

## The Berean Search

# Fanatical Predestinationism

*If you are a fanatical predestinationist,  
please do not be offended by anything I wrote in this article.  
I couldn't help it.*

**By Dave Leach**

*This study is in three sections: A Verses which prove free will; B Bible words which prove free will; C Verses alleged to prove Fanatical Predestinationism (as defined today, as opposed to how the word "predestination" is defined in the Bible). Following these sections is a transcript, with analysis, of the taped debate between a Fanatical Predestinationist and a Free Will Baptist which christened this study.*

***Introduction: the Importance of this subject:***

Some may strain their minds for a while to figure out how one's theology on this subject affects how he lives in any way. But it can seriously affect how one lives, in which situations the subject is seriously important.

Romans 2 explains that theology doesn't always matter. Those most deprived of sound theology can sometimes obey God just as if their theology were sound. They obey God by nature, even when their brains are confused by nonsense. But Romans 3 says God's teachings help. Confused brains destabilize any good in our nature. Our walks with God are most secure when our brains, as well as our nature, are in sync with the Word of God. Nevertheless, the Romans 2 truth must not be forgotten, that it is not necessarily fatal to one's spiritual walk, to misunderstand what God says about predestination, so long as one lives just as if he understood correctly.

My concern with Predestination is that it seems to me, logically, to justify apathy. I have known predestinationists who were far from apathetic, just like I have met Moslems who were far from violent. But I have risked much because Jesus has promised to move mountains through my faith: therefore, when I see that spiritual and physical lives might be saved if I can succeed in certain things, I feel great responsibility to attempt them. I don't understand what can sustain someone through great sacrifice and deep commitment, who doesn't think anything he does even matters because no human thought, deed, or prayer will change anything because all events are already predetermined by the Sovereign Will of God. I don't understand how you can set your hand to the plow and never look back, and believe in Predestination. However, if you can, then, so long as you can, your theology is no problem.

Queen Esther had a serious decision. Lives depended on what she would do. Would she accept great risk to herself, in the hope of saving others? She might get herself killed for nothing. On the other hand, if she did nothing, a million souls would be slaughtered as the price

of her comfort. Could she live with that?

Mordecai advised her that it appeared God had placed Esther where she was in order to have this opportunity to save so many lives, but if she chose not to, God would raise up deliverance from another source. Was Mordecai wrong? Did Esther indeed have no choice? Was God's will so locked into a single means of deliverance that God never contemplates "back up plans"?

The Bible treats Mordecai's theology as sound.

But the point of bringing up this story, found in Esther 4, is not to begin my list of evidence for Free Will, though I perceive it is such evidence, but to illustrate the importance of this subject.

What if Esther had answered, "Don't be silly, Mordecai. You know neither of us has any choice in this matter. Whatever God has ordained will happen. Nothing either of us does can prevent it. We can pray, but our prayers cannot change the course of God's Will. Because either we pray in concord with what God was going to do anyway, in which case we change nothing because God was going to do it anyway; or we pray in opposition to what God is going to do, in which case God's sovereign will cannot be bent in directions we push. Besides, we can't even pray or think except what God decrees we will pray or think. In fact, even this stupid conversation was planned by God before He laid the foundations of the earth and Heavens. So there is no particular reaction to these events which will change them. All we can do is watch while God's glorious plan unfolds. So you might as well relax. Of course, you can only relax to whatever extent God has decreed you shall relax. So I'm not even particularly listening to you. I might if I could, but I can't. I'm helpless whether to even pay attention to you. So good bye. My goodness, I can't believe God forced me to say that! How rude!" ???

Instead, Esther made a decision, just as if she thought she could. She requested fasting and prayer, just as if she thought that would change anything God did – and just as if she thought Mordecai had the capacity to respond to her request.

If Esther and Mordecai believed in predestination, it appears not to have been a problem, because they lived just as if they thought they had free will.

Esther risked her life to go to the king, just as if she thought the course of the future rested on what she decided, and it turned out well. She thought she was deciding something. If it turns out that she wasn't at all, but that God was just pulling her strings like a puppet, the important thing is that she went to the king.

So I suppose it really doesn't matter if you believe you actually have the power to choose to obey God – so long as you, in fact, obey God.

## A. Verses which prove Free Will

Psalms 33:15 <> Romans 7:18 <> 1 Cor 4:5 <> Matthew 23:37 <> Revelation 3:20 <> Matthew 8:10

**Psalms 33:14 From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. 15 He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works.**

Hearts: Hebrew "leb", inner man, mind, **will**, heart, understanding. ...**inclination**, resolution, **determination (of will)**, **conscience**, **heart (of moral character)**, seat of emotions and passions, seat of courage.

We are not alike! Yet God made us alike, we learn here. Could it be that our differences are not to be blamed on God's creation, but upon our choices?

Although we have a limited capacity to *perform* all the good that we would like, God

created us with the capacity to choose, or *will*, to sin or to obey Him.

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: **for to will is present with me;** but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

God judges us, not necessarily for our actions or even beliefs, but for our intentions. How could God more clearly say we have the power to will, the volition to choose good or evil, than to say that will be the thing about us which He will judge? Not that God will necessarily allow us to do all the evil we would if He would let us, but He judges us for evil we would have chosen had He not restrained us. He also credits us for good we would have done had we known how:

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels [Gr: βουλε, volition] of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Jesus expresses God's continual frustration with our choices:

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye **would** [Gr: ηθελησατε/θελω, chose] **not!**"

God wanted to do something, which He could not, because of man's stubborn will? Does this cast doubt on the theory that "God's sovereign will" is locked and loaded, and is not about to budge in response to any prayer or human cooperation or resistance?

If God routinely imposes our choices upon us, how can it matter what we CHOOSE? This verse plainly says that the wicked chose to reject Jesus, and that Jesus wanted very much to gather them under His protection but did not force them, but respected their choice, though He grieved for their choice. Why grieve? Why such pathos, if everybody knows there is no choice?

(In the metaphor, a hen gathers chicks under her wings to protect them from a chicken hawk. Thus the hen gives her life for the chicks, making herself the hawk's target.)

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Barnes Commentary:

... It is taken from an act when we approach a dwelling, and, by a well-understood sign--knocking--announce our presence, and ask for admission. The act of knocking implies two things:

(a) that we desire admittance; and

[Predestination asserts that what God wants, God takes; Predestination says God knocking is a meaningless display of fine acting. God doesn't wait any longer than HE chooses. Whenever He chooses to barge right in and drag the occupant out, He does so, without any formality of waiting for the occupant to choose, which the occupant has no power to do anyway.]

(b) that we recognise the right of him who dwells in the house to open the door to us or not, as HE shall please. We would not obtrude upon him; we would not force his door; and if, after we are sure that we are heard, we are not admitted, we turn quietly away. Both of these things are implied here by the language used by the Saviour when he approaches man as represented under the image of knocking at the door: that he desires to be admitted to our friendship; and that he recognizes our freedom in the matter. He does not obtrude himself upon us, nor does he employ force to find admission to the heart. If admitted, he comes and dwells with us; if rejected, he turns quietly away--perhaps to return and knock again, perhaps never to come back.

The language here used, also, may be understood as applicable to all persons, and to all the methods by which the Saviour seeks to come into the heart of a sinner. ....

However, Barnes does not impress Des Moines pastor Steve Newton, who refuted this verse in a tape recorded debate with a Free Will Baptist pastor in my home in 1993. He gave little reason for questioning the meaning of Jesus' statement as Barnes, relying upon our everyday experience of the scenario, has analyzed it. But he gave several reasons for concluding such a message must be wrong.

Steve began, "Revelation 3:20 doesn't say man has the power to open or shut that door at any time."

Oh? It doesn't? Steve wants us to believe Jesus stands and knocks at the door of our hearts during times when He knows no one has the power to answer? That is certainly outside the everyday experience upon which Jesus' metaphor relies. Who do you know who knocks on doors knowing no one is home, or the people inside are bedridden, or dead? Oh, *you* do? You're weird.

Much of Jesus' teachings teach the things of God through *parables*. That is, allusions to everyday experiences which we all have in common, or at least close enough that we can all understand the experience the same way. If we just arbitrarily assert changes in the fundamental character of the scenario, not only do we appear strange to people, but we have no chance to understand Jesus' lesson correctly.

If we are willing to accept Jesus' metaphor without overhauling it, we cannot escape the conclusion that Jesus' standing and knocking on the doors of our hearts proves that Jesus knows we have the capacity to open the door, while He is knocking, and the choice to refuse His fellowship; and yet the fact that He waits proves He will not barge in before we open, even though He surely has the *power* to enter, should He choose to exercise it. Just like most of us have the power to break down almost any door we might knock on, but our respect for those inside is why we wait for it to be voluntarily opened.

Which is another remarkable feature of the character of God. God certainly has the *power* to manipulate us like robots. And in fact sometimes God does take us over for the benefit of ourselves and others – after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart several times, Exodus 7:22-23, 8:15, 32, 9:7, 34-35, and was finally ready to give in, God hardened Pharaoh's heart a little while longer, Exodus 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10, 14:4, 8, so that all might know "that I am the Lord". But the fact that God normally does not barge in, but lets us choose, and moves Heaven and Earth as necessary to answer our prayers, shows the character not of a model builder or robot designer but of a parent who loves His child, enthusiastically looking forward to where the child will choose – independently of our own vision – to employ his life, and opening whatever doors will help the child to reach his dreams.

If you know Steve, you know that wasn't the end of his argument. He believed he had found a loophole. Sure, Steve said, the person inside might be able to open, *if he could hear you*. But when Jesus knocks on our heart doors we can't hear Him knocking, until He opens our ears.

Again, that rewrites our common human experience. We would never knowingly knock on the doors of deaf people. We knock loudly enough that anyone who can hear, will hear. This proves that when Jesus knocks, He knows how to make enough sound that anyone can hear, deaf or not. The fact that *Jesus* knocks, proves that He is heard, and His invitation is known to those inside. That is, if we may accept the scenario upon which His metaphor is based, without overhauling human experience first.

Here is how Steve makes his point: "It [the verse] says 'If any man hears my voice,' and Jesus made it clear in Matthew 13:17, that a man's ears must be blessed to hear the Gospel. They must be opened by the Lord Himself. In John 8 he told the unbelieving Pharisees, 'the

reason you don't hear the Gospel is that you haven't been saved by my Father.' Hearing comes by the grace of God."

Whether Steve understands these verses correctly will be examined in Part Three. Here I will note only that Steve seems to equate "hearing" with "receiving"; but whatever "hearing" is, to whatever extent "man's ears...must be opened by the Lord Himself", the scenario of the knocking assures us that the Lord opens ears to whatever extent necessary to hear it.

Although Steve is clever to borrow details from distant parables to rewrite the scenario of the parable before us, it really should be a warning light to us, when our juxtaposition of parables results in an interpretation which is the precise opposite of the parable's scenario as commonly experienced. It really is OK to use common sense to interpret parables.

Pro 26:7 The legs of the lame are not equal: so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools.

Steve's final point is that it is blasphemous to assert that God lacks enough sovereignty to manage our "choices". This argument from logic, not from Scripture, applied to a human parent, would say parental authority is emasculated by any intimation that a parent would actually allow his child to make any choice on any level, and thus refrain from exercising his *power* to overwhelm the child with the parent's own choice. This "sovereignty" argument will be addressed in Part B.

**Matthew 8:10** When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (Repeated in Luke 7:9; see also Mark 6:6)

How is it possible for God to marvel that something happened which He planned 4,000 years earlier?

## B. Bible Words which prove Free Will

### Choose

Here are a few verses which require either rewriting our dictionaries, or removal from the Bible, in order to accommodate predestination as defined today. The verses in *Italics* are particularly difficult to read as supporting the theory that men have no power to choose between good and evil, or that any choice we exercise is unimportant to God:

Ex 17:9 And Moses said unto Joshua, **Choose** us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

*De 23:16 He [the immigrant] shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall **choose** in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.*

*De 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose** life, that both thou and thy seed may live:*

*Jos 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, **choose** you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

1Sa 17:8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? **choose** you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

2Sa 16:18 And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, **choose**, his will I be, and with him will I abide.

2Sa 17:1 ¶ Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now **choose** out twelve thousand men, and I

will arise and pursue after David this night:

2Sa 24:12 Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; **choose** thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

1Ki 18:23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them **choose** one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:

1Ki 18:25 And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, **Choose** you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.

1Ch 21:10 Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: **choose** thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, **Choose** thee

(The plain language of this context is that God was prepared to throw off the census results by randomly destroying the population by either one of three means, and that the choice God gave David, between the three, was real. It should sound as a warning bell that imposing today's theology of Predestination on this verse twists this plain language to mean its opposite.)

Job 7:15 So that my soul **chooseth** strangling, and death rather than my life.

Job 9:14 ¶ How much less shall I answer him, and **choose** out my words to reason with him?

Job 15:5 For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou **chooseth** the tongue of the crafty.

Job 34:4 Let us **choose** to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good.

Job 34:33 Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou **choose**; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest.

*Pr 1:29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not **choose** the fear of the LORD:*

*Pr 3:31 Envy thou not the oppressor, and **choose** none of his ways.*

Isa 7:15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and **choose** the good.

Isa 7:16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and **choose** the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

Isa 41:24 Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that **chooseth** you.

*Isa 56:4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and **choose** the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;*

Isa 65:12 Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did **choose** that wherein I delighted not.

Eze 21:19 Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and **choose** thou a place, **choose** it at the head of the way to the city.

In this passage Paul struggles with a choice, just as if he thinks choice is real, not something imposed on him without his participation.

**Phillippians 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.**

The next two verses, almost side by side, show how God's choices are appropriate responses to our choices:

**Isaiah 65:12 Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.**

**Isaiah 66:4 I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.**

## Love

"Love" is written 547 times in the KJV of the Bible, not counting synonyms like "charity" which translate the same Greek and Hebrew words. Love is defined not as a kindly feeling but as the choice to sacrifice yourself to benefit another:

**John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his**

friends.

How is it possible to read this verse as “Greater love hath no man than this, that he be forced by God to imagine choosing to lay down his life for his friends, which he cannot of course actually do since he has no control over what he does, thinks, imagines, or prays”?

Without the power to choose to love, how can love exist? What is left of Love, after you strip it of choice? 1 Corinthians 13 says Love is as important in Heaven as here on earth, unlike prophecy, knowledge and languages. What can possibly be so important about it, if it is not allowed to exist?

## Sacrifice

“Sacrifice” is written 310 times in the KJV. Sacrifice means to voluntarily forfeit something precious.

How is it possible to sacrifice anything, if we cannot choose anything?

Love means to sacrifice yourself for another. God loves us enough to sacrifice Himself for us; God begs us, for our sakes, to sacrifice our “self” for God. Strip our capacity for that out of the Bible, and the best parts are gone.

## Obey

“Obey” is written 115 times in the KJV. What is obedience, without the choice to obey? The slave dragged by his chains into a field to work is not called “obeying”. Obey means to voluntarily do what is told, without being forced. If we have no capacity to do anything which God does not force us to do, obedience cannot exist.

But the Bible says it does exist.

So it looks like we must have the capacity to do what God asks, because we have freely chosen to do it.

Just a few of the 115 times the KJV uses this word:

Ex 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

Ex 23:22 But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

De 13:4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

1Sa 8:19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Here is a verse that says God will be the God of Israel, conditioned upon their choice to obey Him:

Jer 7:23 But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

I repeat: when your theology imposes upon so large a number of verses an interpretation the precise opposite of what those verses would mean if their plain words were taken at face value, perhaps it is time to reconsider your theology.

Here's a verse showing what trouble God went to to persuade His people to obey Him;

far more trouble than one would expect if God were not averse to simply dragging as much obedience out of people as He cared for.

Jer 11:7 For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice.

This next passage says God even reverses His own prophecies as appropriate to the choices of His people, whether to obey or disobey:

Jeremiah 18:6 O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. 7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; 8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. 9 And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; 10 If it do evil in my sight, that it **obey** not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. ... Jer 26:13 Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and **obey** the voice of the LORD your God; and **the LORD will repent him of the evil** that he hath pronounced against you.

Did you notice that last phrase? Do you think that was inserted by some Free Will Baptist scribe?

Obedience has consequences:

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

To whom does God give the Holy Ghost? Those He preordains, or those who obey?

Acts 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Paul takes pretty seriously our commitment to obey God:

Romans 2:8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not **obey** the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ....6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should **obey** it in the lusts thereof. ....6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to **obey**, his servants ye are to whom ye **obey**; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have **obeyed** from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Mark 1:27 and several other places speak of the demons obeying Jesus. Is this voluntary? Luke 8:25 the wind and sea obey Him. Luke 17:6 a tree will obey a command in faith to pull itself up by the roots and plant itself in the sea. Is this an argument for defining "obey" as something rhetorical, done by objects which have no capacity for cooperating or resisting what is commanded them?

When the wind and sea "obey" Jesus, according to our ordinary definitions of these words, the use of the word "obey" is rhetorical. It means only that these inanimate forces, with no consciousness even of the physical words spoken, much less of their meaning, nevertheless responded as fully as if they heard, understood, and obeyed.

Obviously in that case it is God who heard, understood, and indulged.

But when humans are said to "obey", our ordinary definition of the word is that the human could have resisted, and may not have been altogether happy about it, but that the human submitted voluntarily. The demons "obeyed", not happily, but presumably fearful of worse consequences through continued resistance.

Webster's 1828 dictionary: **OBEY**, v.t. [L. obedio; Gr.]

1. To comply with the commands, orders or instructions of a superior, or with the requirements of law, moral, political or municipal; to do that which is commanded or required, or to forbear doing that which is prohibited. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Eph 6. Servants, obey in all things your masters. Col 3. He who has learned to obey, will know how to command.

2. To submit to the government of; to be ruled by. All Israel obeyed Song 1Chron. 29. Dan 7.
3. To submit to the direction or control of. Seamen say, the ship will not obey the helm. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Rom 6. James 3.
4. To yield to the impulse, power or operation of; as, to obey stimulus. Relentless time, destroying power, whom stone and brass obey.

## Sovereign

Oops, “sovereign” isn’t in the Bible! And yet it is ready at the lips of every predestinationist, as an argument why every verse that tells us to love, obey, sacrifice, and choose must be wrong! How could these things be, when God is sovereign?! To allege that people can make choices which God does not control is blasphemy! It denies God’s total sovereignty!

So goes the logic.

Except that “sovereign” is not a word found in the Bible.

Of course, there are concepts similar to that in the Bible. Though not identical.

Actually there has never been a concept identical to today’s predestinationist definition of “sovereign” in all of recorded history, before Calvin invented it.

Kings were called “sovereigns”. But the word only meant the king COULD control anything he wanted. It never meant he ALWAYS controlled everything he saw. Kings have always reserved the choice to allow some people some freedom, even when they didn’t have to. No one has ever thought that diminished anyone’s appreciation of their power. Not until Calvin.

Johnson’s Dictionary, published in England before the American Revolution, the first dictionary of the English speaking world, defines “sovereign” as “supreme [‘highest in dignity’] in power or efficacy [‘ability or power’]; a monarch, king, supreme lord.”

The word “supreme” does not describe the only power, but only the highest power, which delegates power lower but always retains the power to take it back as desired.

Moslems say the idea of God sacrificing Himself for man is an abominable, blasphemous theology. God is more exalted than that. That is because the Qu’ran never defines “love”, a word used only a dozen or so times, and certainly does not mean by it anything sacrificial.

The Calvinist idea is similarly disrespectful of what God plainly says: the idea that God allowing men a few choices is an abominable assault on God’s “sovereignty”, a word absent – significantly, perhaps – from the Bible.

In Matthew 4, Satan offered Jesus “sovereignty”. Jesus’ surprising answer was that such thinking is idolatry! (Look it up. Examine the wording for yourself.) Multitudes later extended Jesus the same offer: rule by force! Jesus had no interest.

What power does it show off, for God to build robots? Robots are so easy, even humans can do that! But give 7 billion souls the power to choose, and yet keep track of the choices of everyone of them, with contingency plans to intervene only as necessary to protect everyone from each other except for the benefit of each; with plans how to make all things turn out wonderfully for those who love Him, and to turn out as spiritual lessons for all – now THAT takes omnipotence!

## Imperative Verbs

Watch. Run. Preach. Rebuke. Walk.

Exhort one another daily. Provoke unto love and good works. (Heb 10:24-25)

English has imperative sentences. Greek has an imperative “case”: word endings on verbs which make them imperative.

“Imperative” means the sentence is a command: you must do this.

But how can anyone obey a command, who has no capacity to DO anything other than be passively dragged through various motions?

The very existence of the Imperative Case in Greek is incompatible with today’s version of Predestination.

## C. Verses Alleged to Prove Predestination

Romans 8:29-30 <> Ephesians 1:11 <> John 6:44

The Bible appears to say, in Romans 8:29-30, that God decides who will go to heaven, and who to hell, before we are born. Paul says:

8:29 **"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.**

Yet Romans 7:18 appears to say that although we have a limited capacity to *perform* all the good that we would like, God created us with the capacity to choose, or *will*, to sin or to obey Him. It says **"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."**

When Scripture passages appear to contradict each other, it is the task of Bible Believers to assume it is not the Bible which contradicts itself, but our interpretations of it which contradict the Bible. The only way humans have of resolving such dilemmas, so far as I know, is to prayerfully study each passage, studying commentaries and the original language, seeking a *theory* that may account for *all* the passages at hand.

But there are some issues which have seemed beyond man to arrive at a theory which neatly tucks in the edges of every relevant verse and puts them snugly in its bed. Not to say there have been no men who have done so. But if any have, perhaps the reason their wisdom has not settled the debate is that other men pass over their books, unaware of their value, or intimidated by the concentration and study they require. Or just too content with whatever half-sound theology they have, to imagine anyone else might possibly have something to teach them.

The consequence of this is that we routinely develop theories which neatly incorporate *most* of the verses before us, or perhaps even all the verses we have thought about. As for the remaining verses, we "make them fit" by contorting their grammar, word meanings, and context. Perhaps we pass off the resulting deformity as an "idiom" of the language. Or we may say something like, "Well, the horse *must* be a house, because God says it has a mailbox in this other verse."

About the only test left for us, after we have taken these steps, is to examine the interpretations which seem most strained under a particular theory, and compare the *degree of strain* there with the degree of strain under another theory.

However, if there is any strain at all, we may be forgiven only for pursuing the theory tentatively, as the most promising candidate so far. We may not be forgiven for clinging to our theory as established doctrine, as capable of identifying people going to Hell as a strip of litmus paper identifies acid.

The Strain-Free Solution:

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate...” Or, at whatever time God “knew” you intimately, the way a husband “knows” his wife, with the intimacy that bears fruit, God ordained that you would be transformed after the model set by Jesus.

The KJV word “predestinate” has become the center of Calvinist theology which assumes God “knew” each human. Not in the Biblical sense of fruit-bearing intimacy, Matthew 7:23, Genesis 4:1, etc, but in some intellectual sense of “knowing”, before conception, which humans God will force into Heaven and which into Hell, without any regard for any choice any of the made or thought they made.

This theology requires redefining most of the action verbs of the Bible, and for that matter, of human languages themselves, starting with commandments to “love”, “watch”, “obey”, “choose”, “serve”, etc. It requires interpreting the Commandments of God as rhetorical statements which no man has the capacity to “obey”, in any sense of choosing to discipline his natural impulses for the sake of a greater goal. Love, meaning to *willingly* sacrificing one’s own interests for another, is assumed to be impossible, since we have no *will*.

But the word itself, προωρισεν (prowrisen), simply means “to ordain before”.

Before when? Before conception, Calvinists *assume*. The passage doesn’t say that. The only other event mentioned in the passage is when God intimately “knew” us, which was well after conception. When was that “ordaining”? Coincidentally, it was likewise “before”. The same time that God “knew” us, apparently, was when God set in motion our refashioning after the pattern of Jesus. (Some who call themselves Calvinists believe merely in fore-*knowledge*. But the Greek word is “fore-*ordination*”.)

Young’s Literal Translation makes the tense more clear by using common words: “because whom He did foreknow, He also did fore-appoint, conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be first-born among many brethren;”

Remember that the Bible uses “know” to mean a profound intimacy.

Genesis 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

Mt 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Notice that we cannot define this “intimacy” as a one way street, where God “intimately” knows the nuts and bolts in a robot. If this were the meaning, there could not be anyone whom God does not “know”. No, this is a reciprocal intimacy. Yet another impossible thing, if we have no capacity to reciprocate.

But back to our question: “Before *when?*” When did God ordain that we would be “conformed to the image of His Son”? It was before some point in time which is not specified. When did God intimately know us? That, also, was before some point in time which is not specified.

Hmmm.

Do you notice a connection here? A coincidence?

*What if the time when God ordained our salvation, and the time when God intimately knew us, were the same time?*

Grammatically, the statement would make equal sense were any other tense used. We could say, in present tense, “when God knows us, God remakes us.” Or in future tense, “when God will know a man, God will remake the man.” The point is that the two events, knowing and remaking, are linked in time.

But is there some reason Paul chose past tense to make this link? Why not the future?

Well, the previous verse says:

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

So Paul is reassuring people who are already saved – who, therefore, intimately knew God, and were appointed by God to be conformed to the image of His Son, “before”. So Paul naturally continues reassuring them that because they have already let Jesus in the door of their hearts, Jesus has already

begun remodeling their hearts.

A similar verse is Acts 13:48 "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained [Gr: assigned, disposed, devoted] to eternal life believed." The predestinationist will mentally insert "as many as were FOREordained...", but the verse only says that the number who believed was equal to the number who were devoted. There is no suggestion, in the grammar of this verse, that God "assigned" them to Heaven *before* they believed.

It is not even certain that it was God who "assigned" them. The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pub. Zondervan, lists "devoted" as one definition of the Greek word. 1 Corinthians 16:15 is an example of where the Greek word describes what people have decided for themselves: "...they have addicted [devoted] themselves to the ministry of the saints". So Acts 13:48 *could* either be interpreted, "...and as many as were [devoted] to eternal life believed", or, "...and as many as were [assigned] (*by God*) to eternal life believed."

Probably the correct meaning is *both*. The believers were *devoted*, or personally committed, to eternal life, and God *assigned* them to eternal life at the same time. This would be no more than a way of saying what Christians popularly believe.

Here is the lesson of these passages: *God has ordained that all who believe should be saved.*

Now look at the wonderful assurance in the verses immediately following, which would be no assurance at all if some of us were predestined to Hell, because any of us would then read these verses and wonder if we were in the blessed group to which these assurances apply, or the cursed group which can only look with longing at others who are the subject of these assurances:

*Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, **in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.** 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated [or, "we are already being transformed"] according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

Steve Newton argued that this verse includes, in "all things", the eternal destinies of all souls, which God decides before humans are even conceived.

He expounds, that according to Free Will Baptist doctrine, "You can allow Christ to save you, or you can tell Him to hit the road next week. And why that isn't the same as you saving yourself escapes my imagination. IT'S THE SAME.

"And then to say that's the Almighty Christ of the Bible that has a name above every name, the name of Christ every knee shall bow, and all the creatures of heaven are bowing before Him and saying "Sovereign God, you rule over the nations", that's not your Christ!

"Your Christ is the impotent savior in the bedsheet who knocks on the door and can't do anything, can't save, can't get in unless man, the savior, lets him save!

"You're a humanist! Man is at the center of your system! Man determines the day of his salvation! Man determines if he'll be kept in the faith! Man will determine if he will be in heaven! Not God!

“We're theists! [We Calvinists.] We believe that God determines all things after the counsel of His will. That all the nations, and the people of the nations, are determined by the sovereign decree and will of God, not man!”

Steve assumes “**the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will**” is to give no man any choice. Some, God will drag into Heaven whether they want to be there or not. Others, God will drag into Hell regardless of what they would have done had they any capacity to do good. But what if that is *not* “the counsel of his own will”? What if it is not God’s *will* to force anybody to love Him?

Steve is wrong to think “all things” includes persons. The KJV did well to translate it “things”, not souls, because the Greek is neuter, which does not apply to persons.

If it did, the verse before, which also mentions “all things”, would mean that it is God’s Will to take everyone to Heaven! I would love to know how to reconcile that with Steve’s belief that it is God’s will to drag quite a number of souls to Hell. The verse before what Steve quoted is a favorite of Universalists, who say everyone will eventually be restored out of Hell and be saved. It says it is God’s will to gather “all things” in Christ!

Despite the neuter in Greek, several commentators think “all things” does include souls. If it should, the Universalist cause looks a bit stronger, and the Calvinist theory that God drags souls into Hell for deeds beyond their control seems unimaginable.

Steve didn’t give the cite or the context. Here it is:

**Ephesians 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated [or, “we are already being transformed”] according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:**

The context explains that God has willed that all things will be gathered together in Christ, and it is this goal, which God has willed, which God “worketh all things” towards.

My insertion of “we are already being transformed” as a translation of “predestinated” is based on my previous discussion of Romans 8:29-30.

**John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.**

The support this verse appears to give predestination is amplified by translating “draw” as “drag”. Steve Newton flatly asserted “drag” is the only correct translation. He said, “You mean that verse, that ‘my father must drag you to salvation’, fits YOUR position? The Greek word is ‘drag’, like you drag a colt to water to make it drink.”

The lexicon in the Zondervan Interlinear New Testament says the “synonym, *συπω* *always* means to drag by force; *ελκυω* (the word in this verse) only *sometimes* involves force, often not.”

The Enhanced Strong’s says: **1670** *ἐλκύνω* [*helkuo, helko* /hel·koo·o/] *v.* Probably akin to 138; [TDNT](#) 2:503; [TDNTA](#) 227; [GK](#) 1816; Eight occurrences; [AV](#) translates as “draw” eight times. **1** to draw, drag off. **2** metaph., to draw by inward power, lead, impel. (Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G1670)

The previous verses are about how difficult it was to believe Jesus’ huge claim that He is greater than Moses. He said no one could embrace such a claim without God guiding him. It is similar to Jesus telling Peter, after Peter’s confession of faith, “flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 16:17. The fact that God revealed this truth to Peter does not take away from Peter’s courage in affirming as truth what no man

had dared suggest, and which, to suggest publicly, risked a death sentence.

If the Greek word means “drag, bypassing free will” in John 6:44, then it must mean the same thing in John 12:32, where such a meaning would teach us that all men will be saved!

**John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.**

Just to be thorough with this word study, 3 verses use the word to describe inanimate objects which have no free will to resist being “dragged”: John 18:10 Peter drew his sword; John 21:6 The nets were so full they could not “draw/drag” them; John 21:11 Peter dragged the net.

Two more verses describe humans forced against their will. James 2:6, Rich men drag you into court. Acts 16:19, They dragged Paul to the marketplace.

But even in those two verses, there is a will which is being overcome by force. Predestinationists assert that in John 6:44, God drags some towards Him, but without having to overcome anyone’s free will since no one has any.

But John 12:32 should lay to rest any notion that the Greek always has to mean “drag, irregardless of anyone’s choice”, unless you are ready to believe all men will be saved.

By the way, Universalists, who believe that, really like this verse.

Although Steve is wrong, he is eloquent! Listen in:

“[As for the concept of an ‘invitation’], Unfortunately, the Bible presents man as dead in his sins and trespasses, and the invitation is given in a graveyard. No cadaver can raise itself from the funeral slab unless the grace of God resurrects the dead to respond to the invitation.

“It’s a metaphor employed by Paul in Ephesians 2. We’re all dead, but by the grace of God we’re resurrected to life. We’re saved by the grace of God. The invitation is not passive. Jesus walks into the living room, grabs the rascal from under the couch, gives him a new heart, and says ‘I’m going to save your soul’. He doesn’t stand outside and say ‘all that choose me this day...’ Yeah! It’s as rational as preaching in a graveyard, ‘cause we’re all dead unless Christ makes us live. NO one responds to the invitation! We run the other way in hostile rebellion! Because we HATE God when left to ourselves. That’s what Romans 8:7 says.”

**Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.**

The value of Steve’s eloquent defense of predestination is that it frames the debate in very clear terms, which is the necessary foundation to useful analysis.

Does Romans 8:7 really say “we hate God when left to ourselves”, right after Romans 7:22 had said “I delight in the law of God after the inward man”? Verses 23-25 had distinguished between this “inward man” and “another law in my members”, which are at “war”. Isn’t, therefore, the “carnal mind” of 8:7 *not* the “inward man”, but rather a way of describing “another law in my members”?

Aren’t these verses a pretty good description of the “discipline” of our desires which we must all do in order to achieve greater goals? Our tongues want us to eat perpetually, but we suppress their desires if we value our health. We suppress sexual attraction to others besides our spouses to avoid a host of spiritual, physical, social, and legal consequences. We musicians are not always in the mood to practice an hour or more every day, but our desire to master music requires that we rule over our moods.

In other words, we are physical bodies which host souls whose home is in some other dimension, each with competing interests, but ultimately it is our souls, or our “inward man”, which decide who rules us: God, or the world. Does Romans 8:7 say anything different than this?

Steve’s error is assuming that just because we can’t “subject” our “*carnal* minds” “to the law of God”, therefore our “inward man” cannot even reach out to God, or cry out to God, or grip tightly the hand God reaches down to us, with our willing consent, and then walk with Him as He teaches us, step by step, how to master obedience to Him.

Let me apply the verse to teaching music, with which I am familiar: Verse 7: “Our minds,

fingers, lips, etc. resist coordinating themselves to produce perfect, beautiful music. They are not naturally wired for perfection. Nor can they be." Verse 8: "So if your performance is all about how perfect you are, how much flashy technique you can show off, your audiences aren't going to enjoy listening." Verse 9: "But if you don't appear to be struggling with your technique, but moved by music, your music will be beautiful. If you don't even look like you are enjoying your music, for worry over your mistakes, you aren't much of a musician."

**Romans 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh** [who choose to allow their moods, or physical desires, hinder their spiritual goals] **cannot please God. 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.** [Because when Jesus knocked, you opened the door to your heart, and God "knows" you, feasting together.] **Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.**

James 2:10-11 shows the absolute character of perfect obedience. It says no matter how many people you DON'T kill, that won't justify you when you are arrested for killing someone. Not even if you only killed one person! As expanded in Matthew 5, which shows God judges us for our very thoughts, God's law is beyond our ability to obey. We CAN NOT (perfectly) submit to it, any more than the best musician can escape ever making a mistake.

We cannot "submit to God's law". We CAN "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and confess that God hath raised Him from the dead", as Romans 10:9 commands us to do. The two are different things. To say we cannot do the one is not to say we cannot do the other either, thank God!

Newton equates the two when he says "That hostility is reflected in the fact he does not submit to God's law, and he can't do it. He can't, when left to himself, decide for Christ or not."

The two are not interchangeable statements.

God DRAGGING us home: The fact that the Greek verb sometimes means to drag by force, but often does not, is consistent with my experience giving music lessons. They come to me, and pay me well, yet I must sometimes drag them over their lack of self discipline, and lack of concentration, to musical maturity. But I am ever mindful that ultimately the choice is theirs and their parents'; and that if I drag too hard they will bolt and quit, or find a more obliging teacher.

Ephesians 2:1 uses the metaphor of death, as does the beginning of Romans 7. It does mean a death from which only Jesus could resurrect us.

But it does not suggest our choices have nothing to do with who Jesus resurrects. Nor does it portray Jesus resurrecting people, as He chooses, case by case, to save people, one resurrection after another from now through the end of time. It portrays one single act on Jesus' part which will resurrect anyone who accepts it.

The "death" referred to is not the death of helplessness to call upon God. It is the "death" of helplessness to obey the letter of "the law of commandments contained in ordinances". (vs. 15)

Let's look at another verse from the John 6 context: John 6:37. **"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."**

Where does God get the people He gives to Jesus? Does this verse specify where God gets the people He gives to Jesus? Does this verse specify that God takes people by the scruffs of their necks, without waiting for people to **choose** God of their own free choice?

Doesn't say that, does it?

In fact, this verse, together with verse 65, portrays God giving Jesus and believers **to each other**, as a Father gives his child to another in holy matrimony. V. 65: **"...no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my father."** The word is "Given", indicating a gift. Giving something to something who doesn't want it is a burden, not a gift. **The fact that God "gives" us Jesus proves that those to whom this is given, want it.** This imagery suggests, not some instant, arbitrary plucking of unprepared, apathetic, surprised souls, but the formal

acknowledgment of a successful courtship.

Or, "No beginner can become a professional musician, except a music teacher gives him lessons."

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 also indicates that God's ownership of us comes at some point after we have sought to be owned by God. It says God has put his seal of ownership on us, and signed a mutual contract with us. Contracts occur only between parties who mutually choose to enter them, and only after the parties have discussed, understood, and agreed to the terms.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest [a pledge, or "earnest money", that ratifies a contract] of the Spirit in our hearts.

God went through the same steps, of making sure the other party had discussed, understood, and agreed to the terms, before He signed a contract with Israel, brokered by Moses. See Exodus 19:4-9.

Exodus 19:4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. 5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: 6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. 7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. 9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

Ephesians 1:13 plainly says God's seal comes "after that ye believed".

Eph 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 13 In whom ye also trusted, *after* that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also *after* that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Revelation 7:3 indicates God seals people after they are already His servants.

Revelation 7:3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

The whole argument during John 6 is between people who claimed to worship God but would not come to Jesus, and Jesus who said anyone who worships God comes to him. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." v. 45.

That's why Jesus says, in verse 37, that if the people *really* worshipped God, they would come to Him too. John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

I believe this verse applies not only to Christ-less Israel, but to all pagan religions which promise their believers a path to God. It is not the religion into which one has fallen that determines whether one will finally reach Jesus, but rather, whether one truly seeks God.

(To further confuse American Christians, nearly all pagan religions, including "New" Age religions, have re-defined "Jesus" to refer to the "Christ-force" which is available through their own religion. But while the terminology confuses Christians, it doesn't confuse the pagans, which we know from the fact that pagans will persecute Christians for following Jesus, but will never persecute anybody for following any "Christ-force".)

# The 1993 Debate

Now here, for your reading pleasure, is my transcript of that taped debate between a Calvinist pastor and a Free Will Baptist pastor, with my analysis. There probably isn't much below that has not been addressed more thoroughly above, but below you will be able to enjoy more of Steve's eloquent defense of fanatical Calvinism.

## Dialogue between a Calvinist and a Free Will Baptist

On September 12, 1993, Steve Newton, pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, and about a dozen with him, engaged in a dialogue by telephone with James Bartlett, a Freewill Baptist pastor from West Virginia who was in Iowa to help flood victims, at the home of P&A editor Dave Leach.

The dialogue was taped. Leach transcribed the tape, added his own editorial comments, (he did not participate in the oral portion of the dialogue), and sent it to Newton and Bartlett for any further comment.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### THE ISSUE DEFINED

Newton: Does Man have a free will?

##### I. Definition of free will

The presumed ability and power of people to accept or reject the grace of God at any time.

##### II. How this idea is commonly presented by the current religious scene?

A. People are told that Jesus would like to save them, but in fact he cannot until they decide for Jesus by yielding to Jesus, opening the door of their heart, etc.

B. Many are told, and many assume, that they become Christians when and because they allowed Jesus to save them, when and if they made that decision to allow Christ to be gracious to them.

So going back to that definition, "The presumed ability and power of people to accept or reject the grace of God at any time." Do you agree that should be the topic for our debate, whether that proposition is true or not?

Bartlett: Yes. It is the truth.

Newton: OK. Would you like to make any statement of your understanding of the topic?

Bartlett: That's pretty much my definition, although I don't think I could put it that eloquently.

Newton: You're wrong!

Bartlett: I don't think so.

Newton: OK. How do you want to proceed to debate this topic?

Bartlett: I'll go with the flow and work on it as it comes. Let's find out where free will actually came in.

Newton: Satan introduced it as a false doctrine after the fall. Do you want me to present my Biblical evidences as to why I think this definition of free will is not true? And have you critique that?

Bartlett: Sure.

Newton: OK. I believe the idea of free will, as I defined it, and as you agree to its definition, to be false for the following reasons: (To be continued in the next chapter.)

#### A SAMPLE OF THE DEBATE:

Bartlett: I would make one point, although I don't have it in the Bible in front of me at the moment. That at one time, God winked in ignorance. But now commandeth that all men, everywhere, to repent. What that is saying, under their law, is they had certain things they were told to do. To sacrifice lambs and all these other things, for an atonement of sin. But now that Christ has come, the ultimate sacrifice, we don't have to do that stuff any more. He has done away with the law.

The law was just a schoolmaster, or a guideline, or a prelude of things to come in the New Testament.

Then, He winked. But now that Christ has come, we have no excuse. We can't say we don't know, because God has told us directly, through His son, as to what He doesn't like. Specifically. Because Christ Himself lived the law, exactly as God had prescribed His will.

Because He did it, we can do it, but only because He empowers us. Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

He overcame the world, so we are more than conquerors, Romans 8:37 says.

He winked at sin in times past, but now commandeth every man to repent. If that's true, then those individuals who do repent, who do live a godly life, what happens to them, if God predestinates? If they have obeyed all the 10 commandments, and loved their neighbors as themselves, and took care of the poor and the weak, but if they hadn't been chosen, what's going to happen to them, who don't deserve to go to hell?

Newton: The case you've created is a fiction. In Romans 3:10, where Paul is quoting from the Psalms, Paul says "There is no one that is righteous. There is not even one. There's no one who understands. There's no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have all together become worthless. Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness and their feet are swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. We know that whatsoever the law says, it says to those that are under the law, that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin."

[Ed: Actually, Romans 2 describes the existence of people who never saw a Bible yet who, by nature, live by it. See 1 Cor 4:5 to understand how this is possible, in light of the preceding verses.]

And I say to you, in this and other passages, the Bible says there's no righteous man or woman that can stand before God and claim that God owes them eternal life because of the virtue of their life.

Now there may be men that are so deluded they would try that!

Bartlett: Jesus said in the last days there would be people who will say "Lord, Lord, didn't we do all these wonderful things".

Newton: Yeah. And what did He say to them?

Bartlett: He said, "I know you not."

Newton: Yeah. I sent them to hell, to be with their father.

Bartlett: That's true. But these are the people we would call hypocrites, if you will. These are the men and women, boys and girls, that call themselves Christians, but you never saw them in church, you never saw them doing any kind of good works.

"We should know them by their fruits." You're going to know, if you watch people long enough, whether or not I'm living a Christian life or not. You're going to see that I'm reading my Bible every day. Or whether when something harsh comes up I blurt out something that shouldn't be said. Some vain word. Whether I get mad over some trifling little thing.

A guy told me last week once you get saved you can go out and do anything you want to do, and God's going to let you into heaven anyway. He said you can go out here and live like the devil, just like you did before you got saved.

In my mind I thought "You're gone. You're lost. You're so far off base it ain't funny." But nonetheless, these are the type of individuals that said "Yeah, I'm a Christian, I went to church every once in a while," these are the ones Jesus will tell "I knew you not".

Newton: How do you explain the 7th chapter of Romans, where Paul looks at his life, and (verse 18) says "Nothing good lives in me; that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Or when he says "I myself, in my mind, am a slave to God's law, but the end of a sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin."

[Ed: Compare with 1 Cor 4:5. Fortunately, our failures in our "works" will be judged in the light of our intentions. And in light of what we have been given to work with, Luke 12:47-48.]

You see, we understand this to be the confession of a man who came to realize the true strength of his depravity, and his impotency to obey the laws of God, and was enabled to trust only in the grace of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, to obey the law of God as a rule of sanctification.

How do you explain what I think in Romans 7:14-25 is an extended denial of your understanding of the Christian Gospel -- as I understand it?

...So again, and I want to say it in a pleasant manner, I think you're taking these passages out of their context, and you're reading into them your underlying philosophical assumption. Which is, by the way, the unique assumption of humanistic philosophy, that man is the author of his salvation.

Bartlett: I'm no humanist!

Newton: Your position is defended by Erasmus, the father of Renaissance humanism at the time of the Reformation, against the reformers! You are a devotee of Erasmus, the father of humanism! This is his position! This is his theology that he presented and defended! You are one with him against Luther, and Calvin, and the reformers! You're defending the Roman Catholic position!

[(Bartlett had previously said that whether we believe in predestination or not is immaterial, as long as we believe in the resurrection "which is the fundamental belief". But Newton said the belief in predestination is so fundamental that belief or lack thereof produces two different gospels; Bartlett's is a faith in the power of flesh to save itself. In other words, Newton believes all Protestants, and all of the Reformers who rejected his version of Predestination, were Catholics! As for the logic of equating free will with the power of flesh to save itself, Steve confuses the power to desire to open the heart's door to Jesus' transforming power with Jesus' transforming power. In other words, he equates the power to receive Grace with the power of Grace.]

Bartlett: No no! No, no no! Not at all!

Newton: Aww, man! You're in hot water now! We got you in a historical error! But that's beside the point. I don't want to get off on that. Let's stick to the Scriptures.

Bartlett: Right.

Newton: Your Christ is not sovereign. ...You hold a humanistic gospel that enshrines man and holds his abilities above God. The religion that we're defending is the Biblical religion that lays man in the dust, and elevates and adores God as the almighty savior and judge of all humanity. Those are two different religions! Your religion is the religion of works. The religion that we're defending is the religion of grace. There's only one Gospel! And I believe you have it wrong.

### **Can God be all powerful and yet delegate the power to choose?**

Bartlett: You may have misread me a little bit. I said we have the freedom of choice. That's true. But we also believe Christ to be sovereign...

Newton: Awww! Your Christ doesn't even determine who is going to be in heaven! Because when people go to an evangelistic rally He can't even figure out who is going to be saved!

And #2, you believe, and apparently the people in your denomination believe, that next week, you can lose your salvation, thereby signifying that Christ doesn't even know who's going to be in heaven with him! And then you want to say that your Christ is sovereign? Your Christ is no sovereign! YOU'RE sovereign over the Christ that YOU worship!

I don't think this is a flight in logic. I don't even think I'm being unkind. If Christ can't save you -- and you've admitted He can't without your permission -- and if He can't keep you -- and you've admitted He can't without your permission -- you're saving yourself! Your salvation is in YOUR hands! Christ may HELP you, but he's always subordinated to you, in your system!...

Bartlett: I don't save myself. I allow Christ to save me. He's given me that choice.

Newton: Yeah. You can allow Christ to save you, or you can tell Him to hit the road next week. And why that isn't the same as you saving yourself escapes my imagination. IT'S THE SAME.

And then to say that's the Almighty Christ of the Bible that has a name above every name, the name of Christ every knee shall bow, and all the creatures of heaven are bowing before Him and saying "Sovereign God, you rule over the nations", that's not your Christ!

Your Christ is the impotent savior in the bedsheet who knocks on the door and can't do anything, can't save, can't get in unless man, the savior, lets him save!

You're a humanist! Man is at the center of your system! Man determines the day of his salvation! Man determines if he'll be kept in the faith! Man will determine if he will be in heaven! Not God!

We're theists! We believe that God determines all things after the counsel of His will. That all the nations, and the people of the nations, are determined by the sovereign decree and will of God, not man!

[Ed: Steve didn't give the cite or the context. The context explains that God has willed that all things will be gathered together in Christ, and it is this goal, which God has willed, which God "worketh all things" towards. Eph 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:]

Bartlett: I don't agree with you on the Humanism part. We have choice, but man is not the center of everything.

Newton: Why not? If you are the final determiner, then you have to be the center; and if God saves you, it's only by permission. And if that will is truly free, meaning undetermined, you

must be the center! You must have faith in your power to keep yourself in the Christian faith. Or you'll lose it next week, for sure!

Bartlett: No; the reason I'm saying we are not the center: #1, God has to issue the call. #2, He is the one who decides how long we live. Unless we shorten our days with suicide.

(This led to a long discussion about how God could even determine the length of our days if we can take our own lives before His time for us.)

## Chapter 2

### DO WE HAVE THE DESIRE OR ABILITY TO ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE?

GENESIS 8:21

The Bible teaches that people do not have the desire and ability to accept the grace of God.

In Genesis 8:21 for example it says "Every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."

Bartlett: That's true. Back in the Garden, when Adam sinned, it was Adam that actually sinned. Eve was just beguiled. Before they took of the fruit, we were perfect in every way, shape, form, and fashion. Would you agree with that?

Newton: Sure.

Bartlett: Until then, there was no sin upon the earth at all. As far as man was concerned. Naturally, in the war in heaven, God cast out the devil and his angels upon the earth. But man knew no sin at that point in time. God only gave Adam and Eve one rule. When they broke it, sin entered the world. And everyone born from them was under the sinful nature, or disobedience, of man.

A child will get into mischief. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." They're always coming up with something to get into.

Adam and Eve could have chosen to live with God eternally, but they chose evil.

Newton: Are you assuming we're like that today?

Bartlett: Yes. Each time we make a decision, once we've been saved, we're choosing whether or not to continue as a friend of God, if you will, [the opportunity for which is] an unmerited favor.

Newton: You know that this passage, in Genesis 8:21, says man does NOT have a choice, because man will only choose evil, all the time, because man fell. What you just said would mean we have NOT fallen! That we are all little Adams and little Eves!

But there's a fall in the Bible. Man became defiled, so defiled that God destroyed them all in the flood of Noah, and yet in spite of man's inclination to evil, God was merciful to man, and promised He would never destroy man.

I can't see moral choice to do good or evil, in light of this passage.

Bartlett: We ARE like Adams and Eves. We don't have the perfection that they had back in the garden before they partook of the forbidden fruit. But we, too, have fallen from the perfection of God.

Newton: Do you believe Genesis 8:21 describes your heart?

Bartlett: As of right now? No!

Newton: Does this describe a person's heart before they're a Christian?

Bartlett: Yes.

Newton: So they have no choice when it comes to receiving Christ?

Bartlett: They have a choice.

Newton: Well this says it doesn't. They don't have a choice, because they're only inclined to do evil. And deciding for Christ is a good act, is it not? It's not evil to decide for Christ, is it?

Bartlett: huh-uh.

Newton: Well no one is going to do that because they're only going to do evil. And by the

way, it's only the inclination of the heart. It's not the doing of the heart.

Bartlett: As long as we're in this body, we'll always tend to do things that we're not supposed to do. That's the Adam nature. That's something that we cannot get away from by ourselves. I, myself, cannot keep myself from taking something that I might want, be it a piece of candy or a \$2,000 ring.

Newton: Then you're not like Adam and Eve in the Garden?

Bartlett: No, I'm better off!

Newton: You're better off.

Bartlett: Than Adam and Eve after they partook of the forbidden fruit.

Leach: The inclination of my heart always to do evil is not inconsistent with the power God has delegated to me to rise above my inclinations and cry out to God, who will help me learn, step by step, trusting His instructions, how to overcome my inclinations.

The Bible opens our eyes to this side of ourselves, but once opened we can see it in our everyday lives. Absolutely everything worthwhile that we do costs us something. A great car must be paid for. If others give it to us we "owe" them. Repairing our car costs us. It costs time we could be watching TV. It costs the distastefulness of being caked in grease and grime which we must scrub off. It costs sore muscles, and possibly a little blood.

Mastering a musical instrument requires nearly Herculean effort of the will to practice every day, without regard to our mood.

Marriage takes a commitment to stay with a relationship even when it becomes seemingly unbearable, and utterly hopeless, and while other men or women seem, to our fickle perceptions, much more attractive.

Eating healthy requires great self discipline in rejecting desserts that outtaste brocolli like the sun outshines a star.

Thinking requires concentration. Discernment requires concentration to the point of nearly hurting. It requires holding thoughts before us, remembering what people have said about them, what Scriptures says about them, talking to people, reading, and praying.

Improving requires that we listen to and think about criticism, which we are inclined to hate because it challenges our working assumption that we have no room for improvement.

If we followed every inclination, our bodies would balloon with fat cells and our brains would drain of all intelligence, and we would be as conceited as Snow White's stepmother.

In Revelation 3, Jesus said he would rather a man be evil than apathetic. At least evil people discipline many of their inclinations in order to more effectively destroy others. The apathetic man disciplines nothing.

Love cannot exist without sacrifice, according to Matthew 5:44-48, which DEFINES love in terms of its level of sacrifice. "Love your enemies...That ye may be the children of your Father...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good...For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." If someone does something for you that they are naturally inclined to do anyway, like bring you something for which you pay them generously, you don't feel loved by them. But if someone sacrifices to serve you, you feel loved!

Jesus was not naturally inclined to die on the cross for us! He sacrificed! In this we recognize His love for us. Does that mean Jesus, too, was inclined to do evil continually? The fact that he faced temptations just like us indicates so.

Matthew 5:44-48 indicates it is not even easy for God to send the sun and rain on the wicked. But we may conclude that God is naturally inclined to do so; but not because it is easy, but rather because "God is love". 1 John 4:8.

And especially we are not naturally inclined to seek God, when our food is fat and our

entertainment lavish. Prayer takes even more concentration than thought, and is only easy when we wait until all to which we are naturally inclined has forsaken us.

But Paul says our inclinations are not unopposed within us. We will to do good. What does this mean?

Even in the midst of satiation, something else within us cries out in despair at the emptiness of all to which we are naturally inclined! Does life have any "meaning" or "purpose"? If so it is certainly not in eating or drinking or sex or entertainment, as pleasant as those things are in God's time, as Solomon explained in Ecclesiastes. What will we do with the little voice crying out for purpose? Ah, here is our choice! Between the adventure of God's battles, requiring faith and courage, or the spiritual slumber of the free fall to hell, which requires nothing.

## Chapter 3

### DOES SINFUL MAN HAVE ANY POWER TO REACH OUT IN FAITH?

ROMANS 8:17

Newton: In Romans 8:7 it says "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

The sinful mind, I think it's fair to observe when read in context, refers to persons before they're converted. I think it's fair to say that, #1, man is not neutral; he is in fact hostile to God. That hostility is reflected in the fact he does not submit to God's law, and he can't do it. He can't, when left to himself, decide for Christ or not.

I believe the definition of Free Will, as expressed at the outset, would make Romans 8:7 a contradiction. Because free will is "the presumed ability and power of people to accept or reject the grace of God at any time." So the grace of God can't be the cause, or even helpful to salvation, if a person can reject it any time. It's certainly not the cause of salvation.

Bartlett: We ourselves cannot live righteous lives. We are against God in every way. Until we come to the point where we accept Him into our hearts and lives. "No man cometh to the Father, but by me. No man cometh unto me, except my Father which is in heaven draw him."

[Note: John 6:44 reads, in the KJV, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."]

In other words, unless I receive an invitation to come to your house, I'm not allowed to come to your house or I'm liable to be shot.

Newton: That verse is against you: "For no man can come to the Father unless the Father draws him." That's OUR position.

Bartlett said that verse supports free will, and is made to fit predestination only by being twisted.

Newton: You mean that verse, that "my father must drag you to salvation", fits YOUR position? The Greek word is "drag", like you drag a colt to water to make it drink.

[Note: the lexicon in the Zondervan Interlinear New Testament says the "synonym, συρω always means to drag by force; ε<sub>ρ</sub>-kuw (the word in this verse) only sometimes involves force, often not."]

John 6:65 "This is why I told you that no one can come to the Father unless the Father has enabled him." Now you say people come to the father when they choose of their own free will. I think Jesus is against you here, because he says no one does that unless the Father has enabled them to do so.

By the force of logic and syntax, the grammatical rules of the English language, I can't

see how that can fit your position, the definition of free will as we've defined it at the outset.

Also John 6:44-45.

[As for the concept of an "invitation"], Unfortunately, the Bible presents man as dead in his sins and trespasses, and the invitation is given in a graveyard. No cadaver can raise itself from the funeral slab unless the grace of God resurrects the dead to respond to the invitation.

Bartlett: You're talking about a physical resurrection.

Newton: No, I'm talking about spiritual life. It's a metaphor employed by Paul in Ephesians 2. We're all dead, but by the grace of God we're resurrected to life. We're saved by the grace of God. The invitation is not passive. Jesus walks into the living room, grabs the rascal from under the couch, gives him a new heart, and says "I'm going to save your soul". He doesn't stand outside and say "all that choose me this day..." Yeah! It's as rational as preaching in a graveyard, 'cause we're all dead unless Christ makes us live. NO one responds to the invitation! We run the other way in hostile rebellion! Because we HATE God when left to ourselves. That's what Romans 8:7 says.

Bartlett: He does compel. He does invite. But we don't have to go. We can run.

LEACH: The fact that we can not "submit to God's law" does not mean we can not reach out to God, or cry out to God, and grip tightly the hand God reaches down to us, by our choice, and then walk with Him as He teaches us, step by step, how to master obedience to Him.

The context of Romans 8:17 is that no matter how many people you DON'T kill, that won't justify you when you are arrested for killing someone. Not even if you only killed one person! As expanded in Matthew 5, God's law is beyond our ability to obey. We CAN NOT submit to it.

We cannot "submit to God's law". We CAN "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and confess that God hath raised Him from the dead", as Scripture commands us to do. The two are different things. To say we cannot do the one is not to say we cannot do the other either, thank God!

Newton equates the two when he says "That hostility is reflected in the fact he does not submit to God's law, and he can't do it. He can't, when left to himself, decide for Christ or not."

The two are not interchangeable statements.

God DRAGGING us home: The fact that the Greek verb sometimes means to drag by force, but often does not, is consistent with my experience giving music lessons. They come to me, and pay me well, yet I must sometimes drag them over their lack of self discipline, and lack of concentration, to musical maturity. But I am ever mindful that ultimately the choice is theirs and their parents'; and that if I drag too hard they will bolt and quit, or find a more obliging teacher.

Ephesians 2 does use the metaphor of death. It does mean a death from which only Jesus could resurrect us. But it does not portray Jesus resurrecting people, case by case, as He chooses to save people, one resurrection after another from now through the end of time. It portrays one single act on Jesus' part which will resurrect anyone who accepts it.

The "death" referred to is not the death of helplessness to call upon God. It is the "death" of helplessness to obey the letter of "the law of commandments contained in ordinances". (vs. 15)

Let's look at another verse from the same territory: John 6:37. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Where does God get the people He gives to Jesus? Does this verse specify where God gets the people He gives to Jesus? Does this verse specify that God takes people by the scruffs of their necks, without waiting for people to **choose** God of their own free choice?

Doesn't say that, does it?

In fact, this verse, together with verse 65, portrays God giving Jesus and believers **to each other**, as a Father gives his child to another in holy matrimony. V. 65: "...no man can come

unto me, except it were given unto him of my father." This imagery suggests, not some instant plucking of unprepared, apathetic, surprised souls, but the formal acknowledgment of a successful courtship.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 also indicates that God's ownership of us comes at some point after we have sought to be owned by God. It says God has put his seal of ownership on us, and signed a mutual contract with us. Contracts occur only between parties who mutually choose to enter them, and only after the parties have discussed, understood, and agreed to the terms.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest [a pledge, or "earnest money", that ratifies a contract] of the Spirit in our hearts.

God went through the same steps, of making sure the other party had discussed, understood, and agreed to the terms, before He signed a contract with Israel, brokered by Moses. See Exodus 19:4-9.

Ephesians 1:13 plainly says God's seal comes "after that ye believed". Revelation 7:3 indicates God seals people after they are already His servants.

The whole argument during John 6 is between people who claim to worship God but are skeptical of Jesus, and Jesus who says anyone who worships God comes to him. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." v. 45.

That's why Jesus is saying, in verse 37, that if the people *really* worshipped God, they would come to Him too.

I believe this verse applies not only to Christ-less Israel, but to all pagan religions which promise their believers a path to God. It is not the religion into which one has fallen that determines whether one will finally reach Jesus, but rather, whether one truly seeks God.

(To further confuse American Christians, nearly all pagan religions, including "New" Age religions, have re-defined "Jesus" to refer to the "Christ-force" which is available through their own religion. But while the terminology confuses Christians, it doesn't confuse the pagans, which we know from the fact that pagans will persecute Christians for following Jesus, but will never persecute anybody for following any "Christ-force".)

## Chapter 4

### WHEN CHRIST STANDS AT THE DOOR AND KNOCKS, IS ANYONE ABLE TO ANSWER THE DOOR?

REVELATION 3:20 (Also Mat 13:17, John 8: Isaiah 29:10-15)

Newton: Where does the Bible teach that we have a choice? Let's cut to the quick here. Do you have a Bible verse that man has the choice to tell a sovereign God, the almighty Lord of the Universe, that they don't want to be saved if the Lord says "I'm going to save you"?

Where does the Bible teach that man has it within his power to throw off the yoke of Almighty God?

Bartlett: Revelations 3:20 says "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in, and sup with him, and he with me." Phillipians 4:13 says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The things you quoted earlier, that are impossible for man, are not impossible for God. I cannot save myself. Christ died on the cross for us, and saved us. But only as a free gift. We have, then, to accept that free gift.

Newton: Revelation 3:20 doesn't say man has the power to open or shut that door at any time. It says "If any man hears my voice," and Jesus made it clear in Matthew 13:17, that a man's ears must be blessed to hear the Gospel. They must be opened by the Lord Himself.

In John 8 he told the unbelieving Pharisees, "the reason you don't hear the Gospel is that

you haven't been saved by my Father." Hearing comes by the grace of God.

#2, when Christ addresses the church of Laodicea, he begins "I am the ruler of God's creation." When you say the ruler of God's creation can't save one sinner, without the sinner's permission, you're dethroning Christ. You're not believing these words when he says he's the ruler of God's creation.

Furthermore, in the letter to the church of Philadelphia, which is earlier in the 3rd chapter, Christ says that he holds the keys of David. And what he opens, no man can shut. And what he shuts, no man can open. And I say, in those words, Christ says He is sovereign over doors and keys! And if He wants to open somebody's heart, by His grace and power, He opens the heart!

And if I might say, these verses must be read in their context. The context of the book of Revelation presents Christ as the ruler of God's creation over and over and over again. It's high rebellion against His kingship to say that man is sovereign over salvation. That Man determines his salvation. MAN saves himself by his decision.

LEACH: Can man hear nothing, until Jesus opens their ears and then they will hear everything? Matthew 13:11-17 alludes to the same statements in Isaiah referenced in Romans 11:8.

Isaiah said that because God's people "seek...to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" (29:15) that God will mercifully reduce their guilt (see Luke 12:48) by making them so ignorant of the difference between right and wrong that they will be less able to consciously do wrong: "For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed...And the book is delivered to him that is not learned [literate]... Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men [their reverence for me has become routine observance of the precepts of men]: Therefore...wisdom...shall perish...." (29:10-14)

But meanwhile, while God's people lose their discernment through misuse, God is giving it to the formerly ignorant who are now seeking wisdom: "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." (29:18-19)

It will be the same in "that day" as it was in those first days, when Moses told the people just before God took him, "Yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." (Deuteronomy 29:4)

Or in the days of Isaiah, when God commissioned him as a prophet to tell the people, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." (Isaiah 6:9) God told Isaiah this message would fail to convict them but would only "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." (Verse 10)

God commanded Isaiah to continue this message, even with this effect, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten..." (Verses 11-13)

Isaiah was commissioned about 740 BC. The wasting of Israel began with Assyria's invasion about 730 BC, (2 Kings 17:5) and culminated with Assyria's conquest of Judah's fenced cities (18:13) in 701 BC.

But that was as far as God needed to pound them to open up their eyes. Or to "drag" them to Him, in the disputed translation of John 6:44. When Hezekiah heard the blasphemous

challenge of Assyria's ambassador (18:19-35), Hezekiah turned with his whole heart to God's ambassador with words of despair over whether God would finally CHOOSE to deliver them, but with full trust that their fate was in God's hands alone (19:3-4). Isaiah answered (19:6-7) not to worry, that Assyria would "hear a rumor" and leave. That happened! Libya and Ethiopia both revolted, the ambassador learned, (8-9) but the ambassador sent back one final threat, all bluff since the siege troops would soon have to withdraw (10-13). Hezekiah's sole response was to turn, this time directly to the Lord, with words of faith forged in the crucible of God's judgment and Isaiah's 39 years of convicting warnings: "...O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only." (15-19)

Notice the ironic turnaround: MAN was praying that GOD would open His eyes and see, and open His ears and hear! I can picture God biting his tongue, and the angels standing around groaning and grinning. God hadn't been asleep! God had been watching! God had been coordinating world events for years in order to be able to answer Hezekiah's prayer the same hour that he prayed!

Isaiah then sent a message to Hezekiah with God's answer, about the hilarity of the Assyrians mocking the power of the very God who had empowered them! (20-34) That night the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian troops, their king fled back home where he was assassinated by his own sons, and the remnant of Israel again took "root downward, and [bore] fruit upward". (30, 35-37)

When Romans 11:8 said "(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.", it was referring to the blindness God gave those who were using their sight to fight God. It's like our nation giving military aid to our allies. We will do that to keep them strong, but if they turn against us then we will stop supplying them. At least that's the way foreign aid is supposed to work.

The blindness the Bible is talking about is even an appropriate thing for us to ask God to do to our enemies: [it isn't as good as converting them, but it is more merciful than killing them] David said, in Psalms 69:22-23, "Let their meals be like bait on a trap. Let the prosperity you gave them, (which they wasted on evil), now entangle them. Blur their vision [when they take aim at your people]. Let THEM tremble and fear [for the terrible judgment they face if they do not repent]!" (Romans 11:9-10 "And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.")

These passages, in context, hardly portray blindness as something God brings on people without their having any input. Isaiah clearly gave the reason God brought it: because people thought they could see well enough to sneak around behind God's back.

**HAVE WE NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOW WELL WE LISTEN?** Newton said, "In John 8 he told the unbelieving Pharisees, 'the reason you don't hear the Gospel is that you haven't been saved by my Father.' Hearing comes by the grace of God."

I see nothing in John 8 that specifies individual will has no impact on how well individuals listen.

Verse 47 says "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because God hath stopped up your ears so that you couldn't hear God's words no matter how

much you wanted to! Hah!"

Oops, that's not what it says. It says "...ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." This does not specify that we have no will capable of impacting whether we are "of God".

Jesus makes several blanket judgments against His hearers in chapter 8: "Ye neither know me, nor my Father" vs 19; "ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins" vs 21; "Ye are from beneath...ye are of this world: vs 23; "Ye are of your father the devil" vs 44.

Does Jesus state these judgments as absolute and irrevocable, against each person to whom He states them?

Apparently not, because verse 30 tells us, "As he spake these words, many believed on him."

To those who believed, Jesus began to test their faith severely beginning in verse 31: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

"33 Of course you don't have any choice in the matter! I decide, and I alone, whether you will continue in my word! Ha ha!"

Are you awake? Are you following along in your Bibles? The paragraph I marked "33" isn't in the Bible, unless it might be in some predestinationist's Bible somewhere.

The normal meaning of "if you...[do something]" is that the person addressed has the ability to do it, and to choose to do it. Example: "if you go to the store for me I will give you an extra dollar for a candy bar". The normal meaning of "if you...[do something] is NOT that the person speaking has exclusive control over what the person addressed does or wants to do! That would be absolutely nutso!

Jesus said "If ye continue in my word", which normally means God had delegated to them the power to choose whether to continue in His word. The fact that this statement was not followed by a qualification, that no one has any choice whether to continue in His word, is a strong argument for free will.

**HAS GOD NO POWER TO DELEGATE POWER?** Newton says, "#2, when Christ addresses the church of Laodicea, he begins 'I am the ruler of God's creation.' When you say the ruler of God's creation can't save one sinner, without the sinner's permission, you're dethroning Christ. You're not believing these words when he says he's the ruler of God's creation."

The parable of the 10 talents, which has the King going to a far country and leaving his servants in charge of important choices for which they are responsible, portray's God's purpose as the delegation, of the power to choose, to man; and yet when the King returns, there is no question about Who is sovereign! Do you think God cannot delegate authority without somehow forfeiting authority? Then it is you who are limiting God's authority: you believe God has no power to delegate; or to put it in the words of the Parable of the 10 Talents, the King has no power to go away!

Delegating authority and forfeiting authority are separate things. One who merely delegates authority retains the power, at any time, to take that authority back. The moments of our deaths are the moments when God takes back the authority to choose! God retains the power to choose those moments!

**THE KEYS OF DAVID.** Newton said very eloquently, "Furthermore, in the letter to the church of Philadelphia, which is earlier in the 3rd chapter, Christ says that he holds the keys of David. And what he opens, no man can shut. And what he shuts, no man can open. And I say, in those words, Christ says He is sovereign over doors and keys! And if He wants to open somebody's heart, by His grace and power, He opens the heart! And if I might say, these verses must be read in their context."

The context of "keys of David" is to assure the Philadelphians, in 3:8, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: FOR (BECAUSE) thou hast a little strength, and has

kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

Did Jesus open the door for them because Jesus Himself had not allowed them to lose all their strength, or forget His Word, or deny His name? The passage certainly specifies no such thing, and that would certainly not be the normal understanding of those words.

In our rush to understand Revelation 3:20 in the context of certain other Scriptures, let us not fail to understand certain other Scriptures in the context of Revelation 3:20! The verse clearly says "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: IF any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Christ is not only SOVEREIGN over the door of our heart; He MADE the door of our heart! And, as sovereign, He has the right and ability to make it any way He likes! And if He wants to make it without a doorknob on the outside, who is any predestinationist to challenge Him? The verse says it is the person inside who must open the door, not Jesus.

Jesus portrayed the person on the inside as the one with the power and the will to open the door. To say Jesus really meant it is Himself, standing outside, who controls whether the person inside can even hear Him knocking, and controls whether the person inside wants to open the door, is a very unnatural way to interpret language.

If that's what you think Revelation 3:20 means, it should have been written, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: and I control whether the person inside can hear my voice. If I decide not to open his ears, so that he remains unable to hear me knocking or hollering out here in the cold, I guess I will just stand here knocking and hollering until Kingdom Come and nothing will ever happen because I won't let it! I just get a great big charge out of knocking and hollering, I really do. But if I open someone's ears, so that he hears me and opens the door, then I will come in and we will have supper."

I really am glad God wrote it the way He did, even if it isn't as funny.

**REBELLION?** Newton says, "The context of the book of Revelation presents Christ as the ruler of God's creation over and over and over again. It's high rebellion against His kingship to say that man is sovereign over salvation. That Man determines his salvation -- MAN saves himself by his decision."

Wait a minute. How can rebellion exist, if there is no free will? How can you define "rebellion" in a way that is possible for inanimate objects with no ability to react other than mechanically and predictably to outside influences?

But it is a big step from saying man can have faith in God to saying man makes the ultimate decision, either by meeting certain conditions or by an act of will, whether he will be saved. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" says Matthew 7:22. An impressive resumé! But Jesus will answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

On the other hand, there will be people whom Jesus will receive into heaven who don't believe they should be there: see the "Come ye blessed of my Father" passages in Matthew 25, and the wonderful assurance of 1 John 3:20, "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

There are certainly pockets of evangelicalism that reduce salvation to so few requirements that anyone can easily fulfill them in a few minutes and walk away with a reserved ticket to heaven. Newton may challenge those pockets with no resistance from me. But one need not believe in a free ride to believe in free will. One can believe God has granted Him the free will to call upon God and trust God without believing one has the free will to make the final decision where he will spend eternity.

## Chapter 5

**WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE SAVED? IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO? ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THERE ANYTHING MEN DO THAT SENDS THEM TO HELL? IF SO, WHAT?**

**Acts 7:51** "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." (Stephen's last words to the Pharisees before they stoned him to death. The rest of Stephen's "presentencing statement" was: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

Bartlett: OK, the only way we can ever be saved is if God sends His Holy Spirit to convict our hearts. That's the only time that we can be saved. If He takes that spirit away from us, we have no choice. We're lost.

Newton: In Acts 7:51, Stephen observes, regarding the leaders of the nation of Israel, and we would generalize this to all man, "You always resist the Holy Spirit." So God can send the Holy Spirit from now until Christ returns and man, left to himself, will always resist the Holy Spirit. And they will always say no to Christ, because they are dead in their heart, and they're hostile to God.

Bartlett: Now wait a minute. He's talking to the Israelites here. ...They have turned their hearts away from God so many times that they won't even begin to listen. ...[Not necessarily everyone in] the whole human race will do what these individuals have.

When a person is convicted in their hearts, is the only time they can be saved. If they turn away from the Holy Spirit at that time, however many times that God decides to call them; or if they accept that call, and say "yes"; they admit they are wrong, they are sinners: then, as it says in Romans 10:9, "...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Verse 13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." It says in 14, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" And right on down the line; (17) "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The only way they can believe is by hearing the Word of God. And it has to be sent by God.

Now when they have heard the Word of God, God can then, at that time, choose to offer them, to give the invitation for them to come and be one of His children. At that time, and that time only, if they accept that, they will then, if they will confess to them "yes, I am a sinner; yes I want to be a Christian; yes I want to go to heaven", then yes, He will save them. He will bring them into the fold.

But any time after they've been saved, if they want to go right back out into the world and do the same things they did before this, they have that choice...

Newton: So you believe a man can lose his salvation, then?

Bartlett: Yes I do. I most certainly do.

Newton: Do you believe you can do that next week?

Bartlett: Yes I do.

Newton: What do you have to do to do that?

Bartlett: Disobedience. The same problem, today, that they had in the Garden of Eden. That's the only sin that was committed.

Newton: If you disobeyed the commandment to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, and soul, would you lose your salvation? How about the commandment to be Holy as God is holy? Or the commandment to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect?

Bartlett: The only sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden was disobedience.

Newton: But can you lose your salvation by not loving God with all of your heart, mind, and soul, and not being holy and perfect as God is holy and perfect? For you said that through disobedience you can lose your salvation.

Bartlett: Yes.

Newton: OK. Can you lose your salvation by not glorifying God in all things, not loving God with all of your heart, mind, and soul, and not being holy and perfect as God is holy and perfect?

Bartlett: What will send a person's soul to hell is unbelief.

Newton: You said disobedience. Now you're changing.

Bartlett: [Adam and Eve] believed in God; they walked with Him, talked with Him, and all of that. But today, what can send a person to hell (and I don't believe in purgatory) is unbelief.

LEACH: Bartlett said disobedience sends us to hell; when pressed by Newton, he said unbelief sends us to hell. Newton says nothing can send a saved person to hell; Newton ridiculed the notion that disobedience can send us to hell by pointing out commandments which no man can fully obey, showing how we ALL are disobedient!

In other words, "For ALL have sinned, and fallen short of the Glory of God."

I too believe any man can lose his salvation; I think of men like Judas, who once went around healing the sick and casting out demons in Jesus' Name; King Solomon, the wisest man on earth besides Jesus, according to Scripture, yet he became so foolish as to sacrifice his children to Molech; the churches of Revelation 2-3, some of whom really had a lot of things going for them but all of them were warned against slipping; Adam and Eve, who even walked and talked with God; and the many times Jesus warned "what I say unto you, I say unto all: WATCH!" The contexts of His warnings sometimes meant we should watch for an attack by the enemy without; the rest of the time it meant we should watch lest we ourselves become lazy, self indulgent, or evil towards others.

If such as these have fallen, who am I to take for granted my own relationship with God? Who am I to take for granted my own safety, so that I don't really need to watch?

Yet it is true that disobedience and unbelief are bases for condemnation to hell. The two aren't really separable, since our actions always follow our convictions. Thus Adam and Eve were not specifically condemned for not believing God, which they did not, but for disobeying: which was the point that their unbelief germinated into full-flowered physical action.

When Jesus separates the sheep from the goats, the selection will be based on what people DID, He says in Matthew 25:31-46, not what they believed; although had they truly believed Jesus had the power over life and death they would have obeyed Him! James 2 explains how actions and beliefs are to each other as is the body and the soul. Take one away, and you are dead. Just as a live body proves the presence of a soul, so do righteous actions prove the presence of faith!

But if God sends us to hell because of our disobedience, and if we are all disobedient and under the curse, who shall save us from this body of sin and death? Thank God: our Lord Jesus Christ! So then my undisciplined body may still serve satan from time to time; but God, who judges the secret intents of hearts, knows my intentions, and is merciful even with those! (Romans 7:24-25)

I learned recently that according to Iowa tax law, a newsletter must charge sales taxes for its subscriptions, but a newspaper is exempt. So I asked for the tax code that defined the difference between a newsletter and a newspaper. There are no clear differences! There are a list of factors which the individual tax bureaucrat may take into account; how broad is the cross section of the population that reads it? Is the publication's purpose educational? A newspaper "more often" prints pictures in black and white than in color, it asserts.

But there is nothing specific enough to assure that any two bureaucrats could come to the same decision in a close call, or that any publisher could read the code and design his publication in such a way as to be confident it would get the intended classification!

Not only are our laws general, but the judges who apply them to individual cases are expected to use additional "discretion".

Why do we have no problem entrusting such discretion to fallen man, but we worry at the prospect that God will use discretion in judging us?! Why do we have a problem with the broad principles which God has given us as the basis by which He will judge us? Why would we prefer specific limits, whose edge we may safely visit without fear, as long as we don't step over the line?

We have no problem with discretion in those situations where we have it. As parents, we lay down guidelines which we know our children will struggle to even partially obey, but we keep them there as goals, to inspire them to maturity. We punish them with discretion; our basis is not their actions but their level of concentration. When they take us for granted, stop listening, and stop maturing, we punish, to get them going again. A sibling may have matured far less; but if they are trying as hard as we think they can, so that punishment would not be capable of getting them to try harder, we just encourage them.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Such grief! Such tragedy! The broken heart of God.

Predestination would translate that, "How many times I wanted to gather you under my wings, but of course you were all dead, and I could have raised you up but I wouldn't. So because I wouldn't raise you, I couldn't gather you the way I wanted to."

### **Why would God WANT to give us free will?**

Newton possesses a philosophical objection, perhaps, to the concept that God would WANT to delegate the power of choose to us. Why is that difficult to imagine? Isn't the greatest dream of computer scientists to create a computer that can do more than merely react, mechanically, to input, and THINK INDEPENDENTLY, or in other words, to make CHOICES?

When God wants things to obey Him without questioning, He makes winds and oceans and planets and stars. When we want things to obey us without question, we pick up hoes and pencils and wood and steel and even lower animals.

When God wants to receive back the love He gives, He makes people who can choose whether to sacrifice for God, which is the measure of love. When we want the most wonderful, the most exasperating, the most adventurous, the most heartbreaking experience possible, we raise children!

## **Chapter 6**

### **WHAT ROMANS SAYS ABOUT PREDESTINATION**

Newton: Before the conversation gets advanced, I want to respond to the passages you cited in Romans 10. You know, you pointed something out, it's nothing personal, I don't know you, I'll probably never see you, but you've done well to point out that Scripture-twisting is probably the chief cause for division amongst professing Christians in these matters. And one of the chief ways that the Scriptures are twisted is when the Bible is not read within its whole context. Particularly the context of the book. For example, it is contrary to proper rules of Biblical interpretation, let alone the interpretation of any piece of literature, to go inside the 10th chapter of Romans and pull a couple of verses out, and give to those verses your understanding of of

free will, after the apostle Paul, in the 7th and 8th and 9th chapter of Romans, has exhaustively presented the teaching that man, apart from the Grace of God, is impotent in his will to obey the law of Christ. And if that isn't the theme of the 7th chapter of Romans, verses 14-25, then I can't understand the Bible!

In the 8th chapter of Romans, Paul labors to show that only those predestined by God are those who shall be conformed to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the 9th chapter of Romans, you have one of the most systematic presentations of the doctrine of election, and the out and out declaration by the apostle Paul that salvation is NOT by the will of man -- 9:16 -- but is solely ascribed to God's power, glory and compassion.

And then, to come to the 10th chapter of Romans, and take those verses out of their context, and interpret them in a way in utter contradiction to Romans chapter 7, 8 and 9 -- and I would add, chapter 11, where Paul ascribes salvation, both of individuals and of nations, to the glory and the power of God alone -- is beyond my imagination.

And I guess I would say, in a gracious and gentle manner, that you're twisting the Scriptures. You're simply taking the verses out of their context, and you're making them teach what you believe. And that is free will.

Free will is not taught in the Bible. And you take these passages out of their context, you ignore the context in what it has affirmed, and then you make them teach this idea of free will.

I would just insist that a fair reading of these passages shows that is far from Paul's intention, and far, far from the normal meaning of the words on the page.

LEACH: I must pause for a moment and express my admiration for Newton's oratory! I have not edited his words, except occasionally to combine them when the conversation took him over the same ground twice. Yet it contains no errors. It is powerful, and clear.

And what he says about Romans has been my understanding of its message until only a few months ago, when I began looking up its Old Testament citations to read THEM in context. What a revelation! The very Old Testament passages quoted in Romans which appeared to inescapably prove predestination, when read in context, appear to inescapably prove free will! (Although I was reserving judgment until I had the opportunity to study this debate.)

(I don't mean to suggest Paul took the OT out of context! But I imagine Paul's readers were not so ignorant of the OT as are modern Christians! I think all he had to do was allude to it and his readers would know the context.)

Here is an outline of Romans 7-9:

## **ROMANS 7**

7:1-6 We are set free from the letter of the law to serve God by the "spirit of the law".

7:7 Not that every letter of the law isn't important to know.

7:8 But knowing and doing are two different things!

7:9-11 The purpose of speeding tickets is to make you a safer driver so you won't kill yourself on the road. But God catches you every time you are a mile over, and it was the tickets themselves that were killing me!

7:12-20 Not that I wasn't a breath from death all along anyway. It just hurts more when you know it. Really, I WANT to drive straight. I have really great intentions. My mind knows exactly where to drive; it's just that my hands are palsied.

7:21-25 Unfortunately the driver's training manual can't steer the car for me. What to do? Thank God for Jesus! He knows the difference between what I will to do, in my mind, and what I actually do with my hands.

Newton believes these last verses, about our inability to "drive straight", proves our inability to take ANY step which God requires of us by our own volition. I believe there is a connection between the first part of this chapter and the last part. Our "wedding vows" to God

have been changed by Jesus' death from an emphasis on externals to an emphasis on what is in our spirit. Maybe we still can't, just by trying to, drive straight; but now we are promised that even when we can't go straight, our driver's training instructor watches how seriously we are trying.

What else can verse 25 mean? Paul is saying that now, with Jesus, it is sufficient that his will, or his intentions, serve Jesus, even if he cannot always discipline his actions to comply. When you put verse 25 with 8:1, you can't avoid the conclusion that we avoid condemnation by what we WILL to do, even though we still fail in what we DO.

And of course, there is nothing in this chapter to indicate we lack the power to WILL to do good.

There is a saying that "good intentions won't get you into heaven." That is true, if by "good intentions" you mean the excuse for carelessness which most Americans make of the phrase "Well, I had good intentions."

But Scripture says our intentions WILL be judged, and only in that context will our actions be judged. Yes, our actions will be judged; even when we do evil in ignorance, we will be sentenced, though it will be a lighter sentence: "But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." Luke 12:47. But judgment will focus on the intentions of our hearts: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." 1 Corinthians 4:5.

None of this is an excuse to escape from action to a world of lofty thoughts and ivory towers. As James 2 says, faith and works are like body and soul; one does not live without the other. But if we will but try, then Jesus has someone He can work with to make perfect! Just like I can make any amateur into a professional musician if he will just practice!

Now here comes Chapter 8, with some of those OT quotes:

## **ROMANS 8**

8:1-4 We who serve God in our spirit, even if not always in our flesh, are immune from prosecution. Jesus lived in the same clumsy flesh we do, to show us, by contrast, how clumsy we are, and to give us an example which we can follow and become righteous.

8:5-8 But if, even in your spirit, you serve your flesh, then like flesh, you will die, an enemy of God.

8:9-11 Does Christ's spirit dwell in you?

8:12-13 You don't owe the flesh a thing, except to kill its cancer in you.

8:14-15 Then you are a child of God, and can crawl right up in His lap and call Him "daddy"!

8:16-17 We are joint-heirs with Christ; which means heirs in His suffering, and heirs in His glorification that followed His suffering.

8:18-23 Not that our microscopic suffering compares with our future stellar glory! Our suffering is like that of a baby about to be born, but meanwhile the whole family is on pins and needles in the waiting room!

8:24-28 We don't know how to prepare for birth. But God does, and will even pray for us, through us! We just know it's going to be great!

8:29 "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

8:31-39 Here's what to say to someone who condemns you: "Who are YOU? Jesus Christ died to wash away my guilt, and while you're down here telling me I'm still guilty, He is at the right hand of God talking about my innocence!"

The key verses in this chapter are, of course, 29-30. Let's examine 3 key words in these two verses.

**"FOREKNOW"** What does "foreknow" mean? In the OT especially, "know" meant a relationship so intimate that it produced offspring! Jesus will one day say "depart from me, for I never knew you." This verse states the converse, that those whom God knew WILL be "conformed to the image of his Son".

Look at the metaphors of birth in the context. "We are the children of God", verse 16. "...creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God", verse 19. "...the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered...into the glorious liberty of the children of God", verse 21. "...the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together...", verse 22. "...we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption...", verse 23.

But what about the prefix "fore"? What time frame is it referring to? "Before our physical conception", answers the predestinationist. But does the Bible ever say that? What if it refers to no earlier time than the present?

Greek has about 5 times as many tenses as English. But in this case, "fore" is not a tense of a verb, but a preposition joined to a verb. It literally means "before". But in English we wouldn't talk about "those who have driven before" without explaining "before when". Or would we?

How about when we say "If you've read the Bible, you've heard the Truth"? We're referring to a past time, but without saying how long ago. Because it is a statement for all people of all time. It could just as well be stated "If you had read the Bible, you would have heard the truth"; or "If you read the Bible, you will hear the truth"; or "once you will have read the Bible, you will have heard the truth." The lesson is that hearing the truth happens at the same time as reading the Bible; so as long as the tense of hearing matches the tense of reading, you can put this statement in the past, present or future and it will be essentially the same statement.

When we are talking about a truth for all people of all times, we choose a tense, not because we mean to limit our statement to THAT time, but because we have to choose SOME tense. We just make sure the elements of our statement that belong in the same time with each other all have the same tense.

Now if you want something to do, go back over that last paragraph and read it in past tense, past perfect tense, perfect tense, and future tense.

There is no reason not to assume verse 29, too, is a statement for all people of all times, so that as long as the tense of "know" and "make plans for" is kept the same, the meaning of the statement will remain the same. Thus, "For everyone God has KNOWN, God has begun to fashion him after the image of His Son..." Or, "If God already KNOWS you, God has begun to fashion you after the image of His Son..." Or, "Whenever God KNOWS you, God will begin to fashion you..."

**"PREDESTINATE"** This verse is, of course, a flagship verse for predestinationists, carrying in it the word that names their doctrine. But remember that while the word has come to summarize, to modern Christian culture, an entire body of doctrine, all it meant in Paul's day was "to limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand, ordain beforehand". Again, the word does not specify "before when." It does not necessarily refer to plans laid before one's first, physical conception. It could very well refer to the time of our second conception, when we are "born again".

Of course there are other verses about specific people indicating God mapped out their lives before they were born; but hang on, they're coming up, and you will see they do not map out the afterlives of these people!

There is no biblical reason to assume the "predestination" in this verse refers to any

earlier time than when God "knew", in the profound OT sense of that word, the people which the verse refers to.

I believe the verse means that, at the moment we give our hearts to God, becoming, from thenceforth, WILLING to serve God, God begins to bring our actions into conformity with our intentions!

I believe that by all the rules of good interpretation, the following translation of verse 29 is just as sound as the predestinationist interpretation, and far more compatible with many Scriptures that point to free will: **"In fact, from the moment God's heart was joined with ours, God begins to remold US in the image of His Son, making us brothers of Jesus, with Him the eldest!"**

With that in mind, here is how I translate verse 30: "When God begins to transform us, He gives us a new name, a new life, and a clean slate to write it on."

"CALL" "Called" is taken by predestinationists as a synonym for "predestination", which, as I said, they take to refer to a mapping out of everyone's afterlife before their life begins. But "called" simply means "called". Nothing very esoteric. A very common word, just like our "call". It means "to summon, invite; to name".

## ROMANS 9

9:1-5 It is tragic that so many Jews, with so much going for them, will go to hell.

9:6-7 But God never did identify His children by race, but by faith.

9:8-9 When God said Abraham's heirs would be through Isaac and not Ishmael, God meant not just physically, but also that it is faithful waiting upon God's promises that we will shoot for the stars, and not our own impatient efforts to settle for shooting at street lights, which God will bless.

9:10 "And not only [this]; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, [even] by our father Isaac; 11 (For [the children] being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger."

Genesis 25:23. "And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."

This was spoken of the twins born to Rebecca, Isaac's wife, before the twins were born -- before either of them had a chance to do good or evil whereby they might "deserve" the roles God foretold for them.

This proves God keeps a handle on history by creating personalities needed for His purposes, rather than waiting for people to develop needed personalities by their own efforts.

But that doesn't mean God decides ahead of time who He will condemn to hell! All God said, ahead of time, was who would be stronger, and which should serve the other. Had Esau read the Gospels, he would have known that being a servant is the path to genuine greatness. God has made all parts of the body essential to each other, and He has essential roles for all His creatures, if they WILL to play them.

9:13 "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." [μισῶ "to regard with less affection, love less, esteem less"]

Malachi 1:1-4 tells us God's feelings towards Jacob and Esau AFTER they and their descendents had opportunity to do good or evil: "...I loved Jacob more than I loved Esau..."

But God also, in the Malachi verses, decreed the conditions of future Edomites who have not even been conceived yet today, much less by the time of the prophecy!

In Malachi, "Jacob" and "Esau" referred not to those two individuals, but to the nations, Israel and Edom, that were descended from them. God said Edom would be known as "The people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever".

But even that general statement about the nation does not say every individual Edomite will go to hell. "Edom" is found 82 times in the OT and most of the references are prophecies of doom, but Jeremiah 49:11 invites the children and widows to trust in the Lord after all the men have been killed, and Daniel 11:41 indicates there will be at least one time when God will preserve Edom.

But the point is that yes, God does keep us on a leash, both as individuals and as nations. But God does not condemn us to hell before we are even born.

9:14 Do you think this is unfair?

9:15 "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Exodus 33:19 is where God was about to appear physically to Moses, and explained that He would extend mercy and compassion to anyone he pleased. In other words, Moses didn't exactly "deserve" to see God in the flesh, but God wanted to do that for him anyway.

Is there something "unfair" about that? If you work all day long, and your boss finds a homeless man an hour before quitting time, and your boss feels compassion for him and pays him the same as he pays you, (Matthew 20:1-16), is there something unfair about that? If the angels, and God Himself, throws more of a party over a deathbed confessor than for you who have served God longer than you can remember, (Luke 15:4-32), is there something about that wasted life that makes you jealous?!

Some people just may need more mercy than you do, if you are that great! But there was another reason God's patience ran out on Edom quicker than it did with Israel, which I have touched on and will get into again: unbelief. I mean, if you had two children who got into the same mischief, but one didn't believe you would or could do anything about it while the other BELIEVED and was accordingly repentant, wouldn't you punish them differently?

9:16 "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." This verse is, for Newton, the clincher. But the context is favors or duties for this life; NOT the determination of where we will spend eternity.

9:17 "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." (Exodus 9:14-16)

18 "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will [have mercy], and whom he will he hardeneth."

19 "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?"

In other words, "You are probably sitting there scratching your forehead and wondering, 'Well, if it isn't even the devil who makes me do it, but GOD makes me do it, then why does he want to throw me in hell when I do it?! I mean, how can I resist God? And even if I could, would resisting God be the thing to do to make Him like me?!'"

No, nothing here says God makes anyone do anything for which He then condemns them to hell! It is our own restless desires that get us in that kind of trouble. [James 1:13-14 "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."]

God held Pharaoh accountable only for that portion of the hardening which was Pharaoh's own -- Luke 12:47-48.

**WHO HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART?** "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." Exodus 7:3

1. "Pharaoh's heart was hardened...neither did he set his heart to this also [neither was his heart moved by all this]..." Exodus 7:22-23

2. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, HE hardened his heart..." Exodus 8:15

3. "And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also..." Exodus 8:32
4. "...and the heart of Pharaoh was hardened [stubborn]" Exodus 9:7
5. "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" Exodus 9:12
6. "...he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened..." Exodus 9:34-35
7. "And the Lord said...I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants..." Exodus 10:1
8. "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart..." Exodus 10:20
9. "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart..." Exodus 10:27
10. "...and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart..." Exodus 11:10
11. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them..." Exodus 14:4
12. "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel..." Exodus 14:8
13. "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord..."

That's the last time we hear about Pharaoh's heart. A few hours later, it was no longer beating.

As with God's blinding of Israel in Isaiah's time, God did not harden Pharaoh's heart until he had already done so several times on his own. Howard Phillips compares that with the 1963 decision to take prayer out of schools, but America's plunge into the Red Sea was the 1973 decision to legalize abortion. "Not a single rational decision has come out of Washington since", he says.

The next few verses in Romans use ceramics to illustrate the same thing Paul said about the parts of the body; that all of it is needed.

What is the ceramic structure which no one likes to think about, and upon which everyone leaves the worst filth they can, even though everyone needs it and would not think of being without it for even one day? Answer: a toilet.

## Chapter 7

### WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAYING A PERSON'S ACTIONS DETERMINE WHERE HE WILL SPEND ETERNITY, AND SAYING A PERSON SAVES HIMSELF?

Bartlett: Well let me ask you this. How do you determine, among your people, who is predestined and who is not? How can you tell?

Newton: I cannot tell. That is a hidden decree in the counsel of God alone. The list of the elect will only be revealed upon the last day, when we will stand on the shore of Mt. Zion, peer into the face of the Lamb, and there look about us, and see who, who amongst those we fellowshiped with, are truly the elect of God.

And it's only until that mighty day that we'll know the elect of God.

And I'll tell you this, we're only commanded, in the Bible, to know if OUR election is true. 2 Peter 1. I believe I can discern no man or woman's estate this side of heaven. But I only make probable estimations, as a fallible man, by applying the evidences of salvation, only then to conclude that this person may or may not be a Christian.

Bartlett: (after a pause) I thought I saw a problem there for a second.

[Leach: I wonder if I see a problem. "...give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:" 2 Peter 1:10. If our calling and election were set in granite before our first, physical conception, what is there, this late in the game, that we could do to affect it?]

Newton: I'd like to make an observation and then ask you a question. First of all, it's often

ascribed to Calvinists that we don't believe that people choose Christ. I want to make it very clear to you and to the audience to whom I'm speaking, that we believe that a man chooses Christ. That people are powerfully enabled to choose Christ. But they, only, choose Christ. Our doctrine is not, "if people choose Christ", or not, but "why one person chooses Christ, and another doesn't."

I believe your position is this: if two people went to an evangelistic service, and one person became a Christian and another didn't, it would be because the first person chose Christ and the other person did not.

Bartlett: Right.

Newton: Now our position is that the first person would become a Christian because God sovereignly and graciously saved them. That's the real difference in a nutshell.

We would say this: that you believe man saves himself...

Bartlett: No.

Newton: ...because man must always add the determining decision. We believe that salvation is only of God from beginning to end. Secondly you apparently also believe that not only does a man decide to become a Christian, but he must also continually decide to keep himself in salvation.

We say if a man stands in heaven one day it's because God saved him and kept him.

I believe your position is to say anyone who will be in heaven, it's because they decided, and then THEY persevered, and then THEY kept themselves.

Bartlett: We are kept by the power of God.

Newton: Only upon permission, correct?

Bartlett: Correct.

Newton: Only upon permission. And it's that permission that determines the outcome. Therefore it's decisive. The permission is decisive, in your understanding. What is decisive in our understanding is the mercy and power of God alone.

LEACH: "Many are called, but few are chosen." As a music teacher, I see many students begin, but few become professionals. In that case it is generally correct to say their perseverance is decisive in determining whether they will become professionals; but it is hardly correct to say they taught themselves! Likewise, while it may be at least roughly correct to say man's will is a decisive factor in determining where he will spend eternity, it is hardly correct to say man saves himself!

Newton's formula needs at least one more element: we must decide, we must persevere, we must keep ourselves, and we must submit. The reason a music student needs a teacher is that the student doesn't even understand with precision how he needs to sound, much less how to achieve that sound. So the student must trust the teacher. Without that, no amount of decision, perseverance, or keeping oneself will get any music or spiritual student anywhere, if all that effort is only to be guided by the student's blurry vision. That is why it is silly to think of a man saving himself.

## Chapter 8

### MISCELLANEOUS SCRIPTURES

Pastor Steve Newton began the dialogue by reading through a printed outline, with brief comments. Then the debate began, and covered some of the first portion of Newton's outline. This is the remainder, which was not debated.

Newton: In John 1:12-13, when taken together, affirm that when people receive Christ, they do not receive Christ by virtue of human decision, but rather by the will of God.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Leach: Does this Scripture say, "But as many as God had predestined before they were conceived, to THEM gave he power to become the sons of God"? No, it was to those who RECEIVED Him, and who BELIEVED ON HIS NAME.

These verses are consistent with my understanding of Romans 7:29-30, (see chapter 6), that at the moment we give our hearts to God, becoming, from thenceforth, WILLING to serve God, God lays out plans to bring our actions into conformity with our intentions. THAT is the "power to become the sons of God." It is receiving Him into our hearts that is our birth "of God".

Why does the Scripture say "nor of the will of man"? Remember the Scriptures already cited about God KNOWING man, a verb which in the OT preceeded giving birth. When God in His unimaginable love (that He should call us Sons of God; 1 John 3:1) unites with a man, a Son of God is born. It was the man's will for something this wonderful to happen, but it was not the man's will that made this happen; it is impossible for any man to will into existence something that is far beyond his wildest dreams!

Newton: In Matthew 19:25-26, the disciples asked Christ who can be saved? And Jesus responded to the question by saying that with man that is impossible, but by God's power, and that's a loose paraphrase, or by the grace of God, people can be saved. So salvation lies in the good hands of God.

Leach: The fact that a music student cannot teach himself does not prove that children have no choice whether to become music students! The fact that we cannot save ourselves does not mean we have no power to choose for or against God!

Newton: In Romans 3:10-18, the apostle teaches that no one understands; no one searches for God. Man has an hostility to God. In Romans 5:6, the apostle affirms that Christ died for us when we were still powerless...

Leach: These passages do not affect the free will v. predestination debate. "No one understands; no one searches for God" applies to all, both the righteous-through-God's-mercy and the unrepentent wicked. It applies to the "righteous" regardless of whether they are righteous by choice or whether they are righteous by God's pre-conception predestination.

Actually the Bible records different shades of this statement. Ezekiel 14:14-20 actually lists three exceptions to this statement: Noah, Daniel and Job. Their own righteousness was sufficient to save them, the bible says! Ecclesiastes 7:27-28 sets the number of, apparently, the righteous, much higher: "Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found."

But you see, the three figures are all close enough to zero that one cannot reasonably fault the Bible for inconsistency on this score.

Yes, Christ died for us when we were "without strength". But Newton denies it is the cross that saves anyone anyway. Newton says that in addition to the cross, Jesus must come along and, case by case, soul by soul, from now through the end of the earth, resurrect souls utterly dead to His call, and drag them to heaven in opposition to their inclinations.

Newton: B. The Bible teaches that belief in free will is a sign of mental delusion. In Galatians 3:3, Paul laments, when addressing the Galatians, that they have been bewitched and taken captive to false doctrine. Because they believe that they could advance their Christian life by the power of their will.

Leach: This passage is about "the works of the law" versus "faith". It doesn't say anything about free will, unless it does so by some stretch which I will need help fathoming.

Newton: C. Biblical metaphors present people to be spiritually and morally dead. In

Ephesians 2:1, people are presented as dead in their sins and trespasses. In John 8:47, 12:40, and Matthew 13:13-16, people are presented as unable to see and hear the Biblical Gospel. In Romans 6:19-20, and 7:25, people are presented as slaves to godless passions which render their wills impotent to obey God or receive His grace.

Leach: Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins..." There is no reason to assume this means "dead to any possibility of crying out to God in faith". It fits Paul's oft-mentioned concept of being "under sentence of death".

John 8:47 "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." The issue is whether one becomes "of God" by RECEIVING Him, or by BEING DRAGGED by Him. This verse does not really address that issue.

John 12:40, "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." See my discussion of this Isaiah 6:9-10 passage in Chapter 4.

Matthew 13:13-16, this cites the same passage in Isaiah.

Romans 6:19-20, 7:25: as already discussed, Romans does not say our wills cannot obey God, but the opposite: that "with the mind I myself SERVE the law of God". 7:25. It is our flesh that cannot obey. But 7:25 and 8:1 tell us that if we "walk after the spirit" "there is...no condemnation" for us.

Newton: D. The Bible teaches that people become Christians because God saves them when HE wants to. John 5:21, Christ says, "The Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." John 17:2, "For you granted Him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him."

Leach: John 5:21-22 says "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:"

This is similar to Ephesians 2:1, where the "dead" whom Jesus "quickens" appears to mean we who were under sentence of death, or were not born again, or who did not have Eternal Life. The fact that "the Son quickeneth whom he will" is consistent with my previous discussion of the discretion God has in bestowing His mercy. See chapter 5. There is no reason to assume this verse portrays Jesus making his decision whom "he will" quicken before people are even conceived. In fact, Jesus Himself said "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John 12:47-48. This portrays with little interest, really, in picking and choosing whom to save; but merely wanting to set forth an objective road map to salvation, and to plead with every creature that they follow it.

Newton: The same is taught in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me", Ephesians 2:1-10, Romans 9:16, it does not depend on a man who runs, or wills, but God who has mercy.

We simply do not understand how any of the Bible verses that I just quoted can be true if people have the power to reject Christ when they want to do so. Because we believe the Bible teaches that Christ saves people when HE wants to. And both propositions, of course, cannot be true.

E. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign over everyone, and that he is especially sovereign in salvation. Ephesians 1:11, "[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Phillipians 2:13, "It is God who works in you to will and do what is according to his good pleasure."

(Later Newton added this paragraph:) I can't let the Phillipians 4:13 passage go by. Paul made it very clear in Phillipians 2:13 that Christ was ruler over all God's creation, and "It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to His good pleasure." We therefore would

see his words in 4:13, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength", to be consistent with what he has already affirmed in 2:13. [In other words,] He can do all things through Christ who strengthens him only because God worked in him to will and to act; and that he, left to himself, would perish.

Leach: Ephesians 1:11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will". This is almost identical to Romans 8:29. If I am right about that, then the word "predestination" here, too, refers not to a plan laid out before our first conception, but at the time of our second conception, when we were Born Again. And what God is working out after the counsel of his own will, to which this verse is referring, is the shaping of our actions to conform more and more with our spiritual intentions.

Philippians 2:13 states the same idea, but adds that it isn't just a matter of conforming our actions to our good intentions, but our spiritual maturation also requires reworking our wills after God's will. Newton wants this verse to say that EVERY act of will, including that by which we initially received Christ, was the work of God, so that there was never any genuine choice on the part of anybody. But this verse does not demand such an interpretation.

It is a common, natural prayer to WANT God to conform our wills to his own. This doesn't take away from the genuineness of our desire. Even Jesus prayed, "not my will, but thine be done."

Newton: This is also consistent with Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in me will carry it onto completion to the day of Christ Jesus." Here Paul was saying God is not only the author of the Christian life initially, but then carries the Christian life through to the day of completion by the grace of Christ Jesus.

Leach: It's a partnership, or why did Jesus warn us so often that we must "watch"?

Newton: The same doctrine of God's sovereign dominion over all nations and all individuals is affirmed in Job 42:2, Psalm 103:19, 22, Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 46:10, Daniel 4:34-35, Matthew 28:18, where the sovereign dominion of Christ, and His authority over all creation, is affirmed in the Great Commission.

Ephesians 1:22-23, where it is ascribed to Christ that His name is above every name. He has all authority on Heaven and in Earth. Has been granted to Him. We have an "etc" because these verses are only representative and not exhaustive.

The idea of free will, as defined above, subordinates God's will to man's will. The popular idea of free will assumes that man is sovereign over God in salvation, in contradiction of the above Bible passages.

F. The Bible teaches that people are like clay in the hands of God their potter Isaiah 64:8, Romans 9:19-21, Jeremiah 18:5-7. The Bible also declares that the ungodly renounce God's right to be the potter and to mold them as He pleases. Isaiah 29:15, 16, 45:9-10.

G. The Bible teaches that no one can be saved by obedience to the law, even the command to have faith in Christ. Galatians 3:21, John 6:28-29. The work of God is to have faith in Christ. We believe the idea that people simply become Christians upon willing to become a Christian is simply a false assumption that salvation is based upon obedience to the law, contrary to Romans 3:20, which declares that through obedience to the law, no one will be saved.

H. The radical and extensive nature of regeneration implies that becoming a Christian is much more than a mere decision to allow Christ to become one's personal savior. For a person to become a Christian he must be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, John 3:5-8, resurrected from the dead by the grace of God in Christ, Ephesians 2:4-6, and made to see and hear by the power of God, Matthew 13:16.

Before a person can thus be enabled to believe the gospel, they must be given a new heart, their eyes must be enabled to see, they must be born again, and they must be

regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:26, 27, 31, II Corinthians 4:6, 1 Peter 1:23, Titus 3:3-7, II Thessalonians 2:13-14. Regeneration is a powerful and gracious act of God through which God sovereignly enables a person to become a Christian through faith in Christ. It is not a mere decision, or motion of the human will. It is a will that has been compelled to decide for Christ by the sovereignty of God's grace.

I. The Bible simply does not teach that people have free will. There is not one verse in the Bible that teaches that people have the ability and power to reject or accept God's grace when they want to do so.

Leach: What an amazing statement! The Bible is packed with stories of people from Adam to the armies of Antichrist who accepted and rejected God's grace to varying degrees! There are many stories where God declared His intention, and then someone prayed, and our gracious God altered His plans to accommodate their request! I can't imagine how anyone can read all these stories with the assumption that all these human decisions were really made by God before the Bible characters were born, and they were helpless to alter their own actions or wills! Scripture so strongly implies that all these decisions and actions were real and initiated by the people whom the Bible says made them.

I would think that the concentration required to read one thing, and interpret a thing so contrary, would hurt.

Newton: J. How can God hold people accountable if they do not have a free will? People are accountable to God because he created them, and not because of some presumed degree of moral ability. Romans 9:19-20. It is ungodly to hold God accountable to our understanding of justice. Romans 9:20-21, 11:33-36.

Notes to myself:

Baptist Confession of Faith, with Scripture Proofs adopted by the Ministers and Messengers of the General Assembly which met in London in 1689:

"Things most surely believed among us: 3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ (7), to the praise of his glorious grace;(8) others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.(9).

7: 1 Timothy 5:21, "I charge thee before...the elect [eklekton, chosen, or choice; can mean either the chooser, or the one chosen; same word as eklesia, translated the church] angels..."

Comment: "Many are called, but few are chosen" is Jesus conclusion of a parable in which it is clearly those who choose to accept the King's invitation who enter Heaven, while those who choose to reject Him are cursed. The "elect" angels means those who chose to remain with God.

Matt 25:34 "...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."  
Comment: the 1689 Baptists emphasized "prepared for YOU" from creation; but more reasonable grammatical construction would emphasize "prepared...from the foundation of the world", and God and I now offer it to YOU.

(8) Ephesians 1:5-6 "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Comment: Verse 4, also, says He chose us before the foundation of the world. This means He chose to offer us eternity with Him.

Not to impose Himself on those who hate Him. Verse 5, in other words, "Having ALREADY FASHIONED us into His children..."

(9) Romans 9:22-23, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory," I think a "vessel of wrath" alludes to something like a toilet, which are fired ceramics to this day, and which in those days could not be used long before they had to be discarded, since they could not be sanitized, being mostly unglazed. I will not be ashamed to serve God as a toilet! Toilets are incredibly important! But even God's toilets choose their eternal destiny, if not their earthly mission and talents.

Jude 4 "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, ..." Greek *progegrammenoi*, or "God's Judgment upon men like this was written long ago in God's Word".

Next in the Baptist confession: "4. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished." (2 Timothy 2:19 John 13:18.)

Jeremiah 1:5

Galatians 1:15-16, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen"

Does this indicate God pegged Paul for Heaven when he was called?

Reveal His son, not to Paul, but *in* Paul "within, among, in, upon, into."

## Free Will, or Predestination?

They go through the processes of decision making *just as if* they think they have volition which will affect how their decisions come out.

Their emotions sometimes reach levels rivaling enthusiasm, *just as if* they believe their emotions are their own and not, after all, forced upon them by some molecules.

I guess Determinists are supposed to believe they have no volition while living *just as if* they believe they do. Everything a Determinist does should be done *just as if* he believes he has a free will.

So I guess I won't even disagree with them if I write *just as if* I believe Determinism is a bunch of phuey.

The religious counterpart of Determinism is Predestination, which maintains that it is *God* that makes everything happen without anybody having any ability to think or choose or do anything for themselves.

Yet predestinationists, too, worry about things *just as if* they thought their failure to stay alert, or to work hard to make a deadline, had the power to change the future for the worse.