

Good News
about
Predestination!

by Royce Frederick

Dear Reader,

This study is offered with love and respect for you and for every person who seeks to understand God's will and honor Him in their life.

As you begin this study, please consider some thoughts about "feelings" and how they can hinder us from welcoming God's word.

When God gave us life, He included the ability to feel and react. Our feelings are most intense about things we care about most. That's usually a great blessing, but sometimes a problem. We're likely to have our most intense conflicts with the people we love the most, and about things which matter most. So, in any discussion of God's word, we need to do our best to be gentle, patient, and forgiving (2 Tim. 2:24-26; Eph. 4:32). In this study, it is not our aim to "wrestle" with people, but with ideas which oppose God's word (Eph. 6:12).

There is often a "contest" between our feelings and God's word. In the first century, God's Holy Spirit worked in miraculous ways to guide the infant church and write His message for us. Today, when we study the Bible, we are reading the words of the Holy Spirit. However, our feelings are always with us. Also, there are some teachings of men which urge us to let our inner voice replace the Holy Spirit's written message.

We need to realize that our feelings can deceive us (Jer. 10:23; 17:9; Pr. 16:25; Rom. 10:2). So, we need to do our best to put aside our feelings and carefully listen to everything the Holy Spirit says in His written word. God did not promise to give us new revelations today. But when we seek His help, He will give us wisdom and will help us grow in our understanding of His written word (see Js. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:7). Saving faith comes by hearing His word (Rom. 10:17). Please remember that every verse quoted in this study is the Holy Spirit's message to us.

It is very important to ask ourselves, "Will I trust my feelings, or will I trust what the Holy Spirit says in His written word? Will I encourage my mate, my children, and others to trust my feelings for their eternal salvation, or will I teach them to trust God and His word?"

After you have read this study, we hope you will keep it for future reference. With that in mind, we have included many scripture references for deeper study, plus a brief index at the back. It is our hope and prayer that this study will be helpful to you as you consider God's word and share it with others.

Please remember that the most loving thing you can do for your family and for others you love is to study and obey God's will to the best of your ability, with His faithful help.

May God bless you in every way, unto His glory.

Yours in His service,

Royce Frederick

Good News about Predestination!

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What would you say if someone asked, “Do you believe in predestination?”
Would you answer “Yes” or “No”? Actually, it would be helpful to ask, “What do you *mean* by ‘predestination’?”

Does the Bible teach “predestination”? YES.

Does “predestination” in the Bible mean God has decided your eternal destiny **without your free choice**? NO.

What is “Predestination”?

“Predestination” refers to the fact that *God decided many events before they occurred*. For example, He predestined Israel’s seventy-year captivity in Babylon, the decree of Cyrus for their return, the death of Jesus for our sins, His return to raise all the dead, and the judgment day (Jer. 29:10; Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4; 53; 1 Pet. 1:18-21; Acts 2:23-24; Matt. 24:36; Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 17:31). The Bible also talks about *our* predestination. The focus of this study is about *how each person’s eternal destiny is decided*.

Why is Predestination Misunderstood?

Some parts of “predestination” are difficult. At the end of a discussion which included predestination, Paul wrote, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD?...’*” (Rom. 11:33-34; see Isa. 55:8-9).

Also, several false teachings and mistakes have caused much confusion about predestination.

Although we cannot know all of God’s mind, He *has* given us *some* information about predestination. We hope this study will help anyone who desires to understand *more* of what God *wants us to know* about this topic.

False Teachings Arose about Grace and Predestination

“Grace” is “undeserved favor.” It is kindness toward a person who does not deserve it. By His grace, God showers us with marvelous gifts *every day*. Our *greatest* interest is in God’s gift of grace in *forgiving our sins*.

After God finished revealing the Bible through His prophets, several false teachings arose about grace:

- (1) Powerful men eventually took control of many churches, and some of them taught the false idea that *church leaders* have power to *grant* and *withhold* God’s grace.
- (2) Some leaders taught that a person can *earn* forgiveness of sins by various kinds of actions.
- (3) Some leaders even taught that a person could *buy* forgiveness of sins with money.
- (4) In the 1300’s A.D., and especially by the 1500’s, courageous “reformers” arose and opposed many of the false teachings. But some of *their* teachings departed from God’s word *in other ways*. One reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564), strongly opposed the false teachings about grace. However, his teachings about *grace and predestination* contain many serious mistakes. Some of his teachings are called “Calvinism.” The acronym “**TULIP**” is a memory tool for the main points of his teachings on grace and predestination:

Total depravity — Like some earlier men, Calvin said all babies are born with *sin* inherited from Adam. Also, Calvinism says all people are born *totally depraved (empty) of any ability to choose righteousness*, unable to accept any *offer* of grace through faith in Christ.

Unconditional election — Calvinism says God *elected* (chose) which persons He would save, with *no conditions* (requirements) for them to do anything before salvation. It says He chose those people and saves them *based on His choice only*, not based on their faith or His foreknowledge of their faith. So, Calvinism actually teaches that salvation is decided *by grace only, without faith* (before faith) — *not* like Eph. 2:8, which says salvation is by *grace through faith*.

Limited atonement — Calvinism says Jesus died to atone *for only the sins of the people God chose*. It says God predestined all other people to *eternal punishment*, and it says Jesus did not die for them.

Irresistible grace — Calvinism says God saves the chosen persons *by overpowering them with His grace*, and they *cannot choose to resist it*. This is sometimes called a “direct operation of the Holy Spirit.”

Perseverance of the saints — Calvinism says every chosen person (every saint on earth) will *persevere* (continue) with God and *cannot choose to leave Him*. This is sometimes called “eternal security,” “once saved, always saved,” and “the impossibility of apostasy.”

Consider the *delicate craftsmanship* of Calvinism. Many of the points *depend* on other points. If one point fails, others fail. In fact, *every point fails the test of God’s word*. “Calvin’s Predestination” is false. Regarding the eternal destiny of people, God’s word shows that:

- (1) “predestination **based on** free choice” is **true**.
- (2) “predestination **without** free choice” is **false**.

Today, many sincere people believe Calvinism — or *parts* of it, with some changes. So, when someone asks if we believe in predestination, we need to ask, “Do you mean Calvin’s Predestination or Bible predestination?” We need to prayerfully examine Calvin’s teachings and “*test all things*” in the light of God’s word (1 Thess. 5:21). We appreciate all who seek to honor God, and we pray that this study will be helpful to you.

Good News about the word “PREDESTINED”!

“Predestined” is used four times in the New King James translation: Rom. 8:29, 8:30, Eph. 1:5, and 1:11. It combines “pre” (before) and “destined” (determined, decided). The original Greek word in those verses is “*proorizo*,” which combines “pro” (before) and “determine.” In Greek and in English, the meaning is “**decided before.**”

A Mistake: When people hear the word “predestined,” many people **add an extra idea** which is *not* part of the word. Many people automatically think: “decided before **without man’s free choice.**”

The word “predestined” *does not include any information* about God’s *reasons* for His decisions. It means “already decided.” It does not say “with free choice” or “without free choice.” The word “predestined” does not reveal anything about *the basis* for God’s decisions.

The same is true of other words in verses about predestination, such as: purposed, promised, prepared, chose (elected), appointed, preappointed, ordained, foreordained, and determined. These words do *not* all have the exact same meaning. But in the original Greek and in English, all of these words *are* alike in *one* way: They *all* contain **no information about the reasons** for God’s decisions regarding future events.

Sometimes God tells us the *basis or reasons* for *some* of His decisions. If we want to learn about those reasons, we must study the verse where the word occurs, the nearby verses, and other parts of the Bible.

It is good news to know that the word “predestined” **does not mean**, “God has decided to send some people to eternal punishment *without giving them a choice.*” The word “predestined” *does not* mean, “God has decided my eternal destiny *without giving me a choice.*”

Good News about FOREKNOWLEDGE!

God’s decisions come from His divine nature. He is “love,” holy, just, omnipotent (all-powerful), and omniscient (all-knowing). “*Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite*” (Ps. 147:5)!

A Mistake: When thinking about “predestination,” some people fail to consider, or fail to believe, God’s ability to “foreknow.”

The Bible is full of prophecies about events which God planned, which later occurred exactly as He had said. He foretells many future events as *facts* — “future history.” He “...calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom. 4:17), “*declaring the end from the beginning...*” (Isa. 46:10). “*Known to God from eternity are all His works*” (Acts 15:18). God foreknew **His works**.

Does God **also** foreknow all of **your works and my works**? We may never learn the answers to all of our questions about this. But God *does* tell us *some* things about His knowledge and foreknowledge.

God knows us. “...God knows your hearts...” (Lk. 16:15; see 1 Kgs. 8:39; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24). Jesus “knew all men” (Jn. 2:24); “...the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: *‘The Lord knows those who are His’...*” (2 Tim. 2:19). “...God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 Jn. 3:20).

God is able to foreknow us. “...Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him” (Jn. 6:64); “...other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice...” (Jn. 10:16). “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...” (Rom. 11:2). “...And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul... ‘speak, and do not keep silent...for I have many people in this city’ ” (Acts 18:8-10). Those verses tell us that the Lord foreknew the hearts of many other people in Corinth who would obey the gospel. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...” (Rom. 8:28-29); “...To the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God...” (1 Pet. 1:1-2). God is able to foreknow us.

These verses tell us that **God’s foreknowledge is the basis** for His decisions about “predestined” and “elect” people: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...” (Rom. 8:29); “...elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God...” (1 Pet. 1:2).

What does God foreknow? Does He foreknow *all* of the choices we will make in the future? We could spend a lot of time on these questions and never learn the complete answers. We should be content to know this: God *knows* and *foreknows* **everything He needs to know** to deliver salvation to all people who love Him and choose to obey His gospel.

Later, we will see many verses which show that God’s decisions about our eternal destiny **are also based on our choices**.

Another Mistake: People often think, “If God foreknew us and our choices, His foreknowledge **would cause us** to make those choices.” That is not true. **Foreknowing does not mean fore-causing.** Any foreknowledge God may have about your future choices *does not mean* He made your choices *for you*.

Consider this: Christians “foreknow” that God will destroy the earth by fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Peter says, “...since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall...” (2 Pet. 3:17). Does our foreknowledge *cause* the fire? No. Foreknowing does not mean fore-causing.

Also consider this: Before creation, God **predestined** Jesus to die for our sins. “...He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world...” to be our sacrifice (1 Pet. 1:20). God saves us, “...not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:9). With complete confidence, God placed **all salvation in Christ**. God was *so certain* that Jesus would give His life for us that He refers to Jesus as “...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). In God’s mind, it was *an absolute fact of the future* that Jesus would die for us.

So, when the time came for Him to die, did Jesus have a *choice*? Yes! “...My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life...No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...” (Jn. 10:17-18). When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He told Peter, “...Put your sword in its place...Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:52-53). Jesus did not ask for angels to rescue Him. He *chose* to die because He loved us and loved His Father — which meant obeying His Father. God was able to *foreordain* the sacrifice of Jesus, because He *absolutely foreknew* that Jesus would *freely choose* to obey and give His life for us!

God *also foreknew* the choices of those who would kill Jesus. “Him, being delivered by **the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God**, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:23; see 4:28). God foreknew the choices of these people, but He was not guilty of the “lawless” deed of murdering Jesus. *They were*.

God is able to foreknow us. It is good news to know that His fore-knowledge does not *cause* our choices!

So, every time we read a verse in the Bible which mentions predestination, we need to remember:

- (1) All of the decisions which God has already made are *based on His knowledge and foreknowledge*.
- (2) God has not decided our eternal destiny *without giving us a choice*.

Good News! God MADE PLANS for You & Everyone!

You may hear people say, “God has a plan for your life!” Many of them *mean*, “God has planned every event of your life.” Then, when bad things happen, that idea leads people to say, “Why did God do this to me?”

The Bible *does not* teach that God *causes* every event in your life. He *does continually help* those who love Him (Rom. 8:28; Jer. 29:11). To mature us, sometimes He even sends, or allows, some of our suffering (Heb. 12:1-13). **But there are many other causes of our suffering**, such as: our sins and mistakes, the sins and mistakes of people around us, the sins and mistakes of people who lived before us, accidents of man and nature, and Satan (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Job 2:7; Eccl. 9:11; Gen. 3:16-24; Isa. 59:1-2; Gal. 6:7-8). You are *not a puppet*, with God pulling all the strings. God does not cause every event in your life — all of your choices, all of your actions, and all of the bad things that happen.

But in a different way, God *does* have a plan for your life! He reveals it in the Bible. And, when you humble your heart to obey His word, *He works in marvelous ways* to bless you and use you as an instrument for good!

God PREDESTINED salvation IN CHRIST!

“*Before time began*” (2 Tim. 1:9), God purposed to save us by His grace through the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. This was His “*eternal purpose*” (Eph. 3:11; see 1 Pet. 1:18-21; Rev. 13:8). This plan would allow God to remain **just** (righteous) by punishing sin, and allow Him to **justify** (make righteous) all people who seek refuge **in Christ** through faith (Rom. 3:21-26; 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-29; Heb. 6:18). This was “*...the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory*” (1 Cor. 2:7). He planned “*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs [with Jews], of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*” (Eph. 3:6).

After creation, God began unfolding His plan. He chose Abram and said, “*...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:3). So, even before He made the nation of Israel, God promised to bless people of all nations, not only Jews. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s prophets foretold many parts of His plan (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Finally, at the right time, Jesus came and died for our sins (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:10).

Then Jesus arose from death and appeared “*...to witnesses chosen before by God...*” (Acts 10:41). After Jesus returned to heaven, God fully revealed “*...the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him*” (Eph. 3:11-12). Through His inspired disciples, Jesus finished revealing God’s complete plan (Jn. 16:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). Jesus “*...has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1:10)!

Good News! JESUS DIED for You & Everyone!

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (Jn. 3:16). Jesus became one of us so that “*...He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*” (Heb. 2:9); “*...the free gift came to all men...*” (Rom. 5:18). Jesus “*...gave Himself a ransom for all...*” (1 Tim. 2:6). He “*...is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*” (1 Jn. 2:2). Jesus gave His life as the sacrifice for all people, not just for a limited number of people.

Good News! The Death of Jesus can SAVE You & Anyone!

God does not overpower anyone with His grace, forcing him to accept the sacrifice of Jesus for his sins. Each person must decide to accept it or reject it. Any sinner can have “*...access by faith into this grace...*” (Rom. 5:2).

God PREDESTINED the NEW BIRTH! Paul says those “*...who love God...whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*” (Rom. 8:28-29). “Brethren” means “sons” in the same family. God predestined a way for us to become His children, “brothers” of Jesus in God’s family! At baptism, a sinner enters into Christ spiritually through faith, and into God’s family. Paul reminded Christians, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put*

on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27). This is the new birth (see Jn. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; Tit. 3:5).

Through obedient faith, a sinner receives *the benefit of the death* of Jesus at the moment of baptism. That is when he or she is “*baptized into Christ Jesus...baptized into His death*” (Rom. 6:3).

The next verse shows that baptism is *also* the moment of *new life*! “*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4).

Someone may say, “You trust in your baptism.” No, baptism is the moment when **we trust in God** and surrender to Him. Baptism is an act of faith. The Colossians were “*buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*” (Col. 2:12). Baptism is the moment a sinner receives the gift of salvation and becomes a child of God through faith.

After we have been born into God’s family, we must continue growing spiritually — continue the process of being “*transformed*” into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:17-18).

Does God “Draw” People & “Grant” Salvation by His Choice Only?

In John 6, Jesus said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...*” (Jn. 6:44); “*...no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*” (6:65). Notice two important points about these statements:

- (1) Jesus did not say anything about God granting this to *some* people and not to *others*.
- (2) Jesus did not say anything about God granting this to anyone *without their free choice*.

With the second statement, Jesus **explained why** He made both of the statements: “*‘...The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, ‘Therefore [this is why] I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father’*” (Jn. 6:63-65). Jesus made the two statements because these people **refused to believe** words from God.

Now, knowing that, consider more about His first statement: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me*” (Jn. 6:44-45). Jesus was saying that a person cannot come to Him and salvation unless he allows God to *teach* him. These people were not willing to listen to God’s word.

Earlier, Jesus had said, “*You search the Scriptures [the Old Testament], for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life*” (Jn. 5:39-40). “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*” (Jn. 5:46-47; see Lk. 16:29-31; 24:27). They refused to hear, learn, and believe the Old Testament prophecies from God *about* Jesus. And, they refused to believe the words from God delivered by Jesus. *No one can come to Jesus* unless he is willing to listen to God’s word and *allow God to draw him through His message of love*.

Good news! *Anyone* who desires to do God’s will can *learn* it and come to Jesus. “*If anyone wants [desires] to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God...*” (Jn. 7:17).

Good News! God Wants to DRAW You & Everyone to Christ!

Does God need to *force* His grace upon us to save us? Or, does *His love* have the power to *draw* us to Him and salvation in Christ? To Old Testament Israel, God said, “*...I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you*” (Jer. 31:3).

God *draws us* to Jesus by His love at the cross! “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself*” (Jn. 12:32). God’s great love **does have the power** to draw hearts to Jesus! He allowed Himself to be “*lifted up from the earth*” on the cross for us! The heart of the “*gospel*” is the “*good news*” that Jesus died for our sins, then arose; “*...the gospel of Christ...is the power of God to salvation...*” (Rom. 1:16). Obedient faith is the *response* of a humble heart to God’s message of love.

“*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures...But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Titus 3:3-5). Here, the “*love of God*” primarily refers to the moment when

God gave His Son for us. And, “*through the washing of regeneration*” refers to the moment of baptism, when God washes away a person’s sins by the blood of Christ. At that moment, a sinner is born again, regenerated, “*born of water and the Spirit*” (Jn. 3:5; see Acts 8:35-39; Gal. 3:26-27).

The cross is God’s greatest expression of love! “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (Jn. 3:16)! Millions of people love God because they heard the good news of His great love for us at the cross! We love Him “*...because He first loved us*” (1 Jn. 4:19)!

Who Are “THE CALLED”?

When talking about the *unfolding of God’s plan* for all people, the Bible tells about some people who were “*called*” for special kinds of work. For example, Jesus “*...went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach*” (Mk. 3:13-14; see Acts 13:2; Rom. 1:1; Heb. 11:8). The apostles’ work was for all of us, but Jesus did not call all people to be His apostles.

In contrast, when talking about *eternal salvation*, the Bible **does not say** God called only some people whom He *wanted*, and did not call others whom He *did not want*. Many verses show that God wants *all* people to be saved, and He calls *all* people to Christ.

“*The called*” refers to every person who has *responded* to God’s invitation. It emphasizes that they are people whom God wanted, invited, and welcomed! It shows that every person who comes to Him is very dear and important! “*The called*” are not people who came without an invitation. “*The called*” are people who came because they had an invitation from the Creator of the universe and from His Son, the King of Kings!

Peter reminds Christians that they had chosen to obey the gospel: “*...you have purified your souls in obeying the truth...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God...Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you*” (1 Pet. 1:22-23, 25). Later, he tells them, “*...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy*” (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Like the term “the called,” these statements declare that all people who have obeyed the gospel are very special to God!

In the New Testament, “*the called*” are all people who, **through faith and love**, have chosen to answer God’s gospel call: “*...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). “*...God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel...*” (2 Thess. 2:13-14). We become “*...partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*” (Eph. 3:6). “*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*” (Eph. 1:11-13). These verses show that “*the called*” are those who heard the gospel, believed it, loved God, and **chose to trust Him** for salvation. All who answer the call of the gospel are “*the called*”: “*...the gospel...is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...*” (Rom. 1:16).

Good News! God Wants to SAVE You & Everyone!

Paul wrote, “*...He has mercy on whom He wills...*” (Rom. 9:18). This verse is *not* talking about how God decides *each person’s eternal destiny*. We will examine Romans 9-11 later in this study.

However, consider one question now about *how* this verse *would apply* to each person’s eternal destiny:

Q: **On whom** does God *will* (choose) to have mercy for eternal salvation?

A: God is willing to have mercy for eternal salvation **on all people!**

GOD WANTS to save you. He is “*...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pet. 3:9; see Ezek. 33:11). He “*...desires all men to be saved...*” (1 Tim. 2:4). He wants people to “*...seek the Lord, in the hope [God “hopes”!] that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*” (Acts 17:27).

GOD is SEEKING you. Jesus came “*...to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Lk. 19:10); “*...the Father is seeking such to worship Him*” (Jn. 4:23). Peter told Jews that God sent Jesus “*...to bless you,*

in turning away **every one of you** from your iniquities” (Acts 3:26).

GOD INVITES you and all people. “Come to Me, **all you** who labor and are heavy laden...” (Matt. 11:28); “...**as though God were pleading** through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20); “...the Spirit and the bride say, ‘**Come!**’ And let him who hears say, ‘**Come!**’ And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever desires**, let him take the water of life **freely**” (Rev. 22:17). “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared **to all men**” (Titus 2:11). “...Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **every creature**. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:15-16). There is *no* false advertising in the gospel! There are **no people** to whom God “offers” salvation, while knowing that He has already decided to send them to eternal punishment. God truly invites **all!** If each person’s eternal destiny depended only on God’s will — on His choice only — every person would be saved, “For there is **no partiality** with God” (Rom. 2:11).

God REJOICES when you or anyone accepts His offer of grace! There is “...**joy in heaven...joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents**” (Lk. 15:7, 10; see 20-24)!

Do Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2 Teach “Total Depravity”?

In Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2, does Paul teach that every person is born “totally depraved” — unable to understand and obey the gospel *until* God sends the Holy Spirit upon him?

Romans 8:7 — “Because **the carnal mind** is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, **nor indeed can be.**”

1 Corinthians 2:14-15 — “But **the natural man** does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know them**, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.”

The Speakers — A portion of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is about the *speakers* through whom God revealed His message: “...my speech and my preaching...we speak the wisdom of God...But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit...These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches...” (1 Cor. 2:4, 7, 10, 13; see 1:17, 23). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets, including Paul, to guide them “into all truth” (Jn. 16:13). The Holy Spirit had even given the miraculous gift of *prophecy* to some of the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14). In Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is saying sinners should *receive* God’s word, and Christians should *grow* by it, because it is *God’s inspired word*, not words of mere men speaking human wisdom.

The Hearers — Paul talks about two kinds of hearers with *bad attitudes*:

(1) **Some who did not obey the gospel:** Some thought they were “wise” and the gospel was “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18-31). To others, the cross was “a stumbling block” (1:23). Many leaders rejected Jesus, but “...the common people heard Him gladly” (Mk. 12:37; see Lk. 10:21).

(2) **Some who did obey the gospel, but did not grow spiritually:** Paul says the Corinthians should have been growing more “mature” (1 Cor. 2:6; see Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:17-18). “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to **carnal** [fleshly, as in Rom. 8:7], as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for **you are still carnal**. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3; see 14:20-40). Later, Paul reminded them, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...?” (1 Cor. 6:19). **They had the Holy Spirit living in them, but that did not make them “spiritual.”** They still needed to mature by *setting their minds* on spiritual things.

God does not *set* a person’s heart to be evil or good *against his will* — *without his free choice*. Before and after baptism, *we are responsible* for our own attitudes toward God and His word: “Therefore take heed how you hear...” (Lk. 8:18). “If **anyone** has an ear, let him hear” (Rev. 13:9).

The *message* about the love of Christ at the cross has a powerful effect on good and honest hearts: “But the ones [seeds] that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with **a noble and good heart**, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15; see 8:8). Each person chooses to be good soil, or not, by the attitude of his heart. Jesus also said, “Either **make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit**” (Matt. 12:33). Each person must choose whether to be a good tree or a bad tree.

We set our own hearts to receive or reject God’s word (Mk. 7:9; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:20-21, 28; 1 Thess.

2:13; 4:7-8; Matt. 10:14; Lk. 18:17; Jn. 3:11; 12:48-50; 17:8; 2 Thess. 2:10; Acts 2:41; Phil. 2:5; Jas. 1:21). Before and after baptism, each person decides whether to “set” his mind on fleshly things or spiritual things (Rom. 12:16; Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:1-3; Gal. 6:7-8).

*“For those who live according to the flesh **set their minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”* (Rom. 8:5-6). Christians need to continue the **transforming process** by setting our minds on God’s will so we can continually grow more “spiritual” and less “carnal” (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Are People Saved by “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”?

Cornelius and his friends were Gentiles (non-Jews, “Greeks”). In Acts 10, they were baptized (immersed, overwhelmed) in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-16; 1:4-5; 2:1-4). Some people believe this was a “direct operation of the Holy Spirit” which suddenly *saved* them. Some also believe they were saved without their free choice.

However, a closer look shows they were not saved by the miracle, and not saved without free choice. When the Holy Spirit overwhelmed them, the miracle did not remove their sins — did not purify their hearts (compare Num. 22:27-30). An angel had told Cornelius that he would hear “...**words** by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). They would be saved by the **words** of the **gospel**, which is “...**the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). **Cornelius and his friends already knew** that God had given the good news of peace to Jews through Jesus (Acts 10:36-37). On this day, God would give that *same* good news to them — to Gentiles!

God knew the hearts of these Gentiles. After this event, the Bible tells us, “...*God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*” (Acts 15:8-9). The miracle “*acknowledged*” their hearts, and faith “*purified*” their hearts.

Instead of removing sins, the miracle *removed prejudice* from the hearts of Jewish believers. They — including Peter — had resisted preaching to Gentiles. But when God sent Peter to Cornelius, he went and preached the gospel. “*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision [Jews] who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...*” (Acts 10:44-48). By the miracle, God revealed *His* heart and *their* hearts. *He* wanted them in His family, and *they* believed His gospel. The miracle silenced anyone who would want to “*forbid water*” — prevent the baptism of Gentiles. After the miracle, seeing that they were ready to obey, Peter “...*commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...*” Their hearts were **purified by obedient faith**, cleansed by the blood of Christ, when they obeyed that command from their hearts (15:9; see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4; Mk. 16:16; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:7).

God “*made no distinction*” between Jews and Gentiles in how He purified their hearts (Acts 15:9). Peter told Jews the purpose of baptism: “...*Repent, and let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...Then those who **gladly received his word** were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them*” (Acts 2:38, 41). There is “*one baptism*” (Eph. 4:4). So, the hearts of the Jews and Gentiles were **purified by faith** when they were baptized in water “*for the remission of sins.*”

After Acts 10, some Jewish believers in Jerusalem opposed Peter for going to Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18). He answered them by telling about the miracle. Then he asked, “ ‘...**who was I that I could withstand God?**’ *When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’* ” (Acts 11:17-18). So, in Acts 11, we again see that the Acts 10 miracle **silenced all objections** from Jewish believers about preaching to Gentiles. This event cleared the way for other Gentiles to hear the gospel and enter the kingdom of Christ through obedient faith!

Baptism in the Holy Spirit was *an event*. It occurred only two times. The apostles gave miraculous gifts to many Christians who were selected by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 6:6-8; 8:14-24; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Cor. 12:1-11). But only Jesus could baptize in the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 3:11). In Acts 2, Jesus baptized the *speakers* in the Holy Spirit, which helped remove the prejudice of the *hearers*. In Acts 10, He

baptized the *hearers* in the Holy Spirit, which helped remove the prejudice of the *speaker* and others.

God never says His grace will suddenly overwhelm you, *with or without your choice*, and make you **feel saved**. In the New Testament, He never tells a sinner to **wait for salvation to overwhelm him** or happen to him. He never tells sinners to “pray through” until salvation comes upon them.

Do we love God because He overpowered us by His grace and Spirit *without our free choice*? No. “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 Jn. 4:19)! Love from *God’s* own heart causes love from *our* own hearts. The gospel is the good news of His love! His message has the power to turn humble hearts to Him! When we obey the gospel, our hearts are freely responding to God’s love. Paul reminds Christians, “...*you obeyed from the heart...*” (Rom. 6:17-18). Obeying the gospel is a decision from the heart of a person who is *drawn to Jesus by His love at the cross*.

Instead of telling people to wait, God’s word says exactly the opposite: “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (Js. 4:10)!

Is Faith a “Gift” Which God “Grants” to Some, but Not to Others?

Is faith a “gift”? Paul reminded Christians at Philippi, “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*” (Phil. 1:29). The Christians in Achaia “*had believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Yes. Faith is a gift.

However, the Bible never says God suddenly puts faith inside *some* lost people, but not others, *without their free choice*.

Every part of salvation is a “gift” — a “grant” which we do not deserve. God does not owe us anything. He never has, and He never will. **God does not owe us evidence of His power and love**. But He grants us overwhelming evidence in the heavens, on earth, and in our lives (Ps. 19:1-6; Job 38-41; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20; Matt. 5:45). **God did not owe us evidence that Jesus is His Son**. But He granted us abundant evidence through prophecies, miracles, and eye-witnesses (Lk. 24:44-45; Jn. 3:1-2; 10:37-38; 20:27-31; Acts 4:33; Rom. 1:4; Heb. 2:3-4). **God did not owe us the life of His Son**. But He granted the life of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins — “*while we were still sinners*” (Rom. 5:8; see Jn. 3:16; Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8). **God did not owe us a way to repent**, a way to turn to Christ and eternal life. But He “*...has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*” (Acts 11:18; compare Heb. 12:16-17).

God did not owe us the Bible — nor the faith it produces. Faith would not be possible if God had not given us the marvelous gift of His word. Jude shows us that “*the faith*” is a gift. He writes about “*...the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). Here, “*the faith*” refers to *the message*, because that is what *produces* faith: “*...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). All of God’s faith-producing message is given to us in the Bible. “*...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*” (2 Pet. 1:3; see Jn. 16:12-13).

The Bible — and the faith it produces — are gifts of God’s grace. God grants faith to anyone who will gladly receive His message.

Does Psalm 51:5 say Babies are Born Guilty?

In Psalm 51:5, David writes, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*” Is he teaching that all babies are born guilty of sin? First, notice that he is not talking about *all* babies. He says, “*I*” and “*me.*”

David is using a *tool of language* called “hyperbole” (pronounced “high-per-buh-lee”). It is from “hyper” (over or beyond) and “ballein” (to throw). Hyperbole is *exaggeration for emphasis*. It is a statement which *goes far beyond the facts* to draw attention to *the real message*.

Hyperbole is often used today. For example, a mother tells her son, “I’ve told you *a million times* not to hit your sister!” Or a man sees an old friend and says, “I haven’t seen you in *a hundred years!*” Both of these people are *greatly over-stating* the facts. But they are not deceiving anyone. Their *true messages* are clear and emphatic.

Luke uses hyperbole: “*For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing*” (Acts 17:21). Does that mean *no one* in Athens cooked, ate, slept, bought vegetables, or did any other work? Certainly not. Luke uses hyperbole to emphasize the fact that people in Athens devoted *an extreme amount of time* to telling and hearing new things.

David uses hyperbole in another psalm: *“The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies”* (Ps. 58:3). Have you ever heard a baby talk on the day it was born? A newborn baby cannot tell lies — or even say one word. David uses hyperbole to emphasize the *true message* that these people have been wicked *for a very long time*. But notice that he does not say they are *born* guilty. Instead, he says *“They go astray”* — *after* they are born.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah (2 Sam. 11). In Psalm 51, he is confessing his evil deeds and telling God how deeply sorrowful he is. He is pouring out the feelings of a broken, contrite heart (a “bruised” heart): *“...I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight”* (51:3-4). *“Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God...”* (51:14). David is not saying he inherited sin from Adam or from anyone else. He is not blaming other people. He is doing the exact opposite. He is accepting all of the blame and guilt. He is confessing his own evil deeds. He is using hyperbole in verse 5 to emphasize that he is *a very, very bad, sinful person*.

We need the same kind of sorrow for *our* sins. That is what leads us to repentance and the joy of salvation (2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 17:30; 2:38; 8:39).

Good News! ALL BABIES are Born Innocent!

Sin is not in the flesh of babies. God made us with many natural desires which can be fulfilled in godly ways. For example, see Heb. 13:4 and 1 Cor. 7:1-5. However, *“the flesh is weak”* (Matt. 26:41; see Rom. 6:19; 7:7-25). We often yield to our fleshly desires and fulfill them in sinful ways (Jas. 1:14-15; Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16-24; Eph. 2:3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 2 Pet. 2:18). Our flesh is certainly an avenue of many temptations. But “sin” and “guilt” are not *in* our flesh when we are born.

Jesus became flesh (Jn. 1:14). We are flesh, and *“...He Himself likewise shared in the same...”* (Heb. 2:14; see 5:7). Actually, He was even *“born of the seed of David according to the flesh”* (Rom. 1:3). Yet, He was sinless (Heb. 4:15). He had no sin at birth, and we have none at birth.

Sin is an action. *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness...”* (1 Jn. 3:4). We can inherit a color of hair, but not an action. Sin can *“defile the flesh”* (Jude 8; see 7); *“...he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body”* (1 Cor. 6:18). We need to *“put to death the deeds [actions] of the body”* and *“the works [actions] of the flesh”* (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19).

Sin is not inherited. In the Garden of Eden, sin was committed by all people on the earth at that time — by your parents and mine, Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). Eve was deceived, but Adam *knowingly* chose to sin (1 Tim. 2:14). That day, you and I also suffered some terrible losses.

The sins and mistakes of parents can make their children’s lives very difficult. For example, a rich man gambles and loses all of his money, houses, and land. That same day, his children also lose those things. They will never inherit the things which could have helped their lives.

Adam’s sin caused *all* of us to *lose* the beautiful Garden of Eden — and access to the tree of life. His action brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12; 3:23; 6:23; Heb. 9:27). So, we inherit some of the **results** of Adam’s sin. But we do not inherit his *act* of sin, nor the *guilt* of it. The sin and guilt of a man cannot be inherited by his children: *“...The son shall not bear the guilt of the father...”* (Ezek. 18:20).

Infants cannot sin — and they cannot obey the gospel. They are not able to believe, repent (“decide to turn” from sin), confess Christ, or obey the command of baptism *“from the heart”* (see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4).

Jesus showed that infants are sinless when He said, *“...of such is the kingdom of God”* (Mk. 10:14; see Matt. 18:3-4).

Good News! God will NOT Punish YOU for HIS Choices!

If Calvin’s Predestination were true, all lost people on the judgment day could blame God. They could say that the reason for their eternal punishment is because God did not choose to save them. But Calvin’s Predestination is not true. So, no one will be able to blame God that day. God will *not* send you to eternal punishment based on a choice which *He alone* made, without your free choice. *“...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Gen. 18:25).

The Bible emphatically teaches that God holds us responsible for our own choices: *“...whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Gal. 6:7-8). *“For we must all appear before*

the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus “...will reward each **according to his works**” (Matt. 16:27); “...if anyone hears My words and **does not believe**...the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:47-48). “So then each of us shall **give account of himself to God**” (Rom. 14:12); “...he who does wrong will be repaid **for what he has done**, and there is **no partiality**” (Col. 3:25). God “...**without partiality judges according to each one’s work**...” (1 Pet. 1:17). Jesus could come at any time, and He says, “...My reward is with Me, to give to every one **according to his work**” (Rev. 22:12; see 2:23; 20:12-13). Sometimes, the word “work” or “works” refers to “earning” something, like earning wages by labor (Rom. 4:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9). But in the verses about how God will judge us, “works” *does not* mean “earning wages by labor.” Instead, the Lord is using “works” to mean “actions.” Obeying the gospel is not a way to earn salvation. Instead, it is an *action* of obedient faith. God invites you to accept His saving grace by humbly obeying the gospel from your heart and serving Him faithfully.

ROMANS 9 - 11

Does Romans 9-11 teach Calvin’s Predestination? That section contains several verses which are somewhat difficult, and many sincere people have thought those verses support Calvin’s Predestination. However, many other verses clearly show that Romans 9-11 does not support it.

In Romans 9-11, there are two kinds of choosing (election):

- (1) In regard to **each person’s eternal destiny**, God’s choice (election) of each person *is* based on that person’s decisions.
- (2) In regard to **unfolding His eternal plan for man**, God’s choice (election) of each person and nation *is not* based on their decisions.

God chose Isaac, not his half-brother Ishmael (Rom. 9:7-9). He chose Jacob (Israel), not his brother Esau (9:10-13). He chose the nation of Israel, and no other nation. **God chose which people He would use** to bring Jesus and salvation into the world. These were entirely His choices, not the choices of the people whom He used.

The fleshly ancestry of a Jew, and **any works of trying to earn** righteousness by law-keeping, did not mean he would live with God eternally (see 9:6-8; 9:30-10:3; Matt. 3:8-9). Some in Israel served God faithfully. Others did not, and deserved death. But God had **mercy** on many, sparing their lives to fulfill His plan (see 9:18-23; Ex. 32:7-14; Num. 14:11-24; Isa. 1:9; Ezek. 6:1-8; Ezra 9:8, 15). His mercy in sparing a person’s *physical* life *did not mean* that He also spared that person’s *spiritual* life eternally.

One aim of Romans 9-11 is to **remove pride**. Paul says many of his fellow Jews “...**have not submitted to the righteousness of God**” (10:3). He also tells Gentile Christians, “...**Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either**” (11:20-21).

In Romans 9-11, there are also two kinds of “Israel.” God used physical Israel to unfold His eternal plan and bring Christ into the world (9:1-5; 3:1-2). He wanted **physical Israel** to be His true, **spiritual Israel** (see 9:6; 2:28-29; Jn. 1:47): “...**All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people**” (Rom. 10:21). Some Jews were faithful to God. But the nation turned away and broke the covenant many times (see Heb. 8:7-9; Isa. 24:5). The Gentiles were sinful, too (Rom. 3:9, 23).

Jesus told some Jews, “...**the Son gives life to whom He will**” (Jn. 5:21). So, **to whom** does Jesus “will” to give life? The answer is “everyone” (2 Pet. 3:9)! However, He told them, “**But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life**” (Jn. 5:40; see 5:44; 7:17; 12:42-43). They *chose* to resist God’s invitation and His grace (see Matt. 11:28-30; 23:37; 2 Tim. 3:8).

Jesus told His fellow Jews, “...**the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it**” (Matt. 21:43). God’s kingdom was often called **Israel**, the name God gave to **Jacob**, from whom the nation came. Before Jesus was born, Gabriel had told Mary, “...**the Lord God will give Him [Jesus] the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end**” (Lk. 1:32-33). The kingdom of Christ is His church, which began in Acts 2 (Heb. 8:6-12; Matt. 16:18-19; Jn. 18:36; Mk. 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; Col. 1:13, 18; Phil. 3:20). We should respect all physical nations and their right to exist today, including the nation of Israel. But spiritually, the kingdom of Christ is “**the Israel of God**” today (see Gal. 6:16). Peter told Christians, “**But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...who once were not a people but are now the people of God...**” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Good news! God wants to save Jews and Gentiles (9:23-24)! Regarding eternal destiny, Romans 10 says, “...there is **no distinction** between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all **is rich to all who call upon Him**. For **‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’** ... ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’ But they have not all **obeyed the gospel**. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So then **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Rom. 10:12-13, 15-17). Any person of Jewish or Gentile ancestry can choose to obey the gospel.

At first, spiritual Israel was composed **entirely of Jewish converts**. Three thousand Jews obeyed the gospel on the very first day of the church (Acts 2:41)! Later, thousands of other Jews entered the kingdom (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). After Acts 10, many Jews and Gentiles obeyed and became part of God’s spiritual Israel (Acts 11:19-26; 14:1; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:4-8). When Gentiles came to God, that fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies (see Gen. 12:3; Ps. 22:27-28; Isa. 2:2; Rom. 15:8-12).

In Romans 11, Paul tells Gentile Christians, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell [some Jews], severity; but toward you, goodness, **if you continue in His goodness**. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also [Jews], **if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in**, for God is able to graft them in again” (Rom. 11:22-23). Regarding salvation, God will “graft in” people or “cut off” people based on *their* choice to believe or disbelieve.

Did God break His promises to Israel about **inheritance**? In Romans 9-11, Paul assures Jews and Gentiles that God keeps His promises. “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...” (Rom. 11:2; see 11:1-5). Today, the inheritance is available to any Jew by becoming part of **spiritual Israel** through faith in Christ. “For you are all **sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**. For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ have put on Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, **then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**” (Gal. 3:26-29). Christ is “*heir of all things*” (Heb. 1:2; see Matt. 21:38). Every Jew or Gentile who enters into Christ becomes an heir with Him (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 1:11; 3:6)!

“And so [in this way] **all Israel will be saved...**” (Rom. 11:26). Making Gentiles “*fellow heirs*” in Christ with Jews **is the way** which God foreordained for saving spiritual Israel (see Eph. 3:5-6). On the judgment day, all who are *in Christ*, **all of spiritual Israel**, will inherit eternal blessings!

Romans 9-11 shows that everything in God’s eternal plan was aimed at saving Jews *and* Gentiles, “...that He might have **mercy on all**” (Rom. 11:32)!

HARDENING Pharaoh’s Heart

Romans 9 talks about God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has **mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens**” (Rom. 9:17-18). Does this mean God makes some people’s hearts sinful and decides their eternal destiny *without their free choice*?

This section of Romans is talking about how God used certain people **to unfold His eternal plan for all people**. In different ways, He used Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Pharaoh, the nation of Israel, and Gentile nations to accomplish His plan. This does not teach that God chooses anyone’s *eternal destiny* without that person’s free choice.

The book of Exodus tells us that “...the **LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh...**” (Ex. 9:12; see 4:21). However, Exodus also says **Pharaoh** hardened his **own** heart. “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, **he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants**” (9:34; see 8:15, 32; 9:17). How can both be true? How can the Lord *and* Pharaoh harden Pharaoh’s heart?

When God gives a command to anyone, it forces that person to make a choice. **Words** can harden the heart of anyone who does not want to hear them (see Acts 7:54-60). We often see different people react in opposite ways when all of them hear the **same words** (see Acts 17:1-5).

God commanded Abraham to give up his son, Isaac (Gen. 22:1-2). “So Abraham rose early in the morning...” to obey God (22:3). Later, an angel told Abraham, “...now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12).

God commanded Pharaoh to give up his slaves, Israel — only for a short time, at first, to go and worship

God. Moses and Aaron delivered **words from God**: “*Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go’*” (Ex. 5:1-2).

Israel had become slaves — a cheap source of labor for Pharaoh. It would be a great economic loss to him if Israel went into the wilderness and did not return. By His demand, God forced Pharaoh to make a choice. God *foreknew* that Pharaoh would choose rebellion. God had said, “*But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand*” (Ex. 3:19). Later, Moses said to Pharaoh, “*But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God*” (Ex. 9:30). Pharaoh “*sinned*” by choosing to resist God’s words (Ex. 9:34).

To accomplish His eternal plan, God used many sinners, such as Joseph’s brothers, Assyria, and Judas (Gen. 37; Isa. 10:5-12; Matt. 26:23-25). *None* of them *deserved* mercy. But to fulfill His plan, God had mercy on some and hardened others. Even when they chose to sin, God was able to use their actions in His plan. As Joseph told his brothers, “*...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive*” (Gen. 50:20).

God used Pharaoh to show His power so His name would be “*declared in all the earth*” (Ex. 9:16; see 10:1-2; Rom. 9:19-24). Pharaoh *chose* to sin, but God used his actions to save people in all nations, including Egypt.

Good news! God does not harden humble hearts! “*...God resists the proud, **But gives grace to the humble***” (Js. 4:6; see Is. 26:5; Rom. 1:21-32; 10:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Matt. 18:4). So, “**Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...**” (Heb. 3:8). “*...Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world **makes himself** an enemy of God...Therefore **submit** to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. **Draw near** to God and He will draw near to you...**Humble yourselves** in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (Js. 4:4, 7-8, 10).

OPENING Lydia’s Heart

Does the statement about God opening Lydia’s heart teach that His grace overwhelmed her heart and saved her *without her free choice*? “*And on the Sabbath day we [Luke, with Paul and others] went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and **spoke** to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia **heard** us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. **The Lord opened her heart** to heed the things spoken by Paul. And...she and her household were baptized...*” (Acts 16:13-15).

This does not say the Lord opened her heart *without her choice*. It only tells us **who** opened her heart. We *do learn* that her heart opened **after** “*we...spoke*” and “*Lydia heard us*” — *after* she heard **words from God**.

Many times, the Bible shows the following process in conversions:

- (1) The apostles and evangelists used Old Testament prophecies to show **the identity of the Christ** (see Acts 2:14-36; 8:29-35).
- (2) After learning *who* He is, many people were ready to “*heed*” (16:14) **the commands of the Christ** — ready to obey (Acts 2:37; 8:36).

For example, the next chapter says, “*...there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures [Old Testament], explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas*” (Acts 17:1-4).

Apparently, Lydia already had some knowledge of, and respect for, the Old Testament. She worshiped God, and she did that on the seventh day, as Jews did. The hearts of many Jews were *closed* to the idea of a new covenant replacing the Law of Moses — *until their hearts were overwhelmed by the good news* that the Old Testament prophecies of the Christ were fulfilled in Jesus! There are more than 300 such prophecies!

Lydia’s heart was not opened by the wisdom or eloquence of the men (see 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 3:6-9). *Every time* a person comes to Jesus, **the glory belongs to God** (1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:29, 31; Eph. 2:8-9). **His word** pierces hearts (Acts 2:37; 7:54). “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12; see Eph. 6:17).

Lydia had to first **hear who Jesus is**. Then she was ready to **“heed” what Jesus says**, and she obeyed Him in baptism. Other hearts were also opened and followed her example that day. *God’s love in His message draws hearts to His Son and eternal life* (Rom. 1:16; Jn. 12:32)!

Some GENTILES in Antioch of Pisidia

Many Jews obeyed the gospel, but some in Antioch of Pisidia did not. Paul and Barnabas told them, *“It was necessary that **the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles** [non-Jews]. For so the Lord has commanded us: **“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”** Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**”* (Acts 13:46-48). Does this say *God alone* made the choice to save these Gentiles? No. Nothing in these verses says He saved them *without their free choice*.

Notice that the gospel **had already** touched their hearts **one week earlier**. The message they had heard is recorded in 26 verses (Acts 13:16-41). After that message, *“...the Gentiles **begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath**”* (Acts 13:42)! People saw their excitement! Also, they had *seven more days* to think about the gospel. There can be no doubt that God knew their hearts *long before* Acts 13:48.

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (13:44)! **This event is a vivid example of people making their own choices about eternal life.** Regarding some who heard *“the word of God”* that day, verse 46 says, *“...you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life....”* In contrast, after this second message, the Gentiles again responded joyfully! They were *“...glad and glorified the word of the Lord...”* (13:48). This is when Luke says, *“...And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”* (13:48)!

Some chose to resist God’s grace, and some chose to accept it. Verse 48 does not say anything about the Lord appointing these Gentiles to eternal life *without their free choice*. Instead, each time they heard the good news, they *joyfully welcomed it!* These Gentiles *chose* to believe!

“ETERNAL SECURITY”?

The idea of “once saved, always saved” is also called “eternal security,” “the perseverance of the saints,” and “the impossibility of apostasy.”

“Once saved, always saved” **is an absolutely necessary part** of Calvin’s Predestination. If Calvin’s Predestination were true — if God had decided our **eternal destiny** *without our free choice* — it would mean that all saved people *could never choose to leave Him*. So, if the Bible says saved people **can choose to leave God** and be lost, we will *know* God has *not* already decided each person’s eternal destiny without our free choice. *We will know for sure* that Calvin’s Predestination is false.

Does JAMES Teach “Eternal Security”?

James says, *“Brethren [Christians], **if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins**”* (Js. 5:19-20). If a Christian *“wanders from the truth”* and never returns, that choice is eternally fatal — *“death.”*

Good news! We can help save souls! When some of God’s children wander away, He often uses some of His other children to help rescue them (see Gal. 6:1). Prayerful encouragement can touch a brother’s heart, bring him back, and *“save a soul from death”!* Also, James says God’s word **can save Christians** from departure: *“brethren...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is **able to save your souls**. But be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (Js. 1:19, 21-22).

Does JOHN Teach “Eternal Security”?

John wrote, *“They went out from us, but they **were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us...**”* (1 Jn. 2:19). Some say this teaches that **all saved people will never leave**. And, they say it teaches that **all people who leave were never really saved**.

This does *not* say “they were never of us.” It says they *“were not of us.”* It **does not reveal how long** their hearts were not with God’s people. There are two ways a person can be *with* God’s people, but *not “of”* His people:

(1) Some are *with* God's people for a while who have never obeyed the gospel. Some of these were "baptized," but did not obey from their heart (see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4). We know this because they tell us. Some explain that they were baptized to please other people, or they were baptized for some other reason. Many of these people eventually obey from their heart. *But some leave who had never obeyed the gospel.*

(2) *Other people who leave were saved.* Some are like the seed which fell on stony ground (Matt. 13:20-21). They receive the gospel with joy, obey it, and endure "for a while." But they let false teachings, troubles, or hurt feelings weaken their faith. For some time, they are present in *body*, but absent in *heart*. When they leave God's people, it can be said that "they were not of us," because **their heart had already left earlier**. This is like many of the Israelites. They *rejoiced* at the Red Sea. But when troubles came, they started complaining, and "...in their hearts they turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:39). They were with Moses in *body*, but not in *heart* — and many died (see Heb. 3:8-4:11).

A person's departure *does not tell us* he was never saved. **If** he was a saved person, his departure does not reveal **when** his heart **changed**. His departure only shows that his heart was not with God's people *before he left*. John *does not teach* that **all** people who depart were **never** saved. And, he *does not teach* that **all saved people will never depart**.

If a Saved Person Has "Eternal" Life, How Can He Lose It?

Does a saved person have eternal life **now**? John records these words of Jesus: "...he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (Jn. 6:47; see 3:36; 5:24, 26; 6:54; 11:25-26; 1 Jn. 3:14-15). So the answer is, "Yes." A saved person **has eternal life now**. In these verses, "believes" refers to obedient faith, *not* belief without actions (compare Jn. 12:42-43; Js. 2:14-26).

Some people have reasoned this way: "A saved person cannot lose eternal life, because *losing it would mean it was not actually eternal.*"

That reasoning is based on a mistake about the *location* of eternal life. Eternal life is not distributed to people like money or food, with all people taking their gifts and going their own separate ways. Instead, eternal life is *always located in one place*. Eternal life is **located** in Christ!

Good News! Before God *made* our *physical* gifts, He *gave* us *spiritual* gifts! He put "every spiritual blessing" in a very special location *for us*! He put them "in Christ"! By doing that, **He chose and predestined all who are in Christ** to receive forgiving grace, adoption, and eternal life!

God "...has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which **was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began**" (2 Tim. 1:9). He "...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**, just as He **chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having **predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted **in the Beloved. In Him** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:3-7); "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is **in Christ Jesus**" (Rom. 3:24). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is **eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Rom. 6:23); "...the promise of life which is **in Christ Jesus**" (2 Tim. 1:1). "There is therefore now no condemnation to **those who are in Christ Jesus**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). "Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ**, he is a new creation..." (2 Cor. 5:17). "For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "...I endure all things for the sake of the elect, **that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory**" (2 Tim. 2:10).

John likewise says, "In Him was life..." (Jn. 1:4; see 11:25-26; 14:6; 1 Jn. 1:1-2). "...God has given us eternal life, and **this life is in His Son**. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn. 5:11-12); "...and we are in Him who is true, **in His Son Jesus Christ**. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

John gives us these warnings from Jesus: "**Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He [God] takes away...**" (Jn. 15:2). Each "branch" is a **saved person in Christ**. Anyone who does not bear fruit will be taken "away" from Christ — away from the *location* of eternal life. "If anyone **does not abide in Me**, he is **cast out as a branch and is withered**; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6; see Rev. 20:11-15). Eternal life *never* ends. But a saved person **can lose eternal life** by leaving Christ, the location of that life.

Good News! God foreordained a way to keep His children clean: “...**if we** [Christians] **walk in the light** as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin...**If we confess our sins**, He is faithful and just to **forgive us our sins** and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And **if anyone sins**, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 1:7, 9; 2:1). Continual cleansing is in Christ. When we fall away, we need to return to Him and His spiritual body, the church (see Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 12:25-27). If we repent, God forgives us. John says, “...everyone who has this hope in Him **purifies himself**, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3). A Christian “**purifies himself**” by “walking in the light,” continuing in the place where there is cleansing and help every step of the way!

The Holy Spirit through John reminds and urges us: “...he who keeps His commandments **abides in Him**...” (3:24; see 2:24); “...He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 9); “And now, little children, **abide in Him**, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28).

Does REVELATION Teach “Eternal Security”?

Rev. 17:8 says, “...And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written **in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world**....” Does this say each person’s eternal destiny was decided *without our free choice* — and cannot be changed by our choice?

Again, this verse calls our attention to **the foreknowledge of God**. It says nothing about our eternal destiny being decided *without our free choice*. Instead, Revelation clearly teaches that our eternal destiny **depends on our choices**. (Other verses which mention “*the Book of Life*” are Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; and 22:19.)

Names can be removed from the Book of Life. We see evidence of that in these words to Christians: “Be watchful...and repent...He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and **I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father...” (Rev. 3:2-3, 5). Jesus warned some Christians, “...because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth...Therefore be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:16, 19). John warned, “...if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, **God shall take away his part from the Book of Life**, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:19). So, Rev. 17:8 **does not teach** that each person’s eternal destiny was decided *without our free choice*. The names of unfaithful Christians who do not repent *will* be removed.

In Revelation 20, John gives us a view of the judgment day, when all people who have ever lived will be judged by God through Christ (see Acts 17:31). Notice that **the Book of Life and God’s record of our actions** will both be used in deciding each person’s eternal destiny: “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is **the Book of Life**. And the dead were judged **according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, **each one according to his works**. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-15). This clearly shows that we will be judged by our own actions.

Good news! Jesus said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. **Behold, I stand at the door and knock**. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will **grant** to sit with Me on My throne...” (Rev. 3:19-21). Jesus said this to **Christians**. He does not lock us IN or OUT. He doesn’t want us to lock Him out, either. But He will not break down the door. *Each Christian* decides whether to open the door. Even when we fall away, Jesus stands at the door *asking us to let Him in again*. The One who *died* for us wants to help us again!

Jesus promised, “...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10)! He will help us be faithful, if we want His help.

Does PETER Teach “Eternal Security”?

Peter says God “...according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for **you, who are kept by the power of God through faith** for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Our Inheritance is “*incorruptible*” (cannot decay), is “*undefiled*” (kept free of stains), “*does not fade away*” (will never lose its glory), and is “*reserved*” (set apart) for us.

Christians are “*kept by the power of God through faith.*” Does “*kept*” mean we cannot leave? He does *not* say God keeps us *against our will*. Peter is reminding us that it is *not our own power* that keeps us clean and safe. The power of God “*through faith*” saved us (Eph. 2:8-9), and “*the power of God through faith*” **keeps us clean and helps us endure** (see Eph. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 1:7; Phil. 4:13). His power will never fail us!

However, if we leave Him and never return, we will lose our inheritance. Peter uses some unpleasant “*pictures*” to warn Christians not to go back into sin: “*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’*” (2 Pet. 2:20-22). If we leave Christ and never return, our punishment will be worse than if we had never obeyed the gospel (see Heb. 10:28-36). So, Peter says, “*...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away...*” (2 Pet. 3:17).

Good news! God’s word can help you avoid falling. The next verse says, “*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*” (3:18). Paul said, “*...brethren, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance...*” (Acts 20:32). The inheritance will be given to Christians who grow spiritually in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Peter *does* teach about “*perseverance*” of the saints. He *urges* saints to persevere so we can enter heaven. To “*persevere*” means to continue on a course of action through all difficulties. He says, “*...giving all diligence, add to your faith...*” virtue, knowledge, self-control, **perseverance**, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, “*For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things...has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so [in this way] an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 1:5-11). Christians are the *kingdom people*, citizens now (Col. 1:13; Phil. 3:20). If we grow and persevere, we will enter the eternal *kingdom place* (see 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4). Jesus said, “*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you...*” (Rev. 3:10).

Peter is the one who wrote, “*The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Pet. 3:9). That includes Christians who have fallen away. God wants everyone to come home.

Does HEBREWS Teach “Eternal Security”?

The letter to Hebrew (Jewish) Christians warns all of us: “*...we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away*” (Heb. 2:1); “*how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...*” (2:3). “*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ‘...Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion’*” (3:12-15). “*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience*” (4:11; see 10:28-29); “*...if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him*” (10:38); “*looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble...*” (12:15); “*...much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven*” (12:25).

Good news! Hebrews encourages us. “*...He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’*” (Heb. 13:5-6). “*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:16; see 10:19-25).

Does PAUL teach “Eternal Security” in Romans 8?

Does Romans 8 teach “once saved, always saved”? Several verses in Romans 8 show that this chapter *opposes* “once saved, always saved.”

Good news! In Romans 8, Paul is giving us *reasons* to remain faithful to God, and *assurance* that God will remain faithful to us!

Romans 8 BEGINS and ENDS “in Christ”! “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:1). “*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:38-39).

All spiritual *blessings* are **in Christ** (Eph. 1:3). There is *safety* for all who are in Christ. If we choose to leave Him, we leave the place of safety. To “*those who are called,*” Jude says, “*keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 1, 21). If you want to stay in Christ, God will help you. God is on your side!

Romans 8 says those who “*set their minds*” on “*the things of the Spirit*” will have “*life and peace*” (8:5-6). Christians have a choice: “*...brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*” (8:12-13; see 6:12-16).

Paul *does* mention “*perseverance*” in Romans 8. But it is *not* an action by God, not a guarantee that we will never fall away. Instead, perseverance is something *we* do, with God’s help. We *choose* to persevere — persist in Christ — or turn back to a life of sin. Paul says “*hope*” helps us persevere: “*But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*” (8:25; see 5:3-5; Eph. 6:18). Paul and Job are examples of people who faithfully persevered through many troubles (2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Tim. 3:10-11; Js. 5:11). Romans 8 *encourages us* to **set our minds** on spiritual things and *persevere*. God will never fail those who stay in Christ!

Warnings from Paul

Paul told the Christians at Corinth, “*We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain*” (2 Cor. 6:1; see 1 Thess. 3:5). “*Vain*” means “worthless, unsuccessful.” How could God’s grace be unsuccessful?

The Corinthians had received God’s *forgiving grace* through faith when they were baptized into Christ: “*...many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized*” (Acts 18:8). That day, God removed their “*old sins*” and would “*remember*” them “*no more*” (see 2 Pet. 1:9; Heb. 8:12). But the *ultimate goal* of that grace was to present them *sinless* to God on the judgment day (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; Col. 1:21-23, 28). They would need “*more grace*” (see Js. 4:6). If they did not **continue in Christ**, their *new sins* would not be removed by His blood (see 1 Jn. 1:7). They would miss heaven, *the final goal* of the grace they had first received.

Paul told Christians in Galatia, “*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel...You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*” (Gal. 1:6; 5:4). They had obeyed the gospel call. But these “called” people fell from God’s grace.

Paul wrote: “*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit...Let no one cheat you of your reward...*” (Col. 2:8, 18); “*...concerning the faith [some] have suffered shipwreck*” (1 Tim. 1:19); “*...some will depart from the faith...*” (4:1). “*For some have already turned aside after Satan*” (5:15); “*...some have strayed from the faith in their greediness...*” (6:10; see 6:21). Hymenaeus and Philetus “*...have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim. 2:17-18). “*If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*” (2 Tim. 2:12). Paul warns, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Good news! In the next verse, Paul assures us, “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*” (1 Cor. 10:13). God gives us “*the way of escape,*” along with strength and grace to help us endure (2 Cor. 12:9-10; Phil. 4:13). But each Christian must **choose** whether to take God’s way of escape or yield to sin. God does not remove the need for saved people to make choices between good and evil (see Heb. 5:14; Phil. 1:9-11).

Good News! God Helps Us “Will” & “Do”!

Does your “willpower” lose power some time? You and I cannot remain faithful to God by our own strength. Paul says we don’t have to! God helps us “will” (determine) and “do” (act) when we *choose* to keep on serving Him: “...my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who **works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure**” (Phil. 2:12-13). When you “work out” — strive to be faithful through every trial — God “works in” you to “will” and “do”! “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus...**” (Eph. 3:20-21)!

The Testimony of a “Predestined” Man

Paul includes himself when he says, God “...**chose us** in Him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world...having **predestined us** to adoption as sons...In Him also **we have obtained** an inheritance, being predestined...” (Eph. 1:4-5, 11). Even if we did not know what “predestined” means, we would know this: **Paul was one of the “predestined” people.**

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CONCLUSION

Jesus gave us God’s word through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:12-13). In *a multitude of verses*, the Holy Spirit tells us that “once saved, always saved” is absolutely false. A saved person *can choose* to leave Christ and be lost. The failure of “once saved, always saved” shows that God has *not* decided your eternal destiny *without your free choice*. And, that means Calvin’s Predestination cannot be true.

Calvin’s Predestination opposes *a massive amount* of God’s word. It’s a very serious matter to oppose God’s word. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48). We pray that this study has helped you understand more of the Lord’s word, and that you are determined to “...abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28).

Good News! Christ **WILL** be in Heaven!

Before creation, God placed all *spiritual blessings* in Christ. Today, God invites all *people* into Christ. His spiritual body *will* be in Heaven! So, every person who enters into His body and continues there, by grace through faith, *will also* be in heaven and enjoy God’s blessings forever!

Where will you be when Christ returns?

Will you “*be found in Him*” (Phil. 3:9)?

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

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Romans 16:16 says, “...The churches of Christ greet you.”
Our goal is to be His church and His people to the best of our ability, by God’s grace.
We encourage you to also make that your goal, and we invite you
to visit the churches of Christ in your area.
May God bless you in every way, unto His glory.

Good News

about

Predestination!



Dear Reader,

This booklet is offered with love and respect for you and for every person who seeks to understand God's will and honor Him in their life.

As you begin this study, please consider some thoughts about "feelings" and how they can hinder us from welcoming God's word.

When God gave us life, He included the ability to feel and react. Our feelings are most intense about things we care about most. That's usually a great blessing, but sometimes a problem. We're likely to have our most intense conflicts with the people we love the most, and about things which matter most. So, in any discussion of God's word, we need to do our best to be gentle, patient, and forgiving (2 Tim. 2:24-26; Eph. 4:32). In this study, it is not our aim to "wrestle" with people, but with ideas which oppose God's word (Eph. 6:12).

There is often a "contest" between our feelings and God's word. In the first century, God's Holy Spirit worked in miraculous ways to guide the infant church and write His message for us. Today, when we study the Bible, we are reading the words of the Holy Spirit. However, our feelings are always with us. Also, there are some teachings of men which urge us to let our inner voice replace the Holy Spirit's written message.

We need to realize that our feelings can deceive us (Jer. 10:23; 17:9; Pr. 16:25; Rom. 10:2). So, we need to do our best to put aside our feelings and carefully listen to everything the Holy Spirit says in His written word. God did not promise to give us new revelations today. But when we seek His help, He will give us wisdom and will help us grow in our understanding of His written word (see Js. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:7). Saving faith comes by hearing His word (Rom. 10:17). Please remember that every verse quoted in this study is the Holy Spirit's message to us.

It is very important to ask ourselves, "Will I trust my feelings, or will I trust what the Holy Spirit says in His written word? Will I encourage my mate, my children, and others to trust my feelings for their eternal salvation, or will I teach them to trust God and His word?"

After you have read this booklet, we hope you will keep it for future reference. With that in mind, we have included many scripture references for deeper study, plus a brief index at the back. It is our hope and prayer that this study will be helpful to you as you consider God's word and share it with others.

Please remember that the most loving thing you can do for your family and for others you love is to study and obey God's will to the best of your ability, with His faithful help.

May God bless you in every way, unto His glory.

Yours in His service,

Royce Frederick

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Good News about Predestination!

by Royce Frederick

What would you say if someone asked, "Do you believe in predestination?" Would you answer "Yes" or "No"? Actually, it would be helpful to ask, "What do you *mean* by 'predestination'?"

Does the Bible teach "predestination"? YES.

Does "predestination" in the Bible mean God has decided your eternal destiny **without your free choice**? NO.

What is "Predestination"?

"Predestination" refers to the fact that *God decided many events before they occurred*. For example, He predestined Israel's seventy-year captivity in Babylon, the decree of Cyrus for their return, the death of Jesus for our sins, His return to raise all the dead, and the judgment day (Jer. 29:10; Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4; 53; 1 Pet. 1:18-21; Acts 2:23-24; Matt. 24:36; Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 17:31). The Bible also talks about *our* predestination. The focus of this study is about *how each person's eternal destiny is decided*.

Why is Predestination Misunderstood?

Some parts of "predestination" are difficult. At the end of a discussion which included predestination, Paul wrote, "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD?...*" (Rom. 11:33-34; see Isa. 55:8-9).

Also, several false teachings and mistakes have caused much confusion about predestination.

Although we cannot know all of God's mind, He *has* given us *some* information about predestination. We hope this study will help anyone who desires to understand *more* of what God *wants us to know* about this topic.

False Teachings Arose about Grace and Predestination

"Grace" is "undeserved favor." It is kindness toward a person who does not deserve it. By His grace, God showers us with marvelous gifts *every day*. Our *greatest* interest is in God's gift of grace in *forgiving our sins*.

After God finished revealing the Bible through His prophets, several false teachings arose about grace:

(1) Powerful men eventually took control of many churches, and some of them taught the false idea that *church leaders* have power to *grant* and *withhold* God's grace.

(2) Some leaders taught that a person can *earn* forgiveness of sins by various kinds of actions.

(3) Some leaders even taught that a person could *buy* forgiveness of sins with money.

(4) In the 1300's A.D., and especially by the 1500's, courageous "reformers" arose and opposed many of the false teachings. But some of *their* teachings departed from God's word in *other* ways. One reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564), strongly opposed the false teachings about grace. However, his teachings about *grace and predestination* contain many serious mistakes. Some of his teachings are called "Calvinism." The acronym "TULIP" is a memory tool for the main points of his teachings on grace and predestination:

Total depravity — Like some earlier men, Calvin said all babies are born with *sin* inherited from Adam. Also, Calvinism says all people are born *totally depraved (empty) of any ability to choose righteousness*, unable to accept any *offer* of grace through faith in Christ.

Unconditional election — Calvinism says God *elected* (chose) which persons He would save, with *no conditions* (requirements) for them to do anything before salvation. It says He chose those people and saves them *based on His choice only*, not based on their faith or His foreknowledge of their faith. So, Calvinism actually teaches that salvation is decided *by grace only, without faith* (before faith) — *not* like Eph. 2:8, which says salvation is by *grace through* faith.

Limited atonement — Calvinism says Jesus died to atone *for only the sins of the people God chose*. It says God predestined all other people to *eternal punishment*, and it says Jesus did not die for them.

Irresistible grace — Calvinism says God saves the chosen persons *by overpowering them with His grace*, and they *cannot choose to resist it*. This is sometimes called a "direct operation of the Holy Spirit."

Perseverance of the saints — Calvinism says every chosen person (every saint on earth) will *persevere* (continue) with God and *cannot choose to leave Him*. This is sometimes called "eternal security," "once saved, always saved," and "the impossibility of apostasy."

Consider the *delicate craftsmanship* of Calvinism. Many of the points *depend* on other points. If one point fails, others fail. In fact, *every point fails the test of God's word*. "Calvin's Predestination" is false. Regarding the eternal destiny of people, God's word shows that:

to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). When you "work out" — strive to be faithful through every trial — God "works in" you to "will" and "do"! "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus...**" (Eph. 3:20-21)!

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"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

“worthless, unsuccessful.” How could God’s grace be unsuccessful?

The Corinthians had received God’s *forgiving grace* through faith when they were baptized into Christ: “...many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). That day, God removed their “old sins” and would “remember” them “no more” (see 2 Pet. 1:9; Heb. 8:12). But the *ultimate goal* of that grace was to present them *sinless* to God on the judgment day (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; Col. 1:21-23, 28). They would need “more grace” (see J.s. 4:6). If they did not **continue in Christ**, their new sins would not be removed by His blood (see 1 Jn. 1:7). They would miss heaven, *the final goal* of the grace they had first received.

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(1) “predestination based on free choice” is **true**.

(2) “predestination without free choice” is **false**.

Today, many sincere people believe Calvinism — or *parts* of it, with some changes. So, when someone asks if we believe in predestination, we need to ask, “Do you mean Calvin’s Predestination or Bible predestination?” We need to prayerfully examine Calvin’s teachings and “test all things” in the light of God’s word (1 Thess. 5:21). We appreciate all who seek to honor God, and we pray that this study will be helpful to you.

Good News about the word “PREDESTINED”!

“Predestined” is used four times in the New King James translation: Rom. 8:29, Eph. 1:5, and 1:11. It combines “pre” (before) and “destined” (determined, decided). The original Greek word in those verses is “proorizo,” which combines “pro” (before) and “determine.” In Greek and in English, the meaning is “**decided before**.”

A Mistake: When people hear the word “predestined,” many people add an **extra idea** which is *not* part of the word. Many people automatically think: “decided before **without man’s free choice**.”

The word “predestined” *does not include any information* about God’s reasons for His decisions. It means “already decided.” It does not say “with free choice” or “without free choice.” The word “predestined” does not reveal anything about *the basis* for God’s decisions.

The same is true of other words in verses about predestination, such as: purposed, promised, prepared, chose (elected), appointed, preappointed, ordained, foreordained, and determined. These words do *not* all have the exact same meaning. But in the original Greek and in English, all of these words *are* alike in *one way*: They *all* contain **no information about the reasons** for God’s decisions regarding future events.

Sometimes God tells us the *basis or reasons* for some of His decisions. If we want to learn about those reasons, we must study the verse where the word occurs, the nearby verses, and other parts of the Bible.

It is good news to know that the word “predestined” **does not mean**, “God has decided to send some people to eternal punishment *without giving them a choice*.” The word “predestined” *does not mean*, “God has decided my eternal destiny *without giving me a choice*.”

Good News about FOREKNOWLEDGE!

God’s decisions come from His divine nature. He is “love,” holy, just, omnipotent (all-powerful), and omniscient (all-knowing). “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5)!

A Mistake: When thinking about “predestination,” some people fail to consider, or fail to believe, God’s ability to “foreknow.”

The Bible is full of prophecies about events which God planned, which later occurred exactly as He had said. He foretells many future events as *facts* — “future history.” He “...calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom. 4:17), “declaring the end from the beginning...” (Isa. 46:10). “Known to God from eternity are all His works” (Acts 15:18). God foreknew **His works**.

Does God also foreknow all of **your works and my works**? We may never learn the answers to all of our questions about this. But God does tell us some things about His knowledge and foreknowledge.

God knows us. “...God knows your hearts...” (Lk. 16:15; see 1 Kgs. 8:39; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24). Jesus “knew all men” (Jn. 2:24); “...the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’...” (2 Tim. 2:19). “...God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 Jn. 3:20).

God is able to foreknow us. “...Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him” (Jn. 6:64); “...other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice...” (Jn. 10:16). “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...” (Rom. 11:2). “...And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul...‘speak, and do not keep silent...for I have many people in this city’” (Acts 18:8-10). Those verses tell us that the Lord foreknew the hearts of many other people in Corinth who would obey the gospel. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...” (Rom. 8:28-29); “...To the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God...” (1 Pet. 1:1-2). God is able to foreknow us.

These verses tell us that **God’s foreknowledge is the basis** for His decisions about “predestined” and “elect” people: “**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined...**” (Rom. 8:29); “...elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God...” (1 Pet. 1:2).

What does God foreknow? Does He foreknow all of the choices we will make in the future? We could spend a lot of time on these questions and never learn the complete answers. We should be content to know this: God knows and foreknows **everything He needs to know** to deliver salvation to all people who love Him and choose to obey His gospel.

Later, we will see many verses which show that God’s decisions about our eternal destiny are also based on **our choices**.

Another Mistake: People often think, “If God foreknew us and our choices, His foreknowledge would cause us to make those choices.”

bitterness springing up cause trouble...” (12:15); “...much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (12:25).

Good news! Hebrews encourages us. “...He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6). “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16; see 10:19-25).

Does PAUL teach “Eternal Security” in Romans 8?

Does Romans 8 teach “once saved, always saved”? Several verses in Romans 8 show that this chapter opposes “once saved, always saved.”

Good news! In Romans 8, Paul is giving us reasons to remain faithful to God, and assurance that God will remain faithful to us!

Romans 8 BEGINS and ENDS “in Christ”! “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). There is safety for all who are in Christ. If we choose to leave Him, we leave the place of safety. To “those who are called,” Jude says, “keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1, 21). If you want to stay in Christ, God will help you. God is on your side!

Romans 8 says those who “set their minds” on “the things of the Spirit” will have “life and peace” (8:5-6). Christians have a choice: “...brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (8:12-13; see 6:12-16).

Paul does mention “perseverance” in Romans 8. But it is not an action by God, not a guarantee that we will never fall away. Instead, perseverance is something we do, with God’s help. We choose to persevere—persist in Christ—or turn back to a life of sin. Paul says “hope” helps us persevere: “But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (8:25; see 5:3-5; Eph. 6:18). Paul and Job are examples of people who faithfully persevered through many troubles (2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Tim. 3:10-11; Js. 5:11). Romans 8 encourages us to set our minds on spiritual things and persevere. God will never fail those who stay in Christ!

Warnings from Paul

Paul told the Christians at Corinth, “We...plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1; see 1 Thess. 3:5). “Vain” means

and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Pet. 2:20-22). If we leave Christ and never return, our punishment will be worse than if we had never obeyed the gospel (see Heb. 10:28-36). So, Peter says, "... **beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away...**" (2 Pet. 3:17).

Good news! God's word can help you avoid falling. The next verse says, "*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*" (3:18). Paul said, "... **brethren, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance...**" (Acts 20:32). The inheritance will be given to Christians who grow spiritually in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Peter does teach about "perseverance" of the saints. He urges saints to persevere so we can enter heaven. To "persevere" means to continue on a course of action through all difficulties. He says, "...**giving all diligence, add to your faith...**" virtue, knowledge, self-control, **perseverance**, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, "**For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things...has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so [in this way] an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**" (2 Pet. 1:5-11). Christians are the kingdom people, citizens now (Col. 1:13; Phil. 3:20). If we grow and persevere, we will enter the eternal kingdom place (see 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4). Jesus said, "*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you...*" (Rev. 3:10).

Peter is the one who wrote, "*The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9). That includes Christians who have fallen away. God wants everyone to come home.

Does HEBREWS Teach "Eternal Security"?

The letter to Hebrew (Jewish) Christians warns all of us: "...we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, **lest we drift away**" (Heb. 2:1); "**how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...**" (2:3). "*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, '...Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'*" (3:12-15). "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience*" (4:11; see 10:28-29); "...if anyone **draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him**" (10:38); "*looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of*

That is not true. **Foreknowing does not mean fore-causing.** Any fore-knowledge God may have about your future choices *does not mean* He made your choices *for you*.

Consider this: Christians "foreknow" that God will destroy the earth by fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Peter says, "...*since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall...*" (2 Pet. 3:17). Does our foreknowledge cause the fire? No. Foreknowing does not mean fore-causing.

Also consider this: Before creation, God **predestined** Jesus to die for our sins. "...*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world...*" to be our sacrifice (1 Pet. 1:20). God saves us, "...*not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began*" (2 Tim. 1:9). With complete confidence, God placed **all** salvation in **Christ**. God was so certain that Jesus would give His life for us that He refers to Jesus as "...*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Rev. 13:8). In God's mind, it was an *absolute fact of the future* that Jesus would die for us.

So, when the time came for Him to die, did Jesus have a choice? Yes! "*...My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life...No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...*" (Jn. 10:17-18). When the mob came to arrest Jesus, He told Peter, "...*Put your sword in its place...Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?*" (Matt. 26:52-53). Jesus did not ask for angels to rescue Him. He chose to die because He loved us and loved His Father — which meant obeying His Father. God was able to *foreordain* the sacrifice of Jesus, because He *absolutely fore-knew* that Jesus would *freely choose* to obey and give His life for us!

God *also foreknew* the choices of those who would kill Jesus. "*Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death*" (Acts 2:23; see 4:28). God foreknew the choices of these people, but He was not guilty of the "*lawless*" deed of murdering Jesus. *They* were.

God is able to foreknow us. It is good news to know that His fore-knowledge does not cause our choices!

So, every time we read a verse in the Bible which mentions predestination, we need to remember:

- (1) All of the decisions which God has already made are based on *His knowledge and foreknowledge*.
- (2) God has not decided our eternal destiny *without giving us a choice*.

Good News! God MADE PLANS for You & Everyone!

You may hear people say, "God has a plan for your life!" Many of them mean, "God has planned every event of your life." Then, when bad things

happen, that idea leads people to say, “Why did God do this to me?”

The Bible *does not* teach that God *causes* every event in your life. He *does continually help* those who love Him (Rom. 8:28; Jer. 29:11). To mature us, sometimes He even sends, or allows, some of our suffering (Heb. 12:1-13). **But there are many other causes of our suffering**, such as: our sins and mistakes, the sins and mistakes of people around us, the sins and mistakes of people who lived before us, accidents of man and nature, and Satan (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Job 2:7; Eccl. 9:11; Gen. 3:16-24; Isa. 59:1-2; Gal. 6:7-8). You are *not a puppet*, with God pulling all the strings. God does not cause every event in your life — all of your choices, all of your actions, and all of the bad things that happen.

But in a different way, God *does* have a plan for your life! He reveals it in the Bible. And, when you humble your heart to obey His word, *He works in marvelous ways* to bless you and use you as an instrument for good!

God PREDESTINED salvation IN CHRIST! “*Before time began*” (2 Tim. 1:9), God purposed to save us by His grace through the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. This was His “*eternal purpose*” (Eph. 3:11; see 1 Pet. 1:18-21; Rev. 13:8). This plan would allow God to remain **just** (righteous) by punishing sin, and allow Him to **justify** (make righteous) all people who seek refuge **in Christ** through faith (Rom. 3:21-26; 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-29; Heb. 6:18). This was “...*the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory*” (1 Cor. 2:7). He planned “*that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs [with Jews], of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*” (Eph. 3:6).

After creation, God began unfolding His plan. He chose Abram and said, “...*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Gen. 12:3). So, even before He made the nation of Israel, God promised to bless people of all nations, not only Jews. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s prophets foretold many parts of His plan (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Finally, at the right time, Jesus came and died for our sins (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:10).

Then Jesus arose from death and appeared “...*to witnesses chosen before by God...*” (Acts 10:41). After Jesus returned to heaven, God fully revealed “...*the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him*” (Eph. 3:11-12). Through His inspired disciples, Jesus finished revealing God’s complete plan (Jn. 16:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). Jesus “...*has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1:10)!

Good News! JESUS DIED for You & Everyone!

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting*

...were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-15). This clearly shows that we will be judged by our own actions.

Good news! Jesus said, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne...*” (Rev. 3:19-21). Jesus said this to **Christians**. He does not lock us IN or OUT. He doesn’t want us to lock Him out, either. But He will not break down the door. *Each Christian* decides whether to open the door. Even when we fall away, Jesus stands at the door *asking us to let Him in again*. The One who *died* for us wants to help us again!

Jesus promised, “...*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10)! He will help us be faithful, if we want His help.

Does PETER Teach “Eternal Security”?

Peter says God “...*according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Our Inheritance is “*incorruptible*” (cannot decay), is “*undefiled*” (kept free of stains), “*does not fade away*” (will never lose its glory), and is “*reserved*” (set apart) for us.

Christians are “*kept by the power of God through faith*.” Does “*kept*” mean we cannot leave? He does not say God keeps us *against our will*. Peter is reminding us that it is *not our own power* that keeps us clean and safe. The power of God “*through faith*” saved us (Eph. 2:8-9), and “*the power of God through faith*” **keeps us clean and helps us endure** (see Eph. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 1:7; Phil. 4:13). His power will never fail us!

However, if we leave Him and never return, we will lose our inheritance. Peter uses some unpleasant “pictures” to warn Christians not to go back into sin: “*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’*

things I write to you, so that you may not sin. **And if anyone sins**, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 1:7, 9; 2:1). Continual cleansing is in Christ. When we fall away, we need to return to Him and His spiritual body, the church (see Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 12:25-27). If we repent, God forgives us. John says, "...everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3:3). A Christian "purifies himself" by "walking in the light," continuing in the place where there is cleansing and help every step of the way!

The Holy Spirit through John reminds and urges us: "...he who keeps His commandments abides in Him..." (3:24; see 2:24); "...He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn. 9); "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 Jn. 2:28).

Does REVELATION Teach "Eternal Security"?

Rev. 17:8 says, "...And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the **Book of Life from the foundation of the world**...." Does this say each person's eternal destiny was decided without our free choice — and cannot be changed by our choice?

Again, this verse calls our attention to the **foreknowledge of God**. It says nothing about our eternal destiny being decided without our free choice. Instead, Revelation clearly teaches that our eternal destiny **depends on our choices**. (Other verses which mention "the Book of Life" are Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; and 22:19.)

Names can be removed from the Book of Life. We see evidence of that in these words to Christians: "Be watchful...and repent...He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the **Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father..." (Rev. 3:2-3, 5). Jesus warned some Christians, "...because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth...Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:16, 19). John warned, "...if anyone takes away **part from the Book of Life**, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:19). So, Rev. 17:8 **does not teach** that each person's eternal destiny was decided without our free choice. The names of unfaithful Christians who do not repent will be removed.

In Revelation 20, John gives us a view of the judgment day, when all people who have ever lived will be judged by God through Christ (see Acts 17:31). Notice that the **Book of Life and God's record of our actions** will both be used in deciding each person's eternal destiny. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the **Book of Life**. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which

life" (Jn. 3:16). Jesus became one of us so that "...He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9); "...the free gift came to all men..." (Rom. 5:18). Jesus "...gave Himself a ransom for all..." (1 Tim. 2:6). He "...is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). Jesus gave His life as the sacrifice for all people, not just for a limited number of people.

Good News! The Death of Jesus can SAVE YOU & Anyone!

God does not overpower anyone with His grace, forcing him to accept the sacrifice of Jesus for his sins. Each person must decide to accept it or reject it. Any sinner can have "...access by faith into this grace..." (Rom. 5:2).

God PREDESTINED the NEW BIRTH! Paul says those "...who love God...whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:28-29). "Brethren" means "sons" in the same family. God predestined a way for us to become His children, "brothers" of Jesus in God's family! At baptism, a sinner enters into Christ spiritually through faith, and into God's family. Paul reminded Christians, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). This is the new birth (see Jn. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; Tit. 3:5).

Through obedient faith, a sinner receives the benefit of the death of Jesus at the moment of baptism. That is when he or she is "baptized into Christ Jesus...baptized into His death" (Rom. 6:3).

The next verse shows that baptism is also the moment of new life! "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

Someone may say, "You trust in your baptism." No, baptism is the moment when we trust in God and surrender to Him. Baptism is an act of faith. The Colossians were "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). Baptism is the moment a sinner receives the gift of salvation and becomes a child of God through faith.

After we have been born into God's family, we must continue growing spiritually — continue the process of being "transformed" into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:17-18).

Does God "Draw" People & "Grant" Salvation by His Choice Only?

In John 6, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." (Jn. 6:44); "...no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (6:65). Notice two important points about these statements:

- (1) Jesus did not say anything about God granting this to *some* people and not to *others*.
- (2) Jesus did not say anything about God granting this to anyone *without their free choice*.

With the second statement, Jesus **explained why** He made both of the statements: “ ‘...*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.*’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were **who did not believe**, and who would betray Him. And He said, **‘Therefore** [this is why] *I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*’ ” (Jn. 6:63-65). Jesus made the two statements because these people **refused to believe** words from God.

Now, knowing that, consider more about His first statement: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be **taught by God**.’ Therefore **everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me**” (Jn. 6:44-45). Jesus was saying that a person cannot come to Him and salvation unless he allows God to teach him. These people were not willing to listen to God’s word.

Earlier, Jesus had said, “You search the Scriptures [the Old Testament], for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. **But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life**” (Jn. 5:39-40). “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (Jn. 5:46-47; see Lk. 16:29-31; 24:27). They refused to hear, learn, and believe the Old Testament prophecies from God about Jesus. And, they refused to believe the words from God delivered by Jesus. *No one can come to Jesus unless he is willing to listen to God’s word and allow God to draw him through His message of love.*

Good news! *Anyone who desires to do God’s will can learn it and come to Jesus. “If anyone wants [desires] to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God...”* (Jn. 7:17).

Good News! God Wants to DRAW You & Everyone to Christ!

Does God need to *force* His grace upon us to save us? Or, does His love have the power to *draw* us to Him and salvation in Christ? To Old Testament Israel, God said, “...*I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you*” (Jer. 31:3).

God *draws us* to Jesus by His love at the cross! “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself*” (Jn. 12:32). God’s great love **does have the power** to draw hearts to Jesus! He allowed Himself to be “*lifted up from the earth*” on the cross for us! The heart of the

Good News! Before God made our *physical* gifts, He gave us *spiritual* gifts! He put “*every spiritual blessing*” in a very special location for us! He put them “*in Christ*”! By doing that, **He chose and predestined all who are in Christ** to receive forgiving grace, adoption, and eternal life!

God “...*has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began*” (2 Tim. 1:9). He “...*has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*” (Eph. 1:3-7); “*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24). “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 6:23); “...*the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 1:1). “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:1). “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...*” (2 Cor. 5:17). “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:10). “...*I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim. 2:10).

John likewise says, “*In Him was life...*” (Jn. 1:4; see 11:25-26; 14:6; 1 Jn. 1:1-2). “...*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*” (1 Jn. 5:11-12); “...*and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life*” (1 Jn. 5:20).

John gives us these warnings from Jesus: “**Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He [God] takes away...**” (Jn. 15:2). Each “*branch*” is a **saved person in Christ**. Anyone who does not bear fruit will be taken “*away*” from Christ — away from the location of eternal life. “*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*” (Jn. 15:6; see Rev. 20:11-15). Eternal life never ends. But a saved person can **lose eternal life** by leaving Christ, the location of that life.

Good News! God foreordained a way to keep His children clean: “...**if we** [Christians] **walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...**My little children, these

Does JOHN Teach “Eternal Security”?

John wrote, “They went out from us, but they were **not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us...” (1 Jn. 2:19). Some say this teaches that **all saved people will never leave**. And, they say it teaches that **all people who leave were never really saved**.

This does **not** say “they were never of us.” It says they “were not of us.” It **does not reveal how long** their hearts were not with God’s people. There are two ways a person can be *with* God’s people, but *not “of”*. His people:

(1) Some are *with* God’s people for a while who have never obeyed the gospel. Some of these were “baptized,” but did not obey from their heart (see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4). We know this because they tell us. Some explain that they were baptized to please other people, or they were baptized for some other reason. Many of these people eventually obey from their heart. *But some leave who had never obeyed the gospel.*

(2) *Other people who leave were saved.* Some are like the seed which fell on stony ground (Matt. 13:20-21). They receive the gospel with joy, obey it, and endure “for a while.” But they let false teachings, troubles, or hurt feelings weaken their faith. For some time, they are present in *body*, but absent in *heart*. When they leave God’s people, it can be said that “they were *not of us*,” because **their heart had already left earlier**. This is like many of the Israelites. They rejoiced at the Red Sea. But when troubles came, they started complaining, and “...in their hearts they turned back to Egypt” (Acts 7:39). They were with Moses in *body*, but not in *heart* — and many died (see Heb. 3:8-4:11).

A person’s departure *does not tell us* he was never saved. **If** he was a saved person, his departure does not reveal **when** his heart **changed**. His departure only shows that his heart was not with God’s people *before he left*. John *does not teach* that **all** people who depart were **never** saved. And, he *does not teach* that **all saved people will never depart**.

If a Saved Person Has “Eternal” Life, How Can He Lose It?

Does a saved person have eternal life **now**? John records these words of Jesus: “...he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (Jn. 6:47; see 3:36; 5:24, 26; 6:54; 11:25-26; 1 Jn. 3:14-15). So the answer is, “Yes.” A saved person **has eternal life now**. In these verses, “believes” refers to obedient faith, *not* belief without actions (compare Jn. 12:42-43; Js. 2:14-26).

Some people have reasoned this way: “A saved person cannot lose eternal life, because *losing it would mean it was not actually eternal*.”

That reasoning is based on a mistake about the *location* of eternal life. Eternal life is not distributed to people like money or food, with all people taking their gifts and going their own separate ways. Instead, eternal life is *always located in one place*. Eternal life is **located** in Christ!

“gospel” is the “good news” that Jesus died for our sins, then arose; “...the gospel of Christ...is the power of God to salvation...” (Rom. 1:16). Obedient faith is the response of a humble heart to God’s message of love.

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures...**But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**” (Titus 3:3-5). Here, the “love of God” primarily refers to the moment when God gave His Son for us. And, “*through the washing of regeneration*” refers to the moment of baptism, when God washes away a person’s sins by the blood of Christ. At that moment, a sinner is born again, regenerated, “*born of water and the Spirit*” (Jn. 3:5; see Acts 8:35-39; Gal. 3:26-27).

The cross is God’s greatest expression of love! “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (Jn. 3:16)! Millions of people love God because they heard the good news of His great love for us at the cross! We love Him “...because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19)!

Who Are “THE CALLED”?

When talking about the unfolding of God’s plan for all people, the Bible tells about some people who were “called” for special kinds of work. For example, Jesus “...went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (Mk. 3:13-14; see Acts 13:2; Rom. 1:1; Heb. 11:8). The apostles’ work was for all of us, but Jesus did not call all people to be His apostles.

In contrast, when talking about *eternal salvation*, the Bible **does not say** God called only some people whom He wanted, and did not call others whom He *did not want*. Many verses show that God wants *all* people to be saved, and He calls *all* people to Christ.

“The called” refers to every person who has responded to God’s invitation. It emphasizes that they are people whom God wanted, invited, and welcomed! It shows that every person who comes to Him is very dear and important! “The called” are not people who came without an invitation. “The called” are people who came because they had an invitation from the Creator of the universe and from His Son, the King of Kings!

Peter reminds Christians that they had chosen to obey the gospel: “...you have purified your souls in obeying the truth...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God...Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached

to you” (1 Pet. 1:22-23, 25). Later, he tells them, “...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Like the term “the called,” these statements declare that all people who have obeyed the gospel are very special to God!

In the New Testament, “the called” are all people who, through faith and love, have chosen to answer God’s gospel call: “...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). “...God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel...” (2 Thess. 2:13-14). We become “...partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:11-13). These verses show that “the called” are those who heard the gospel, believed it, loved God, and chose to trust Him for salvation. All who answer the call of the gospel are “the called”:
“...the gospel...is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...” (Rom. 1:16).

Good News! God Wants to SAVE You & Everyone!

Paul wrote, “...He has mercy on whom He wills...” (Rom. 9:18). This verse is *not* talking about how God decides each person’s eternal destiny. We will examine Romans 9-11 later in this study (pages 18-21).

However, consider one question now about how this verse would apply to each person’s eternal destiny:

Q: **On whom** does God will (choose) to have mercy for eternal salvation?

A: God is willing to have mercy for eternal salvation **on all people!**

GOD WANTS to save you. He is “...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9; see Ezek. 33:11). He “...desires all men to be saved...” (1 Tim. 2:4). He wants people to “...seek the Lord, in the hope [God “hopes”!] that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

GOD is SEEKING you. Jesus came “...to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10); “...the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (Jn. 4:23). Peter told Jews that God sent Jesus “...to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:26).

No. Nothing in these verses says He saved them without their free choice. Notice that the gospel had already touched their hearts one week earlier. The message they had heard is recorded in 26 verses (Acts 13:16-41). After that message, “...the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath” (Acts 13:42)! People saw their excitement! Also, they had seven more days to think about the gospel. There can be no doubt that God knew their hearts long before Acts 13:48.

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (13:44)! **This event is a vivid example of people making their own choices about eternal life.** Regarding some who heard “the word of God” that day, verse 46 says, “...you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life....” In contrast, after this second message, the Gentiles again responded joyfully! They were “...glad and glorified the word of the Lord...” (13:48). This is when Luke says, “...And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (13:48)!

Some chose to resist God’s grace, and some chose to accept it. Verse 48 does not say anything about the Lord appointing these Gentiles to eternal life without their free choice. Instead, each time they heard the good news, they joyfully welcomed it! These Gentiles chose to believe!

“ETERNAL SECURITY”?

The idea of “once saved, always saved” is also called “eternal security,” “the perseverance of the saints,” and “the impossibility of apostasy.”

“Once saved, always saved” is an **absolutely necessary part** of Calvin’s Predestination. If Calvin’s Predestination were true—if God had decided our **eternal destiny without our free choice**—it would mean that all saved people *could never choose to leave Him*. So, if the Bible says saved people **can choose to leave God** and be lost, we will *know* God has *not* already decided each person’s eternal destiny without our free choice. *We will know for sure* that Calvin’s Predestination is false.

Does JAMES Teach “Eternal Security”?

James says, “Brethren [Christians], **if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins**” (Jas. 5:19-20). If a Christian “wanders from the truth” and never returns, that choice is eternally fatal — “death.”

Good news! We can help save souls! When some of God’s children wander away, He often uses some of His other children to help rescue them (see Gal. 6:1). Prayerful encouragement can touch a brother’s heart, bring him back, and “save a soul from death”! Also, James says God’s word **can save Christians** from departure: “**brethren...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves**” (Jas. 1:19, 21-22).

This does not say the Lord opened her heart *without her choice*. It only tells us **who** opened her heart. We do learn that her heart opened **after** “we...spoke” and “Lydia heard us” — *after she heard words from God*.

Many times, the Bible shows the following process in conversions:

- (1) The apostles and evangelists used Old Testament prophecies to show **the identity of the Christ** (see Acts 2:14-36; 8:29-35).
- (2) After learning *who He is*, many people were ready to “**heed**” (16:14) **the commands of the Christ** — ready to obey (Acts 2:37; 8:36).

For example, the next chapter says, “...there was a *synagogue of the Jews*. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures [Old Testament], explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:1-4).

Apparently, Lydia already had some knowledge of, and respect for, the Old Testament. She worshiped God, and she did that on the seventh day, as Jews did. The hearts of many Jews were closed to the idea of a new covenant replacing the Law of Moses — *until their hearts were overwhelmed by the good news that the Old Testament prophecies of the Christ were fulfilled in Jesus!* There are more than 300 such prophecies!

Lydia’s heart was not opened by the wisdom or eloquence of the men (see 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 3:6-9). *Every time a person comes to Jesus, the glory belongs to God* (1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:29, 31; Eph. 2:8-9). **His word pierces hearts** (Acts 2:37; 7:54). “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb. 4:12; see Eph. 6:17).

Lydia had to first **hear who Jesus is**. Then she was ready to “**heed**” *what Jesus says*, and she obeyed Him in baptism. Other hearts were also opened and followed her example that day. *God’s love in His message draws hearts to His Son and eternal life* (Rom. 1:16; Jn. 12:32)!

Some GENTILES in Antioch of Pisidia

Many Jews obeyed the gospel, but some in Antioch of Pisidia did not. Paul and Barnabas told them, “‘It was necessary that **the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles** [non-Jews]. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**” (Acts 13:46-48). Does this say *God alone* made the choice to save these Gentiles?

GOD INVITES you and all people. “Come to Me, **all you who labor and are heavy laden**...” (Matt. 11:28); “...**as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God**” (2 Cor. 5:20); “...the Spirit and the bride say, ‘**Come!**’ And let him who hears say, ‘**Come!**’ And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely**” (Rev. 22:17). “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). “...Go into **all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned**” (Mk. 16:15-16). There is no false advertising in the gospel! There are **no people** to whom God “offers” salvation, while knowing that He has already decided to send them to eternal punishment. God truly invites **all!** If each person’s eternal destiny depended only on God’s will — *on His choice only* — every person would be saved, “For there is **no partiality with God**” (Rom. 2:11).

God REJOICES when you or anyone accepts His offer of grace! There is “...**joy in heaven...joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents**” (Lk. 15:7, 10; see 20-24)!

Do Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2 Teach “Total Depravity”?

In Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2, does Paul teach that every person is born “totally depraved” — unable to understand and obey the gospel until God sends the Holy Spirit upon him?

Romans 8:7 — “Because **the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be**.”

1 Corinthians 2:14-15 — “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one**.”

The Speakers — A portion of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is about the speakers through whom God revealed His message: “...my speech and my preaching...we speak the wisdom of God...But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit...These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches...” (1 Cor. 2:4, 7, 10, 13; see 1:17, 23). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets, including Paul, to guide them “into all truth” (Jn. 16:13). The Holy Spirit had even given the miraculous gift of *prophecy* to some of the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14). In Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is saying sinners should receive God’s word, and Christians should grow by it, because it is *God’s inspired word*, not words of mere men speaking human wisdom.

The Hearers — Paul talks about two kinds of hearers with *bad attitudes*:

- (1) **Some who did not obey the gospel**: Some thought they were “wise” and the gospel was “foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18-31). To others, the

cross was “a stumbling block” (1:23). Many leaders rejected Jesus, but “...the common people heard Him gladly” (Mk. 12:37; see Lk. 10:21).

(2) **Some who did obey the gospel, but did not grow spiritually:** Paul says the Corinthians should have been growing more “mature” (1 Cor. 2:6; see Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:17-18). “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to **carнал** [fleshly, as in Rom. 8:7], as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3; see 14:20-40). Later, Paul reminded them, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...?” (1 Cor. 6:19). **They had the Holy Spirit living in them, but that did not make them “spiritual.”** They still needed to mature by setting their minds on spiritual things.

God does not set a person’s heart to be evil or good against his will — without his free choice. Before and after baptism, we are responsible for our own attitudes toward God and His word: “Therefore take heed how you hear...” (Lk. 8:18). “If anyone has an ear, let him hear” (Rev. 13:9). The message about the love of Christ at the cross has a powerful effect on good and honest hearts: “But the ones [seeds] that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15; see 8:8). Each person chooses to be good soil, or not, by the attitude of his heart. Jesus also said, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). Each person must choose whether to be a good tree or a bad tree.

We set our own hearts to receive or reject God’s word (Mk. 7:9; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:20-21, 28; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:7-8; Matt. 10:14; Lk. 18:17; Jn. 3:11; 12:48-50; 17:8; 2 Thess. 2:10; Acts 2:41; Phil. 2:5; Jas. 1:21). Before and after baptism, each person decides whether to “set” his mind on fleshly things or spiritual things (Rom. 12:16; Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:1-3; Gal. 6:7-8).

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6). Christians need to continue the **transforming process** by setting our minds on God’s will so we can continually grow more “spiritual” and less “carnal” (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Are People Saved by “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”?

Cornelius and his friends were Gentiles (non-Jews, “Greeks”). In Acts 10, they were baptized (immersed, overwhelmed) in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-16; 1:4-5; 2:1-4). Some people believe this was a

not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12).

God commanded Pharaoh to give up his slaves, Israel — only for a short time, at first, to go and worship God. Moses and Aaron delivered **words from God:** “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’ And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go’” (Ex. 5:1-2).

Israel had become slaves — a cheap source of labor for Pharaoh. It would be a great economic loss to him if Israel went into the wilderness and did not return. By His demand, God forced Pharaoh to make a choice. God foreknew that Pharaoh would choose rebellion. God had said, “But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand” (Ex. 3:19). Later, Moses said to Pharaoh, “But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God” (Ex. 9:30). Pharaoh “sinned” by choosing to resist God’s words (Ex. 9:34).

To accomplish His eternal plan, God used many sinners, such as Joseph’s brothers, Assyria, and Judas (Gen. 37; Isa. 10:5-12; Matt. 26:23-25). None of them deserved mercy. But to fulfill His plan, God had mercy on some and hardened others. Even when they chose to sin, God was able to use their actions in His plan. As Joseph told his brothers, “...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

God used Pharaoh to show His power so His name would be “declared in all the earth” (Ex. 9:16; see 10:1-2; Rom. 9:19-24). Pharaoh chose to sin, but God used his actions to save people in all nations, including Egypt.

Good news! God does not harden humble hearts! “...God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6; see Is. 26:5; Rom. 1:21-32; 10:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Matt. 18:4). So, “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...” (Heb. 3:8). “...Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God...Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (Jas. 4:4, 7-8, 10).

OPENING Lydia’s Heart

Does the statement about God opening Lydia’s heart teach that His grace overwhelmed her heart and saved her without her free choice? “And on the Sabbath day we [Luke, with Paul and others] went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And...she and her household were baptized...” (Acts 16:13-15).

not cast away His people whom He foreknew..." (Rom. 11:2; see 11:1-5). Today, the inheritance is available to any Jew by becoming part of **spiritual Israel** through faith in Christ. "For you are all **sons of God through faith** in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, **then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**" (Gal. 3:26-29). Christ is "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2; see Matt. 21:38). Every Jew or Gentile who enters into Christ becomes an heir with Him (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 1:11; 3:6)!

"And so [in this way] **all Israel will be saved...**" (Rom. 11:26). Making Gentiles "fellow heirs" in Christ with Jews is the way which God fore-ordained for saving spiritual Israel (see Eph. 3:5-6). On the judgment day, all who are in Christ, **all of spiritual Israel**, will inherit eternal blessings! Romans 9-11 shows that everything in God's eternal plan was aimed at saving Jews and Gentiles, "...that He might have **mercy on all**" (Rom. 11:32)!

HARDENING Pharaoh's Heart

Romans 9 talks about God hardening Pharaoh's heart. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.' Therefore He has **mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens**" (Rom. 9:17-18). Does this mean God makes some people's hearts sinful and decides their eternal destiny without their free choice?

This section of Romans is talking about how God used certain people to **unfold His eternal plan for all people**. In different ways, He used Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Pharaoh, the nation of Israel, and Gentile nations to accomplish His plan. This does not teach that God chooses anyone's *eternal destiny* without that person's free choice.

The book of Exodus tells us that "...the **LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh...**" (Ex. 9:12; see 4:21). However, Exodus also says **Pharaoh** hardened his **own** heart. "And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, **he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants**" (9:34; see 8:15, 32; 9:17). How can both be true? How can the Lord and Pharaoh harden Pharaoh's heart?

When God gives a command to anyone, it forces that person to make a choice. **Words** can harden the heart of anyone who does not want to hear them (see Acts 7:54-60). We often see different people react in opposite ways when all of them hear the **same words** (see Acts 17:1-5). God commanded Abraham to give up his son, Isaac (Gen. 22:1-2). "So Abraham rose early in the morning..." to obey God (22:3). Later, an angel told Abraham, "...now I know that you fear God, since you have

"direct operation of the Holy Spirit" which suddenly saved them. Some also believe they were saved without their free choice.

However, a closer look shows they were not saved by the miracle, and not saved without free choice. When the Holy Spirit overwhelmed them, the miracle did not remove their sins — did not purify their hearts (compare Num. 22:27-30). An angel had told Cornelius that he would hear "...**words by which you and all your household will be saved**" (Acts 11:14). They would be saved by the **words of the gospel**, which is "...**the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek**" (Rom. 1:16). **Cornelius and his friends already knew** that God had given the good news of peace to Jews through Jesus (Acts 10:36-37). On this day, God would give that same good news to them — to Gentiles!

God knew the hearts of these Gentiles. After this event, the Bible tells us, "...God, who **knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith**" (Acts 15:8-9). The miracle "acknowledged" their hearts, and faith "purified" their hearts.

Instead of removing sins, the miracle removed *prejudice* from the hearts of Jewish believers. They — including Peter — had resisted preaching to Gentiles. But when God sent Peter to Cornelius, he went and preached the gospel. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. **And those of the circumcision [Jews] who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...**" (Acts 10:44-48). By the miracle, God revealed His heart and their hearts. He wanted them in His family, and they believed His gospel. The miracle silenced anyone who would want to "forbid water" — prevent the baptism of Gentiles. After the miracle, seeing that they were ready to obey, Peter "...commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...." Their hearts were **purified by obedient faith**, cleansed by the blood of Christ, when they obeyed that command from their hearts (15:9; see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4; Mk. 16:16; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:7).

God "made no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles in how He purified their hearts (Acts 15:9). Peter told Jews the purpose of baptism: "...Repent, and let every one of you **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...** Then those who **gladly received his word** were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:38, 41). There is "one baptism" (Eph. 4:4). So, the hearts of the Jews and Gentiles were **purified**

by faith when they were baptized in water “for the remission of sins.”

After Acts 10, some Jewish believers in Jerusalem opposed Peter for going to Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18). He answered them by telling about the miracle. Then he asked, “... **who was I that I could withstand God?**” *When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’*” (Acts 11:17-18). So, in Acts 11, we again see that the Acts 10 miracle **silenced all objections** from Jewish believers about preaching to Gentiles. This event cleared the way for other Gentiles to hear the gospel and enter the kingdom of Christ through obedient faith!

Baptism in the Holy Spirit was *an event*. It occurred only two times. The apostles gave miraculous gifts to many Christians who were selected by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 6:6-8; 8:14-24; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Cor. 12:1-11). But only Jesus could baptize in the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 3:11). In Acts 2, Jesus baptized the *speakers* in the Holy Spirit, which helped remove the prejudice of the *hearers*. In Acts 10, He baptized the *hearers* in the Holy Spirit, which helped remove the prejudice of the *speaker* and others.

God never says His grace will suddenly overwhelm you, *with or without your choice*, and make you **feel saved**. In the New Testament, He never tells a sinner to **wait for salvation to overwhelm him** or happen to him. He never tells sinners to “pray through” until salvation comes upon them.

Do we love God because He overpowered us by His grace and Spirit *without our free choice*? No. “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 Jn. 4:19)! Love from God’s own heart causes love from our own hearts. The gospel is the good news of His love! His message has the power to turn humble hearts to Him! When we obey the gospel, our hearts are freely responding to God’s love. Paul reminds Christians, “...*you obeyed from the heart...*” (Rom. 6:17-18). Obeying the gospel is a decision from the heart of a person who is *drawn to Jesus by His love at the cross*.

Instead of telling people to wait, God’s word says exactly the opposite: “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (Jas. 4:10)!

Is Faith a “Gift” Which God “Grants” to Some, but Not to Others?

Is faith a “gift”? Paul reminded Christians at Philippi, “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*” (Phil. 1:29). The Christians in Achaia “*had believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Yes. Faith is a gift.

However, the Bible never says God suddenly puts faith inside some lost people, but not others, *without their free choice*.

Every part of salvation is a “gift” — a “grant” which we do not deserve.

3:9)! However, He told them, “**But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life**” (Jn. 5:40; see 5:44; 7:17; 12:42-43). They chose to resist God’s invitation and His grace (see Matt. 11:28-30; 23:37; 2 Tim. 3:8).

Jesus told His fellow Jews, “...*the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it*” (Matt. 21:43). God’s kingdom was often called **Israel**, the name God gave to **Jacob**, from whom the nation came. Before Jesus was born, Gabriel had told Mary, “...*the Lord God will give Him [Jesus] the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end*” (Lk. 1:32-33). The kingdom of Christ is His church, which began in Acts 2 (Heb. 8:6-12; Matt. 16:18-19; Jn. 18:36; Mk. 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; Col. 1:13, 18; Phil. 3:20). We should respect all physical nations and their right to exist today, including the nation of Israel. But spiritually, the kingdom of Christ is “*the Israel of God*” today (see Gal. 6:16). Peter told Christians, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...who once were not a people but are now the people of God...*” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Good news! God wants to save Jews and Gentiles (9:23-24)! Regarding eternal destiny, Romans 10 says, “...*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*” ... “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:12-13, 15-17). Any person of Jewish or Gentile ancestry can choose to obey the gospel.

At first, spiritual Israel was composed **entirely of Jewish converts**. Three thousand Jews obeyed the gospel on the very first day of the church (Acts 2:41)! Later, thousands of other Jews entered the kingdom (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). After Acts 10, many Jews and Gentiles obeyed and became part of God’s spiritual Israel (Acts 11:19-26; 14:1; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:4-8). When Gentiles came to God, that fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies (see Gen. 12:3; Ps. 22:27-28; Isa. 2:2; Rom. 15:8-12).

In Romans 11, Paul tells Gentile Christians, “*Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell [some Jews], severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also [Jews], if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again*” (Rom. 11:22-23). Regarding salvation, God will “*graft in*” people or “*cut off*” people based on their choice to believe or disbelieve.

Did God break His promises to Israel about **inheritance**? In Romans 9-11, Paul assures Jews and Gentiles that God keeps His promises. “*God has*

about how God will judge us, “works” does not mean “earning wages by labor.” Instead, the Lord is using “works” to mean “actions.” Obeying the gospel is not a way to earn salvation. Instead, it is an *action* of obedient faith. God invites you to accept His saving grace by humbly obeying the gospel from your heart and serving Him faithfully.

ROMANS 9-11

Does Romans 9-11 teach Calvin’s Predestination? That section contains several verses which are somewhat difficult, and many sincere people have thought those verses support Calvin’s Predestination. However, many other verses clearly show that Romans 9-11 does not support it.

In Romans 9-11, there are two kinds of choosing (election):

- (1) In regard to **each person’s eternal destiny**, God’s choice (election) of each person *is* based on that person’s decisions.
- (2) In regard to **unfolding His eternal plan for man**, God’s choice (election) of each person and nation *is not* based on their decisions.

God chose Isaac, not his half-brother Ishmael (Rom. 9:7-9). He chose Jacob (Israel), not his brother Esau (9:10-13). He chose the nation of Israel, and no other nation. **God chose which people He would use** to bring Jesus and salvation into the world. These were entirely His choices, not the choices of the people whom He used.

The fleshly ancestry of a Jew, and **any works of trying to earn** righteousness by law-keeping, did not mean he would live with God eternally (see 9:6-8; 9:30-10:3; Matt. 3:8-9). Some in Israel served God faithfully. Others did not, and deserved death. But God had **mercy** on many, sparing their lives to fulfill His plan (see 9:18-23; Ex. 32:7-14; Num. 14:11-24; Isa. 1:9; Ezek. 6:1-8; Ezra 9:8, 15). His mercy in sparing a person’s *physical life did not mean* that He also spared that person’s *spiritual* life eternally.

One aim of Romans 9-11 is to **remove pride**. Paul says many of his fellow Jews “...**have not submitted to the righteousness of God**” (10:3). He also tells Gentile Christians, “...**Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either**” (11:20-21).

In Romans 9-11, there are also two kinds of “Israel.” God used physical Israel to unfold His eternal plan and bring Christ into the world (9:1-5; 3:1-2). He wanted **physical Israel** to be His true, **spiritual Israel** (see 9:6; 2:28-29; Jn. 1:47): “...**All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people**” (Rom. 10:21). Some Jews were faithful to God. But the nation turned away and broke the covenant many times (see Heb. 8:7-9; Isa. 24:5). The Gentiles were sinful, too (Rom. 3:9, 23).

Jesus told some Jews, “...**the Son gives life to whom He will**” (Jn. 5:21). So, **to whom** does Jesus “will” to give life? The answer is “everyone” (2 Pet.

God does not owe us anything. He never has, and He never will. **God does not owe us evidence of His power and love**. But He grants us overwhelming evidence in the heavens, on earth, and in our lives (Ps. 19:1-6; Job 38-41; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20; Matt. 5:45). **God did not owe us evidence that Jesus is His Son**. But He granted us abundant evidence through prophecies, miracles, and eye-witnesses (Lk. 24:44-45; Jn. 3:1-2; 10:37-38; 20:27-31; Acts 4:33; Rom. 1:4; Heb. 2:3-4). **God did not owe us the life of His Son**. But He granted the life of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins — “*while we were still sinners*” (Rom. 5:8; see Jn. 3:16; Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8). **God did not owe us a way to repent**, a way to turn to Christ and eternal life. But He “...*has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*” (Acts 11:18; compare Heb. 12:16-17).

God did not owe us the Bible — nor the faith it produces. Faith would not be possible if God had not given us the marvelous gift of His word. Jude shows us that “*the faith*” is a gift. He writes about “...*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). Here, “*the faith*” refers to *the message*, because that is what produces faith: “...*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). All of God’s faith-producing message is given to us in the Bible. “...*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*” (2 Pet. 1:3; see Jn. 16:12-13).

The Bible — and the faith it produces — are gifts of God’s grace. God grants faith to anyone who will gladly receive His message.

Does Psalm 51:5 say Babies are Born Guilty?

In Psalm 51:5, David writes, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*” Is he teaching that all babies are born guilty of sin? First, notice that he is not talking about *all* babies. He says, “*I*” and “*me.*”

David is using a *tool of language* called “hyperbole” (pronounced “high-per-buh-lee”). It is from “hyper” (over or beyond) and “ballein” (to throw). Hyperbole is *exaggeration for emphasis*. It is a statement which *goes far beyond the facts* to draw attention to *the real message*.

Hyperbole is often used today. For example, a mother tells her son, “I’ve told you a *million times* not to hit your sister!” Or a man sees an old friend and says, “I haven’t seen you in a *hundred years!*” Both of these people are *greatly over-stating* the facts. But they are not deceiving anyone. Their *true messages* are clear and emphatic.

Luke uses hyperbole: “*For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing*” (Acts 17:21). Does that mean *no one* in Athens cooked, ate, slept, bought vegetables, or did any other work? Certainly not. Luke

uses hyperbole to emphasize the fact that people in Athens devoted an *extreme amount of time* to telling and hearing new things.

David uses hyperbole in another psalm: “*The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies*” (Ps. 58:3). Have you ever heard a baby talk on the day it was born? A newborn baby cannot tell lies—or even say one word. David uses hyperbole to emphasize the *true message* that these people have been wicked *for a very long time*. But notice that he does not say they are *born* guilty. Instead, he says “*They go astray*” — *after* they are born. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah (2 Sam. 11). In Psalm 51, he is confessing his evil deeds and telling God how deeply sorrowful he is. He is pouring out the feelings of a broken, contrite heart (a “bruised” heart): “*...I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight*” (51:3-4). “*Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God...*” (51:14). David is not saying he inherited sin from Adam or from anyone else. He is not blaming other people. He is doing the exact opposite. He is accepting all of the blame and guilt. He is confessing his own evil deeds. He is using hyperbole in verse 5 to emphasize that he is a *very, very bad, sinful person*.

We need the same kind of sorrow for *our* sins. That is what leads us to repentance and the joy of salvation (2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 17:30; 2:38; 8:39).

Good News! ALL BABIES are Born Innocent!

Sin is not in the flesh of babies. God made us with many natural desires which can be fulfilled in godly ways. For example, see Heb. 13:4 and 1 Cor. 7:1-5. However, “*the flesh is weak*” (Matt. 26:41; see Rom. 6:19; 7:7-25). We often yield to our fleshly desires and fulfill them in sinful ways (Jas. 1:14-15; Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16-24; Eph. 2:3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 2 Pet. 2:18). Our flesh is certainly an avenue of many temptations. But “sin” and “guilt” are not in our flesh when we are born.

Jesus became flesh (Jn. 1:14). We are flesh, and “*...He Himself likewise shared in the same...*” (Heb. 2:14; see 5:7). Actually, He was even “*born of the seed of David according to the flesh*” (Rom. 1:3). Yet, He was sinless (Heb. 4:15). He had no sin at birth, and we have none at birth.

Sin is an action. “*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness...*” (1 Jn. 3:4). We can inherit a color of hair, but not an action. Sin can “*defile the flesh*” (Jude 8; see 7); “*...he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*” (1 Cor. 6:18). We need to “*put to death the deeds [actions] of the body*” and “*the works [actions] of the flesh*” (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19).

Sin is not inherited. In the Garden of Eden, sin was committed by all people on the earth at that time — by your parents and mine, Adam

and Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). Eve was deceived, but Adam *knowingly* chose to sin (1 Tim. 2:14). That day, you and I also suffered some terrible losses.

The sins and mistakes of parents can make their children’s lives very difficult. For example, a rich man gambles and loses all of his money, houses, and land. That same day, his children also lose those things. They will never inherit the things which could have helped their lives.

Adam’s sin caused *all* of us to *lose* the beautiful Garden of Eden — and access to the tree of life. His action brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12; 3:23; 6:23; Heb. 9:27). So, we inherit some of the **results** of Adam’s sin. But we do not inherit his *act* of sin, nor the *guilt* of it. The sin and guilt of a man cannot be inherited by his children: “*...The son shall not bear the guilt of the father...*” (Ezek. 18:20).

Infants cannot sin — and they cannot obey the gospel. They are not able to believe, repent (“decide to turn” from sin), confess Christ, or obey the command of baptism “*from the heart*” (see Rom. 6:17-18, 3-4).

Jesus showed that infants are sinless when He said, “*...of such is the kingdom of God*” (Mk. 10:14; see Matt. 18:3-4).

Good News! God will NOT Punish YOU for HIS Choices!

If Calvin’s Predestination were true, all lost people on the judgment day could blame God. They could say that the reason for their eternal punishment is because God did not choose to save them. But Calvin’s Predestination is not true. So, no one will be able to blame God that day. God will *not* send you to eternal punishment based on a choice which *He alone* made, without your free choice. “*...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” (Gen. 18:25).

The Bible emphatically teaches that God holds us responsible for our own choices: “*...whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life*” (Gal. 6:7-8). “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus “*...will reward each according to his works*” (Matt. 16:27); “*...if anyone hears My words and does not believe...the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (Jn. 12:47-48). “*So then each of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Rom. 14:12); “*...he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality*” (Col. 3:25). God “*...without partiality judges according to each one’s work...*” (1 Pet. 1:17). Jesus could come at any time, and He says, “*...My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work*” (Rev. 22:12; see 2:23; 20:12-13). Sometimes, the word “work” or “works” refers to “earning” something, like earning wages by labor (Rom. 4:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9). But in the verses