

Fixed in the Heart of God

How
Election
the Gospel
and Evangelism
Live Gloriously Together

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Preface

I hear these questions from earnest believers all the time:

How could God choose some people and not others?

Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus died for everyone?

If God is sovereign over salvation, why bother with evangelism?

Sincere Christians also discover that the more they dig into the Bible, the more contradictions *seem* to pop out:

-God says he wants everyone saved, yet not everyone is.

-God says Jesus is the savior of all men, yet only the elect are in heaven.

-Jesus says he'll draw all men to himself, yet many in fact perish.

-Man is invited to come to Jesus, yet resolutely told he is unable to.

-Man has free will, yet God does whatsoever he pleases.

-It's only fair that God give everyone a chance, yet many never hear the message.

Hmm. What's going on?

This book attempts to alleviate the confusion generated by these *apparent* contradictions and to help you see that there is no conflict between God's sovereign election, the gospel, and evangelism. These three doctrines are fixed gloriously in the heart of God, if you will, standing together in a harmonious relationship without contradiction or confusion. Because the Bible teaches each of these doctrines, they can't be in competition. Is there some mystery involved in these issues? Yes indeed. *Why* God chooses some and not others is buried in the secret counsel of his mysterious will. Likewise, *when* God chooses to create faith in a sinner's heart is an enigma. But it is *not* a mystery *that* God chooses some and not others, and that evangelism is the method he uses to save his elect. And, just in case you were wondering, if you want to be saved from your sins and hell right now and enjoy eternal life in heaven, by all means you can trust with certainty that Jesus will save you if you ask him to.

Our Methodology

It never hurts to define terms clearly and to know what question is being answered with any given biblical theme. So let's frame our study that way.

Part 1 examines the doctrine of *sovereign grace*- sometimes called *unconditional election* or the *predestination of God's chosen ones*. Because all human beings are born spiritually dead with no appetite for God, and therefore possess no inclination to move toward him, and in fact have a subconscious aversion to God, they can never will to be saved until God first changes their desires.

The doctrine of election answers the question,

Why did I become a Christian?

And the answer is,

God alone made me one, or I'd never desire it!

Part 2 delineates the simplicity of *the gospel*. The gospel is good news for sinners: if you call upon the name of the Lord, believing his promise to save you from your sins and to make you perfectly righteous for heaven through the grace given in Jesus, then you will be completely accepted by God forever.

The gospel answers the question,
How do I become a Christian?
 And the answer is,
 Believe the promise of the gospel and you will be saved!

Part 3 examines *evangelism*, or announcing the message of grace promised in Jesus. Evangelism includes living in such a way as to make Jesus' love for sinners visible in word and deed, and engaging others where they are in order to make the otherwise counterintuitive truths of the gospel accessible and intelligible to any who will listen.

Evangelism answers the question,
Who can become a Christian?
 And the answer is,
 As far as I am concerned, everyone in the entire world!

Perhaps the diagram below helps you visualize the relationship between election, the gospel and evangelism. Election is foundational and for me only; it tells me *why* I became a Christian. Believing the gospel is *how* I became a Christian. The gospel, not election, frames my relationship to anyone else. As far as I know, Jesus will save *whoever* looks to his cross for salvation.

The only issue you use to relate to others is
 the Cross:

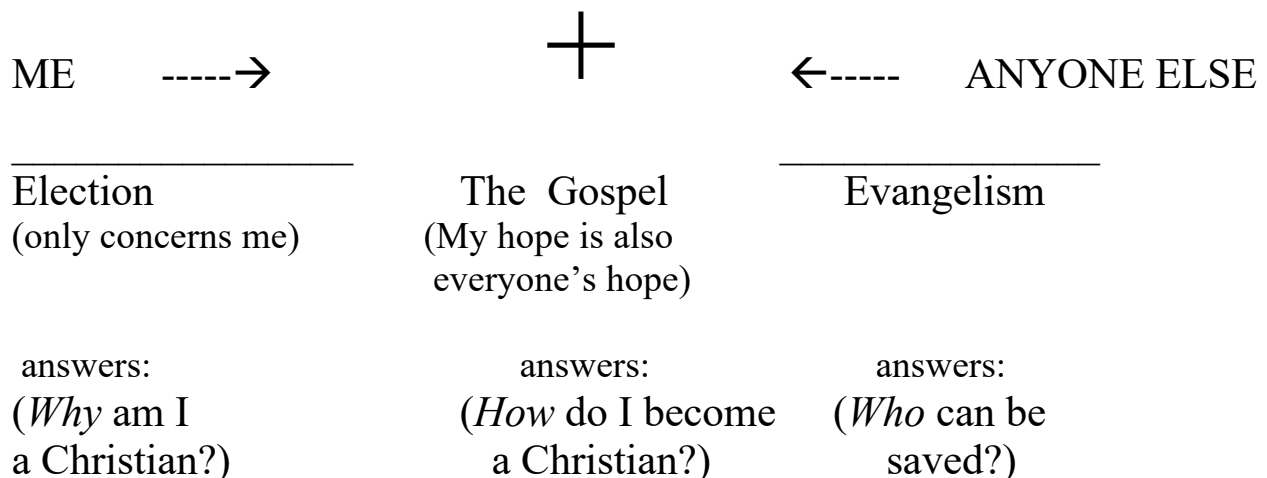


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Part 1: Sovereign Grace: Why did I become a Christian?

Why am I a Christian?

Why did I become a Christian? There are at least five ways to answer this question. In other words, the notion of *why* can be nuanced from several different perspectives. For example, why did you fall asleep last night? You might answer the question:

- Physiologically: your body started to shut down;
- Psychologically: perhaps you were feeling low and didn't want to face the world;
- Functionally: when your head hit the pillow in your dark bedroom you conked out;
- Practically: you went to sleep because if you didn't you may not succeed at work.

In the same vein, the reason anyone becomes a Christian can be answered from a variety of perspectives:

1. Environmental

I was born into church-going home, in a country with many churches. In other words, the locale in which a person lives functions significantly into their opportunity to hear the gospel message. If you were born into a Christian home, you likely cannot remember a time when you did not love Christ because your parents intentionally raised you that way. But if you were born in a remote village where the gospel has never gone, you would never hear about Jesus.

2. Practical/functional

Many people testify that their faith in Christ makes a huge difference in their life. In other words, it works, it satisfies, it changes and challenges me, and helps me grow and makes me a better person. Because God gives a new heart, I enjoy a new perspective on things, freedom from self, Satan, the world, the burden of the law (nothing to prove, nothing to lose). What could be more beneficial than access to the throne of grace!

3. Philosophical

I am a Christian because it is true. Having been compelled by the evidence, I could not deny the facts of Jesus' life, miracles, teachings and resurrection. I therefore find Christianity not only to be a deeply satisfying worldview, but also the only one that comports with reality.

4. Instrumental

I became a believer by embracing the gospel. God makes promises and I was convinced they were trustworthy. Perhaps at an event I heard gospel preaching, was compelled

(faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of Christ), there was an invitation and I accepted and leaned on Christ.

5. Theological

God in his sovereign grace wooed me to himself, opened my eyes, created faith and repentance in my heart, and persuaded and enabled me to put my trust in Jesus. Finding him irresistible through the Spirit's efficacious work, Jesus drew me to himself, transferred me from darkness to light, took out my heart of stone and gave me a heart of flesh, so that I could not *not* become a believer.

The definition of effectual calling in the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter X.1 and 2) captures this beautifully:

All those whom God has predestined 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.

This last perspective, the theological reason anyone becomes a believer, is the focus of Part 1. We need to explore what the Bible says about sovereign grace, or what some have called unconditional election or predestination. The theologians of the Protestant Reformation understood that this doctrine can easily be misconstrued and distorted. The Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter III.8) rightly guards:

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care.

It is important, therefore, to use the doctrine for the reason it is given in scripture: to be a tremendous comfort to believers, as an assurance that we are God's work, His creation in Christ, and the object of His love from before the foundation of the world. The Lord has graciously, sovereignly and efficaciously willed and accomplished our salvation. Amazing! Hence, you stand secure forever in His unfailing love. This doctrine should not be used to speculate about who may or may not be saved. Only God knows that. The only thing he wants us to be concerned to tell the whole world is how delighted Jesus is to save sinners. Nor should our assurance of God's grace become an excuse not to seek Him wholeheartedly. Why wouldn't we want to walk closer and closer with the most beautiful person in the world?

To sum up, when we preach to unsaved folks, we tell them the gospel, not election; these doctrines are not the same thing. The gospel is for everyone; election is for believers. Once you trust the gospel you should know the doctrine of election because it is true, it is assuring and liberating, and it alone redounds to the glory God deserves in your salvation. Only election will create in your heart the humility and praise God looks to produce through his sovereign grace.

The Meaning of Sovereign Grace

A careful study of Ephesians 1:4-14 will teach us to rightly apprehend the doctrine of election or predestination.

3 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, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Five words show us the way the Apostle Paul depicts the meaning of this awe-striking teaching:

1. The METHOD of Predestination

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (v. 4)

The word *choose* means to pick out from among alternatives. Just as we did not choose our physical existence, owing it solely to the will of our parents, so we owe our spiritual rebirth solely to the will of God.

Those who believed...who were not born of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:13)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you... (John 15:15)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father. (John 6:44, 65)

Does this mean simply that God knows ahead of time who will choose Him and who will not, and based on that he elects a sinner to salvation? According to Romans 8:29-30, God's foreknowledge is personal. We are elected *to* our faith, not *for* our faith. He brings us to faith:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His son...and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified... (Romans 8:29-30)

The Apostles understood this clearly. Their proclamation echoed *Salvation is of the Lord* (Psalm 3:8, Jonah 2:9), the heart of the Old Testament gospel message. Notice the disciples response to the conversion of the Gentiles:

God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life... (Acts 11:18)

The reason the Gentiles exercised repentance unto life is because God granted it to them. Likewise,

...as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed... (Acts 13:48)

How many believed? As many as God appointed; they believed because God appointed them to do so. Both of these verses are observing what is happening with conversions from God's point of view; they stress the work of God bringing people to faith.

Jesus made it clear in His dealings with Nicodemus that faith is first preceded by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit:

...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... (John 3:3)

Seeing the kingdom is synonymous with faith. Faith results from the prior working of the Spirit in us, enabling us to see. Regeneration (being born anew) proceeds faith (believing the gospel). We are otherwise blind to the reality of God's saving kingdom. Hence Paul prays that the *eyes your heart may be enlightened* (Ephesians 1:18) because only God's Spirit can do so.

This may shock us today, given our sense of inalienable individual rights and autonomy, but it would not in the least come as news to a believing Jew. For he would know that:

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not choose you or set His love upon you because you were more numerous than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your fathers... (Deuteronomy. 7:6-7)

But now, thus says the Lord, your creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine! (Isaiah 43:1)

With no surprise, therefore, Peter writes,

Blessed be God...who caused us to be born again... (1 Peter 1:3)

God *has* to cause us because we have nothing in us to cause us to believe.

2. The MOTIVATION in Election

Why does God elect some lost sinners to His eternal glory? We can certainly agree that God owes no one in the world anything. He would be the same great, loving, wise God of the

universe if He never chose to save one person. Strictly speaking all he owes anyone is judgment for his sins. So why does He choose to save any?

Let's be clear about this: It is not anything in us that causes God to save us. Indeed, according to Paul, we are *dead in our trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1); just as a physically dead person has no appetite for food, so a spiritually dead person has no appetite for God. God's word could not be clearer on this:

There is none righteousness, not even one; There is none who understand, there is none who seeks for God... There is no fear of God before their eyes... (Romans 3:10, 11, 18)

No, it was nothing in us, either prompting God to esteem us, or prompting us to seek God, that saved us. It was, as Paul states so emphatically in Ephesians 1:

according to the kind intention of His will (1:5)
according to the riches of His grace (1:7)
according to His kind intention (1:9)
predestined according to His purpose (1:11)

This passage, as well as others, speaks so gratefully of God's grace, His unmerited favor and goodness that he extends when it is not deserved. That is what makes grace what it is:

it is freely bestowed upon us in the beloved... (1:6)

So we ask, why does God love us? He loves us because He loves us. You are loved by God simply because He chooses to love you. That's as far as we can go. But what glory! We are the object of God's saving power and love...

...To the praise of His glorious grace (1:12, 14)

God put you and Jesus Christ together in His mind from all eternity. He said, "I'm going to have a family that is mine forever. It will be a family of people who are testimonials to my saving grace, and who will share the likeness of their elder brother, my beloved Son, Jesus Christ."

So love is God's motive, to the praise of His grace; next follows...

3. The MEANS of Election

The first 14 verses of Ephesians 1 overflow with the language of "union with Christ". In other words, all the spiritual blessings we have *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3) we have precisely because we are *in Christ*.

blessed in Him (v3)
chosen in Him (v4)
adopted through Him (v5)
grace bestowed in Him (v6)
redemption in Him (v7)
God's will purposes in Him (v9)
summing up of all things in Him (v10)
we hope in Him (v12)
sealed with the Spirit in Him (v13)

What, then is...

4. The OUTCOME of Our Election

Very simply, but nonetheless grandly, the outcome is summed up in the thrice-used refrain of Ephesians 1:6, 12, 24: *To the praise of His glory*

If God has a job description in the universe, it is to bring glory to Himself. So Paul tells us God *works all things after the counsel of His will* (1:11). If man plays any part in the effecting of salvation, then that man should get credit for making an incredibly wise choice. But the nature of the gospel is that it precludes boasting:

...not as a result of works, that no man should boast... (2:9)

Who can boast before God? Is He not the one who takes a dead heart and makes it alive? (see Romans 4:17; John 5:21; Ezekiel 37:1-14) Did Lazarus boast upon his reception of new life? No indeed, he was raised by the power of the word of God,

for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by this. (John 11:4)

Paul tells us in Romans 9:23 that we who Jesus saves are *vessels of mercy*. This simply means that of all the lost people in the world, whom the Bible portrays as straying from God and hostile to Him (Romans 1:30; 8:7), God chooses to save some while passing by the others. He doesn't keep people from coming to Him; He doesn't need to, as they will not anyway. He chooses whom He desires, and leaves the rest to pursue the wishes of their wills, which is life without God.

This is indeed a hard doctrine, as we humanly would want all to have a chance to respond to God. But in a real sense they do. Romans 1 tells us that

God is evident to them...His invisible attributes having been clearly seen...so that they are without excuse. (1:19-20)

And as if that were not sufficient to render all guilty, Paul goes on to elucidate the universal guilt of humanity in Romans 2 by declaring that the Gentiles, who have the law written on their hearts, don't even live up to the standards they set for themselves; nor are the Jews who have the law from God, explains Romans 3, able to keep it faithfully. Thus:

All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. (3:23)

This is what the Bible teaches. We will either humbly believe it, or choose to ignore what God has made clear. Finally, we conclude with:

5. The GOAL of our Election

According to Ephesians 1:4-5 the goal of election is that we would be *holy and blameless and adopted as the sons and daughters of the living God*. In no sense can our election be an excuse for sin or sloth. To the contrary, if we act thus we deny the reality of our election. God does not save us to leave us in the misery and bondage of sin. He rescues us from the ravages of sin so that we might enjoy Him and the glorious benefits of His salvation as His precious children.

Frequently Raised Questions Concerning Predestination

Why is this doctrine a “hard saying”?

Let's be clear first of all that this wonderful doctrine is given to us for our comfort. God is telling us how unshakable is our salvation, because we are the work of God from eternity to eternity. What God starts He finishes. This is especially meaningful to Christians in trial and persecution, or in personal fear of losing what they hold so precious. The doctrine is *not* given as a reason to neglect sharing the gospel with people who seem un-savable, nor as an excuse for sloth or indifference in our walk of holiness. The real import is, “Thanks be to God's grace that I am in His forever family by His sure sovereign choice!”

This is a hard doctrine because it cuts against the grain of the human spirit, which proudly wants to claim some sense of responsibility for salvation. Nor does the human spirit want to admit how totally incapable of choosing God it is.

Apparently the crowds who followed Jesus were offended by His teaching this. In John 6 Jesus twice teaches that salvation is only by the sovereign initiation of God:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him... (6:44)

...no one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father. (6:65)

It is a hard saying to swallow, but nevertheless true, that none of us would ever choose Christ unless He first chose us:

We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)

He saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity... (2 Timothy 1:9)

Do I have to believe this doctrine to be a Christian?

No. You must trust Christ alone to save you in order to be a Christian. People who believe they alone are ultimately responsible for their “decision” to accept Christ are, of course, Christians. But because sovereign grace stands at the heart of the doctrine of salvation (commonly called Reformed Theology), one's Christianity will be “imperfect” to the degree to which it departs from the “whole counsel of God”. I believe what you will miss is: 1) the heights of praise to which our hearts soar when we give all the glory to God, and 2) the depths of humility that this doctrine promotes in us.

Doesn't God's choosing some over others make Him unjust?

Indeed, this is the deepest concern for many people. But a careful study of Romans 9 will provide the answer. In Romans 9 Paul begins a section, spanning chapters 9-11, which addresses the issue of Israel's salvation. He anticipates the objection that, because not all Israel in the flesh has professed Christ, does that mean that God's promises to Israel have failed (Romans 9:6)? His answer is no, the word of God has not failed, for Israel is not defined by outward membership in the covenant community, but by the heart (*it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise* v.9:8, cf. Romans 2:28). Then Paul teaches that those who

are God's by the promise are so *in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand* (9:11). Both the sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau (before either was born), and the raising up of wicked Pharaoh (who in the hands of the sovereign God fulfills God's purposes) demonstrates two key truths.

First, the truth that God's choice in no way depends on man, for it is wholly dependent on God's decree and purpose.

So it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 9:16)

This simply affirms what John says in his gospel,

...who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13).

God sends the Spirit, before any initiative on our part, that we might have faith, our truly resting upon Christ, and that, the gift of God (Acts 11:18, 13:48) The clearest picture of this in the New Testament is the raising of Lazarus. He was dead. So are we in our sins. The word of God was spoken: *"Come forth!"* He was called to life by the sovereign Lord, as we are also through the preaching of the Word: *faith comes through hearing.* (Romans 10:8-17).

The second important truth is that the charge of injustice on God's part is fallacious. Paul even anticipates this in Romans 9:14:

There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

We see here that God's word teaches that justice is decidedly not the issue at all. No one is worthy of the free gift of salvation. No one even desires it. Indeed,

all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Justice involves what's fair. The only fair deal is that we all receive due punishment for our sin. God owes no one in the universe anything... except judgment for their rebellion against Him.

That He chooses to show mercy to some is entirely His free prerogative; indeed, it is the issue of compassion, not justice. Hence,

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and hardens whom He desires.
(Romans 9:18).

If you drive through the city and, moved by compassion, stop to give a \$20 bill to a homeless person, you are simply choosing to show mercy to that person, not creating an injustice toward any of the other homeless who might happen to be there. Because you owed none of them anything, the issue is mercy, not fairness. The text is clear that 1) God chooses to extend undeserved compassion to those who do not deserve it, and that 2) God chooses not to extend mercy to those who don't deserve it, and all of this for His own glorious purposes.

He did so in order to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared before hand for glory, even us, whom He also called... (Romans 9:23)

Finally, Paul anticipates a last objection to all this, namely, from v. 9:19:

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

Can God really hold us accountable for our sin? Are we culpable for not fitting into God's plan to be saved? Paul says the very question is out of court:

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God. The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this', will it?" (9:20)

At this point we are simply called to humbly accept what God makes clear.

Does this mean that God actively keeps people from coming to Himself?

By no means. No one comes because they do not possess in their nature the inclination, desire or ability. God does not create unbelief in their hearts; He doesn't need to because unbelief is naturally resident there already.

Well, then, is the free offer of the gospel really sincere?

Yes, indeed. It is an offer extended to Jew and Gentile alike, a message of salvation to be taken to the ends of the earth. Jesus said that *whoever believes in Him would have eternal life* (John 6:47). It is a most earnest offer, which all everywhere are commanded to accept (Acts 17:30), and which some resolutely rejected (Acts 13:46). That people do not accept the free offer is entirely their fault. Remember that both Ezekiel (3:4-11) and Isaiah (1:18-19; 6:9-13) were commanded to preach to people who were not going to believe.

How do I know that I'm elect?

You obey the command of God to *believe and repent*. (John 3:16) As you accept Christ, the witness of the Spirit will confirm in your heart that you are God's new creation. In other words, all the elect believe. God desires that they do so because he wants to save them. Correspondingly, anyone who believes, is, evidently, elect. If you aren't sure you are elect, what should you do? Believe the gospel! If you maintain that it is too difficult for you to trust the promises of grace, then simply ask the Holy Spirit to create such trust/faith in you. Most certainly, He will. Ask Him to enable you to believe the gospel promise of salvation through Jesus life, death and resurrection.

But didn't Christ die to save the world?

Yes, in the sense that His death was sufficient to save the entire world (the scope of God's salvation), and that His death is a gift for all peoples of the world, not just His chosen nation the Jews. But of course the Bible does not teach that every man was saved by Christ's death, for His work must be personally appropriated by faith.

So then for whom did Christ die?

He died to save all who would believe in Him, all whom the Father gave Him from all eternity, i.e., His elect people. Key passages are John 6:37-40, and those indicating He died for His people (Matthew 1:21); His sheep (John 10:11,15,26); His friends (John 15:13); His church (Acts 20:28); and His bride (Ephesians 5:25). The question of *particular redemption or limited atonement* is taken up in Appendix 2.

In two places Jesus unequivocally declares that only those whom He wills to save are in fact saved:

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matthew 11:27).

The only reason anyone knows the Father and the Son is, the Son wills to reveal the Father and the Son to him. Jesus echoes the same truth in John 5:21:

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

Is that clear to you? The Son gives life to whom He wishes. It has to be that way because no one left to himself would wish it. If, by the way, you conclude that you could never be saved, even if you wanted to, because Jesus may not wish for you to be saved, fear not! Ask Him immediately to give you faith in His promises, and be assured He will gladly do so.

But doesn't the Bible say that God wills all to be saved?

The Bible says that *God takes no pleasure (joy) in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11)*, that *God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4)*, and that *the Lord...does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)*.

The best way to interpret these verses is to keep in tension several issues:

1. The rest of Scripture is clear on God's sovereign choice.
2. God can never be frustrated, ultimately, in what He decrees, so these verses cannot mean that God is impotent to do what He would will to do.
3. These verses teach that God is benevolent and does not delight in a sinner's rebellion against Him.
4. The words "will" and "wish" can either mean "a desire" or a "decree or purpose". In these contexts the word means "desire". God is not saying His decree or purpose is the salvation of all, because He, *who works all things after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11)*, obviously doesn't bring that to pass.

So why engage in evangelism, if God has already foreordained whom He will save?

We do indeed proclaim the good news out of ignorance of who the elect are. God says, "Leave that up to Me". His appointed way of bringing people to Himself is the message of Christ crucified. God ordains the means as well as the ends: the way He saves His elect is through the proclamation of the Gospel. And, since he commands that we do it, that ought to be reason enough to do it. The fact is, we have an enormous privilege to "co-labor" with the God of the universe in bringing many sons and daughters to Himself.

You're saying that God is absolutely sovereign in His universe?

Yes, this is what the Bible teaches. *He works all things after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11)*. There isn't a molecule in the universe outside of the umbrella of God's sovereign control. Think of it, if one molecule was outside of His domain, why couldn't that one thing wreck havoc in the plan of God?

The doctrine of election teaches that especially in the arena of salvation, where the concern is the heart of man, God is sovereign. It is not as if God rules sovereignly the entire universe, but then makes an exception for man's heart. He rules it all.

Does that imply that God is the author of sin, if He wills whatsoever comes to pass?

No, yet He foreordains it. See Genesis 45:8, Acts 2:23, 4:28. If sin was outside of God's decrees, then very little would be included in His decrees! Most of history would be outside of His control.

God is holy and He hates sin. Yet He efficaciously permits it. He willingly permits sin that is in accordance with His decree and not outside of His sovereign will. In the final analysis, we cannot fully comprehend this. All we can affirm is what the Bible tells us. There are examples where: God brought sin to pass (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 3:18; Luke 22:22; Genesis 45:5-8; 50:19,20); He hardened hearts (Exodus 4:21); caused Israel's enemies to attack them (Judges 3:8); sent an evil spirit upon a person (Judges 2:22-23); sends a deluding effect (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

If God is thus sovereign, can man really be free?

Yes, in that freedom is not autonomy (being a law unto yourself) but rather freedom to do exactly what you want, that is, to follow the desires of your heart. But of course for unregenerate man, that would always be sin because we are naturally slaves of sin (John 8:34). Though man does not have the moral ability to freely choose God, he is nonetheless totally responsible for his sin. When God judges us for sin, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

So does God coerce us into His kingdom against our will?

No, in the sense that He places in our hearts the desire for Christ, so that we want to come to Jesus, and we want to choose to follow the Lord. Willingness is His gift. While it is true that God is the one who gives the graces necessary for entrance into the kingdom (faith and repentance), we ourselves do act of our wills to turn and believe.

Yes, in the sense that, if left entirely to ourselves, we would never come to the Lord (*there is none who seeks God*, Romans 3:11; *He made you alive when you were dead*, Colossians 2:13). In this sense God counteracts our "free will". But, we should ask, what is so sacred about free will, if what this really means is we're marching headlong into a fiery furnace for eternity, and God grabs us to reverse the direction of our lives? That is truly glorious!

Oh, the depths of the riches both in the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Romans 11:33)

Some Nuances in Reformed Theology

Many of those outside of the Reformed view of salvation conclude, “Well then, there’s nothing anyone can do to be saved if God hasn’t willed it. Isn’t your theology a kind of cruel fatalism?”

Is that a fair conclusion? The answer is, about whom is the question asked? Do *you* want to be saved? The Bible says, “If *you* believe, you *will* be saved.” Is the question asked of other people in the world? Is it true that none of them will be saved unless God opens their heart to the Gospel? If man is dead in sin (which the Bible emphatically teaches!) it *has* to be that way. Jesus said the thing to do about the “lostness” of the world is to take the gospel message to the ends of the earth.

An attractive way around this is to claim that God simply knows ahead of time who will choose Him and who won’t. On the basis of God’s foreknowledge, He elects those people to salvation. That way, it can’t be said of God that He is creating people He knows He is going to condemn to hell. But think through this position.

First, the Reformed view isn’t the only position with this problem. In the other view (Arminian) God is still creating people He knows ahead of time won’t exercise faith, and will be condemned to hell. Both positions deal with a mystery: why does God create people (and He is the author of all life) He knows ahead of time will never embrace the gospel? The Arminian answer seems to be, to preserve their free will. The closest answer God gives is in Romans 9:22-23:

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And he did so in order that he might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory...

This may be an echo of Proverbs 16:4:

The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.

1 Peter 2:8 plainly asserts of those who stumble over Christ:

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

We may protest that we don’t like this, but why aren’t we more bewildered that God would save anyone? Our problem is our theology is too man-centered. If we start with God and the dreadful state of man in sin, we’d *never* answer back to God that He is being unjust. If we *really* believed we deserved hell, we’d feel the weight of other’s doom much more acutely.

Reformed theology classically distinguishes between two kinds of God’s decrees in salvation: His passive and active decrees. With respect to the unbeliever, God is passive, in so far as He does not will their salvation (without which no one could be saved). Yet He decrees to leave them in their unbelief (“to pass by”, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, III.vii); thus they earn what they deserve: judgment. He is passive, doing nothing, with respect to their unbelief. With regard to His elect, He actively decrees their salvation, changing their hearts, in order that they will believe. We have to affirm mystery here: God’s Word affirms two truths that seem to us impossible to reconcile: God is absolutely sovereign over His creatures, yet they are

completely responsible for their choices. In other words, no one can believe until God changes his heart. Yet, they are totally culpable for their unbelief. Will people be held accountable for a gospel they never heard of? No, that would be unjust. They will be accountable for what they know, which Romans 1:20 says, leaves them “*without excuse*”.

Second, if God is simply foreknowing something, He doesn't actually elect anything. If God knows ahead of time, as a mere spectator, that I will exercise faith, why does anything need to be elected? I'm doing the electing- choosing God from my free will! The Arminian view empties election of its personal content. The truth is, He elected me! What a wonder! He will save you too! Simply ask the Son to save you and He will.

Do you see? Election is for you the believer, for your comfort and assurance, while the gospel (not election!) is the Biblical truth to be presented to any unsaved person. Election tells me *why* I believed; the gospel promises anyone that *if* they believe they will be saved. When we're doing evangelism, election is never the issue. The issue is: there is Savior who saves sinners—TAKE HIM! Election never gives an excuse not to evangelize. We don't know who is elect and who isn't, nor do we need to know. That's God's business. He wants us to know that He will save those *who call upon the name of the Lord*. (Romans 10:13)

Unbelief Explained

37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" 39 For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them." 41 These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. 42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. (John 12:37-43)

If you personally witnessed the ministry of Jesus, would you have followed or rejected Him? Six days of the week I would answer: "I would most certainly have loved Jesus!" One day of the week I would have to admit: "I would have rejected Jesus." And on that one day, I'd have been most accurate. My how we flatter ourselves! My how highly we think of our hearts!

The text before us invites, with sober reflection, to play the game: how would I have responded? It is a heart prober, a refresher for our understanding, "Why do I believe?" and "What about the treachery of unbelief?"

The shocking report

John reflects on the success of Jesus' ministry up until this time with amazement: *But though He had performed so many signs before them* (lit. in their face), *yet they were not believing in Him.* (v.37)

Do you hear, by virtue of the language he uses, John's shock? As if a prominent sports writer lamented, "But though Tiger Woods had performed so well in his last twelve tournaments- all irrefutable signs of his astounding ability- yet he was not selected to the Ryder Cup team!" Shock, amazement, wonder; you'd have to ask, what is going on?

John says, "*though he had performed so many signs before them*" (v.37)- inexplicable miracles, wonders only God could orchestrate (raising the dead, sight to the blind, the lame walk, 5000 fed from 5 loaves and 2 fish, changing water to wine), all designed to impress the heart with God's power in Christ (not to mention His profoundly wise teaching)- yet many who saw and heard said, "I don't believe in you!"

Why not? What were they thinking? It's interesting that John does not put a political spin on this situation. I would have been tempted to pad the statistics, do a little revisionist history, to focus on the times of overwhelming popularity. Not John. He tells it like it is to help us. He is inviting a heart probe: Would *you* have believed? Is this Jesus' fault that more folks don't stick with Him?

If v.37 is the amazing report, then v.38-41 provide...

The explanation

“they were not believing that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled”

John says, Isaiah saw this, don't be surprised. Now here we have to keep in mind John's contemporary audience, probably Jews wondering why they should embrace Messiah if so many of their leaders did not years before- even leaders who saw Jesus' many signs. Come now, they may have reasoned, doesn't scripture predict success for Messiah? Won't he take up David's throne forever? But John, it's now decades later, your Jesus has vanished, and we're still oppressed by the Romans- explain that!

John explains that the word of God predicts this unbelief. It is a theme he has already highlighted in the gospel (1:11; 3:19; 5:40; 8:44), so now he'll provide an Old Testament accounting for this apostasy. Seven hundred years ago Isaiah raised a question in 53:1 that John quotes:

Lord, who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (Isaiah 53:1)

The few verses prior, in Isaiah 52, Isaiah confesses astonishment that the nations will come to Yahweh's servant, Jesus. What about the Jews? Will they honor the Servant of the Lord? God gave Isaiah the answer when he called the prophet to preach. Isaiah 6 records the glorious vision of the Lord (John indicates in v.41 that Isaiah saw Jesus) which leads the prophet to repent and to cry out, *“Send me!”* God sends him, with the promise of this result: *no one will be converted!* Your preaching will be ignored and you will be scorned and rejected. In other words, you are going to preach to deaf people.

John quotes God's word to Isaiah in John 12:40:

He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.

Admittedly, it is a hard word; is God the bad guy here? Obviously not; God is infinitely just. The *hardening* described here is a “judicial hardening”. God is not creating unbelief. Both Isaiah's audience and Jesus' audience already have unbelieving hearts. We are all born with hard hearts toward God; we're not disposed toward God, not even neutral! God must move on the human heart to change it to believing. A clear picture of this truth is given in Deuteronomy 29:4:

Yet to this day God has no given you a heart to believe, or ears to hear or eyes to see.

This judicial judgment, predicted and mandated by scripture, amounts to God saying to people who do not want Him: “Because you don't want me, I don't want you and I'll give you what you want.” Mark this carefully: God is not stiff-arming folks who want Him. He is punitively pushing away folks who don't want Him. Remember, God is not obligated toward people who don't want Him. He is free to extend mercy to them if He chooses, but mercy creates no injustice.

This is how Jesus pronounces judgment on unbelieving Israel. The same teaching appears in Matthew 13:14-15, Acts 28:26-27, and Romans 11:7-25. Each passage uses the Isaiah quotation to condemn unbelieving Israel, a just sentence that is neither arbitrary nor capricious.

Who's fault is it if they aren't saved? Only theirs; they are completely responsible for their unbelief.

Could God have changed their hearts? Yes. In fact, in every conversion- yours and mine- the Holy Spirit changed our hearts.

There can be only two responses to this truth:

- a. Those who now believe in Jesus should praise Him for His grace. You owe Him everything. Make the glory of His mercy your heart's theme. You are a free man when you live as a debtor to Christ's love.
- b. Those who do not now trust Jesus should confess Him now. Anyone who believes and repents will be saved. Jesus offers Himself to any sinner right now.

A qualification in verse 42 is added to the amazing report and explanation; John backs off his depiction of wholesale unbelief with a qualifier: "*nevertheless, many even of the rulers believed in Him*" (v.42). Well, behind the scenes, despite what many faces may reveal, apparently in their hearts there was some inclination toward Jesus. Jesus' effectiveness wasn't as poor as some might surmise. Then why weren't they standing up for Jesus, why did they not have unreserved dedication to the Lord?

They had a higher priority:

I love Jesus, with higher priorities.

Jesus is important; but my reputation is more important.

Looking back at our main text in verses 42-43:

42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue;

43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

When it is too costly to identify with Jesus, we stay quiet. Many church-goers think this way. I spoke with someone recently who described a neighbor as "too religious". I wondered aloud, "is it really possible to take God too seriously? Yes, there are fanatics, who are essentially consumed with themselves. But can anyone regard too highly the most glorious person in the universe?"

We see this all the time, don't we? "Religion is a personal and private thing for me". Let me translate that sentiment: "I won't tell you that you're wrong about religion if you don't tell me I'm wrong". Or perhaps what they really mean is, "I won't let my religion cost me anything". Essentially, this attitude means, "I'm in control of God". That isn't the faith for which the martyrs died, I assure you. No one lost his life for proclaiming a relativistic, private, cost-me-nothing Christianity. John reveals this to us because he wants us to know: the cross is either

worthless or it costs you everything. Jesus gave up His life to save sinners. Verse 25 demands the same from any who would claim to benefit from His life and death.

In the case of these Jews, the root idol is exposed in verse 43. They “*loved (agape) the approval (literally glory) of man rather than God.*” John opens up the heart and invites you to look in: see there in the heart, people are big and God is small. Fear of rejection is huge and fear of the Lord is tiny. Self-love (which is really the prime motivator in fear of man- I crave to be liked by others) is enormous, love of God quite insignificant.

In John 5:41-44 Jesus already described this problem.

...but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves...How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?

Many of us struggle with this idol; we want to be liked. We agree with Proverbs 29:25, *the fear of man brings a snare*. We sometimes find it hard to speak our mind, while we find it easy to fish for compliments and to avoid conflict.

We should note parenthetically that some of you are gloating now and thinking, “Well I sure don’t have a problem with that!” And right you are, but you still have a problem. Chances are you care so little what people think that you are insensitive and unloving. You also don’t fear the Lord as much as you fear losing control or not being respected.

Learn to question yourself and your situation:

Do I *really* need someone’s approval?

If I don’t get it, is God *still* sovereign?

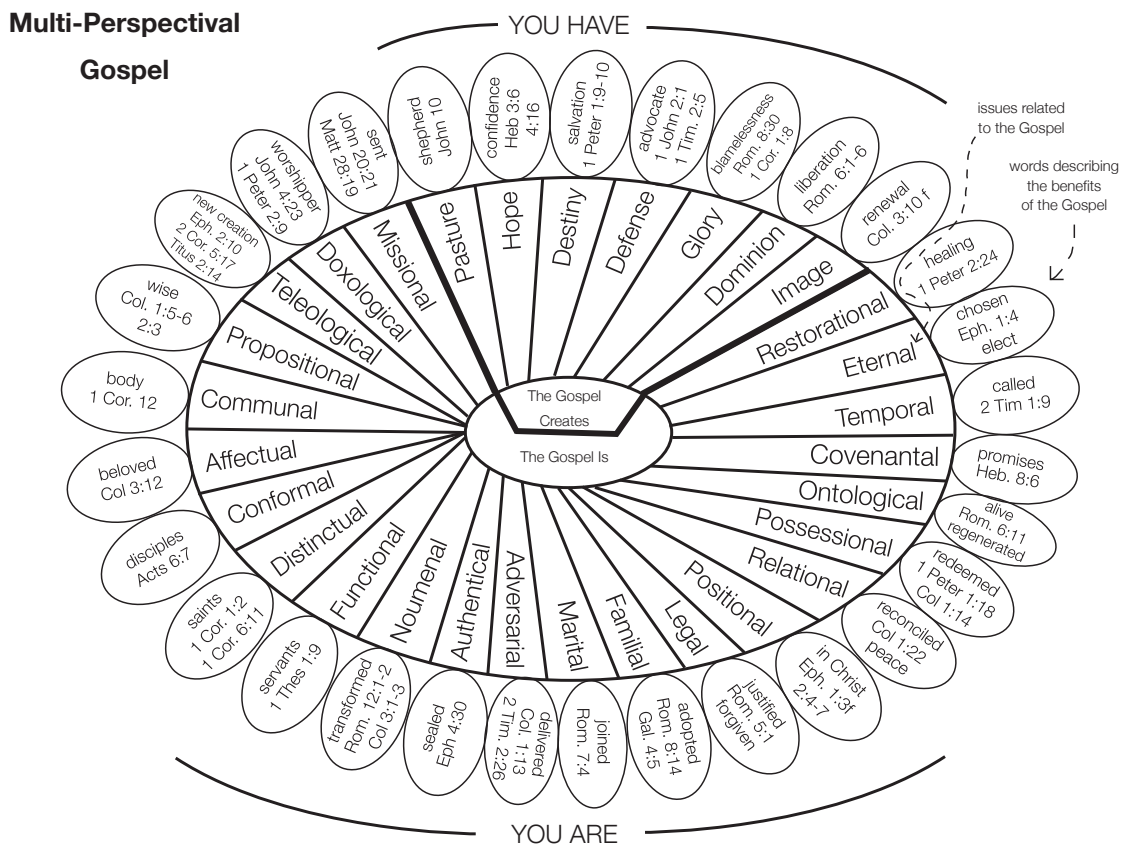
Can Jesus be trusted to preserve me and satisfy me without other’s affection?

One theologian, John Calvin, asks at this verse, “What is more foolish, nay, what is more brutish, than to prefer the paltry approval of men to the judgment of God?” Somehow I don’t think he was an approval lover! Here is his encouragement: “When anyone has his eyes fixed on God, his resolve will be unbreakable and inflexible,” simply echoing John 5:44.

Why is Calvin right? Because approval seeking is really looking at others and saying, “Defend me, declare me acceptable!” But they can’t! No one can truly do that but God Himself. In Christ God declares His pleasure with us, because only through faith in His Son do we become partakers of His perfect sacrifice, receiving the grace of forgiveness and the gift of Jesus’ perfect righteousness. That, dear friend, is sufficient and final grounds for all the approval anyone could ever dream to have. That is the glory that is from God that Jesus tells us to seek. He tells us to believe the gospel! He tells us to find our complete acceptance in Christ alone because He is our glory! Jesus is the soul’s true and sole defender. Once justified by Him, you can get out of the approval-seeking business!

Part 2: The gospel: *How* do I become a Christian?

Now that we know *why* anyone becomes a Christian- God chooses and makes them one- we are ready to answer the question, *how* did I become a Christian? The answer is, in every case, because I believed the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is multi-faceted. To prove the point, just study the chart below, showing how many different themes are related to the gospel:



Why Jesus?

There are many ways to present the gospel; you may have seen the Four Spiritual Laws by Bill Bright, or the Evangelism Explosion outline by D. James Kennedy. The following is a gospel outline I wrote to distribute at a funeral where I knew there would be many non-Christians.

Why Jesus?

What's the big deal about Jesus? Isn't it up to us to decide for ourselves what will make us happy? Can't people fashion their own spirituality?

The Bible was written to reveal to us how to have true spirituality. It explains how to know God personally and to enjoy him forever. The following points summarize the Bible's basic teaching on what it means to be alive spiritually, to be right with God, to have eternal life, and why Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the *way, the truth and the life*. (John 14:6)

God is good

The Bible testifies over and over that God is good. He is the fountain of every good thing,

the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord (Psalm.33:5)

He delights to bless his creatures. Every pleasure we enjoy comes ultimately from the hand of God.

The Lord is good to all, His mercies are over all His works...You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:8,16)

In his goodness he makes life possible. He created us and upholds us. Think about how the very nature of life screams *dependence*: we can't live for a minute without air, or days without water, or weeks without food. We can't even make ourselves breathe.

He gives life and breath to all things. (Isaiah.42:5)

Think how defenseless you are roughly one third of your life...while you sleep! You are also totally vulnerable to disease, the forces of nature, and many things simply beyond your control. It is patently obvious we are dependent creatures; none of us makes the sun to shine or oxygen to exist. Since we are not self-created we owe our existence, and reason for existence, to the Creator.

God is holy

God is an eternal person, the uncreated Creator, who is morally perfect in his being. He is just, righteous, hates evil, and always acts with moral splendor. He is trustworthy, faithful, kind, and merciful. If you saw him in his beauty you would never desire to leave his presence. No wonder Psalm 33:8 says, *let the whole world stand in awe of him.*

King David of Israel understood this, writing in Psalm 27:4:

One thing I have asked of the Lord, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord...

Being a just and fair God, he must punish the guilty.

Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly? (Genesis 18:25)

God will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7)

When we've been wronged and demand justice in a law court, we especially understand that God should be this way. We all instinctively hate injustice, cheating, bribes, lies, or being slandered or swindled by others.

God can't be bought; he will always give everyone exactly what he deserves, no less, no more. He loves what is right and hates what is wrong. He will most certainly put all wrongs to rest.

He will render to every man according to his deeds. (Romans 2:6)

He has such an aversion to sin, as you would to a toxic substance, that he will not tolerate it in his presence. Since sin is a violation of his law and nature, he will never have it in his presence and he must punish it. His universe is a moral universe, such that sin always and inexorably attracts his judgment or wrath. He would not be good if this were not so.

We are not holy

We all know we are not perfect. Who ever claimed to do everything for every second with every fiber of his being exactly like God does? We fall so far short of God's moral beauty that there really is no comparison.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? (Psalm 130:3)

Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin'? (Proverbs 20:9)

Sadly, we are very comfortable with our own imperfection. We are usually the last person to see sin in our own hearts:

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick, who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Sin is both a heart and a legal problem.

As a heart problem, sin twists us from our original moral glory. We were made to depend upon God in loving obedience. Rightly related to him, all was well. But once sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, our nature changed such that we want to take and enjoy the gifts of God without the Giver. Our tendency is to either be content without him entirely, or to use God, to fashion him in our own likeness, to take him on our own terms. This tacitly keeps us from dealing with the horrendous issue of our rebellion against God.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. (Romans 1:25)

Sin is also a legal problem. Many people refuse to admit that self-serving autonomy is the dominant principle in their hearts, and that they fall woefully short of living by God's holy standards or laws. God says that *all have sinned and missed the mark of His moral perfection.* (Romans 3:23) Not one of us has kept His precepts without blemish, we've all done what we should not (sins of commission) and left undone what we should do (sins of omission). By thought, word and deed we have not sought to please and honor God with every fiber of our being. Rather than keep God's law, we lower his standards, become a law unto ourselves, and do what seems right in our own eyes. Sin, therefore, creates a debt; we owe him complete loyalty of life, yet don't come close to paying it.

The God problem

Now you see the “God problem”: we can’t live without him and we can’t live with him. While we were made to live for God, and in fact we are completely dependent upon him for everything, we seek to live independently of God. God is too holy for us. We are too sinful for him. He must punish our sin. Our sin attracts his wrath. Do you see, if you die with your sins you will suffer eternal torment away from his presence forever? Jesus said,

But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Luke 12:5)

Man-made solutions

What have human beings done over the ages about the God problem? Some have simply denied there is a problem, asserting that there is no God.

The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ (Psalm 14:1)

Others have sought to make themselves good enough for God. They try to earn his acceptance. But realistically, how good do you have to be for a perfect God? If you think you are succeeding, your standards are too low. If you are sure you are not, you’re probably riddled with fear and guilt, drowning a guilty conscience in the pursuit of pleasure, possessions, or some passion.

Still others think that God merely wants people to be sincere, an idea that is foreign to the Bible. It ignores the fact that it is possible to be sincerely mistaken, that we are usually more self-serving than sincere, and that sincerity itself makes no one righteous, nor can it cleanse anyone of the stain of sin.

Finally, others have invented religion as a solution. All world religions share the same basic premise. Keep the rules and God owes you. Do your part and God is obligated. Religion is advice: do this and God will accept you. Christianity, however, is totally different. It is an announcement: God accepts you not because of what you did, but by what someone else did!

Yes, Christianity stands alone as the only religion of grace. It alone takes seriously the fact that no one can ever give God the perfect righteousness he requires, nor is any amount of our good deeds sufficient to stop God’s wrath from being attracted to our sin.

By the works of the law no flesh will be justified (declared perfectly righteous) in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Paul is showing that, regarding acceptance before God, the only thing moral standards (the law) can do is reveal how much you miss the mark of perfect obedience to God. The law can never bring about the obedience it requires because the heart is sinful. What we need is a shield of protection against God’s wrath, the removal of our sin and the acquiring of perfect righteousness. Where do you find that? No religious leader ever claimed to be that for anyone, except...

Jesus

Jesus came to earth to do for sinners what they are completely incapable of doing for themselves. What do you need to enjoy God’s presence?

First, you need the forgiveness he offers through Christ's death. Christ's death on the cross was completely sufficient to satisfy God's just punishment for your sin. Jesus paid the debt in full by nailing to the cross, in His body, your sins, thus bearing the curse of law-breaking (death) in your place.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... (Romans 5:6f)

Second, you need the perfect righteousness attained by Christ's obedience.

Just as Christ died for your sins, he also lived a blamelessly righteous life that He might grant His "perfect record" to any who trust Him.

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith... (Philippians 3:9)

Thus, in Jesus Christ you have all you need for salvation. Jesus, acting in your place, met the whole demand of God's law by living righteously. He also fulfilled the penalty of the law by dying to purchase your forgiveness. Some call this the "Great Exchange": you give Jesus your sin, which he removes from your "moral record" and nails to the cross, and then he grants you his moral perfection.

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The Bible calls this marvelous transaction "justification". God declares helpless sinners as totally righteous in his sight because of the merits of the resurrected Jesus Christ--and all as a free gift of his grace. Behold the *mercy* of God, not giving us what we deserve – death, and the *grace* of God, in love giving us what we do not deserve --eternal life!

...that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Ephesians.2:4)

Is it clear that absolutely everything we need for salvation we find in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who invites us to Himself for salvation:

The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many... (Mark 12:45)

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 12:46)

Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

And you?

Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)

"Calling upon the name of the Lord" means having faith. Faith embraces Jesus as the Savior of

your life, trusting the promise of God, taking Him unreservedly at His word, that Jesus died for a sinner like you. Faith is acknowledging, believing and trusting that Christ's death and resurrection were enough to save you, and that you can not add anything to His completed work.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Faith, the "empty hands" that reach out to receive what God offers freely, knows the facts about Jesus, believes those facts to be true, and trusts Jesus Christ alone as your personal Savior.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. (Romans 10:9)

True trust in Christ will transform the heart; it always changes your priorities. Jesus said faith has a cost: *Take up your cross; follow me; you must die to self.* Jesus takes your heart's throne as Lord of your life.

When considered in light of God's design for your life, His Lordship is perfectly reasonable: you were *originally intended* to live in humble, obedient reliance upon the Creator, doing all your works for His glory. Now that through faith you are reunited to your Lord, the same pattern of life holds true: you live for His glory! These works do not merit your salvation; they are simply the fruits of it:

For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Christ Jesus gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14)

Faith restores that wondrous relationship. How? The same Spirit that brings to your heart the resurrection life of Christ is the Spirit who also changes the desires of your heart to cause you to want to follow Jesus and to turn from (repent) anything that hinders your obedience to and enjoying of him. The Spirit, using the Word of God, teaches you how to please your Heavenly Father, and abundantly empowers you to, as well.

Why not ask Jesus in prayer to mercifully take away your sin. Tell him you trust his promise to cleanse and love you forever. Ask him to take control of your life by the power of his indwelling Holy Spirit.

Part 3: Evangelism: *Who* can become a Christian?

Landscape of Belief

*16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who **believes** in Him is not judged; he who does **not believe** has been judged already, because he has **not believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (John 3:16-21)*

Here's a pretty easy question: What is the most publicized scripture verse in America? Everyone has seen John 3:16 somewhere on the landscape, and your best bet is either on a bumper sticker or at a sporting event, usually in the end zone! Most Christians know John 3:16, probably the majority have it memorized. And that's great, it is a tremendous verse encapsulating the gospel. So let's look carefully at what this famous verse, taken in context with its surrounding verses, teaches us about ourselves and about God. There are some wonderful doctrines in these verses that can be missed, if we merely take a quick glance.

Basic Observations

Who are the main characters mentioned here? First, the subject of the first two sentences is God and His Son. Second, the world, and then narrowly defined as men, anyone, whoever and everyone.

What are the principle activities associated with these two groups?

First, God loves, gives, sends, saves through his Son; and he judges.

Second, this text centers on what human activity? Believing. It mentions this two times in v. 16-17. Believing is directly contrasted with what? Not believing, highlighted two times in v.18.

What are we told specifically to believe? Believe in Christ.

With respect to God, then, we could say these verses teach us the *Doctrine of How God Saves the World*. With respect to people, we could call this the *Doctrine of Believing*, or perhaps the *Doctrine of Saving Faith*, since the text is clearly concerned with the *world being saved through Him*. (v.17).

I like to see this passage as painting a landscape of belief. You may remember that John's stated purpose for revealing to us the glory of Jesus Christ is that we might believe:

...but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

The doctrine of believing involves all sorts of interesting questions. Let's try, however, to restrict our questions to those that principally rise directly out of the text:

*Why doesn't everyone believe the gospel? And,
Why does anyone believe the gospel?*

That's really two sides of the same coin- *the belief coin*. And aren't these issues we wonder about? Why hasn't Uncle Joe become a Christian? Why am I a Christian and not my father? Am I sure I am a Christian? These are practical, pressing questions, which beg us for doctrinal clarity.

Question #1 *Why doesn't everyone believe the gospel?*

It is clear that there are many folks who hear the gospel but do not believe it. In this particular chapter we're not concerned with those who never hear the gospel. That is a different question. This text seems to limit its focus to those who have some exposure to it.

This question presupposes a more fundamental issue. Why do people do what they do—what drives them in the core of their being? Answer: *their desires*. We always act out of what we believe or desire at any given moment. This is the sense in which human beings have *free will*. God isn't coercing us to do anything; He certainly isn't actively creating sinful desires or unbelief in anyone's heart.

The best term for this is *free human agency*. We are, in God's sight, morally responsible beings who have the freedom to choose certain things. We have the *freedom* to choose one thing or another, but the *ability* to choose only what we *desire*. We are not robots or puppets. We always act out of our own inclinations, unforced by outside powers. For example, you are free to have breakfast or skip it; no one forced you to do either. But which you chose was ultimately determined by your desires. You skipped breakfast because—for whatever reasons—you desired to. Consider another example: to any extent you were, this past week, proud, defensive, impatient, judgmental, gossipy, fearful, selfish, jealous, greedy, self-pitying, or lustful, you were those things because of your desires.

Yet having said that, we must immediately stress that the Bible also teaches an apparently contradictory truth, that is, God is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of man. Nothing happens without his permission; *He works all things after the counsel of his own will*. (Ephesians 1:11) God knows the future because He predestines it. He neither learns nor forgets.

Is this hard to understand? Yes! Do you have to completely understand this mystery to go to heaven? No! But does the Bible clearly teach this tension? Unapologetically! Look at Acts 2:23 for a perfect rendering of this tension:

This Jesus, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death...

Acts 4:27-28 echoes this truth:

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus...to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.

Do you see the amazing tension assumed in these two verses? God was utterly sovereign over the event of Jesus' death, yet those who perpetrated it were completely responsible. Both God's sovereignty and human responsibility are asserted, though from a human point of view we may wonder how it could be so.

Back to the issue at hand: the million dollar question really becomes: Who has a desire for God? Does man as he is born naturally have any desire for the Lord or the things of the Lord? There's no point talking about free will, since we never will what we don't desire (or, put positively, we will only what we desire). Who naturally has an internal, already existing desire to please God, pursue God, or know God? No one! We're all stillborn spiritually. Just as a physically dead person has no appetite for food, so a spiritually dead person has no appetite for God.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins... (Eph.2:1)

This is what the Bible calls "*spiritual death*":

There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside...(Rom.3:13f)

The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; it does not subject itself to the law of God, it is not even able to do so. (Romans 8:7)

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John1:5)

We're all blind, dull, deaf; we just don't get it spiritually: (1 Corinthians 2:14)

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

This is not denying what Romans 1 teaches, that in our heart of hearts we all know God, though we suppress that knowledge. Having some knowledge of God is one thing, really knowing Him so that we desire Him is another. In our heart of hearts we want to have nothing to do with the God we know. Rarely does an unbeliever admit this; but it is so, nonetheless. Do you feel the indictment of Proverbs 19:4?

The foolishness of man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.

Or Proverbs 14:2,

He who walks uprightly fears the Lord, but he who is crooked in his ways despises Him.

The same truth is expressed here in John 3:19:

...the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light.

The point is, no one can believe until they are given the desire to believe. That was one of Jesus' points to Nicodemus: *unless you are born from above, you can not see the kingdom. (3:3)* The Holy Spirit must first breathe life into your dead heart, thus creating a desire for God that never existed.

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. (John 5:21)

So the question, *Why doesn't everyone believe the gospel?* is most accurately answered: *They can't (or won't) believe because they have no desire to believe.*

Many of us have seen this in our experience sharing the love of Christ. It seems like the good news goes in one ear and out the other. You realize you are asking them for a commitment to Christ, yet they are restrained by a prior commitment to something else. I receive solicitations in the mail all the time for credit cards, and none of them appeal to me because I already am committed to another, with which I am satisfied.

The unbeliever's prior commitment is, according to v.19, *to the darkness*. Even though the light of God's glory shines constantly, and the witness of Christ has come to many parts of the world, people would rather grope in the pitch black cave of unbelief, searching for tiny gems of happiness, than look to the spotlight of the Savior to lead them to safety.

Do you see the insanity of sin? *We desire the darkness*. Darkness is life without God, an existence independent of God, characterized by this tragic dynamic:

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

(Proverbs 14:12)

It's not as though we are innocently waiting for the light. Unbelief is tenaciously motivated, according to v.20, by hatred of the light, love of evil, and fear of being exposed. Each of these could be explored in greater detail, but for our purposes not here.

What doctrine is this we've been uncovering? *The depravity of man*. Sin has tainted every part of my constitution, and most tragically, my desires. All I desire is self gratification- sin. I have no appetite for God. That's why v.18 can declare that *we are already judged*. We're born under judgment. Eph.2:3 says we are *by nature children of wrath*, echoing John 3:36: *the wrath of God abides on us*.

Question #2: *Why does anyone believe the gospel?*

In every case sinners believe, ultimately, because they want to. Every person that becomes a Christian does so because he or she wants to. We may wrestle, question, and resist for a season, but when we finally repent and believe, we do so willingly.

Well, if no one is born with the desire, where then did it come from? Do you have it because you were born to Christian parents? No, John already explained in 1:13 that *you were not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*. Who changed your desires? The Holy Spirit:

No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him. (John 6:44)

Notice that this verse expresses ability, not permission. The same idea is present in Deuteronomy 29:4,

Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.

If anyone has the heart to know or eyes to see or ears to hear, it is because God gave it. Jesus echoes this truth in Matthew 11:27:

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

Lydia illustrates this:

The Lord opened her heart to understand the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

This is the doctrine called *irresistible grace*. Does sinful man resist God's kindness? Constantly. But, when God sets His love upon us to save us by the regenerating power of the Spirit, no one could resist that. And who would want to?! So in the nature of the case regeneration always precedes faith.

Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ... (Eph. 2:4)

...He caused you to be born again... (1 Pet. 1:3)

In the exercise of His will he brought us forth by the word of truth... (James 1:18)

Now you may be wondering, making some mental connections, does that mean God chooses some to have the eyes of faith and not others? Evidently. Jesus said in John 15:16, *you did not choose me, but I chose you.*

Romans 9:13-16 starkly declares:

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated...I will have mercy on who I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion...So then it (SALVATION) does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

In this context we are able to make sense out of verses like:

The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of judgment. (Prov. 16:4)

...for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. (1 Peter 2:8)

We call this the doctrine of *unconditional election*; God saves people based solely on His own pleasure, not based on anything in them. Sadly, this is a hard doctrine for most Americans to get their hearts around. Much theology tends to an "I elect God" spirit in America. But you have to agree, if everything we have seen thus far is true, this is the only way anyone could possibly be saved.

Why do we quarrel with God if, for His own pleasure and glory he changes the desire of some rebels, and gives other rebels what they want? This is not an issue of justice, is it? Some will, regretfully, get justice, what they deserve. Others will, *to the praise of His glorious grace* (Ephesians 1:6), receive mercy. *All who desire to be saved will be saved!*

There really isn't any mystery there; Ephesians 1:4 clearly states *that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world*. The mystery is: Why does anyone receive mercy? God is only obligated to deal out retribution. Why does he create belief in anyone's heart?

It is dangerous to talk about election in the abstract. We always have to make it personal. Therefore, the question for you today is: Why would you now refuse his mercy, having just heard about it? Only because you want to refuse it. It is not difficult to understand: You deserve to die for your sins, but God gave His Son Jesus to die in the place of any who believe in Him. That's the gracious offer of John 3:16: *whoever believes has eternal life*. As far as you are

concerned, God freely offers you eternal life in His Son. Take it! He is commanding you to believe! He is commanding you to compare eternal life with eternal perishing!

God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent... (Acts 17:30)

The Father, out of His great love, sent the Son to save us from perishing. Jesus has come this first time around to save: v.17 indicates that the next time He comes He'll judge with absolute finality. There will be no second chances. *"It is appointed for all men to die once, and after this comes judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27) Today is the day to be saved through Christ. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

This is the doctrine we call the "free offer of the gospel".

ANYONE HEARING THE MESSAGE CAN BE SAVED.

It's for the anyone in the world, not just the Jews. Nicodemus would have embraced the typical Pharisee's view that Messiah was coming to establish the Jewish nation, and to destroy the Gentiles. But the stress of the free offer of the gospel is that the cross can save anyone, Jew or Gentile, *"God so loved the world..."* Salvation isn't restricted to the smart, the wealthy, or any race or any nationality. It's for anyone! Are you an anyone? Then you can be saved!

...whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life... (John 3:16)

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved! (Romans 10:13)

But some of you may protest: *I don't have the desire!*

I understand- the Bible says you won't! But you must ask for it.

You counter-protest: *But I am unwilling!*

Right! Thanks for being honest, the Bible says as much about all of us! But, you must ask to be made willing, and repent of your steadfast refusal to bow before the Lord who made you!

But, you could be wondering, *What about the innocent native in Africa?*

Here's a two-pronged answer to your question. First, what's that got to do with you? Don't let someone else's ignorance be a cause of your refusal to deal honestly with the knowledge you have! Second, he or she is not innocent, we've already established that. God will deal justly with them. Paul explains in Romans 1 that everyone knows God, God making Himself evident in the creation, yet all refuse to acknowledge Him and exchange the truth of God for a lie. (Romans 1:19f)

So, you also may be thinking, *How do I begin to feel the desire?* By bearing into the gospel. God uses the gospel to flame into fire the desire. *Faith comes through hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.* (Rom.10:17) The Holy Spirit works mysteriously to create belief, but it is your belief, and it is always a believing grounded in gospel revelation.

Here is a maxim: No one can believe without the gospel.

Everyone who believes does so because of the gospel.

Do you see how it *must* be the Spirit who creates the desire for salvation; He uses the gospel to create faith. Is there a mystery here? Yes. Why does God awaken people when He does? I don't know. But I do know that this awakening is completely by His grace, from beginning to end.

Working of the Word of Grace

13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

We have a can opener in our kitchen that I can't seem to work. It's not like the old school ones where you push into the metal can top and turn and the lid pops up. No, this is different and I'm constantly calling my wife to help me work it, and if she's not around, I starve!

Paul shows us here that people will starve without the word of God. The word of God is powerful to open up human hearts. Paul says here it does a work- *performs its work in you who believe*- perhaps echoing Isaiah 55:11:

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; [SEP]It will not return to Me empty, [SEP]Without accomplishing what I desire, [SEP]And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Obviously, we need to know how the word of God works. This passage shows three specific works the word performs.

The Word Provokes the Proud

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. (1 Thessalonians 2)

Paul alludes to the constant struggle he faced with opposition to the gospel everywhere he preached. Sadly, the conflict came virtually always from his own countrymen, the Jews.

At one level it doesn't make sense. Jesus is the most beautiful person in the world. Who ever said he could have done it better. Jesus embodied:

Truth with grace.

Tenderness with conviction.

Power with gentleness.

Self-sacrifice without failure.

Weakness without fear.

Strength without bullying.

Sovereignty without injustice.

Mercy without sentimentalism.

Anger without bitterness.

Tears without hopelessness.

Intensity without burnout.
Brightness without blinding.
Sounds without deafening
Touch without a punch.

Why would anyone be upset that Jesus- full of compassion, kindness, mercy and love- healed the sick, delivered folks from demons, fed hungry people, raised the dead, and revealed the truth of God? What's not to like? There's everything to like and nothing to hate- except in yourself. Therefore, disdain for Jesus must depend on the condition of your heart.

The humble were drawn, intoxicated with his glory.

The broken saw wholeness.
The sick saw healing.
Those in darkness saw light.
Those in lies saw truth.
The downcast saw hope.
The shaken saw a refuge.
The hungry saw satisfaction.
Those in chains saw freedom.
Sinners saw salvation.

But, the proud and self-reliant were repelled and exposed because their pretentious goodness paled in comparison to his moral beauty. That moral glory brought on conviction:

I'm not pure like he is, I'm guilty.

The living Word Incarnate does what the written word of God does: He convicts, accuses, condemns, and exposes sin for what it is. Being around Jesus was like being around a really hard worker, which usually evokes two responses: honest people respect the hard worker because he elevates the team, inspires excellence, motivates us to be like him, sets a high standard, so the whole enterprise benefits; but lazy co-workers hate it when someone else goes all out because it makes them look bad. Actually, no, it simply reveals what they are versus what they should be. Jesus manifests a human glory infinitely better than any of us.

They hated and hunted Jesus because of what he stood for and what he exposed. His presence and teaching created space, a division between true and false religion, both at an institutional level and a personal level.

Regarding the Jewish institutions, he ignored their man-made rules and traditions, showing how they minimized God's laws and laid burdens of man-made laws on people. Jesus exposed them as arrogant, bigoted, and disdainful of the outsider, condemning their false trusts saying, "You're not a true Israelite because you have a birth certificate connecting you to Abraham, but only when you have the blessing promised to Abraham, a new or circumcised heart. Forget the formality and ritual; you need the reality."

It got him killed.

At a personal level, Jesus exposed hypocrisy, self-love, self-righteousness, and false confidence.

You honestly had to conclude, I really love myself and my life more than his, being more committed to my glory than God's. I really don't think I need a savior; I haven't owned the truth that I'm really a bad person in my core.

Jesus predicted all this:

The light has shown in the darkness and men loved the darkness rather than the light.
(John 3:19)

Light exposes what darkness hides. Who wants to come to the light if you don't want your dirt exposed?

What would move you toward the light? Understanding the grace of Jesus! You could come to the light without fear of condemnation. He didn't come to judge but to bear the judgment. He will forgive you, cleanse you and heal you of the dirt.

See how this plays out in your life? Someone tells you you're wrong, challenges, disagrees with, dislikes, or disparages you. Do you get defensive? Do you think, how dare you! Or do you want the truth: let's do some careful inquiry into this. If it is the truth you want most, you'll ask questions. If it is about you, your pride will cause you to become prickly, being more concerned with looking right, than being right. But the gospel declares you accepted with nothing to prove. Someone's critical of you? No problem, the King of glory accepts you unconditionally.

The Word Predicts Hostility

3: 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

Paul wants to remove any shock from the church: this is nothing new.
for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

When the gospel rubber hits the road, it is going to kick up stuff (tar, grease, dirt, rocks) and throw it on your fender. Jesus told his disciples:

They hated me, they'll hate you. Don't take it personally.

Peter did the same writing to Christians elsewhere:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (1 Peter 4:12)

This is the way the Jews have generally always treated their prophets. God eventually judged them in 70AD with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem.

Paul's warning served to comfort and to prepare them, like when a doctor or nurse knows that what they are about to do will be a shock to your system, they give a heads up. "You're going to feel a sharp pain right here and then it should go away."

4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

You must know that God isn't tempting you, the tempter is: "Why follow a God who allows such

suffering. Give up. Find a more comfortable way.”

But wait. Jesus didn't embrace that strategy. He took the hard road to secure paradise for us in the end.

Christians never have the present in view as their final destination. What preserves us is faith; hence Paul sent to find out about their faith. Grace creates trust in God. The word produces the roots that help us stand firm.

The Word Produces Treasures of Grace

17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20)

Paul, far from being some cold, detached theologian, is a man overcome with affection for these believers. He's encouraging them. He's encouraging them not least in 3:9-10:

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

By the way he's speaking you'd have to say either, he was in love, or he had kids. That's the way lovers and parents feel. This isn't mushy sentimentalism, where I love what you do for me, or how I feel when in your presence. No. The sign of authentic biblical affection is:

v.10 that we may see your face complete what is lacking in your faith

Paul wants to see them to mature and develop to become all that God wants them to be, to blossom, bloom, and ripen into fullness.

Grace produced a perspective on them that moved Paul, filled with encouragement, to say,

19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

It's like Paul was able to see grace in them, as if they'd swallowed gold and jewels and diamonds and precious gems. “Look at you, Christ in you, you radiate supreme value.”

Think about Paul's answer to his own question. Wouldn't you expect Paul to answer the question, *19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?*

with the answer, Jesus? Of course, isn't Jesus our joy, hope and crown? Yes, but because they are one with Christ they share in kind the glory of Christ, a glory of status, a glory to be revealed when Jesus returns.

Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

The coming of Jesus will finally reveal what is true in the unseen world. All will come to light.

My oldest son hit a few homeruns over the fence playing high school baseball. After watching him touch home plate I would try to track down the ball. One time someone got there first and had the ball in his hand. I asked for it and said, “My son hit that, it’s a treasure.”

My other son had some pictures published on the front page of the New York Times while he interned two different years. He would let me know with a text: *frontn*, telling me his picture was above the fold on the front page, the *cat’s meow* of photojournalists. So I’d go by Starbucks to buy that edition of the Times. I just *had* to tell the cashier, “my son took that picture,” just loud enough so everyone in there could hear.

Paul sees every believer as God’s treasure. When Jesus comes again in glory, and we come with him, God will declare for all the hear: “My son did that, that one belongs to my son.”

Jesus Christ lived perfectly, suffered obediently, called effectually and forgave you, clothed you in his righteousness, adopted you through the gospel, and constantly prays for and sanctifies you ...but it’s quite invisible.

Yet in union with him in his death and resurrection, you’re glorious, you’re his crown, his trophy of grace:

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

A Case Study: How Sovereign Grace Advances the Gospel by Evangelism

1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (1Thessalonians 1:1-5)

Do you have moles in your yard? You're not sure? Then you don't. You'd know if you did; the evidence is on the ground, their tunnels unmistakably visible. The ground is all churned up; you can see where they advance by the tangible, concrete effects in the soil. If you like moles, you'll be ecstatic. If you don't, those little mole trails spell huge irritation.

By the time Paul finished ministering to the Thessalonians he was ecstatic. He saw all these mole trails of grace advancing in the lives of the believers there, ploughing up the soil of their hearts. You couldn't miss it! So he begins his epistle celebrating the advancement of grace into their lives. He gives thanks and prays for them.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers
His gratitude for them recalls their reception of grace: *remembering* (v.3) what grace looked like as it ploughed up their hearts. It changes people, it is visible, it's real. Advancing grace produces Christians.

This text, then, answers three simple questions:

- How do I become a Christian? (the reception of grace)
- Why did I become a Christian? (the prior working of grace)
- What is the evidence I became a Christian? (the proof of grace)

How do I become a Christian? (reception of grace)

v.5 Our gospel came to you not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

The word *gospel* in the Greek means to herald or announce something beneficial, helpful, good, liberating, or joyous. The gospel comes to people *in word*, it's a message about something that is meant to be preached, and ought to be accompanied by *power, in the Holy Spirit, with full conviction.* (v.5)

Acts 17:2-3 gives a tidy summary of the content of the message:

(Paul) reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

How did they become Christians? They heard a message about a man, Jesus Christ. It struck a chord in their hearts. It made sense, so they were persuaded when Paul explained the promise of Jesus' salvation, showing how the Old Testament spoke of Christ and clearly predicted his coming. God made promises and he kept them; this God can be trusted to keep his word, and He is in control of history.

The gospel message reveals both the *necessity* and *sufficiency* of Jesus' salvation. Human sin makes it *necessary*. Because you're not self-created, and God made you for himself, to bear his image in righteousness, the Creator is worthy of your trust, adoration, and obedience. Any breach of faithfulness to him is an offense we are completely unable to pay ourselves.

The *sufficiency* of Jesus' salvation lies in what he came to do for sinners. There's only three possibilities for being perfect in God's sight:

- 1) You have to do it all by yourself.
- 2) Jesus does his part and you have to do yours.
- 3) Jesus did it all in your place.

The first two aren't good news. We simply can't. The good news is, there is a substitute who came to do for you what you need to be acceptable to God:

Jesus came to earth under the law, to both keep all its demands, offering God the perfect life God requires, and to pay the penalty of law-breaking; in love he gave up his life, desiring so badly to have us know and enjoy him that he died the death our sins deserved.

All you can do is trust it, believe the promise, receive it as a gift. How liberating! He pays the debt, opens the prison door, and earns the peace we need with God.

To recap then, how did they become believers in Jesus Christ? Just that, they believed in him, they trusted his promise, they relied upon his work not their own.

Why did I become a Christian? (prior working of grace)

Paul doesn't shy away from telling them the obvious:

v.4 we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you.

To hear that wouldn't be a surprise to the believers there. He isn't introducing some new idea. They knew experientially the advancement of sovereign grace making them willing to be saved. They knew prior to this preaching they had no desire to repent, trust or live for God. The doctrine of election is a sweet savor to a sinner's heart. Remember, it answers not, *How* do I become a Christian? but, *Why* did I ever believe this stuff in the first place?

The largely Gentile church there apparently didn't struggle with sovereign grace. In their experience they knew they'd never give their lives to Christ unless God had changed their

disposition. It's often folks who grow up in the church who have difficulty with election- that God chooses us, not we elect God. They think they made a choice at some point, having been exposed to the faith.

The fact is, the desire to belong to Christ doesn't naturally reside on our hearts. Of all people unbelievers know that; they have no desire for Christ.

So I ask myself: why would I flatter myself and think I'd figure this out on my own?

In other words, your second birth is just like your first, you didn't will it, God did. The following four verses prove the point:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (James 1:18)

By his doing you are in Christ Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

We are passive at regeneration and active at conversion.

What makes election necessary? The Bible does not portray man as merely sick but hopelessly spiritually dead.

And you were dead in your trespasses sins...were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1)

And when you were dead in your sins...He made you alive together with Christ. (Colossians 2:13)

Yet to this day God has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, or ears to hear... (Deuteronomy 29:4)

Spiritual death leaves us not simply separated from God, but with no appetite for God:

There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside...there is none who does good.. (Romans 3:10-18)

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He wishes...he who hears my word and believes has passed out of death into life. (John 5:21,24)

Man's innate condition is so bad that the Bible says we are naturally at enmity with God:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...while yet sinners...if while we were enemies... (Romans 5:5-8)

The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those in the flesh cannot please God.

(Romans 8:7-8)

The light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light;
(John 3:19)

This blind, depraved condition leaves us darkened in our understanding:

...in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for practice of every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (Ephesians 4:17f)

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot (not may not) understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

No wonder our unresponsive hearts need removing:

I shall put a new spirit within them, and I shall the heart of stone out of their flesh and given them a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19)

Yes, we are estranged from the womb :

the wicked are estranged from the womb; (Psalm 58:3)
in sin my mother conceived me; (Psalm 51:5)
you have been called a rebel from birth. (Isaiah 48:8)

And therefore we remain ignorant of God until he wills to reveal himself to us:

No one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matthew 11:27)

So then it does not depend on the man who wills or runs, but on God who has mercy.
(Romans 9:13)

You did not choose me, but I chose you... (John 15:16)

As many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

The Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Election is not answering the question, *Who* can be saved. It's not for unbelievers, but comfort for believers. The doctrine for unbelievers is the gospel, most sincerely offered freely to everyone in the world. Who can be saved? Anyone who feels the need. Anyone who desires. You don't have the desire? Ask God for it; he wants to give it to you. There is a wonderful promise:

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

God ordains the ends as well as the means. He ordains the salvation of his elect, while the gospel preached is the means to effect that end.

See the security and comfort it gives you? Grace is sovereignly advanced in you to give you the desire, and sovereign grace will keep you.

Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. (Hebrews 12:3)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27)

This guarantees evangelism will be effective, otherwise you're talking to a grave. It is God who raises the dead. He uses the message of grace preached to do so. So, are you out if not elect? No, believe and you will be saved. Far from quenching evangelism, such an act of love- God does not leave us in our natural state of untroubled sinfulness-produces it!

the word of the Lord sounded forth from you. (v.6)

What is the evidence I became a Christian? (the proof of grace)

Is there tangible visibility of grace? When the moles advance you can see it. Paul says the advancement of grace among them is very evident. There are three signs of life: faith, hope and love. Paul puts these three together several other places in the NT. Sovereign grace, far from stifling Christian virtue, produces it, creating an explosion of spiritual blessings: faith, hope, and love. Grace is alive, it advances one's faith, propels one's love, burns one's hope.

So you have three tests to see if grace is truly advancing in you:

Test #1: Is your faith working?

Because advancing grace brought you to faith, it continues to produce spiritual fruit. True faith always changes your priorities and interests, it creates concern for God's glory, new hatred of sin and humble suspicion of your motives. Your internal belief becomes visible in way you treat others, spend resources, speak, conduct yourself, respect those different from you, and seek to include outsiders and disenfranchised- you were one once!

Test #2: Is your love laboring?

Having experienced the love of God in Christ, we can't help but show the same to others. It may be tiring serving others' needs above your own, but advancing grace works (a word used of manual labor and sweat!) to bless others as we've been blessed.

Test #3: Is your hope steadfast?

Advancing grace illumines a greater, brighter future; I am not living ultimately for this life. Grace liberates me to not find my heart's deepest satisfaction in anything related to this world. All of this makes believers marvel; only God could do this. We live to the praise of his glorious grace. When grace advances, you are increasingly less impressed with yourself, and increasingly in awe of God's kindness.

Being Missional: The gospel as a way of life

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10)

For many of us, healthy is a way of life; everything we do turns around that core- the way we structure our time, our activities, and our diet. Many of us consciously consume super foods, anti-oxidants, vitamin supplements, and plenty of water for hydration. Here's a word to describe that lifestyle: missional. Missional is being purposeful, intentional, thoughtful, staying on a focused track or mission about a way to live.

Paul is describing folks in this text who also were missional. They had the gospel as a way of life. As a result, this young church thrived, even in a hostile environment. I want some of what they had. Let's look at three questions.

What is it?

Living missionally is not quite the same as being a missionary. It's living with the gospel as a core principle and motivation of your life, wherever your mail is delivered to you. Paul shows here that the Thessalonian believers became missional through the gospel itself.

Paul set an example →

The Thessalonians received the gospel →

They imitated Paul, becoming an example →

The Macedonians received the gospel.

Jesus by his Spirit put something in their DNA that fostered spiritual health and vigor, expressing itself in outward concern for others. This is exactly what God himself is like. He sends, he comes to us, he seeks us out. Jesus is his sent son. Jesus came with a core value in the center of his soul: in joyful obedience to his father, he came *to seek and to save what was lost*. Jesus is missional; if you know him you are too. Jesus said,

As the father sent me, so I send you. (John 20:21)

There is a pattern: in the same way you were attracted to Christ and those he sent, finding them worthy of imitation, you likewise live so others are as well. You're not living for you, but for

Jesus' sake. He is worth everyone being attracted to; he is worthy of the worship of all creatures. You can't *not* speak about something so magnificent:

...the word of the Lord sounded forth from you. (8)

The Thessalonians had a missional mindset; they sought Christ's glory, what he is doing on earth, where God is working, how Christ is extending grace, knowing that he uses us to do it! Thus Paul's spontaneous prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:

11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are its benefits?

There are at least two benefits of living missionally. First, being missional frees you to live for something larger than yourself. Living for maximum health is fine; I want to extend my days and make those I am given most effective, with health and vigor. But eventually health ends. And your health is always subject to forces beyond your control.

Healthy can't be your ultimate mission. Why? Because if health is the most compelling cause you know, you'd only be living for your own welfare, for your glory. You weren't created for that. That's not God's purpose for your life. Human hearts function properly only when they live for something greater than themselves, namely, God's glory. Think about your experience: Who has helped you most in life, people who lived for their glory, or for others' welfare? When are you faithful to the two great commandments, love God and love neighbor, when you live for your glory, or God's?

Paul saw his life as belonging to another, for his good and God's glory. So he laments in Philippians 2 not being with the Lord in heaven, yet values life on earth as bringing benefit to those he can serve. Nowhere does the bible commend or command living for yourself! So think of your life as being either like a tether ball or a soccer ball.

If you're a ball tethered to Jesus and his grace, that's where you'll stay wound. If you live for the gospel, though things buffet you from without, you will ever be tethered to an unshakeable core, Jesus, who uses difficulty to wrap us closer to himself. He identifies, comforts, helps us in our every need.

But if a soccer ball, if you live for yourself, all the things you live for ultimately end up kicking you around. Things like money, approval, control, success- you never have enough of them and ultimately fear losing them. A good indicator you live for these things is your strongest emotions, or how you feel when you don't get what you want, or when what you expect is threatened.

For Paul, what was larger than himself? Actually, something that is healthy, alive, and indestructible: the eternal word of God. Hence his prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:

I Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,

Paul describes a life where your relationship to the word of God is like the wind and a leaf. It carries you.

Where do you get loyalty to that? From the one who word it is, Jesus. That explains why Paul offers this prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:5:

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Think of your heart as unbaked bread. Ask God to bake it in the oven of Christ's commitment to you, the warmth of his undying affection, his steadfastness whereby he endured the cross and now ever lives to pray for you, and gets you every resource you need:

For he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things. (Romans 8:32)

With that unshakeable promise Paul prays this:

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thessalonians 2: 16)

Do you detect the core of missional in his prayer?

...our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace...

The second benefit of living missionally is such an outlook saves you from false way of understanding church. Some see church as a spiritual restaurant; you come in regularly for spiritual nourishment and leave. If church is just another block of time in your otherwise full calendar, Jesus won't change the world. He purposes to use corporate worship- time spent with the world changer himself- to renew his people in our relationship and to reveal his beauty again so that we can't help but live for and speak for him.

Additionally, being missional saves believers from seeing their faith as a private, personal thing, where God is true for me but isn't necessarily for others. It also saves the church from trying to be like the world, stressing what we have in common while downplaying the distinctives that make the church a counter cultural movement. Nor should the church maintain an "us versus them" mentality, withdrawing to a place where outsiders don't feel invited into the discussion.

What is the evidence you are living missionally?

Is it hard to tell a stale pond from bubbling brook? No, the movement of the water is a dead give away. You can easily see, hear, and smell the effects of the moving water. Likewise, in the heart, and therefore the life, of a missional person, you see movement. The gospel becomes a bubbling brook in them, an idea hinted at in Proverbs 10:11:

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life. Proverbs 13:4

God starts the waters flowing in us and through us:

7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! ^[L]^[SEP]The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. ^[L]^[SEP]8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. ^[L]^[SEP]9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. (Psalm 36:7-9)

What movement do you see in the life of a missional person? First, there is always movement toward God:

*...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, **10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Yes, this verse describes their conversion, but because of the tendency of our hearts to turn inward on ourselves, we need to constantly turn to gaze upon Christ. Then what do we discover? The more I look myself, the less impressed I am with me and the more impressed I am with God. Serving idols destroyed me; serving God made me. His glory became my heart's chief delight.

Second, there is movement toward others. Movement toward God will always produce concern for others. Why? That's what God specializes doing in his Son, who came to earth to reclaim it as his own. He heals, restores, redeems, renews. God sees human brokenness and is moved to pity. Look how many people Jesus healed. He couldn't stand the status quo, so he used his power to change it. That's being missional. Missional folks are discontent with the status quo. Jesus isn't receiving the glory he deserves from all his creatures,

Missional folks can't stand to see the church as irrelevant or marginalized in society. The majestic cathedrals in Europe became museums because at some point what they offered people became irrelevant. We must ever see the world as needing redemption and loved by God, worth saving, the sphere of his loving restoration. That's why missional people discover where God is at work already. If it looks like he isn't, move on. No one can open hard hearts; only God can. We just hang around and offer ourselves as servants, asking God: How are you at work here? What is my role here?

Missional folks, third, move toward their resources. Our money tends to grip us and speaks to us: "save me, keep me, don't part with me, spend me, use me for your self, you deserve what I can buy you." The missional heart, though, is free to move toward his resources to part with them, to scatter them.

24 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. 25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. (Proverbs 10)

Being missional sees needs and moves to help meet needs because this is a tangible way to joyfully be rich toward God. Since your money isn't just for you, you have developed the grace to want what you have, versus want what you lack.

What Evangelism Fixes

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

What's wrong with the world? How you answer that question determines how you live in the world. If fundamentally you see the world basically fine as it is, you won't bother with it. "If it ain't broke don't fix it." But if you're deeply persuaded there is something fundamentally wrong, you'll live accordingly. For example, my wife and I don't walk aimlessly in our neighborhood because we know there are cooper heads along the road.

What do you think is *really* wrong with the world?

In my mind, it isn't the most obvious things, such as political corruption, pollution, murder, poverty, terrorism, corporate greed, disease, natural disasters, and the like. No, those things are all symptoms of a much graver problem. What plagues this world also happens to be the thing that is most wrong with me: lack of worship. God is worthy of the adoration, praise and delight of all his creatures, and he simply isn't receiving it. The fact that we don't even think about this tragedy, that the deserving One is snubbed, is indicative of the problem.

Our care and concern for the glory of God- for God to receive the place of highest esteem in all we do, think, and say, that his person be revered, his presence cherished above all, his name exalted, his reputation honored, and his grace credited for all things good- ought to permeate our entire existence.

Sadly, it doesn't. I know that my worst attitudes, words and actions invariably stem from a heart that is not captivated by the glory of God. So too my best efforts and dispositions only flow out of a heart under the control of the Spirit of praise and wonder himself.

There is not, I hope you concur, enough worship of the true God in this world. While *we* may not find this intolerable, *Jesus* did; and he's the only one who can do anything about it. What is Jesus doing about it? According to this text,

He is saving a people by mercy to declare his glory.

This is the heart of the church's calling in the world. Let's examine how the text unpacks this.

First, Peter tells you the *way* you were saved :

called out of darkness into his marvelous light

In the Bible, darkness is code for sin and death, falsehood, and ignorance of God. His audience, converted Gentiles, had been in darkness.

There are lots of forms of darkness, excluding what Hollywood and Spielberg attempt to portray. Most Americans, even some Christians surprisingly, are in darkness because they embrace moral relativism.

Satanic: all that involved the realm of the Devil;

Religious: any attempt to reform man without heart transformation;

Philosophical: reasoning without biblical presuppositions about reality;

Cultural: assigning value to things without the light of God's glory;

Psychodynamic: pride, selfishness, self-reliance;

Moral: thinking you can be good without God, believing only I can decide what happiness means for me.

The bible says that sin exists because true worship does not. Sin at its core is always a failure to worship/honor/adore/obey/delight in/seek/yield to/trust/enjoy or love the true God, while giving preference to something else. Jesus came to earth because people were not giving ultimate allegiance to the One for whom it was due, they were not worshiping the right God, and even those who *thought* they were, did not do so in the right way.

The mission of Jesus can be seen as exposing the darkness in order to collect worshipers. In order to solicit the true worship due him, sometimes Jesus needed to show people that they were in fact worshiping the wrong thing. Much like a doctor, his diagnosis of the disease of false or vain worship was designed to lead to the healing of true worship.

Darkness is not knowing yourself truly. We never know ourselves truly until we know who we are in relation to the glory of God: image bearers, built for worship, yet tragically bent on worship the wrong thing. Idolatry is our biggest problem; all human immorality stems from it.

That's why we can say:

-the drunk lives for his bottle; the despot lives for his power;

-the socialite lives for his respectability; the entertainer lives for his adulation;

-the sloth lives for his ease; the revolutionary lives for his cause;

-the playboy lives for his trysts; the materialist lives for his things;

-the glutton lives for his next bite; the people-pleaser lives for his approval;

-the control freak lives for his dominance; the perfectionist lives for his performance.

How sad having your heart given over to an inferior thing, yet you don't know that you don't know.

The good news is, God calls us out of darkness into his light. In the Bible light (the word means *wonderful, marvelous*) stands for truth, life, righteousness, and true worship; that is, seeing things as they truly are, seeing God as he has revealed himself, and responding in worshipful obedience.

God calls you normally by working providentially in your life to bring you to an end of all your false worship and into the true worship of Jesus.

Often he has to break down a life in order to rebuild it, revealing the futility of our intellectual autonomy and moral autonomy (seeking to be a law unto yourself).

Calling in this sense isn't God saying, "Here I am!" The outward vehicle of calling is the gospel message: Christ crucified for sinners. *Call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved.* He moves our hearts to call on him, to trust a promise, to rely on a pledge: I will treat you forever as if you have already done everything my son has done.

So Peter explains that you *received mercy*. You asked for what you could not bear: penalty for sin. "Don't give me what I deserve." I don't want darkness because it ends ultimately in exile from God's light. Calling on his name means, you told God to condemn his son in your place, trusting by faith that it was so.

Second, notice the *result* of merciful salvation:

but now you are,

People fight their whole lives to establish an identity, a sense of worth, a reason why others should think well of them, a justification for their own existence. In union with Christ, however, you have a marvelous identity, irrespective of your IQ, success, appearance, popularity, wealth, talent- all of which are temporal gifts of God and fleeting.

You are is in the indicative, not imperative. You aren't becoming these, working at these, trying to be these. *You are* these by God's decree. He commanded it. Declared it. He changes your status.

Peter unpacks some elements of your new status using markers identifying God's people in the Old Testament. Each of these glorious aspects of your new identity also addresses your most fundamental human needs:

Freedom → Humility: *a chosen race*

Meaning → Access and prayer: *royal priesthood*

Belonging → Mindset of set apart, loyal to God's purity: *holy nation*

Significance → Secure and loved: *people for God's own possession.*

Third, Peter describes the *reason* you were saved:

to declare his glory

We tell others about Jesus not because we think we are better than they are, but because Jesus tells us to, because he is good for them, and because he is worthy of their obedience, trust and adoration.

Why were you, dear sinner, called out of darkness, shown mercy and claimed as a person for God's own possession?

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you.

You *really* know you've experienced an authentic Christian conversion when you become a worshipper, a proclaimer of all that is excellent and surpassingly marvelous about God. Not only do you get the keen sense that worship is what you were made for, and you increasingly fight to delight in God as a person (not just what he can do for you) but you grieve that you don't offer Jesus the worship he deserves.

Declaring or proclaiming (from Greek: *ex angello*) is to tell out, to explain things unknown. It was always Israel's calling to declare God's glory in the world; his glory was unknown because the world was in darkness. What the world needs to hear about is his excellencies (Greek: *arête*)

meaning virtues, manifestation of his power, and mighty and glorious deeds. The apostles proclaimed these on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 1.

What a marvelous privilege to declare God's glory: both who he is and what he has done for sinners. The supreme manifestation of the glory of God, therefore, is Jesus Christ:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", 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)

The message is about a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who came:

As God: Jesus the Son of God;

To find us: Jesus seeker of the lost;

To reveal the Father to us: Jesus the Word made flesh;

To bear our infirmities: Jesus our healer;

To deliver us from evil: Jesus our liberator;

To rescue us from temptation: Jesus captain of our salvation;

To teach us who we are and what's wrong with us: Jesus our prophet;

To show us how much we need grace: Jesus our teacher;

To set us free: Jesus our redeemer;

To live perfectly in our place: Jesus our righteousness;

To die for sin's judgment in our place: Jesus our substitute, lamb of God;

To earn heaven for us: Jesus our Savior;

To be raised from the dead as our guaranteed future resurrection: Jesus our life and surety;

To pray for us: Jesus our high priest;

To rule the world for us: Jesus, King of kings;

To share his inheritance with us: Jesus our older brother;

To reconcile us to a holy God: Jesus our peace.

How do we declare his glory? Start small, think large! Start small by focusing on the concentric circles in your sphere of influence:

-Self: you can't give away what you don't have; when you sense something so magnificent, can't *not* talk about it. So keep seeking Jesus in his word until the stamp of his glory is fast upon your heart.

- Family: This is our primary mission field.

- Church: Our corporate worship declares what we think God is like.

- Neighbor: Pray for opportunities to be a friend, win a friend, and bring a friend.

- Nations: You either have a sending or sent role to play.

Nine Questions which Establish the Necessity of the Gospel

To understand Christianity, step inside it to make sense of it on its own terms. The Bible basically raises the following questions:

1. Is there a self-existent God who created all things for his own pleasure, and man in his image, for himself? Is that God holy, righteous, and incapable of injustice or falsehood, by virtue of his perfect moral character? YES.

2. Does that God desire relationship with man? Does he desire to be known by him, to reveal himself personally to his creatures? YES. The Bible overwhelmingly shows that God desires to enter into relationship with man (versus Islam, where only his will can be known).

3. Does the bible teach that man chose sin over God and is therefore incapable himself of the perfect righteousness God requires for anyone to stand in his holy presence? YES.

4. Does the bible teach that man's condition is so bad that only God could remedy it via a sacrificial substitute for sin? YES. All evidence from the Fall onward points to the fact that God will have to pay the price for sin. See especially Isaiah 53 (it pleased the Lord to crush him), and Isaiah 59:15-20. God himself must come down, *a Redeemer will come to Zion*. This foresees Jesus!

5. Did the Old Testament anticipate that Jesus would be God? YES.

6. Does the Bible reveal that God is one, and yet exists in three persons? YES. That's why Jesus claimed to be God, the exact reason the Jews crucified him.

7. In the crucifixion of Jesus, does the bible teach that both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility come into play? YES.

Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27-28. Jesus died at the hands of godless men, killing an innocent person, yet also according to the eternal plan of God to give his Son a ransom for sinners. God the Son died on the cross for sinners. God the Father ruled the world and punished his Son for their sin.

8. Was Jesus' body laid in a grave for three days, and raised by the power of his Father on the first day of the week? YES. His spirit immediately left him upon his last breath where he met the confessing thief in paradise. His resurrected body is the proto-type for the future of all who are saved by his sacrifice.

9. Was man's salvation accomplished completely by Jesus? YES. The glory of God is revealed in the cross, as God in love sacrifices his own son for the thoroughly undeserving. No greater love has anyone than that! The only way for sinners to be reconciled to God is a righteous substitute had to live the perfect life necessary to enter heaven, and also pay the price for sin (death). This gift is received by faith, trusting that the promise of God is true. The NT goes to great lengths to show that salvation was always by faith and not human effort (Rom.4 Gal. 3).

Appendix 1 The Sovereignty of God

Historians describe the Reformers as theologians who were intoxicated with the majesty of God. They themselves described their work as merely repeating the message of the martyrs, that is, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The Reformers had deeply Theo-centric theology; they started with God, ended with God, and never moved away from a profoundly God-glorifying view of all things. They would say that is because they find the Bible to be that way: God reveals Himself as absolutely in control of everything. He has no revivals. He alone rules the universe, directs all its affairs, is the Most High God, the Almighty, who does whatsoever He pleases, can be thwarted by no person or thing, and accomplishes all that He wills to do, being resisted by nothing. He is sovereign.

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is sovereign, we affirm His right to govern the universe, which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that His right is the right of the Potter over the clay, viz: that He may mould that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any. Sovereignty characterizes the whole Being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes. He is sovereign in the exercise of His power. His power is exercised as He wills, when He wills, where He wills. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. (A.W. Pink)

If you are not familiar with the multitude of ways the Bible asserts God's sovereignty, consider the following.

GOD is SOVEREIGN over:

All things

- Ps 115:3 But our God is in the heavens, He does whatever He pleases
Ps 135:6 Whatever the Lord pleases, He does
Is 46:9-10 I will accomplish all My good pleasure
Phil 2:13 God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure
Ps 103:19 His sovereignty rules over all
Ps 33:11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever
Prov 21:3 To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice
Is 14:27 For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it?

All authority

- Matt 28:18 All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth
Rom 13:1 For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God
Luke 5:24 But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins

All creation

- Rev 4:11 for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being
- Prov 16:4 The Lord has made everything for its own purpose
- Dan 4:35 He does according to His will in the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth
- Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible
- Rom 4:17 In the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

The animals

He formed them at creation, used them in the plagues, provided quail, spoke through Balaam's donkey, shut the mouths of lions, used ravens to feed Elisha, sent a great fish to swallow Jonah and directed the great fish to deposit Jonah at a specific place on the shore.

The weather

- Ps 147:15-18 He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the hoarfrost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments. Who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.
- Mk 4:39 And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still". And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

All reality

- Col 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities –
- all things have been created by Him and for Him.
- Heb 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Child-bearing

- Gen 30:2 Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"
- Acts 17:25 And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Human plans

- Prov 19:21 The counsel of the Lord, it will stand.
- Prov 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

Deut 8:18 It is He who is giving you power to make wealth.
Prov 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord.

God's enemies

Ps 2:1-4 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather against the LORD and against His Anointed One. "Let us break their chains", they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.
Josh 10:10 The LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter.

Sin

Gen 50:20 You meant it for evil, God meant it for good.
Rom 8:28 God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Governments

Ps 22:28 For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations.
Ps 47:8 God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.

History

Acts 14:16-17 And in generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness.
Acts 17:26,31 And He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation.
Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Incarnation

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

Crucifixion

Acts 2:23 This man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.
Acts 4:28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

Salvation

Acts 13:48 and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Rom 9:16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Matt 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

1Pet 2:8 And to this doom they were also appointed

The Mystery of God's Sovereignty

Deut 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD ...

Is 55:8-9 My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways ...

Rom 11:33 How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways

Appendix 2

The Five points of Calvinism

We can understand sovereign grace by exegeting specific Biblical texts, as we did with Ephesians 1, or we can systematize what the whole Bible teaches about specific subjects or doctrines. That's what the "Five points of Calvinism" are; they outline five issues related to the overarching question of God's electing, sovereign grace.

Though named for him, these five affirmations were not the product of the French Reformer John Calvin, even though he certainly believed and taught these truths. They actually were delivered to the church after he died by pastors who followed his theological convictions. A church council formed to respond to the theology of the followers of Jacob Arminias, a group which came to be known as Arminians. They summarized their views on sovereign grace and man's condition in a treatise labeled the Remonstrance. A church council, called the Synod of Dort, produced a point-by-point response to the Remonstrance in what is called officially, The Canons of Dort, and unofficially, The Five Points of Calvinism. The order in which we find them spells the word *tulip*, appropriate for the setting of the council in Holland.

Total Depravity

1. Terminology

A better phrase may be *radical corruption* (from Latin *radix* meaning root). At the root of who we are as fallen creatures, we are thoroughly corrupt because of sin.

2. The issue

Are we so tainted by sin so as to have no inclination towards God whatsoever, or are we left with some vestige of desiring God within? Are we sick or dead? Are we capable of making ourselves seek God or are we hopelessly lost without sovereign, divine intervention.

3. Definition

Total depravity means:

- a. Sin has corrupted *all* of man's constitution: will, mind, body, emotions, heart.
- b. Nothing in us prompts *us* to move toward God; in fact we are running from Him.
- c. Nothing in us prompts *God* to pity us and to move toward us.
- d. Despite tragically fallen, by *common grace* we are not as bad as we could be. People do accomplish "good" things by common grace. The one time God seems to have given over His creatures to the full extent of their sin was just prior to the flood: "*And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" (Gen.6:5) [effects of unrestrained depravity vs. restrained]

4. Implications

If man is dead, he has no hope of salvation apart from God's sovereign initiative. Either He elects us or, if we have some ability to move toward God, we elect Him. Once we establish total depravity, each of the other four points of Calvinism necessarily follow.

5. Is man pictured in the Bible as merely sick, or spiritually dead?

Eph.2:1 *And you were dead in your trespasses sins...were by nature children of wrath*

Col.2:13 *And when you were dead in your sins...He made you alive together with Christ*

Deut. 29:4 *Yet to this day God has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, or ears to hear...*

John 5:21,24 *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He wishes...he who hears my word and believes has passed out of death into life..*

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren...*

(Everyone has life [bios] naturally; only those regenerated by Christ's Spirit have eternal life [zoe: the nature of God's indestructible life, implanted into us]) (the lake illustration)

We have no appetite for God: Romans 3:10-18; *there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside...there is none who does good..*

Matt.11:27 *No one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

We are at enmity with God: Rom.5:5-8; *For while we were still **helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the **ungodly**...while yet **sinner**s...if while we were **enemies***
 Rom.8:7-8 *The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those in the flesh cannot please God.*
 Prov.19:3; *The foolishness of man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord*
 14:2 *He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is crooked in his ways despises him.*

We are darkened in our understanding Eph.4:17f; *in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for practice of every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*
 John 3:19 *the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light;*

We have no spiritual understanding 1 Cor.2:14 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot (not may not) understand them, because they are spiritually appraised*

God calls us a new creation (2 Cor.5:17: *Behold, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*) because we have no power in ourselves to produce it.

Our hearts are as stone before God, completely unresponsive (Ez.11:19) *I shall put a new spirit within them, and I shall the heart of stone out of their flesh and given them a heart of flesh.*

We are enslaved to sin, Satan, and the world Jn.8:34; Eph.2:1-3;

We are estranged from the womb Ps.58:3; *the wicked are estranged from the womb; 51:5; in sin my mother conceived me; Is.48:8 you have been called a rebel from birth*

Conclusion: we are spiritually dead. This means not simply “separation from God”, but enmity with God.

6. What about the will?

<u>Garden</u>	<u>After Fall</u>	<u>Born Again</u>	<u>Heaven</u>
Able to sin/ Able not to sin	not able not to sin	able to sin/ able not to sin	not able to sin

Man is a free moral agent, in that he determines his own actions, is conscious of moral obligation, is not coerced to sin, chooses out of his nature, and as such is totally responsible for his actions before God.

He has **liberty** to choose righteousness or sin (God is NOT keeping him from it).
 But he has no **ability** to choose because the desire is absent.

Is the will, therefore, sovereign or servant? Is it self-determining or determined by something else? Whenever we choose something, we always choose what we desire, because every choice depends on a preference for one thing over another (ie. the strongest motive acting upon it at the time). We make free choices, but only choose what we want. Since we are dead in sin we will never want God until he creates the desire within us.

DESIRE-----→ WILL-----→ACTION

7. This does not mean we do not know God.

We most certainly do! But the tragedy is we want nothing to do with him. Romans 1 explains the dynamic:

We know the nature of God through nature (the creation) 1:20

We suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness 1:18

We refuse to thank or honor God and speculate about other gods 1:21

Being irrepressibly religious, we exchange God's glory for another glory 1:23-25

We basically resent the fact that we owe God everything and we'll be condemned for not giving it to Him, so we create gods after our own liking, or take the God of the Bible on our own terms. We have a strong aversion to the true God. Yet, the nature of sin is to deny the fact that we are suppressing the truth about God.

The OT gives a picture of this in Ez.37:4-5—(dry bones) I will cause the Spirit to enter you so you may come to life

The NT picture is the raising of Lazarus in John 11:43-44—Lazarus, come forth!

God must awaken us, although we may feel like we're in control of the process.

(NOTE: some verses spoken from a human point of view; others from the divine)

C. Only God can reverse our fallen state:

- **If we are dead, he must bring us to life.**

Col.2:13 When you were dead, He made you alive together with Him

Eph.2:4-6 But God..., when we were dead, made us alive, raised us up..., seated us with Him in the heavenly places

1 Cor.2:14 A natural man does not accept things of God's spirit, foolishness, cannot understand, because spiritually appraised

- **If we are blind, He must open our eyes.**

Gal.1:15-16 He set me apart, called me, revealed His Son in me

- **If we are slaves to Satan and sin, He must set us free.**

2 Cor.4:4 Every one who sins is a slave to sin

Jn.8:34 God of this world has blinded minds of unbelievers

2 Tim.2:25 Perhaps God may grant repentance to those held captive by the devil

Col.1:13f He delivered us from the domain of darkness

- **A new creation is the result of something being brought into existence by a power outside of itself.**

2 Cor.5:17 If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature

James 1:18 He brought us forth, first fruits

Rom. 4:17 God ...gives life to the dead

- **Repentance and faith are gifts given by His grace.**

Eph.2:8-9 By grace you are saved through faith, the gift of God

Acts 5:31 Jesus to grant repentance to Israel & forgiveness of sins

Acts 11:18 God has granted to the Gentiles repentance to life

D. God regenerates based on His sovereign choice:

Mt.11:25-27 God hid things from the wise, intelligent & revealed them to babes

John 6:44,65 No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him, unless the Father grants it

John 15:16 Jesus said, you did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain

1 John 4:19 We love, because He first loved us

Acts 13:48 As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed

2 Thess.2:13-17 God has chosen you from the beginning, He called you

2 Tim.1:9 God called us according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity

Titus 3:5 He saved us, according to His mercy

1 Cor.1:27 God has chosen foolish, weak things of the world to shame wise, strong

John 5:21 The Son gives life to whom He wishes

Romans 9:1-18 It does not depend on man who wills or runs, but on god who has mercy. He has mercy on whom He desires, He hardens whom He desires.

E. Election serves the glory of God

Eph.1:1-11 “According to the kind intention of His will” (5)

“To the praise of the glory of His grace” (6)

“Having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” (11)

Particular Redemption (Limited Atonement)

Introduction

1. The doctrine of limited atonement (perhaps better called particular or definite redemption) is one of the five points of Calvinism that some people just can't embrace, though they believe the other four. They called themselves "4-point Calvinists".
2. We believe that particular redemption flows logically from total depravity and unconditional election. In other words, if the first two are true, this one also has to be true. But, the case for it is not simply based on logical deduction, but on the testimony of scripture.
3. Why do some people resist this doctrine? They have a hard time squaring it with Biblical texts which indicate "Jesus died for the whole world".

Three options

When we examine the biblical data, we have three ways to answer the question, "For whom did Christ die?"

1. Christ died to save all men without exception. (all the sins of all people: universalism)
2. Christ died to save no one in particular. (some of the sins of all people: Arminianism)
3. Christ died to save a certain number, namely, the elect. (all the sins of some men: Calvinism)

The Issue

The issue is, for whom did Christ die? For whose sins did Christ pay His blood on the cross? This is determining the **scope** of the atonement, or its **extent**.

A. Is it: He died intending to save all men, but they aren't saved because they refuse Christ; in other words, Jesus died to make salvation **possible** for all, but **efficient** for none.

B. Or is it: Christ died to save those the Father gave Him, those who believe in Him, the elect. He secured the definite salvation of all of His people. What Jesus did (died for sinners) and accomplished (the redemption of the elect) are one and the same thing.

Qualification

Christ is not limited in His power to save. He saves to the uttermost. His death is **sufficient** for the entire world to be saved (i.e., it is infinitely meritorious) but according to the Father's plan is **efficient** (or efficacious) for the elect.

Better than saying, "Christ's death makes salvation possible for all people" (as if they have the ability to accept it of their own free will) we ought to more accurately maintain: "Christ's death is sufficient for any person to rest upon for their salvation."

Both theologies limit the atonement in some way:

The Calvinist limits the **extent** of the atonement: it applied effectually only to the elect (who only God knows)

The Arminian limits to **power** of the atonement: it actually saves no one.

Finding the Meaning

The thrust of this doctrine depends on reconciling passages which indicate Jesus died for a **limited** group (the many, His own, etc.) and those indicating He died for the **whole world**.

A. Passages seemingly **limiting** the scope of the atonement:

John 6:37-40 *“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise Him up on the last day.”*

Christ dies for:

the many Mt.20:28; *the Son of man came to give His life a ransom for many*
26:28; *My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins*
Heb.9:28; *so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...*

Is. 53:11; *My Servant will justify the many, as he will bear their iniquities*

His people Mt.1:21 *you shall call His name Jesus, it is He who will save His people from their sins*

His sheep John 10:15: *I lay My life down for My sheep* 26; *you do not believe b/c not of My sheep*

His friends John 15:13 *Greater love has no man than this, that he lay his life down for his friends*

His church Acts 20:28 *...to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood*

His bride Eph.5:25 *just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*

His own: (John 17:6,9) *I manifested Thy name to the men whom you gave Me out of the world...I ask on their behalf, I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom thou hast given Me.*

Summary: God's love is particular:

Amos 3:2; *hear this sons of Israel...you only have I chosen among all the families of the earth*
Rom.8:29; *those whom He foreknew, He predestined, He predestined He called, He called, He justified*

Rom.5:8; *God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 John 4:10 *This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

This in no way requires us to deny God has a general love for all His creatures, subsumed under the concept of “common grace”. He sends rain on the just and the unjust. He opens His hand to satisfy the needs of all. (Ps.145) Why? He’s loving, He can’t help it!

But this is a different love from His *hesed*, covenantal love for His own people, a love He decidedly does not have for His unrepentant enemies.

B. Passages seemingly **not limiting** the atonement:

1. “whosoever” (John 3:16)

Doesn’t that imply that anyone can believe? Not necessarily.

No one comes but those who are drawn (John 6:44,65; 1:12-13)

Why say it then? These are the conditions seen from a human point of view. We are all commanded to repent and believe. (Acts 17:30) It is clear that both faith and repentance are gifts of grace: Acts 11:18; (5:31) *God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life* Acts 13:48 *for as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*

2. “all the world” (1 John 2:2)

We must use the “analogy of scripture”, that principle of interpretation which says we need to interpret any single passage in light of all the passages.

Do these passages intend to indicate that Jesus actually saved everyone in the world when He died? This would be universalism, which the Bible clearly does not teach. It indicates there are many who perish apart from Christ, even one of the disciples (Judas). But if He died for their sins, how can God judge them when they die, if Christ has already propitiated their sins?

When Jesus says in John 12:32, “*I will draw all men to myself*”, He has to mean something other than universalism, for in fact not all men are drawn to Jesus. Millions are born and die and never hear His name.

Jesus doesn’t mean *I will draw all men without exception*, but rather, *all men without distinction*. The stress in the New Testament on *all men* is simply an attempt to get into the mindset of the first disciples (who were largely Jews who believed they were the chosen and the Gentiles were scum) that God is saving through Christ **both Jews and Gentiles**. The gospel is for **all** peoples, **all** nations. Christ came to save all men without distinction: any kind of person can be saved! (versus all men without exception).

Two questions

A. So why do evangelism? This question could be asked after each of the first three points of Calvinism.

1. God commands it. That in itself is enough of a reason. (Mt.28:19-20)
2. The proclamation of the gospel is the God-appointed **means** for the God-appointed **end** of saving His people.
3. God gives us the enormous privilege of co-laboring with Him in His vineyard (they are ripe for harvest!) to bring His own to Himself. Since we don’t know who they are (nor do

we need to), we simply share the good news as His ambassadors and let the Spirit do the converting. (2 Cor.5:20)

4. The spoken word is the medium the Spirit uses to create faith in the hearts of the elect (Rom.10:17)

B. Is it reasonable of God to require faith of those unable to believe (because dead in sin)?

The universal call of the gospel (general or external call: Jesus said preach the gospel to the whole world, *whosoever* passages, *come unto me*, Is.55:1, Acts 17:30) does not indicate what sinners are *able* to do, but what sinners *ought* to do. God requires all His creatures to love Him and neighbor perfectly because that is what it means to be human, yet we are thoroughly unable to do so. Kant (and Finney following him) said *ought* implies *can*, and he was wrong. What God commands measures our duty not our ability. The general call is most sincere, revealing how God saves sinners, and what is their duty in response: His Son died for the sins of all who call upon His name.

The internal, effectual call happens when the Holy Spirit creates faith in an unregenerate heart by the word preached (Acts 16:14; Romans 10:17).

Irresistible Grace

1. The big question:

If God wanted to save you, could He in fact do so?

Is He sovereign over that issue, or is man?

Is God **TOTALLY** sovereign in His world, or has He left the domain of the human heart to its own sovereignty?

Are God's hands tied- He'd save you if only you let Him? (Arminian preaching)

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What hast thou done?’” (Daniel 4:35)

If man is able to choose or not choose God (God isn't sovereign) then the choice to be saved is a work. It has to be salvation by man's initiative and effort (believing).

If salvation is up to you, you made a very good choice, and logically, have something to boast about, but not before God: 1 Cor.1:30-31: *“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus...“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”*

2. Once you establish **total depravity** (human beings are dead in sin and need to be awakened by the Spirit of God in order to respond to God- Eph.2:5), all the other elements of “Calvinism” necessarily follow. God's call to sinners, in other words, will **ALWAYS** be resisted by stubborn, rebellious hearts, **UNTIL** the Spirit of God creates receptivity in the heart to respond to the call. Human beings will consistently resist God until God removes their resistance.

3. Notice, therefore, that there is a **general call** of God to all His creatures:

In general revelation to honor Him (Rom.1:19f)

In the law written on the heart to obey Him (Rom.2)

And in the preaching of the gospel (the free offer of the gospel)

“Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden” (Mt.11:28)

“Whoever believes will be saved” (John 3:16)

“God is now declaring to men that all everywhere must repent...” (Acts 17:30)

There is a warrant out for all men to believe and repent.

This general call will be resisted by sinners until God changes them.

The issue:

is NOT can God's grace be resisted, for believer [*“do not grieve the Holy Spirit”* Eph.4:30] and unbeliever [*“you are unwilling to come to Me that you may have eternal life”* (John 5:40) *“you are always resisting the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 7:51)] alike resist it in a multitude of ways) but **IS** once God chooses to move on a dead heart, will He efficaciously bring faith to that heart?

There is, therefore, a special, **effectual call** which is performative in the heart of a spiritually dead person. The Spirit does what He sets out to do: He changes a person God has chosen. Just as in response to God's *let there be light* in Genesis, so when God says *let there be life* in a human heart, the life or the light certainly or irresistibly comes into being.

****Our estimation of the cross changes from “stumbling block/foolishness” to “the power of God”- 1 Cor.1:23-24 “But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to**

Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

***Our blindness turns to sight- 2 Cor.4:4-6 ...those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world had blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God is the one who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

***Our captivity to Satan is released- 2 Tim.2:24-25 ... “with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”*

***Our coming to Jesus is granted (given as a gift) from the Father (John 6:64-65) “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”*

“The Lord opened her heart to understand the word” (Acts 16:14)

“Unless you are born again, you can not see the kingdom” (John 3:3)

“God caused you to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3)

“You are a new creation” (2 Cor.5:17)

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth” (James 1:18)

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...” (Phil.1:29)

4. Does God violate your will?

Yes, in the sense that if God never prompted/awakened/quickenened you, you would never move toward God.

No, in that God never acts against our will. Yet, He makes us willing. Willingness is His gift. What we can’t do through the weakness of the flesh (believe or repent) the Spirit enables and persuades us to do. He who made us willing (by changing our desires) also makes us able.

Humanly, we experience being in control of the process; secretly, God is working by His spirit.

5. From Spurgeon’s “A Triumphal Entrance”

There is nothing but mischief in man’s heart when Christ is not there, and another lord usurps dominion over him. In vain is the gospel preached to any one of the sons of men so long as they, like the strong man armed, keep the gates of the castle of their heart. The eyes of the understanding are blind to the way of peace. Until Christ shall come and take that castle by storm, there is no doing anything for that man; the spirit that worketh in him is the “spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience”. He is deceived by Satan, and made a willing slave to that tyrant of evil. What thou wantest, sinner, for thy salvation, is that Christ should come to thee. For if He should come to thee, then that dead soul of thine would live. His presence is life. He quickens whom He will. When He comes to a soul, spiritual life is there...

6. This does not mean all conversion experiences are like Christ taking us by storm. The Lord often works slowly. Many of us grew up in Christian homes where we can not remember a time when we didn’t love Jesus. Some of us are converted in fits and starts.

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Romans 9:16: *So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy*

Perseverance of the Saints

A. Defined:

Seen from **our** perspective, true saints will persevere to the end and be finally saved. We may at times stray and plunge badly from walking with Jesus, but we will believe through death, for no one is saved without faith at death; we are finally saved NOT on the strength of our faith, but on the strength of God's promises and His faithfulness.

Seen from **God's** perspective, He will preserve all those elected from eternity for eternity. He will complete the work He began. He keeps His people through means: giving us faith and warnings. He does *not* preserve us *apart from* prayer, watchfulness and faith on our part.

The question: Can a person who has true faith ever lose it?
If you have salvation, you'll never lose it. If you lost it, you never had it.

Accompanying phrases: "Once saved always saved." "Eternal security" "Assurance of salvation"

The key issue is: Who needs to know? You must persevere in a state of grace.

The Arminian perspective: "It is not altogether certain that salvation can not be forfeited."

B. The challenge:

Making sense of the:

Verses indicating perseverance

Verses seeming to indicate forfeiting

Option 1: It just isn't clear. We can't tell definitively from the biblical texts whether or not you can lose your salvation. (Sometimes it's OK to say you don't know.)

Option 2: The verses promising perseverance can't be trusted because the warnings prove you can lose your salvation.

Option 3: The verses promising perseverance are trustworthy, and the warnings must be taken seriously, though the warnings do not threaten or contradict the doctrine of perseverance.

C. The Resolution:

Why should we have confidence in the promises? We can't make any sense of them IF we can lose our salvation. (After all, we were saved by trusting a promise!)

1. If man chooses of his own free will, then it makes sense that he could just as easily "un-choose" and fall away. BUT, If "T" then "P". Total depravity proves our salvation is a choice of God to spiritually raise us for the display of His glory and power. Nothing can thwart God's purpose. Our salvation is for God's glory and nothing will rob God of His glory. (Eph.2:4-10: union with Christ...display of His grace...His workmanship)
2. The Lord is for me.

Ps. 118:6; *The Lord is for me; I will not fear.*

Rom.8:32 *He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?*

3. We are sealed with the Spirit as a pledge
Eph.1:13-14 *...having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.* (Eph.4:30; 2 Cor.1:22)
4. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb.12:1-2)
Notice how Jesus prays for Peter (not Judas) *that your faith may not fail* (Luke 22:31)
Phil.1:6 *I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*
Phil.3:12 *Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*
1 Cor.1:8-9 *...the Lord Jesus shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.*
5. We are the work of God
Phil.2:13; *God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*
1 Peter 5:10 *the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*
1:5 *who are protected by the power of God through faith*
2 Thess.3:3; *The Lord is faithful, He will protect and strengthen you from the evil one*
1 Cor.10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you... God is faithful...you will be able to endure*
2 Tim.4:18; Jer.32:40; Phil.3:20-21)
6. Christ actually, not theoretically, redeemed us from the curse
Gal.3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us*
John 5:24 *He who hears my word, and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*
John 6:37, 39; *All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out...And this is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.*
10:27-29; *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall not perish; and no one shall 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 the Father's hand.*
Heb.10:14 *For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*

D. Objections

1. Can't Christians backslide? (Who's asking the question?)
2. Are there in fact phony professions of faith? (visible/invisible church, Romans 9:6 indicates that not all in the visible church are true believers) 2 Tim.3:5; Matt.7:21; James 2:14f; 2 Peter 2:21.
3. "If you...." Passages (Col.1:23) We are in fact *commanded* to hold fast because we *must* hold fast (Heb.3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23)

4. Those who apparently have fallen away

Gal.5:4; If we seek to be justified by the law in any way, then we have abandoned or fallen away from justification by grace

Heb.6:6 This passage is variously interpreted; some say it merely posits a hypothetical case, which in their case is not possible (v.9 *we're convinced of better things concerning you*), or that it describes people who were really close to the kingdom but never were truly saved. BUT if it teaches a saved person can forfeit salvation, ALL the verses we looked at here are unintelligible.