, Galatians 3:7. We learned this upon investigation but didn't "experience it" up front. Discovering anything of God's work in our hearts, post our conversion, should uncover new details of it. None of it needs to necessarily be "experiential" to be true. If we're in Christ I intend to demonstrate here in this text that our salvation was actually a plan in God's mind from all eternity, and that this is actually true no matter what side of this argument you're on. We didn't need to know this when we came to Jesus, but it's our privilege to know it now. We're all learning, after the fact, just how God did it. Just for a moment consider how amazingly complex the Christian Faith actually is. It is a promise with many, many factors to bring it to pass in our lives. There's the Fall, recall Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. Our salvation is something we can constantly learn about in greater depth, and some of what we learn about of God's ways would *never* be apparent to us on the surface. This doesn't mean that they're not true or relevant. This subject is like that. So much of what's called Christianity today is filed under the "no problem" file. There's no probing the depths because the faith of many is only about an inch deep. Honestly, how much of our faith today redounds with thoughts like: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!"? Romans 11:33. *Paul wrote this after 11 straight chapters of telling us exactly how God's wisdom actually works in prodigious detail. It was the revelation of salvation given to him in all of its detail and depth that prompted him to say this, not ignorance of it!* It's almost like probing the depths is taboo today. When I find this in a person's faith it honestly makes me sad. We dig, we search, we learn, we enjoy. Proverbs 25:2; Jeremiah 9:23-24. I invite you to do that here as we examine the idea of human freedom. I want you to consider exactly what freedom must mean to us under God, his nature, and the way he says he operates. I want to be precise with what freedom can and *cannot* mean. Let's begin. Introductory remarks complete.

"Of course men are free" many say today. "Totally free and that without limitation". We see that God presents men with choices in the Bible and so we quite naturally assume that it's because men are free to make them. Seems legit. Many see the idea that man is *not* free or capable to ultimately choose or alter his own destiny as ignoble. Like Pelagius (AD 354-420) we are offended at the idea that God would ask of us what we cannot do. We see it as making men less than human or like beasts of the field, puppets, robots, etc. if you take away their completely

free, ever-able-to-be-changed-at-any-moment, God-given freedom of will. I know the frustrations many feel in considering the biblical constraints of man's will because I once railed against the notion that I was not totally in control of my own destiny as well. At one point in my life the idea that I or anyone else could not at any moment change our destiny with God made the whole Bible (or gospel) appear entirely irrelevant. It made God evil. It made evangelism futile. Some synergistic preachers like Jerry Walls take their demand for complete human autonomy so far that doctrines of purgatorial sanctification become reasonable. For Walls, since God cannot dare violate the citadel of human freedom, it leads him to conclude that saints cannot be instantaneously perfected at their glorification, but must instead go to purgatory to sanctify out, or through, their sins "willingly" first. While this view is certainly a fringe hypothesis and not a view held by most even in his own camp, it demonstrates just how far down the rabbit hole the ideology can lead.

The doctrine of the freedom of man's will and the doctrine of predestination, while separate, are inextricably linked topics, and so must be discussed in tandem. An understanding of one aids in an understanding of the other, so I will be addressing predestination a good bit in this text. The question for any Bereanesque student of the Bible is not 'does God predestine?' The question is '*how* does God predestine?' No one serious about the Bible can deny that God predestines. No one. For further in-depth study on this subject I'd like to recommend five books. The first two are between James White and Norman Geisler in their books "The Potter's Freedom" and "Chosen but Free," respectively. Geisler's was first; White's was a response. A second set of books is the interaction between Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus in their writings often now collected together under titles like, "Discourse on Free Will." This was a eminent debate. Luther considered his written response to Erasmus, which was called "The Bondage of the Will," to be his most important work. Along with his catechism, Luther consider his book on the bondage of man's will his most important written work. Martin Luther, the one to whom every Protestant reader should give homage, denied the idea of man's free will as it was understood by many in his day. Lastly, I'd like to recommend John Owen's "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ," Not only do I recommend Owen's inimitable, centuries-old work, but along with it I also recommend J.I. Packer's introductory essay to its 1959 publication. The introductory essay alone is worth the purchase price of the book. Let's look at a Scripture on predestination.

Ephesians 1:3-6 (NKJV): "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 blesses God for election. Many today seem to curse God for just having to deal with their views on it. This is just one of many cogent passages I could cite on predestination. Predestination is a composite of the words "pre" and "destine." This is the idea that God predestines or pre-determines our eternal fate. There are several leading understandings of this doctrine today. No credible Bible teacher will deny that God knows who's going to heaven and

who's going to go to hell in the end, and that he knows it, quite literally, from forever ago. God knows. He is omniscient. Omni-science (all knowledge) comes to mean something like: "God knows all things about all people from all eternity infallibly" for the Bible student. Open theism is imbecilic. An open theist says that God doesn't know the future. No one in their right (sanctifying) mind claims that drivel. Synergistic theologians historically are *not* open theists. This verse cited above is in itself alone so cogent that every child of God understands that the idea of "predestination" is not a Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, or even Augustinian idea; it's a Bible idea. *Everyone has to define the doctrine of "predestination" somehow, and every major denomination in the church that I'm aware of does.* Synergistic schools of thought are but other definitions of the doctrine. Again, everyone serious about God's word has to define what the Bible means by what it says when it speaks of predestination...as it very often does. One's definition of it will invariably color their approach to understanding the freedom of man, and so again, it must be discussed alongside.

I'm not going to try to deal with the whole range and scale of synergistic theology here. Of course not. Any synergistic system, like any Reformed system, is much more than just its stance on one matter. Though I disagree with it on many fronts I respect synergistic theology, and thank God for the men and women who love Jesus according to it. I respect it, but want to challenge some of its erroneous notions on human freedom. It is bad theology. I want to help people think through their theology on this. Hold your horses I'm getting there. To do this I will go as far back as I can. Below is Arminianism in article one of the Remonstrance:

Article I — That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ, his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, **shall believe on this his Son Jesus**, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John iii. 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," and according to other passages of Scripture also. [Bolded words mine].

Recall how I wrote already that Arminian theology is the bedrock in the Protestant west of synergistic theology. If you're not well acquainted with the Calvinist/Arminian argument you'll really have to follow me. I will give some details below, but I'm purposefully sacrificing detail for brevity. I must confess that I like this article of faith. I find in it not one shred of damnable heresy. Wrong? Yep. Satanic? Nope. Christians do indeed believe and confess this article of religion. If I were a minimalist with just one pass at it I'd likely say, "Ok, this accords with what'll get a person into heaven. Let's move on." I'm not a minimalist though; I'm a Bereanesque Bible-believing disciple and ferocious lover of Jesus. *What they meant by what's written here is the problem* I wish to deal with here. On the surface I have no dispute with what's

written. It's what's under the surface, what informs it, or sits just behind it that's the problem. This Arminian paragraph is the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

I haven't here given you any history on the origins of this article of faith, or the rest of them that went with it. In the briefest summary form, I'll say that this article was written around 1610 just after its main ideological proponent, Jacob Arminius died. It is part of a system of theology in direct and intentional opposition to Reformed (Calvinistic) doctrines of soteriology (salvation). Arminius was a student of Calvin. The word "remonstrance" means a forcible protest or reproach. Arminius' followers wrote in protest against Calvin's teaching. John Calvin, whose teachings came before and influenced those who penned the Remonstrance after Arminius, understood that salvation is based upon an "unconditional election." What's written in the article above is a written disagreement with that. What's written above, and specifically bolded therein, going just about as far back as I can go textually, is the foundation of the modern Protestant synergistic idea of a "conditional election." This is nothing more than a repackaged semi-Pelagianism as the Reformed tradition understood it. The Synod of Dort was called to deal with the Arminian view in 1619. The two ideas of conditional and unconditional election end up at the same end point- namely, that saints are born again, but they differ entirely in how. The two views are Christian; one's just much more Christian. One is right and one is wrong, but neither deny the Cross of Christ in their essence in my opinion. Arminianism = synergism; Calvinism = monergism. The Arminian school of logic was trained by the best, Calvin's, so they got a lot right. What they got wrong is the issue. Friends, this is not a mountain from a mole hill. It's a mountain from a much larger one. This is Everest from Olympus Mons. In all actuality, *the synergist says he owes his election to his faith; the monergist says he owes his faith to his election*. Again, if you're not acquainted with the argument's deeply rooted biblical basis I'm sorry I can't get you there in this short letter. I highly recommend Dr. John Gerstner to anyone looking for a study in doctrinal history on this or just about any other subject.

Okay, follow me here please. This next part is crucial. Here's the synergist's view on how a person gets saved within that understanding of predestination. Let's say that Mike Smith gets saved on 1 January 2001. When the synergist defines predestination, what they mean to stress, as is stressed above in article one of the Remonstrance, is that God looked ahead to that January day in 2001 from before Adam was even formed in Genesis, clearly saw Mike's faith and thus, because of it, wrote "Mike Smith" in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Cf. Revelation 13:8; 21:27; Luke 10:20 on that book). Mike Smith, because he freely believed on his own, has just been, "Predestined from before the foundation of the earth." That's it. That's how it works in synergism. Good job, Mike. It was done before Adam was created from the dirt, but it's all based on Mike's "foreseen faith", and it was all determined for Mike in space and time before God said "Let there be light." Mike autonomously decided something before he was created. It was done,

and Mike's name was either inscribed in the Lamb's Book of Life, or not, as affirmed in synergism thus "*before* the foundation of the world." Mike Smith became a member of the elect of God, "...to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ..." etc., as the Remonstrance said. This is a synergistic conception of the doctrine of predestination. It strives to maintain a doctrine of predestination and still uphold Mike's human autonomy. Mike therefore decided his own eternal fate, and not God. And this decision was done before Mike (or anyone else for that matter) was actually even born. You have to get this point to see my challenge here in this letter. Now most of us believe this. I trust no one would accuse me of misrepresenting the synergist view here even though this is just a brief snapshot of it. On the surface this appears to be completely biblical. It is biblical, but it just isn't biblical enough. It has been well said by many that synergists are very often true in what they affirm and false in what they deny. Again, I will not try to challenge *all* of the synergistic view here today. I will challenge the nature of "freedom" as seen in Mike Smith's choice and understood by many of the synergistic persuasion today. Please try and keep Mike's name and the scenario above in mind as we move on.

For the synergist everything predestination-wise is based on the foreseen free willed faith of autonomous individuals, and God is the observing contingent. God elects us unto life or death *based upon what we do or don't do*. This error reaches out and infects a great many other things. I will not deal here with all of the problems with this, but I would be remiss if I didn't take at least a paragraph to name just some of them, in no particular order of conviction, for your consideration, before I move on in my main thesis. 1) No one ever believes on their own. Romans 3:9-18. Men never want God rightly so what is God ever foreseeing in them except their rebellion if he himself is not the one working it? (Note that this truth of depravity and the fact that no one would ever, ever want God rightly in and of themselves without God's intervention is vehemently upheld by many synergists). 2) Jesus said, "The flesh profits nothing," John 6:63. In Greek, what Jesus actually said here was, "The flesh profits nothing." Yes. This was taught to the faithful specifically in light of the disbelief of unfaithful people. The unfaithful were *not* chosen. Their "fleshly" following of Jesus profits nothing. They were offended and left. The disciples (minus Judas) knew there was nowhere else to go. How then can my natural-born, inherited from ma n' pa, fleshly human "will" *ever* be what God needs me to exercise faith with for my eternal profit? If he needs me to be willing first then my flesh, which must be free to act of its own accord or God's no gentleman, actually ends up profiting me absolutely *everything*. This is an utter contradiction to the consistent Scriptural testimony of the natural inability of fallen flesh represented here in this text. 3) People in the flesh (the un-saved) cannot please God, Romans 8:8. Faith pleases God, ergo, those in the flesh can't exercise it. It can't come "from them". Faith is *not* just a matter of will! This points us to what's called unconditional election. 4) The curse of sin is spiritual death. Simple. Corpses don't have anything to offer God...or faith. Corpses must be first raised to life. The gift of faith *is* the gift of life in Christ itself. It's life you get when you

get him. He can only be had *in* life. Being born again cannot be likened to some external gift placed on a table before you that you have to open; it's life from death itself. It's not a gift placed before you it's the life force that provides the spiritual heartbeat that feeds your eyes with oxygen and your very being with blood to have a thought on the room you find yourself in. 5) What about those who didn't hear of Jesus' cross? Does God's plan lack foresight? (Note: everyone has to answer this question). God intended to show wrath in this world, Romans 9:14-24. He's no telemarketer just making as many sales as possible. That would be a careless, guessing and cruel god. 6) Man should get no credit for his salvation. Salvation is to the glory of God alone. This is the heart of true religion and synergism sticks man's dirty little hands all over it. No boasting is proper, Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:1-5. The idea that man's free will or decision making gets him into heaven gives him either full or at least 50% of the credit for being born again since God is said to not be able to do it alone, and only his free will, working in its own inherent power (however externally "assisted" it may be) can. Synergism is a theology that can only pretend to give God full credit. This is why it is often referred to as semi-Pelagian. Salvation, either at its starting point or when viewing it in its entirety must be said to be the work of both God *and* man in synergism. The Reformed perspective (monergism) sees sanctification as a cooperative effort, but wholly ascribes salvation (at regeneration and thus in its totality) to God. 7) Point six upheld in the synergistic way makes God contingent or subordinate to men, even the most vile of men. 8) Points six and seven upheld in the synergistic way makes God impotent. He can save absolutely no one, but can only provide the means by which men can save themselves through their faith. Jesus is therefore really only a man's co-savior in the end. See point two again. 9) The synergistic idea of freedom demands that God's purposes in election and providence are subservient to man and can be overthrown by our freedoms and frustrated. God has to work around both men and circumstance. A reactionary God worries me. 10) It presupposes the idea that all future salvation realities for all of us are fixed by something outside of God himself because he can ultimately only watch what is to unfold, but yet somehow what's foreseen is still certain. He cannot intervene to save a single soul. Who or what then can say that what God foresaw will surely come to pass either in our salvation or damnation if it isn't God? What force or law fixes our future if not God? 11) It makes God careless in the sacrifice of a million to allow "time" for one more to live while still daring to affirm him not being willing that any should perish. This creates a frustrated "god" and sacrifices God's wisdom on the idolatrous arms of free will. 12) It makes God one who simply deals with the cards he's given in the world and destroys the confident praise of him as the almighty one with good purposes providentially working out everything for good for those who love him. How can we ever profess Romans 8:28 that, "...we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose" if God is bound up by creatures? I'll give you a hint as to why I think we should confess Romans 8:28- it's in the next three verses! 13) If God is not sovereign over who goes to heaven and hell then he is not sovereign. 14) It makes God a

reluctant punisher of sin, and sets him in opposition to his own wrath as if he's not as perfectly holy in it as he is in all of his ways. Instead of wrath being a part of God's eternal plan, Romans 9:14-24, synergism makes wrath only a sort of dirty or unfortunate afterthought. Synergism can lead to a "God didn't make hell for man" sort of imbalance in our theology, and makes God at least somewhat indifferent to his wrath. It at the very least makes us think he wasn't omnisciently aware that men would be in hell in the end...even though no one would likely ever say such a thing outright. 15) It leads to a "say this prayer and get forever saved" idiotic mentality in the church. After all, all men have to do is, "open their hearts" and/or "just decide". It gives men a power Scripture never reduces to our wills. 16) It fundamentally opposes God's pattern of a special love for some over others as clearly seen in Scripture. It makes God's special love for some repugnant. "God loves everyone" I hear a lot. Ok, I might agree depending on what you mean by it, but he surely doesn't treat all men the same in that love. No one can sanely deny that God dealt with Israel quite differently than he did with Egypt. Why? They both had little babies. It's because he had a special love and purpose for the children of Israel and *not* for the children of Egypt. Most Christians today, in ignorance, would call this ungodly of God. God hated Esau, a literal son of a literal man named Isaac, while he loved Jacob, another literal son of Isaac through whom the literal Seed (Jesus) who saves all was preserved. Romans 9:13. God has a love that is set upon some differently than others. Period. We cannot deny him this in any covenant. God gets to choose his bride. 17) Except with Adam and Eve before the Fall, the Bible nowhere afterward even comes close to setting forth the idea of a free will in man. SIN changed everything and man became enslaved. That can be demonstrated. Even if total depravity wasn't explicitly taught, man's performance post the Fall would be enough to prove it. Romans 3:9-18. It's been well said that the doctrine of depravity while most reviled today is also the most empirically verifiable. The term "free will" isn't like "Trinity" where while the term may not be there the concept is inescapable. It is philosophical speculation that has only some merit. By this I mean an ultimate self-determination, or that man is somehow post-Fall still neutral before God and able to determine heaven or hell for himself if given the chance. This gives too much to the flesh. Anything spiritual is too much. Such an idea is only, at best, implied back into the Bible through external theological systems. Choices presented in Scripture are not sufficient to prove autonomy, meaning ultimate self-determination (heaven or hell). Man's choices are limited by his nature. *He doesn't want Jesus!* Much like an inmate can choose whether or not she'll eat mashed potatoes or corn but *cannot* choose the exit men have limited freedoms by constraint of their fallen nature. The Bible shows us that if left to ourselves all we'll desire is sin. Again, we're not neutral. The Bible presents us as slaves to our sinful desires unless Christ sets us free. We aren't neutral, we're hostile to God the Bible says. We're hostile. Slaves can't and furthermore don't want to free themselves. We need a prison break that we don't want by nature. 18) I mention this next one with a bit of roundabout in it. God never demonstrated a wait and watch approach in his covenant callings. Abraham, Moses, Paul, the disciples, etc., were approached by

God *first* and only afterward demonstrated their faith. Faith had to be given first not had by them first. God made unilateral promises ratified by later acts such as Abraham with Isaac on Moriah. Abraham was given the promise in sworn certainty (cf. Hebrews 6:13-15) roughly thirty years before that day with Isaac. This shows that while works are anticipated, they're not at all prerequisites to covenant graces. Hence the promises are based never upon us, but only on God's purposes in us. He never "waits to see" whether or not he can make a promise. That is not the pattern. God made the first move every single solitary time. Theologically we should come to see that the "first move" soteriologically is regeneration in the elect. "Those whom he foreknew he predestined and called..." etc., Romans 8:29-30. God doesn't wait to see what anyone does and thus act. Not in real time and not in eternity either if he's omniscient. Therefore (since you may be thinking about it) any appearance of contingency in God such as with the destruction of Israel with Moses, or Sodom's number of righteous people with Abraham, the Ninevites with Jonah, or Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem who wouldn't believe can't cancel out his omniscience. Did God not know every outcome and every reason why for it all already from eternity past? Yes, he did. Why would Jesus weep with Mary and Martha when he purposed for days on earth and from eternity past to raise up Lazarus from death? How *could* he cry? Passions expressed by God don't negate his omniscience though this gets even more complicated in Jesus' humanity. We must simply see that God condescends so that we can relate to him. We are not robots...yet neither is the omniscient God. Our choices are real. Jesus can weep over *our* unbelief. Our choices are real. God's are simply shall we say *more real*. I say this point just to say that denying God's omniscience leads to confusion in his contingency as it relates to our wills. 19) Rehash. Slaves aren't free, John 8:34. Since we all sin we aren't free until we're set free. We can't set ourselves free, we need faith, and only the ones set free are set free by faith. 20) Synergism dismisses the three analogies given to being born again in Scripture, and the unifying fact that all of them share which is the completely passive nature of man therein- namely, a new creation, a resurrection, and a new birth. In all three of these portrayals a will simply cannot (never mind would not) play any part; *we must be acted upon first entirely from without first*. This is why John 1:12-13 can mention our active will in freely receiving Jesus, but then immediately say that our willingness had *nothing* to do with our being born again at all. Synergism confuses this point. This too points to the utter necessity of an unconditional election. 21) If the entire period of the Old Testament (OT) was waiting for the Messiah to come, and the whole of the New Testament (NT) is looking back to that coming, then for whom in the OT era did Jesus die? Did he die to redeem all of the people who'd come and gone, or only some? The chronology alone reveals that Christ's work only works in wisdom in light of an eternal election. If he died for all then perhaps the worst thing he did was to plan two advents. 22) If salvation was simply a random seed sown and men's hearts by their own selves received it or not, wouldn't you expect the rate of positive choice to be anywhere at all even close to fifty percent of the population? 23) Scripture says, "...no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:3. This goes

along with point four. The Bible's central author teaches that you must have him active within you to ever even rightly call Jesus your Lord. Hence it logically follows that you must actually be born again of the Spirit to ever do it in the first place. So calling on Jesus can't *lead to* you being born again; you must be *already born again* to truly call on Jesus. And the list could literally just go on and on and on. Nevertheless, I maintain that I believe this to be an issue Christians can disagree on.

What initially confronts us about the Reformed perspective on life is that unconditional election puts all of the onus on God alone for salvation. We shouldn't do that we think, but God is not running from the biblical picture of sovereign. Man's sin is what takes him to hell if he does not repent, but God is *not* uninvolved in a non-elect person's creation, having already fully seen their fate, any more than he is in the creation of the elect, both of which are fixed in his mind from eternity past. Going back to the Mike Smith example on 1 January 2001, the Reformed view says that God, for reasons that we're sure were *not* found in Mike Smith, chose Mike for salvation. That God literally foreloved Mike and so Mike will be brought to heaven, Romans 8:29-30. Mike will not object. Jesus' perfect righteousness was not credited to Mike until 1 January 2001 when Mike believed, but it was indeed already determined for him from before the foundation of the world. This gives God all of the credit for Mike's salvation. It was *not* based on God's merely seeing Mike choose him (something that would be impossible given Mike's fallen nature anyway); it was instead based on God's will for Mike alone. It is unconditional love Mike has received. Mike needs to meet no precondition of faith for God's saving love to be upon him. Mike was given faith by God through the message preached, he thus believed the gospel, and was in turn justified in willing repentance and should spend the rest of his life marveling at the amazing complexities of God's unmerited faithfulness to bring it to pass. The knowledge of God's eternal election, which is manifested in Mike's love for Jesus with the accompanying fruit of it, will give Mike great comfort in his fight against his sin because he'll trust in God alone knowing that all of his sins *must have* been already forgiven in Christ. He's not performing for God's love; he's already received it in full. God gets all the glory only in this. No wife is happy if she feels her husband might not be faithful, or divorce her each day. The Christian submits because he knows that God is faithful and has already granted him grace. It's a covenant God has shown himself committed to.

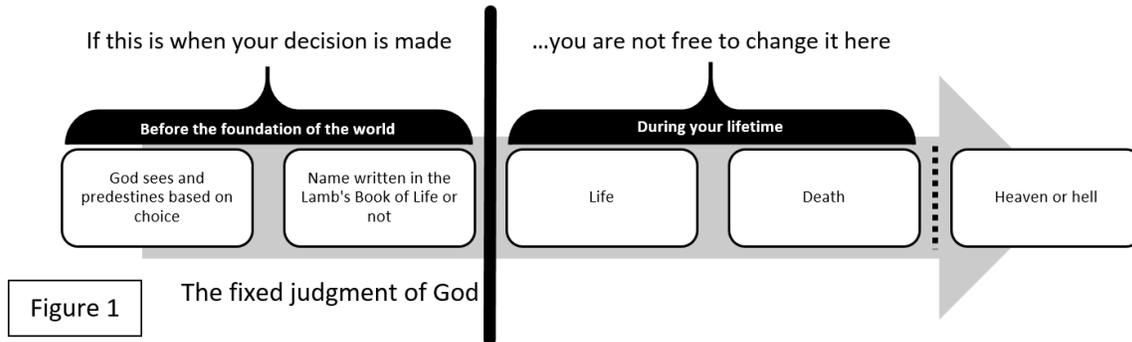
I've just got to throw this in somewhere. It is only one instance, yes, but I think it must be inserted to aid the overall scope of this letter. God did not appear to respect Paul's choice. You may say that this is not normative, but it did happen, and this is not nearly the only example of it in the Bible. The fictional concept of free will meant nothing to God regarding Paul. He slammed him down like a MMA fighter, blinded him, commissioned him an Apostle by likening him to a beast on his plow, and then used him to bear witness of his grace for the rest of his life until his

head was lopped off. Jesus' yoke is easy...even when it's an apostolic one, but man, where was Paul's will ever accounted for in this? Paul never complained about God's "un-gentlemanly behavior," only the synergist must.

In three points I want to help my synergistic brothers by showing that 1) you're really not all that free even according to your own view when it's examined, 2) that to be consistent with your view you *must* believe that you *can* lose salvation, and 3) that in light of all of this in your system it's odd to assume that God has any certain knowledge about anything. This is mainly a philosophical or apologetical challenge to see how these points then line up with the rest of your theology on grace. It is indeed a polemic against some errors in the body. I am purposefully being light here on the Scripture citations, as is not my M.O., to try to keep it as philosophical and digestible as I can. Logic must always maintain some place in theology. Luther's famous "Here I stand" speech cited the need for Scripture *and* sound reasoning or right thinking for a reason. We always need both. I believe that the sovereignty of God in salvation is very logical. I believe that logic alone demands we submit to it.

Point one. Main point. I want to say that I do believe that God is outside of time. Time is a created thing for a created and fallen world. God is not subject to it when he does not wish to be. God doesn't have to wait a year to see what will happen next year like we do. He does see all of it, somehow, however and whenever he wants. Acts 15:18 means just that. I confess this in my complete inability to grasp it. God has a plan and perfect foresight. Prophecy proves this. God is above time I just don't make use of this knowledge in the way the synergist does. I do not make time, decisions, or consequences things fixed *outside* of God himself; God is the only eternal thing. He is the only fixer I know of. If you hold to the synergistic view of salvation then you believe that God saw your free willed faith before you were born in what can only be described, without trying to be silly, as sort of an alternate reality. It's fixed and it existed in its entirety, along with everyone else's, before you were born, but God fixed no one into anything in it as it pertained to life and godliness. God, who is outside of time and not bound by it, in eternity past, saw your absolutely fixed existence from start to finish before your current existence and he saw you at some point making your free will choice to believe in Jesus *and so* he predestined you to conformity with Christ based on that. Or he saw you *not* ever choose Jesus and so he did *not* predestine you to life based on that. In either case it's all done. It's all been decided already. You made your choice and he recorded it before the foundation of the world. *What this means is that you are not now free to change it.* Please catch that because the certainty of this would not agree with the most common definitions of freedom or autonomy I hear today in synergism. Figure one

below is an illustration of this point.



This is the core of my philosophical challenge to you in this letter. Life is fixed for everyone no matter what. This defies how most people imagine freedom to be if decisions that determine our eternity aren't changeable, either for better or worse, yet that's exactly what the most prominent synergistic views try to uphold even in their own logic and confessions. God is omniscient so we cannot escape this question. Take a moment and consider that you're currently locked forever into "your own previous choice". You cannot know what you've already chosen, but God does. Your final judgment already happened in a literally foreseen preexistence thousands of years ago because God already saw your decision. If you're a believer you might be ok with this, but by the way, this would also necessarily include a choice to reject Jesus in your life so you couldn't now change that either if that was the choice you'd already made. I hope you can see the absurdity of us making our decisions immutably before we were born already, but let's continue. You'd be born to be damned and God would not/could not be at work to change it because it's already fixed. He's already seen your end. God knows that nothing will change regarding you because he's already seen your death. He's already judged you. The Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 17:8) was filled in "...from the foundation of the earth." In the negative of people immutably denying Jesus is really where the synergist is challenged. Indeed, we all are, but I think there are clearer answers in the Bible than an interpolation of man's pre-existent free will. In fairness, we also do well here to remember that it's likely that no one in the synergist camp believes that a person has only one hour of one day or something to make their choice. Most would imagine one's choice to believe or not as sort of the culmination of a lifetime of choices. Indeed, in this view, no one but God would really know when "the choice" was made or not, but since he saw the end of you even before the start of you it would still all essentially reduce down to "a" moment of time for us somehow in God's view. Even if we say that a person's ultimate decision is only decided over the course of many choices that would make it no less eternally fixed because God has already seen it all through to the somehow fixed end. So what exactly is freedom to you my synergistic compadre but a freedom to live out a life so fixed that God could view it already and make his determinations on all eternal souls having already

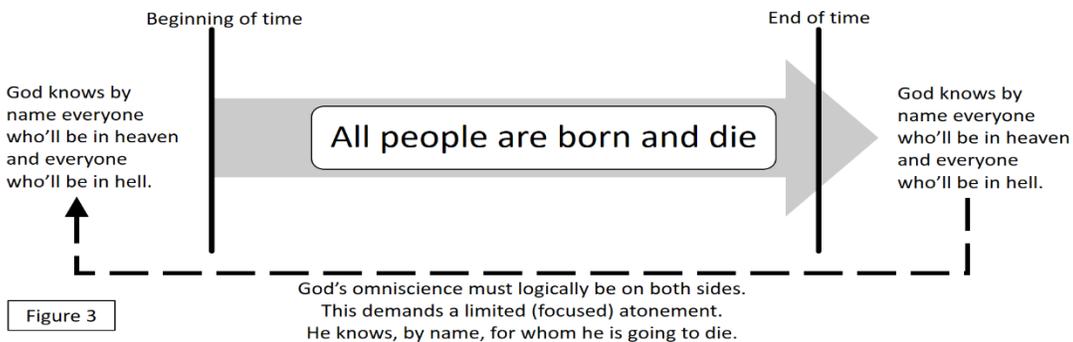
seen it all unfold? You cannot today change your already made decision(s) to believe or not. It seems to me that most of what the synergist rails against in Reformed Theology, namely that it's all 100% fixed, is upheld by their own assumptions, but they rarely follow it through in their reasoning. Remember, God created people that he knew would go to hell so this still says something about his character. *Nothing is any less fixed regarding our eternal state in either the synergistic or monergistic system if God is omniscient.* My challenge here is how we understand our notions of freedom under God in light of this reality, the reality of God's omniscience and predestination. You made your choice already, now live or die with it according to the prescient view (that God's election of you was based upon your foreseen faith like with Mike Smith). Whatever it was it's done. There is no changing it or God is not omniscient and we're all open theists. I've heard respectable preachers like Adrian Rogers (an Arminian) emphatically declare that whatever is going to happen is going to happen. That it must. That God saw it all already. It must all come to pass. Rogers held to a synergistic understanding of predestination. It is an election fixed in God's "unchangeable" purpose, as we saw in article 1 of the Remonstrance, and based on foreseen faith, or a lack thereof, forever. It is forever fixed in the secret counsel of God from before we were made. *So, if God's already seen it all then nothing at all in your life, or in your neighbor's life, is at all one iota any less fixed than in any other view out there.* No one can change anything now. It's all done for everyone. So what's the difference between God determining it and you determining it? That you still made the choice in the end? Okay. I see where you're coming from. I understand the difficulties here. There is indeed paradox here to appeal to on each side. In every major doctrine of the Faith there is paradox. I affirm that men end up in hell solely because they have willingly sinned and are rightly judged for it. I highlight this topic in this letter because it seems to me that what initially turns people off to the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty in election is that it makes men fixed or "robots", yet it's always fixed, and they themselves, in their own theologies, in an attempt to do away with the issue, make themselves robots to an impersonal universe in eternity past in the strangest non-biblical ways. They say that decisions are fixed in their lives, but *not* by God. This is odd. Dealing with salvation in its eternal parameters at all is enough to move the minds of many in my generation beyond the shallowness of the altar call, and so that alone makes this writing worthwhile, but there's more to it than just that. Seeing God as the determiner puts us under him. There's great profit to this I think. But they're okay with it as long as they're in control of themselves in the end. Sorry, I just don't think that universe exists. They don't want God in charge of their fate, they want to be. Again, this would imply a fictitious neutrality in man's heart. Since the Fall, if God left it up to us we'd all decide to go to hell. None of us would want Jesus. I digress. You are not free to choose *today* if you believe that your salvation was already pre-seen and predetermined, indeed even if the choice was by you, before you were born. You already did your choosing and he already did his. You're fixed in a reality of your own making that you cannot in any way alter at any altar. Again, this is also true of the non-believer. Based on that, he

or she will go to heaven or hell having been already predestinated by God. This means they too cannot change it. It's done. Yes, your evangelism will be wasted on them. This is the synergistic view in its philosophical underpinnings. No one denies the omniscience of God. So what freedom are you talking about? Many people initially reject Calvinism for the same things that the logic behind their own systems demand right under the surface. Even in the synergistic view you may go like me to evangelize total strangers, but their eternal state is already fixed. Do you see my point in this? I know I'm being redundant. Dear friend, either you're sovereign over you or God is. Again, if we were sovereign, heaven would have *only* God and his elect angels.

The following two figure analogy will help shed some light on this. It is simply a logical certainty. It centers on the omniscience of God. In figure one I've depicted what I've almost never seen argued against by any Christian. God knows everything about everyone from all time infallibly. That's his omniscience. Blows the mind? Yes. Fully comprehensible by man? No. Demonstrated in Scripture, however? Yes. The figure below simply shows God's "knowing of all things" at the end of time. This is after the last judgment when heaven and earth are renewed, etc. Do you agree with the following figure?



Now in the next figure what happens when we simply move the text block on the right to the left? We're left with the only logical conclusion written below. Do you believe this?



You should believe this because it is the only logical conclusion under an omniscient God. We are not omniscient, but his word clearly shows us that he is. His omniscience is perfect

just like every other attribute he has. My point here: everything is fixed and God knows it. My secondary point is that the doctrine often called “limited atonement” is the only logically consistent idea.

If freedom before God means what many today argue it means, then men must *always* be free at any moment to change everything about their eternal fate *at any time*. God cannot know for sure what we’re going to do if we were totally free because we could always change it. There could be no predestining from before us because we’re not done choosing. It seems to me that if this is true then open theism is the only thing compatible with the synergistic view of freedom. We are not bound by anything if freedom means what many say it does. We are not bound by God, satan, or any previous choice if we are truly free as is often implied. We’ll look at this in the next point.

Point 2. Many today who preach human free will, especially in my Baptist circles, also oddly enough teach eternal security. They say that you cannot lose your salvation as stated in the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 in section V, *God’s Purpose of Grace*. This is inconsistent, however, if a man holds to freedom of the will. If man is truly free and chooses his own fate then how can you go back against that and say that men cannot afterward freely choose to be lost? Or that God, seeing it all from eternity past, wouldn’t have to honor their choice to leave the kingdom if they later chose it? What’s the shelf life on your definition of freedom? Why does it expire at salvation as far as one’s ultimate destination is concerned? Forget whether they’d ever want to or not, I’m talking about autonomy. I’m talking about what freedom is as the synergist demands it to be. You can’t limit it to a space in time before time and still talk about freedom in any absolute sense as they try to. It’s just logically suicidal. Many argue that God never violates free will and then turn right around and say that he’ll do it post your salvation and never let someone leave...even if it was what they themselves willed. This seems to me to be terribly inconsistent. Friend, it’s simple, *if men are ever free to choose (autonomous) then they must always be free to choose*, or else autonomy takes on a strange new meaning related to time and space. Now, to be fair, some are consistent in their views here. Arminius was. His followers who penned the Remonstrance were. Though I think it’s poorly written, point five of the Remonstrance teaches that men *can* lose salvation. That you *can* lose your salvation even after it’s been bestowed. This is what I call temporary eternal life. This is an oxymoron, but it’s at least logically consistent with freedom. If you want to uphold freedom then you must uphold freedom consistently. Taking the pure, historical Arminian view then, we have God, foreseeing temporary faith in an individual, granting them a temporary eternal life in Christ, and then taking it from them (as he already knew he would forever) at a later time. I confess that such a ridiculous farce can only be maintained in the strongest biblical illiteracy, but yet I know some learned men seduced by its fleshly charms.

You cannot affirm both eternal security and the freedom of the will with any logical consistency. Such would say that men were free but only to enter into the prison cell. Afterward they're not free to depart. This is both biblically and logically inconsistent. One passage to illuminate this:

³Blessed *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, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (NKJV).

Forgetting the obvious exegetical certainty of this passage's stressed fixedness toward its intended readers I ask, who made the reservation in heaven, and when? God did it and he did so from before time began as we've already established from the synergistic view. Remember, he saw Mike Smith's faith from before time and wrote his name down. But why would he make the reservation at all if he knew he would soon cancel it because he, being omniscient, knew that a person would draw back to death? The question is, why would he ever "truly" make the reservation? The answer is that the reservation would be a fraud. The answer would be horrible. It would be a corruptible and wholly defile-able inheritance not at all reserved by anyone but you (for a bit) and cancellable by you who are obviously *not* kept by the power of anything logically consistent. The answer would be that salvation for many is not ready to be revealed one day. St. Peter does not agree with that logic.

Point 3: If man's will is truly free in the way many assume then it is impossible for God to know a single thing with certainty about the future. Hollywood enjoys playing with this idea a lot, but it is at least consistent. Even seen flicks like *Back to the Future*, *Inception*, *Timeline*, or *Deja Vu*? Mcfly can create entirely different streams in alternate realities just by meeting his mom, etc. He can then go back and alter it all back. I know. That's just fiction you say, but if we're truly free then God cannot fix anything until it happens. How could he? If we can change it then he can't really know what's to be until it is. If he can know any such changes before they happened, then we really didn't "change" anything. There have in fact been men in the past who've championed what I call the spreadsheet view of God. Men like Ignatius Loyola (and other even more respectable men) have theorized something called "middle knowledge". Middle knowledge is the idea that God merely knows every possible outcome of every possible situation. He knows it all in this sense, thus he is omniscient, but he does not know what you're going to choose or what each outcome will be yet. This mangling of things makes God basically a big number cruncher or a massive super computer sort of weighing all the odds. I think it gets closer to the truth than an outright open theism although I think that it is itself just another more tame form of open theism. However, it still misses by a long shot. One major problem with it is

that God goes on record many times in the Bible about exactly what some individual or group will do in the future. Sometimes he bases his own promises to humanity on it. Should they not do it then his word would be questionable. As it is, however, he *never* misses. Consider the betrayal of Judas as foretold, or the betrayal of Peter down to the roster's call and then also his subsequent certain restoration. Or consider the infallible calling of John the Baptist disclosed to his father before John's birth that he "would be the forerunner to the Messiah". Can you imagine Zacharias being careful to leave out that embarrassing "wrong part of God's word" when he recounted his temple story to his buddies if John had instead become a tax collector, or a philosopher? Should John have instead chosen to be a Celtic freeform jazz dancer then God would have been wrong when he said he'd be thus and such. No. God declares things even over John's will and they are certain. He goes on record. And even if there were numerous certain outcome options known only in the mind of God over each event, is he not able to "fast forward" the tape and see the actual choice? If it can be changed by us at any point then the fast forward would also be worthless, Mcfly! Hello! Hello Mcfly! Anybody home?! Think, Mcfly, think. Middle knowledge is a complete dog's breakfast.

Consider Jesus and his will which was free. Scripture foretells in a many places and in many ways that he would Resurrect and see the reward of his suffering. That he'd bring many sons to glory, etc. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he cried, "not my will, but yours be done". Let's say Jesus did ever choose Satan's way in the wilderness temptation. Let's say he did allow them to crown him king, etc. what then would have happened to all of the passages foretelling his death? What of Psalm 22? While this question is strained to bring upon us the circumstances of God incarnate it illustrates that there can again be no alteration of God's written word and then still be a credible word. If we're free to alter the story. If Pilate did *not* crucify Jesus. If Judas did *not* betray Jesus. If the Pharisees and Sadducees did *not* shoot out their lips. If king Herod was *not* against him. What of God's supposed plan in Acts 4:27-28 that says, "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done." What if they all did the "right thing" by not condemning Jesus? What if we wretches did not choose Barabbas? Oh, the list goes on and on. What I'm trying to relay here is that there can be no contingencies with a God who prophecies like this and goes on record. He may present them that way sometimes because he knows our frame, but there simply can be no such thing in his mind as an unknown. Consider how foolish such an idea is next to God's repeated claims such as in Isaiah 46:9-11. Perhaps I can illustrate something of use here with an absurd example. Let's say Jesus did not go to the cross. Would he have ever died? The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. He never sinned. So why would he have ever died? He aged. He couldn't have died I say. But such a question is only absurd in that it cannot ever be

asked of necessity? Why? Because there was no possible plan B. None. He came to die. It's why he said he came. There was no plan B. He would die so the question becomes futile.

If there is contingency before God. If Nineveh might not repent. If God may have not known the precise number of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. If God may have actually wiped out all of Israel's seed except by the pleading of Moses. If your salvation is in fact "all up to you" then he can know nothing of the future and we're all open theists. You may say it's a mystery to us how we reconcile human responsibility with sovereignty, and I would agree. I've never been to the summit of Mt. Everest, but I have seen pictures from it. God has shown me pictures from his vantage point through his word. He's shown you too. He does not operate like I do. He does not operate on contingencies.

I'm not alone in my theology here, and I'm in some pretty great company. Listen to Martin Luther:

If God foreknew that Judas would be a traitor, Judas became a traitor of necessity, and it was not in the power of Judas or of any creature to act differently, or to change his will, from that which God had foreseen. It is true that Judas acted willingly, and not under compulsion, but his willing was the work of God, brought into being by his omnipotence, like everything else...if you do not allow that the thing which God foreknows is necessarily brought to pass, you take away faith and the fear of God, you undermine all the Divine promises and threatenings, and so you deny Deity itself. (*The Bondage of the Will*, pg. 213).

Conclusion.

Sin is death. It is bondage. It is a literal slavery. It is a spouse that must die before one can legally marry Christ, Romans 7:1-6. Sin is what men love by nature. Sin tastes good to men. The cross tastes bitter. It's foolish. It's scandalous. It's offensive. We must be set free from SIN. One sin. Just one sin plunged humanity into God's perpetual Noahic flood-sized wrath. Adam's sin started it all. What sort of a strange twist is it to say that any of us are able to reverse the curse? No, we are so far gone in SIN that we cannot but despise grace unless God actually, in a very real sense, saves us from ourselves. We have a will. It is free to follow its desires. Romans 3:9-18, et al, tells us that our desires are just never good. That's why I put no stock in will power *unless it's in the life of the believer*. Once a person is set free he is free to seek after Jesus. Not before. Outside of the Faith the will never profits. We don't want God. We are by nature only children of wrath, Ephesians 2:3. He's there, but we're bound, as Jonathan Edwards would have us understand, by our own selves. Edwards' book "The Freedom of the Will" is another great read for anyone wanting a sound treatise on the subject of human will.

Dear reader, I pray that God would take you into the depth of this. Logical consistency is a powerful thing. God cannot be omniscient and not predestinate. Paradox is not contradiction. God has designed a world where his perfect judgement and perfect knowledge coexist above us and though us. Knowing this puts a great deal into perspective. When we see the futility of professing our election based on a supposed foreseen faith, we can see the purity of professing a faith of grace alone fade. Once we stop sewing together this doctrinal fig leaf, God's monergistic atoning work can truly make sense. I believe that a mature "grace alone" profession is at stake here. As a church we must stop assuming that salvation is within our power. We're helpless. We're dead. Into this dead helplessness the gospel shines brightest. The number of those saved is not affected by this nearly all men would confess. The glory of their salvation, however, is.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.