

Predestination

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

There are many different Christian denominations: from Southern Baptist, to Primitive Baptist, to Roman Catholic, to Methodist, to Pentecostal, to Presbyterian and all points in between, it seems. All of these different denominations came about because of differences in interpreting the Scriptures. Some of the most common differences of opinion and interpretation occur on doctrines about baptisms, eternal security, and the concept of free will, or man’s choice in the matter of his own salvation. This matter of free will gets directly to the subject of predestination, and the issue of whether God chooses who will be brought to faith in Christ, or whether each man chooses for himself whether he wants to believe in Christ and be saved.

The doctrine of predestination is one of the most controversial and divisive doctrines among Christians. Believers who earnestly desire to know the truth about predestination should be willing to thoroughly and carefully examine the biblical teachings on this subject in order to determine what the word of God teaches us about our salvation in Jesus Christ, and to what extent our own will or decision is involved in our salvation.

All Christians can agree from reading the Bible that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and that those who have not come to faith in Christ during their lifetimes here on earth will spend an eternity in Hell separated from God. Jesus taught His disciples that relatively few will be saved, and that most will in fact spend eternity separated from God (Matthew 7:13-14). The disagreements begin when we begin to discuss whether man has a say in determining his own salvation, or whether God Himself determines who will be saved and who will be left in their sins.

During our study on predestination, we will look at “both sides of the coin” so to speak. We will consider Scriptures used by those who say the Bible teaches that man’s own decision either to accept Christ or reject Him is the determining factor in his salvation. And we will also consider Scriptures used by those who say that God decides who will ultimately come to faith in Christ, and who will be hardened and left in their sins with no hope of salvation.

In our endeavor to determine just what the word of God teaches us on this difficult subject, we will interpret the Scriptures considering the context of the passages in which they appear. We will also consider who is being addressed in these passages, and we will interpret these Scriptures in the light of all the rest of the Scriptures as a whole. When we derive an interpretation of God’s word that is not contradicted by other passages of Scripture, then we can be confident that we have derived a correct interpretation, and that we have correctly handled the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Later in this book, we will also consider what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty of God in the lives of all men, and in the events that transpire in His creation. We will examine Scriptures that speak of the sovereignty of God in determining the paths that men take during the course of their lives, whether they are believers or unbelievers. We will also see from the Scriptures how God works in the lives of His people to motivate them, sometimes even forcefully overcoming their own wills, in order to make them will and act according to His sovereign will and purpose for His creation.

The Apostle Paul prayed that we as God’s people would grow in our knowledge and understanding of the things of God. Paul wrote: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9). And again Paul wrote: “...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9). Therefore, let us now look

diligently into the Scriptures to see what God's word teaches, so that we may fully understand what God has done for us as recipients of His saving grace.

Predestination –Two Widely Held Interpretations

In the Bible we find numerous references used to describe those who have, or will at some point in time, come to faith in Christ. These references describe believers with words such as “predestined”, “chosen”, “elect”, and as those who are “called” by God. With this in mind, we must admit that the subject of predestination is mentioned in the Bible, and at some point during our walk as believers, we will find ourselves wanting to know more about this teaching.

What exactly do the Scriptures teach us about predestination, and does man himself have a choice in the matter of his own salvation? Predestination refers to one's eternal destiny after their life here on earth is over, and the issue of that eternal destiny having already been decided beforehand by God.

Some interpret the Bible as saying that God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is an offer that is open to each and every human being who has ever lived, and that their ultimate destiny rests with their own decision either to accept Christ or reject Him. Those who interpret salvation in this way will say that predestination, or God's choice of those who will be saved, refers to those whom God foreknew, or knew before hand, would make the decision to accept Christ as opposed to rejecting Him, at such time as they are drawn or enabled by God to do so.

Others believe the Bible teaches that those who will receive eternal life are predestined to come to faith in Christ, in that they are foreknown and chosen beforehand by God Himself to be brought to faith, regardless of any works of their own whatsoever, including any decision made while they are still dead in their sins as to whether or not they will accept Christ. In this second case, God foreknew from before the creation of the world those individuals whom He will call to faith in His Son. This calling is effectual, meaning that all of those who are called to faith in Christ will come to Him, and none will refuse that call.

So we see that there are two widely held and different interpretations of the biblical doctrine of predestination. Regardless of which interpretation we hold as being the correct biblical teaching, let us resolve to do as the Bereans did when

they considered the message brought by the Apostle Paul, and let us search the Scriptures ourselves, to see whether these things are true (Acts 17:11).

As we begin our study of predestination, we should first consider what the Bible teaches about the depravity of man. When we understand what the Scriptures reveal to us about man's sinfulness and the extent of his wickedness and depravity, we will better understand our own salvation and what God has done for us through His saving grace.

The Fall of Man and Its Consequences

In Genesis 2, after the Lord God had created the heavens and the earth, the plants and creatures that live on the earth, we find that He created Adam, and then Eve to be Adam's helper. God planted the Garden of Eden, and He placed Adam and Eve in the garden to tend it and take care of it. He put all kinds of trees in the garden that were good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam and Eve, saying that they could eat from any tree in the garden, but they must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or they would surely die.

Following in Genesis 3, we read the account of the fall of man. The serpent, or the devil, deceived Eve with a lie, saying that if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that her eyes would be opened, and she would be just like God. The serpent also lied to Eve again saying that she would not surely die if she ate the fruit, as God had said she would.

Eve, after hearing this enticement, looked at the fruit and saw that it was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable as something that would give her wisdom. So she took some and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband Adam who was with her. Adam, who also knew that God had forbidden them to eat this fruit, ate it as well.

This is the point at which sin entered the world. Immediately after they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve became aware that they were naked, and they felt shame, whereas they had no awareness of their nakedness before. As a result of this transgression, God cursed the serpent saying:

“And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,

And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

This curse that the Lord God pronounced upon the serpent was fulfilled in Christ’s victory over Satan at Calvary’s cross. After cursing the serpent, the Lord said to Eve that He would greatly increase her pain in childbearing, and that her desire would now be for her husband, who would rule over her. The Lord then said to Adam that because he had listened to his wife and had eaten the fruit of the tree that He had commanded him not to eat, he would have to toil painfully by the sweat of his brow to obtain food from the land until he died and returned to the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 2:7).

At the point in time when Adam and Eve ate the fruit that God had told them not to eat, sin entered into the world. This was the fall of man. Before that time, Adam and Eve had the power to either obey God, or to sin by disobeying him. After that point, the inclination and tendency of man was to do only evil. The extent of man’s depravity after the fall is revealed in Genesis 6 where we read: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5).

Paul described the fall of man saying: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.” (Romans 5:12-14). Paul then explained that just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and that one sin of Adam’s brought death and condemnation to every man, so also through one Man, Jesus Christ, and His one act of righteousness, God’s grace would overflow to many, resulting in justification that brings life.

No One Seeks God, Not Even One

Paul wrote about man’s depravity in Romans 3:9-18, and within this passage he taught us that there is no one who seeks God, not even one. Paul also described the extent of man’s wickedness when he wrote in verse 9 that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin. Beginning in verse 10 we read:

“There is none righteous, not even one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks for God.
All have turned aside, together they have become useless;
There is none who does good,
There is not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12)

In these verses, Paul quoted Scriptures from Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3 and Ecclesiastes 7:20 to describe the extent of man’s wickedness, and to emphasize that *there is not one man who seeks God, not even one*. Paul then continued in this passage to quote several verses from the Psalms and Isaiah that speak of man’s wickedness and depravity. Since Paul taught us clearly that “there is none who seeks for God”, then God Himself must seek men if any from among them are to be reconciled to Him.

Unregenerate Man is Dead in His Trespasses and Sins

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul described the totality of man’s depravity by saying that he is “dead” in trespasses and sin. In chapter 2 we read:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

In verse 1, Paul did not say that man is sick with sin, or terminally ill with sin with some small spark of life left in him, but he said that man is *dead* in trespasses and sin. He described man’s total depravity and condition of deadness

and inability to respond to the things of God in order to emphasize the magnitude of God's grace toward us whom He has saved.

Paul taught that all of us as believers were also once dead in our transgressions, until God, because of His love and mercy which He chose to show toward us, made us alive with Christ, even when we were still dead in our sins (verses 4-5). Paul then taught that it is solely by God's grace that we have been saved, through faith in Christ. And he also taught that our faith does not come from within ourselves, but it is a gift given to us by God. (Consider also Philippians 1:29). Paul made it clear that our salvation does not come about through any work or effort of our own whatsoever, so that no one may boast that he had anything at all to do with his salvation (verses 8-9).

If our faith were somehow based on even one good work of our own, even making a "right decision", then we would be able to boast that we made the right decision when others refused to do so, when they too supposedly could have. However, Paul taught that for those of us who have come to faith in Christ, we should understand that our faith is the gift of God and has nothing to do with any works of our own.

Paul again emphasized the inability of unregenerate man to receive and respond to the things of God when he wrote: "But a natural man *does not accept* the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he *cannot understand* them, because they are spiritually appraised." (1 Corinthians 2:14, emphasis added).

The natural man, or man in his lost, unregenerate state, does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because he cannot understand them. The things of the Spirit of God cannot be discerned with the intellect alone. Rather, as Paul said, "they are spiritually appraised", which is to say they are discerned and understood only through the Spirit of God. For this reason, when the lost, unregenerate man hears the Gospel message given to us through the word of God, it sounds like foolishness to him. He is simply unable to understand or accept it because he is without the Spirit of God, which means that he is still spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins.

A dead body is unable to respond to any outside stimulus other than the call of God raising it to life, as was the case when Jesus called Lazarus to life though he had been dead for four days (John 11:38-44). In the same way, the unregenerate man who is dead in his transgressions is unable to respond to the Gospel message

until he has been called to life by God, and his regeneration occurs. At this point he is made alive with Christ, and he is then able to respond to Jesus Christ as his Lord who has saved him, just as Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul, was able to do for the first time when the time for his conversion came on the Damascus road.

Saul's Conversion on the Damascus Road

Saul's conversion is recounted three times in the Book of Acts: the first time in Acts 9:1-16, the second time in Acts 22:1-11, and the third time in Acts 26:9-18. When our sovereign God chooses to repeat events and teachings in His word, we should consider very carefully just what He is saying to us.

At the time of Saul's conversion, he was still thoroughly intent on persecuting the church. He had made no decision at all to come to Christ. In Acts 9:1-2, we see that he was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord", and that he was on his way to Damascus to bring back to Jerusalem in chains any followers of Christ he found there, to be punished (See also Acts 22:4-5 and Acts 26:9-12).

Saul had heard the Gospel message. He knew what it was about, and he was opposed to it. We see from these accounts of his conversion in the Book of Acts that he had remained steadfastly opposed to the Gospel, right up until the instant in time when he was confronted by Jesus Christ Himself.

However, this persecutor of the church and enemy of the Faith was one whom God had foreknown from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). In His time, though Saul was overtly hostile to the Gospel of Christ, God intervened in his life to bring him to faith. God forcefully overcame Saul's own will, which was hostile to the Gospel message as is the case with all unregenerate men (Romans 8:7). And as a result of God's forceful intervention in his life, Saul then responded to Jesus Christ as his Lord for the first time, as we see recorded in Acts 22:

"But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me saw the light,

to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’ (Acts 22:6-10)

If we read the text in the passages of the book of Acts recounting Saul’s conversion, and if we refrain from adding our own thoughts and conditions to the text, we will come to this conclusion: ***Saul got saved contrary to his own will, and apart from his own decision in the matter.*** At the time of Saul’s conversion, he was still hostile to the Gospel message; he had made no decision to come to Christ. God intervened in Saul’s life to change him and bring him to faith, and He does the same in the lives of every one of us who comes to faith in Christ.

Paul himself emphasized the inability of unregenerate men, all unregenerate men, to respond to the things of God when he wrote: “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for ***it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able***, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:6-8, emphasis added).

Paul taught us in these verses that “the mind set on the flesh”, or the mind of unregenerate man, is hostile toward God; it will not subject itself to the law of God ***because it is not even able to do so***. Sinful, unregenerate man is unable to accept or subject himself to the word of God, and therefore he cannot please God. Paul’s teaching in these verses is consistent with his teaching in Romans 3:10-12, where he emphasized that no one seeks God, not even one.

Since no unregenerate man will seek God, because he is unable to do so, how then can man be saved? How can sinful man be freed from his inability to respond to the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ and through him alone?

The answer is that God must intervene in an individual’s life to overcome their own will, which is hostile toward Him, and He must forcefully and effectually bring them to faith, just as He did in the life of Saul. When God does this, an individual’s regeneration has occurred; they have been born again (John 3:3). The evidence that they have been born again is that they respond to Jesus Christ as Lord, and they believe the Gospel message, just as happened in the life of Saul.

This is the lesson that God communicates to His people through the conversion of Saul, which is recounted three times in the Book of Acts. And as we will see, this same teaching is consistently communicated through other passages of Scripture as well.

Predestination – Part 2

As we continue our study of predestination, we will consider more teachings from the Bible that speak of God’s sovereign choice of a people for Himself, whom He has foreknown since before the creation of the world. One of the things that we will notice as we study further is that teachings given to us by Jesus are consistent with teachings given by the apostles John, Peter, and Paul. And their teachings are in agreement with teachings given to us by the authors of the book of Acts and the letter to the Hebrews.

The Effectual Calling of God

In John 6, Jesus said: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44). In this verse Jesus taught that for anyone to be able to come to Him, they must be drawn by God the Father. Otherwise, they are unable to accept the Gospel of Christ; they are unable to believe in Him. Now let us look carefully at the second part of this verse. After Jesus said that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him, He then immediately said, “and I will raise him up at the last day”.

Notice the certainty in the statement where Jesus said, “I will”, which teaches us that those whom the Father draws to His Son *will* be raised up at the last day. Jesus did not say that those who are drawn must then make the decision to come to Him in order to be saved, as opposed to rejecting Him. However, Jesus did say clearly, and without any added conditions or any mention of man’s cooperation, that those whom the Father draws *will* be raised up at the last day.

John 6:44 is one of several Bible passages we will consider that teach us about the calling of an individual to faith in Christ. Jesus taught us that this calling of God, this drawing by God the Father, is an effectual calling, meaning that all of those who receive this inward calling *will* indeed come to Him, and they *will* all be raised up at the last day. Without this effectual calling of God, the mind of sinful man, which is hostile toward God, has no desire to come to Christ and has not even the ability to come to Him (again, Romans 8:7).

There is an outward calling whereby the Gospel of Christ is preached in the hearing of men, which is illustrated in the Parable of the Sower recorded in Matthew 13:1-23. Jesus taught us in this parable that *the only place where the seed sown by the farmer produced a harvest of good fruit was where it fell upon "good soil"*. This is to say that when the seed of the Gospel of Christ is spoken in man's hearing, the only place where a harvest of good fruit will be realized is where the message is heard by God's elect. In contrast to others who hear the same Gospel message, God's elect both hear *and understand* the message, and they will therefore be saved and bear fruit to the glory of God. (Consider Matthew 13:23 and Acts 22:9).

In contrast to others who may receive the outward proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in their hearing, God's elect not only hear this outward calling for men to put their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, but they also receive the inward calling of God, which always results in the regeneration of those who receive it. In His time, the Father draws His elect to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and they all do in fact come to Him.

This drawing, which Jesus spoke about in John 6:44, is the inward calling of God, and it always results in the one who is drawn being raised up at the last day, just as Jesus said. *With this inward, effectual calling of God regeneration occurs, and one is born into the kingdom of God, apart from their own personal decision or cooperation.* The one who has received this calling has no more chance of refusing it than Saul had when he was called to faith on the Damascus road, even while he was still intent on persecuting the church.

If anyone rejects the Gospel of Christ, it is only because they have never been drawn by the Father; they have never received this inward, effectual calling of God which Jesus spoke about in John 6:44. Believing in Christ is not something that sinful, unregenerate man has the ability or capacity to do, in and of himself, in order to obtain salvation for himself. He must be drawn by the Father.

When a man is drawn to Christ by the Father, he is regenerated. He is born into the kingdom of God, and evidence of this regeneration and conversion which God has wrought within him is that he does indeed believe in Christ. Man does not reject the inward calling of God. Rather when the Father draws a man, Jesus *will* raise him up at the last day, just as He said He would.

There is one other thing that we should mention regarding the “drawing” by the Father that Jesus spoke about in John 6:44. The Greek word in the original text which is translated to English as “draws” in John 6:44 is the word “helko”, which means “to draw” or “to drag”. With this meaning in mind, we can easily see from the accounts of Saul’s conversion in the Book of Acts how he was forcefully “dragged” into the kingdom of God apart from any decision or cooperation of his own, even as he was “still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9:1).

Later in John 6, Jesus once again emphasized man’s inability to come to Him, unless it has been granted to him by the Father. Speaking to a crowd, Jesus said that the words He had spoken to them are “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63), and yet there were some there who did not believe. Jesus then explained the reason that there were some who had heard His words but did not believe, when He said to them: “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (John 6:65).

Jesus knew that some of those following Him at the time refused to accept Him and His words. Knowing His own sheep, and knowing that there were also some there who did not believe, Jesus emphasized again in John 6:65 what He had already taught in John 6:44, when He said that no one *could* come to Him; no one was *able* to come to Him, “unless it has been granted him from the Father”.

In John chapters 8 and 10, Jesus again taught of the inability of unregenerate men to hear His words and come to Him, unless they are numbered among those whom He referred to as His sheep. In John 10:24-26, we read that some Jews had gathered around Jesus and asked Him not to keep them in suspense, but to tell them plainly if He was indeed the Christ. Jesus replied to them saying that He had already told them, and that the miracles He had done in His Father’s name among them bore witness to His claim that He was in truth the Christ. And then Jesus told them: “But you do not believe *because you are not of My sheep*.” (John 10:26, emphasis added). It has only been given to God’s elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep, to believe in Him.

Notice that Jesus did not say to them they were not His sheep because they had decided for themselves not to believe, but conversely, He said that the reason they did not believe in Him was because they were not His sheep. Only those who belong to God, or those whom Jesus calls His sheep, will hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). *All of the rest will not be able to hear* (John 6:44, 6:65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew that these individuals to whom He was talking were not numbered among His sheep. Only God's elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His "sheep", will hear His voice. These will be called to faith in Christ, and they will therefore believe in Him. All of the rest will be left in their sins.

Jesus said: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (John 6:63). The Spirit of God gives eternal life, and unregenerate man, or man who is "in the flesh" so to speak, is completely without the ability to accept the Gospel of Christ unless he is called to faith by God Himself (John 6:44, 6:65, Romans 8:7, 1 Corinthians 2:14).

If and when this calling of God occurs in an individual's life, they are regenerated; they have been born again. Their being born again does not come about as a result of their own decision made when they are still dead in their sins, or still in the flesh, because as Jesus said: "the flesh profits nothing". Man's salvation comes about by the sovereign choice and effectual calling of God.

All men will remain hostile toward God unless and until they are called by Him to faith in Christ, just as was the case with Saul right up until the moment of his conversion on the Damascus Road. The Scriptures teach us that man's depravity is total. Since man in his unregenerate state is hostile toward God and unable to seek Him, then God must seek men and Himself bring them to faith, if any are to be saved.

Paul Described the "Order of Salvation"

In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also

called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30).

In these verses Paul spoke of God’s foreknowledge of those who would receive the gift of eternal life. Paul taught that those whom God “foreknew” are the ones who are “predestined” to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, which means that those whom God foreknew are the ones who are predestined to be the recipients of eternal life. Further, Paul taught that those whom God predestined; He also called, and those whom He called; He also justified, and those whom He justified; He also glorified.

Romans 8:29-30 describes the chain of events by which each of us as believers comes to faith in Christ, and ultimately spends eternity with Him in Heaven. Notice that action by God is involved in every event in the chain. Paul said that God foreknew, God predestined, God called, God then justified, and God finally glorified. In every case action by God is mentioned, and action by man is not mentioned.

All who come to faith in Christ come to faith in Him and ultimate glory by the order given in Romans 8:29-30. Each of these events happens in succession, and once again, each of the actions involved in these events is brought about by God Himself; there is no action or cooperation by man mentioned at all.

First, God foreknew these individuals, meaning that He chose them from before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4-5). And these whom He foreknew are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. In God’s time, these individuals are born into the world. And again in God’s time, He calls these chosen individuals to faith in His Son. Paul then taught that God justifies those whom He calls. And finally in this chain of events, we see that those whom God justifies, He also glorifies.

Let us now look very carefully at the “link” in this chain of events where Paul said that those whom God called, He also justified. Paul did not say that “some of those” whom God called are also justified, if they decide to heed that call of God and accept Christ. Rather, Paul taught very succinctly in this passage, and with no added conditions or cooperation by man mentioned whatsoever, that ***all of those whom God calls to faith in His Son are also justified by Him.***

This calling that Paul wrote about in Romans 8:30 is the same effectual calling of God that Jesus taught about in John 6:44 and 6:63-65. The lesson from

all three of these passages is that *all of those* who are called to faith in Christ with this inward, effectual calling of God *will* come to Christ, and none will refuse.

In Romans 8:29-30 where Paul describes the order of salvation, and also in John 6:37, we find stated very concisely the teachings of both predestination and the eternal security of the believer. Every step in the salvation of an individual is brought about by God Himself, and the decision to bring that individual to faith in Christ was made by God before the foundation of the world. Further, that salvation is eternally secure and certain, as Paul also taught elsewhere in the book of Romans when he wrote: “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

Chosen by God - Appointed to Eternal Life

Paul mentioned predestination again in his letter to the Ephesians, where he wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will”. (Ephesians 1:3-5).

The letter to the Ephesians is written to God’s saints (Ephesians 1:1). God’s saints are those who have, or will in God’s time, be brought to faith in Christ. Speaking of God’s saints, Paul taught that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him”. Paul also said that God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself”, and that He made His choice of us “according to the kind intention of His will”.

Paul mentioned predestination yet again as he continued his teaching in Ephesians 1. Paul wrote that in Christ “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

In this verse Paul taught that God works out “all things” in conformity with His sovereign will, plan and purpose. And “all things” includes His choice of those who will be brought to faith in Christ, receiving redemption through His blood, which bought for us the forgiveness of our sins. God Himself chose to reveal His

Son to those whom He foreknew, His elect, and it is the result of His choice of us that we are brought to faith and believe in Christ.

We are those whom the Father has given to His Son Jesus Christ, and we will indeed come to Christ (John 6:37). Jesus referred to those of us who were given to Him by the Father as His “sheep” in John 10. Elsewhere in the Bible, those of us chosen to receive eternal life are referred to as “the elect”. Elect means chosen, and an election simply means a choice.

Considering once again Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 1, we will notice that it is God who chooses men for salvation, and that man’s choice or decision is not mentioned (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11). In another passage in the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke to His disciples, and He told them plainly that it was not they who had chosen Him, rather it was He who had chosen them and appointed them to bear fruit that would last (John 15:16).

The writer of the Book of Acts spoke of those whom God has chosen, or God’s elect, as being those who are *appointed* to eternal life. In Acts 13 we read: “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*” (Acts 13:48, emphasis added).

Who were those who believed? It was those who were “appointed” to eternal life who believed. Let us not overlook the order of the events in this verse: the appointing to eternal life by God came first, and then as a result came the believing in Christ.

Those who do ultimately come to faith in Christ are those whom God chose before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. These are the ones whom He appointed to eternal life. In God’s time these individuals are born into the world, and again in God’s time they are all called by Him to faith in Christ. When they are called, they all come to Christ.

When we believe in Christ, it is *evidence* that God has chosen us and has appointed us to eternal life. In fact, it is evidence that we have already been called to faith in Christ by God the Father; it is evidence that we have already been born again.

Believing in Christ is not an act of our own will that we choose to do when we are still unregenerate and dead in our sins, by which we avail ourselves of

God's "offer" of salvation, as some say. Paul taught in Ephesians 2:8-9 that it is by God's grace we have been saved, through faith. And this faith which saves us is not a result of *any* works of our own. Rather our faith in Christ is a gift that God gave to us apart from any work, action, merit, or decision of our own. The Scriptures we have considered so far indicate that getting saved is something that happens to an individual as a result of God's choice and His calling, and it is not something that unregenerate man attains by way of his own choice or decision to believe in Christ.

If we believe in Christ, it is because we have been appointed to eternal life, and all of those appointed to eternal life will come to faith in Christ at such time as they are called by God, as Jesus taught in John 6:44. When these elect are called to faith in Christ, they all come to Him, regardless of their present hostility toward the Gospel, and regardless of any decision of their own, just as was the case with Saul when he was called to faith on the Damascus road, even while he was still hostile toward God and intent on persecuting the church (Acts 9:1-16, 22:1-10).

As we can see from John 6:44 and 6:63-65, Jesus taught that unregenerate men are *not able* to come to Him apart from His Father's drawing or calling. And let us consider once again Paul's teaching in Romans 8 where he wrote: "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, *for it is not even able to do so.*" (Romans 8:7, emphasis added). If it were not for God's irresistible grace demonstrated by His effectual calling to faith of His elect, no one would be saved, because we would all remain hostile toward Him, and unable to come to Christ.

Our coming to faith in Christ has nothing to do with any decision that we make while we are still unregenerate and dead in our sins, either to receive Christ or to reject Him, because we are incapable of coming to Christ when we are still dead in our sins. Rather, our faith in Christ is the gift that results from the decision of God, who "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), and who "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself". (Ephesians 1:5).

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus gave the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. In verse 11 we see that the king, who had prepared the wedding banquet for his son, noticed that there was a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. The

wedding clothes in the parable signify the righteousness of Christ, without which no one will enter the kingdom of Heaven. The king told his servants to tie the man up, and throw him outside into the darkness, where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, which signifies eternal separation from God. In the final verse of the passage Jesus said: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14).

When Jesus said that many are called, He was teaching that many are called outwardly, when they hear or read the proclamation of the Gospel message. Many are called outwardly to repent of their sins and come to Him. But Jesus then said that though “many” are called in this way, only “few” are chosen. These few who are chosen are God’s elect, who hear not only the outward call for men to repent of their sins and believe in Christ, but through the hearing of the word of God they are also called with the inward, effectual calling of God which always results in the regeneration of those who receive it.

Many may hear the outward call of the proclamation of the Gospel message, but as Paul wrote to Thessalonians believers, he knew that God had chosen them because “our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Those who receive God’s calling hear the outward proclamation of the Gospel, and it comes to them not in word only, “but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” Here is the evidence manifested by those whom God has chosen, those who have received God’s calling to faith in Jesus Christ.

As we consider Jesus’ teaching in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, let us once again consider His teaching in the parable of the sower given to us in Matthew 13:1-23. Both of these parables provide an illustration of men hearing the Gospel message, and both parables demonstrate the results in their lives of them having heard the message.

In the Parable of the Sower, a farmer went out to sow seed. The seed is the metaphor that Jesus used to symbolize the Gospel message. As the farmer spread the seed, some fell beside the road, some fell on rocky places, some fell among the thorns, and some seed fell on what Jesus described as “good soil”.

In each of the first three cases, no harvest was realized from the seed that was sown. Only in the case where the seed fell on “good soil” was a harvest indeed realized. The “good soil” in this parable symbolizes God’s elect, who receive the seed of the Gospel message and understand it. And they are the only ones who

come to faith in Christ. As a result of their genuine faith, they will bear a harvest of spiritual fruit to the glory of God (Matthew 13:23).

Even though many are called outwardly, as Jesus taught in Matthew 22:14, only few are chosen by God to come to faith in Christ. All of these chosen, or God's elect, will all be called with His effectual calling to faith in Christ, and they will all indeed come to faith in Christ. This again is what Jesus was teaching when He said: "All that the Father gives Me *will* come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (John 6:37, emphasis added).

In Conclusion

When Paul wrote in Romans 8:30 that those whom God calls, He also justifies, he did not say that those whom God calls are justified, if they should cooperate by making the right decision. Paul said without ambiguity and without any added conditions whatsoever that those whom God calls He also justifies. ***Any added implication of the decision of man being necessary is something that is not contained in the Scripture.***

No one resists this inward, effectual calling of God. Many may reject the outward call of the spoken or written Gospel message, but all of those who are called inwardly by God do indeed come to faith in Christ, and none who receive this calling resist it or refuse it. This is the destiny of those of us whom God has chosen to come to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and it is a destiny that God decided and appointed for us before the world was created.

The Apostle Peter also spoke of God's elect, or those chosen by God, when he addressed the recipients of his first letter with the words: "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure" (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Peter addressed his epistle to those who are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father", as Paul also taught in Romans 8:29-30. For what purpose were they chosen? They were chosen by God "to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood". And God's choice of His elect was made before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Predestination – Part 3

As we have noted before, many dedicated Christians interpret the Bible as teaching that God’s salvation through faith in Christ is an offer that is open to each and every individual who has ever lived. With this belief and understanding of the Scriptures, the determining factor involved in each person’s salvation is their own decision as to whether they want to believe in Christ.

Other dedicated believers interpret the Bible as teaching that those who come to faith in Christ are those individuals whom God chose before the creation of the world, and that God brings these chosen individuals to faith in Christ apart from any decision of their own will. These come to faith at such time as they are effectually called by God, after which they believe in Christ and find themselves with a heart to obey Him. Their belief in Christ is both a result and evidence of their regeneration.

In the first case, man’s own will and decision is the determining factor in his salvation. In the second case, man’s will and decision have nothing at all to do with his salvation; rather God’s choice is the determining factor. The question that we should ask ourselves as dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ, is which of these two teachings is the scripturally consistent, and therefore the correct teaching.

Salvation – Does God or Man Decide?

In the first case of those who believe the Bible teaches that man’s own will and decision is the determining factor in his salvation, many will agree completely with John 6:44 and 6:65, where Jesus said that no man can come to Him unless the Father draws him, or enables him to come. And then, in order to make the free will doctrine of salvation logically consistent, they must insist that there is a time at least once in every individual’s life when they are drawn by God and enabled to come to Christ, and at that time the individual must decide for themselves whether or not they will accept Christ.

The problem with this interpretation is that the idea or the assertion that there is at least one “enabling” or “drawing” by God in every individual’s life is stated nowhere in the Bible. The assertion that God gives every individual at least one opportunity to choose to believe in Christ is a teaching that is not found in the

Scriptures, but it is a necessary assertion for man to make in order to “fill in the gaps” so to speak, in an effort to support the free will doctrine of salvation, at least logically.

Continuing with this line of interpretation, part of which comes from the Scriptures, and the rest which comes from man “filling in the gaps” with his own assertions and reasoning, some will then interpret God’s foreknowledge mentioned in Romans 8:29 and elsewhere as God knowing from before the creation of the world those individuals who would choose to accept Christ when drawn and enabled by God to do so. They will also say that the individual could reject Christ at this time, if they choose to do so.

To make matters even more complicated, in the light John 6:37, 6:44, 6:65, and Romans 8:30, some who adhere to the free will doctrine of salvation feel compelled to acknowledge that there is an effectual calling of God, and that none of those who receive this calling will refuse it. However, because they interpret God’s foreknowledge as God knowing ahead of time those individuals who will make the decision to accept Christ and not reject Him when they are drawn or enabled to do so, they must then assert that God only extends His effectual calling to those whom He knew would accept Christ of their own free will anyway, without an effectual calling.

This idea of God only extending His effectual calling to those whom He knew would accept Christ of their own free will anyway is yet another idea and concept that is stated nowhere in the Bible. And this makes it yet one more attempt by man to “fill in the gaps” by adding his own assertions and reasoning to what is written in the Bible, in an effort to support the free will doctrine of salvation by attempting to explain passages of Scripture that clearly challenge this doctrine.

In the second case of those who believe the Bible teaches that man’s own will or decision has nothing at all to do with his salvation, God’s foreknowledge is understood as follows: God chose before the world began to save certain individuals, and He “knew” these individuals from the beginning. In His time, each of these chosen individuals is born into the world, and again in His time, He calls each of them to faith in Christ. Everyone who receives this calling does indeed come to Christ, and no one who receives this calling rejects Him. This means that the calling of God, which Jesus mentioned in John 6:44, and which Paul mentioned in Romans 8:30, is an effectual calling; it always results in regeneration for those who receive it. This interpretation is supported entirely by the Scriptures

themselves, and it requires no additional assertions or reasoning by man in order to make it consistent and cohesive.

God's Sovereign Choice

Perhaps no other passage in Scripture gets right to the core of the question as to whether or not man's own will, desire, or decision is involved in his salvation, as does the Apostle Paul's discussion of God's sovereign choice of a people for Himself in Romans 9. The reader is encouraged to first review and study prayerfully the entire passage of Romans 9:6-24 before proceeding with the explanations that follow, so that a complete consideration can be given to the context of this passage and the individual verses themselves. We should consider very carefully, verse by verse, what Paul is teaching and exactly what he intended to communicate.

Paul began Romans 9 by lamenting that many of the Jews rejected the message that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, and that salvation and the forgiveness of sins comes through Him alone. Paul said that the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises were all given to the Israelites. He then continued to explain in the following verses that it does not mean that God's word had failed because so many of the people descended from Israel (or Jacob) were rejecting His salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

As he continued his teaching in verse 6, Paul explained that not all of the people of Israel by birth will be included in spiritual Israel, but only those who are the "children of the promise". In this passage Paul used the example of God's sovereign choice of a particular people in the Old Testament in order to demonstrate God's sovereign choice in His calling of a particular people to faith in Christ, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles.

Here Paul began his discussion of God's sovereign choice of His people, even from among the descendants of Israel, by saying that just because they were directly descended from Jacob in the natural way did not mean that they would be included with spiritual Israel. This is what Paul meant when he said: "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants" (Romans 9:6b-7a).

Paul then continued the discussion by quoting Genesis 21:12, saying that it would be through Isaac that Abraham's true offspring, the children of God, would

come. Isaac himself was the child of promise born to Abraham and Sarah. God promised Abraham that he would have a son through Sarah, even though Abraham himself was about a hundred years old and Sarah was known to be barren. Nevertheless, in God's time, Sarah did conceive even in her advanced age, though she was unable to do so as a young woman, and Abraham did have the son of God's promise, who was Isaac. God gave life in the dead womb of Sarah, fulfilling His promise of a son to Abraham. And as Paul also taught, God "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." (Romans 4:17).

As he continued his teaching in Romans 9:10, Paul carried the discussion of God's sovereign choice of a people for Himself a generation further by considering the twin sons of Isaac and his wife Rebekah, who were Jacob and Esau. Let us look carefully at the following verses where Paul wrote: "for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" (Romans 9:11-13).

Paul taught in these verses that God makes His choice or election of His people, just as He had decided to do concerning Jacob and Esau, before they are even born, and before they have done anything at all, either good or bad. The teaching that Paul intended to communicate here becomes very clear in the next verse, because we see that he anticipated objections to what he had just written. Beginning in verse fourteen we read: "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" (Romans 9:14-15).

If Paul were teaching that each and every person ever born could be saved if they so desired by deciding for themselves that they would receive Christ and not reject Him, then there would be no reason for him to anticipate any objection at all. After all, if everyone had a chance at salvation, and if their salvation ultimately depended upon their own choice and decision whether to accept Christ or reject Him, then in terms of human ideas of what is fair and what is just, nothing could be fairer and more just than allowing each man to decide for himself.

However, Paul was not teaching that man's salvation rests ultimately with his own personal decision either to accept Christ or reject Him. On the contrary, what Paul taught in these verses was that the choice of man's salvation rests with God alone, and that He has mercy and compassion in this respect upon whomever

He chooses. Paul understood that in the minds of most men, this concept of God's salvation will be considered unfair, unjust, and unreasonable, and this is exactly why he anticipated that many would object to what he was teaching.

In verse 14, Paul responded to these anticipated objections and protests by stating emphatically that God is not unjust. All of those whom God leaves in their sins receive justice, in that they pay the just penalty for their sins in an eternity separated from God. Those of us whom God has chosen to bring to faith in Christ, however, receive something far better than justice. We receive God's mercy, and not the justice due us for our sins, in that the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all of our sins. From Paul's teaching here we see that some receive mercy from God, while all of the others receive justice, but no one receives injustice from God.

Paul then continued, teaching clearly that a person's own will or desire or effort has nothing at all to do with their salvation, but their salvation is solely and completely dependent upon God's decision as to whether He will show mercy to them. This teaching is revealed in verse 16 where Paul wrote: "So then it ***does not depend on the man who wills*** or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." (Romans 9:16, emphasis added).

As we have noted previously, many who say that man ultimately decides for himself whether or not he will receive Christ will freely admit that no man can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, just as Jesus taught in John 6:44. They will then insist that at some point in each and every individual's life, the Father does draw or enable them to come to Christ. And they will then go on to say that at this point the individual must decide for himself whether he will accept or reject Christ as his Lord and Savior. Those who hold this view are saying that indeed salvation ***does*** depend on man's will, and the decision is his, but the Apostle Paul is saying with clarity and with no ambiguity in Romans 9:16 that salvation ***does not*** depend on man's will, or his effort, but the decision is God's.

There is clearly a contradiction here between the teaching of those who say that man's own will is the determining factor in his salvation, and the teaching of the Apostle Paul who said that man's salvation does not depend upon his own will, or his effort, but it depends upon God, who decides to whom He will show mercy. If we as believers hold the view that each man's own will and decision to either accept Christ or reject Him is the determining factor in his salvation, then we must ask ourselves how this teaching of Paul's in Romans 9, and especially in verse 16, can possibly be consistent with our own opinion.

The Holy Bible is the inspired word of God, and it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). If there is ever a contradiction between what the Bible teaches and our present understanding of things, then we should be willing to let the Scriptures themselves be the guide for what we embrace as the truth.

Does God Harden Some People Against Himself?

After Paul's statement in Romans 9:16 that man's salvation does not depend upon his own desire, or his own effort, he continued his teaching of election and God's sovereign choice of a people. Paul emphasized God's decision to save those individuals to whom He has decided to show mercy, and he also taught that God chooses not to show mercy to others, even hardening them against His will. Paul wrote: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." (Romans 9:17-18).

Here Paul used the example of Pharaoh, whom God hardened against His will and against the request of Moses to let the people of Israel go from their bondage in Egypt. As Paul quoted from Exodus 9:16, God hardened Pharaoh against Himself in order that He might show His power and that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth by the miracles He wrought through His servant Moses when He brought His people out of Egyptian bondage by His own might and power.

God hardened Pharaoh against Himself and accomplished His own purpose through it. One might ask: Why did God harden Pharaoh; why did He not just show mercy to Pharaoh and make him willing to obey Him? God does not reveal His "reasons" why He chooses to harden some, and He chooses to show mercy to others. However, it is revealed to us that God's mercy shown to those whom He calls to faith in His Son has nothing whatsoever to do with their own works, and therefore no man can boast that he obtained God's favor by his own actions (Ephesians 2:9-8, 1 Corinthians 4:7). The fact remains, as Paul taught in Romans 9:18, that God has mercy upon whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens those whom He wants to harden.

Continuing with verse 19 we read: "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? ***For who resists His will?***' On the contrary, who are you, O man,

who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?” (Romans 9:19-21, emphasis added).

In these verses we see that Paul again expected that some would object to what he was teaching and would question how God could find fault and condemn someone whom He has chosen to harden against His will. The hard truth that Paul is teaching here, is that regarding salvation, ***no one is able to resist God’s will*** (Romans 9:19).

Those to whom God shows mercy are called to faith in Christ, and none refuse that call. Whereas those to whom God does not show mercy are not called by Him; they are left in their sins. These are not able to come to faith in Christ by their own innate desire or decision (John 1:13, Romans 8:7, Romans 9:16), because no man has the ability to come to Christ unless God the Father draws him (John 6:44). Paul answered these anticipated objections by saying that it is not for man to question his Maker regarding His sovereign decisions about those whom He has created and how He decides to use them, whether “for honorable use” or “for common use” (Romans 9:21).

Paul concluded his teaching in Romans 9 regarding God’s sovereign choice of a people for Himself when he put forward these questions: “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” (Romans 9:22-24).

We see here in these final verses of Romans 9:6-24, that there are those who are “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”. And in contrast there are those who are “vessels of mercy, ***which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called***” (emphasis added), and these He called from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles also, Gentiles being categorically all of those who are not Jews. Those who are vessels of His wrath, prepared for destruction, are those to whom God did not want to show mercy. These He hardened, as Paul said in verse 18.

John's Teaching Agrees with Paul's

In Romans 9:16, Paul taught that a man's salvation does not depend upon his own will or choice in the matter, or upon any effort of his own, but upon God's will and choice as to whether or not He will show mercy to him. The Apostle John also emphasized that man's own will is not involved in his salvation when he wrote: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood *nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man*, but of God." (John 1:12-13, emphasis added). For one to assert that man's own will and decision as to whether or not he will receive Christ is the determining factor in his salvation would contradict not only Paul's teaching of God's sovereign choice in Romans 9, but would also contradict John's teaching here in verse 13 of this passage where he clearly stated that the children of God are not born by way of their own will.

All who come to faith in Christ do receive Him, and they do believe in Him (John 1:12). But the receiving of Christ and the believing in Him are not the means by which unregenerate man avails himself of God's "offer" of salvation, as some would say. Rather the receiving of Christ and the believing in Him are *evidence* in an individual's life that they have already been called by God to faith in Christ; they have already been born again.

In God's time, His elect are born into the world, and again in His time they are all called by Him to faith in Christ. Those who are called by God, He also justifies, and those whom He justifies, He also glorifies together with Christ in Heaven, all according to the order Paul described in Romans 8:29-30.

God Himself brings about an individual's salvation from beginning to end, and He does this only for those whom He foreknew from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). And according to Romans 9:16 and John 1:13 their own will or decision has absolutely nothing to do with their salvation. If we are still not convinced, and we still insist that a man's own cooperation and willful agreement to believe in Christ is the determining factor in his salvation, then let us once again recall the conversion of Saul on the Damascus Road, which occurred apart from his own will or decision in the matter, and in fact contrary to his own will at the time (Acts 9:1).

Jesus said: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me..." (John 6:37). Those whom the Father has given to His Son Jesus Christ are those who were foreknown by God and chosen by Him before the creation of the world to be

brought to faith in Christ. In God's time He calls them to faith in His Son, and none refuse His calling; they all come. God's word does not return to Him void, but always accomplishes the purpose for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Peter Teaches of Those Destined to Disobey

The Apostle Peter also spoke of those individuals whom Paul described in Romans 9:22 as vessels of God's wrath, "prepared for destruction". Peter described them as those who were ***appointed*** or destined to the doom which comes to those who are disobedient to the word. Peter wrote:

This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve
"The Stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner stone
And "A Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense";
for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and ***to this doom they were also appointed.***

But you are chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:7-9, emphasis added)

Peter referred to those who stumble because they are disobedient to the word, saying that they were "appointed" to this doom. As we consider Peter's teaching about those who were appointed to disobedience, let us also call to mind Acts 13:48 and the fact that others have been appointed to eternal life.

God has chosen these individuals who have been appointed to eternal life as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for His own possession. In contrast, those who were appointed to disobey the word are those whom God has hardened against Himself and His word, and He has willed not to show them mercy (Romans 9:18). So we see that God's chosen people were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29), and they are all "called...out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9), whereas all of the others did not receive God's mercy, but were destined to disobey the word, and as Peter said, "to this doom they were also appointed".

Predestination – Part 4

The subject of predestination is an often times divisive issue among genuine believers endeavoring to the best of their ability understand the truths of God's word. This teaching is also one that can be hard to grasp because of the presence of some Scriptures which would at first glance seem to indicate that man does have a say in the matter of his own salvation.

Therefore, in the interest of a thorough examination of the Scriptures on this subject, we will consider several Bible verses that have been used by some to insist that man's own decision either to accept Christ or reject Him is the ultimate factor in determining his salvation. In studying these verses, we will consider them within the context of the passages in which they are found, and we will also consider them within the context of the Scriptures as a whole, in order to make sure that the apparent meaning of these verses is not contradicted by other Scriptures. This is to say that we will let Scripture interpret Scripture.

As believers with a heart to understand and obey God's word, let us once again recall how the Bereans in Paul's day "...received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11). In the same way, let us all prayerfully search the Scriptures ourselves in an effort to understand what is taught in God's word. And let us receive and embrace that truth as it is written in the Bible, even if it should challenge our own ideas about the way we think God should be, or if it should challenge things that we have heard declared with great confidence many times before.

The Difficulty of Paul's Teaching in Romans 9

Paul's teaching in Romans 9 gets right to the heart of the disagreement between those who embrace the free will doctrine of salvation, and those who say the Bible teaches that it is ultimately God's election and calling of an individual that determines whether or not they will be saved. Romans 9:6-24 is probably the most difficult passage to explain for those who adhere to the belief that a man's salvation rests ultimately with his own decision to either accept or reject Christ.

Despite the clarity of Paul's language in this passage, and the scriptural examples that he used to communicate his point, some will still object to the

teaching found here, and in numerous other passages of Scripture. As we discussed previously, within the context of this passage itself, Paul anticipated and fully expected that many would object to what he was teaching as being unjust and unreasonable.

The objection was then, and is still today, to Paul's teaching of God's sovereign choice of a particular people who receive His mercy and are called to faith in Christ, while others do not receive God's mercy, but are actually hardened by God Himself (Romans 9:18). In an effort to make objections to this teaching valid, an attempt must be made to interpret certain Scripture passages, especially Romans 9:6-24, in such a way as to support the free will doctrine of salvation.

Did God Really Hate Esau?

Within this controversial passage of Romans 9, we read these words:

For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:11-13)

One objection that has been put forward by those who say that man's own decision either to accept Christ or reject Him is ultimately the determining factor in his own salvation, is an assertion that Romans 9:13 actually says something different than what the text itself would indicate. In this verse, Paul quoted from Malachi 1:2-3 to clarify the point that he intended to communicate. Romans 9:13 reads: "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Those who object to the doctrine of predestination as God's choice alone will assert that God really did not "hate" Esau, but that He only loved Esau "less" than He loved Jacob. The Greek word from the original text, which is translated as "hated" in Romans 9:13, could be interpreted as "hated" in the sense that we all understand hatred, which is to detest someone, or it could be interpreted as "loved less".

Those who adhere to the free will doctrine of salvation must insist that the Greek word which is translated as "hated" in this passage, should actually have been translated as "loved less". Without taking this position, their doctrine would clearly be shown to be contradicted by Paul's teaching in Romans 9:6-24. The

question that we must ask ourselves is this: What is the correct interpretation of the Greek word that is translated as “hated” in the text of Romans 9:13?

As with any interpretation of Scripture, we must consider the context of the passage from which the Scripture is taken. With an examination of the context of this passage in Romans 9:6-24, we see that Paul referred to vessels of God’s wrath, who are prepared for destruction (Romans 9:22). We also see reference to vessels of God’s mercy, “which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” (Romans 9:23-24). We also see in Romans 9:18 that God has mercy upon those whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens those whom He wants to harden.

Words like the ones Paul used in verse 22 of this passage, “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”, do indeed imply hatred as we all understand hatred, which is to detest someone, and they do imply rejection by God. These words do not imply “loving less” as some would say.

Therefore, the context of this passage within which Romans 9:13 is found does not support the assertion that God loved Esau “less” than Jacob. Rather, it supports exactly what the text reads literally, which is that God did in fact hate or detest Esau. And that is why Paul used this Scripture from Malachi to support his teaching here. He used God’s love of Jacob and His hatred of Esau as demonstrated in Malachi 1:2-5, in order to illustrate God’s sovereign choice or election of a people for Himself who are recipients of His mercy, while the rest receive no such mercy.

To carry our examination of the context of this passage further, we can look at the context of the passage in Malachi from which Paul takes this verse, in an effort to see if the context there supports the assertion that God really did not hate Esau, but only loved him less than Jacob. Romans 9:13 contains a quotation taken from a passage in Malachi 1 which reads:

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.” Though Edom says, “We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins”; thus says the Lord of hosts, “They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.” Your eyes

will see this and you will say, “The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!” (Malachi 1:2-5)

In verse 3 of this passage, God spoke of His hatred for Esau (the descendants of Esau are the people of Edom) by saying that “I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.” Further, God said in verse 4 that they would be called: “the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.”

These words and their meaning are clear and can be interpreted in no other way. The words, “the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever” make it clear that God did indeed hate or detest Esau. So from the context of Romans 9:6-24, and also from the context of Malachi 1:2-5, we see that God did not love Esau less than He loved Jacob, but He did indeed hate Esau in the sense that all of us understand the word hatred.

The teaching that Paul intended to communicate by way of scriptural reference to Jacob and Esau, is that there are individuals whom God has decided to love, before they are even born, and before they have done anything at all either good or bad, as was the case with Jacob. These individuals receive His mercy. Likewise, there are also individuals whom God has decided not to love, but to hate, before they are even born, as was the case with Esau. These individuals do not receive His mercy.

The assertion that many have made in an attempt to support the free will doctrine of salvation, which is that God did not really hate Esau, but only loved him less than Jacob, is actually contradicted by the context of both Romans 9 and Malachi 1. Therefore, this assertion is invalid and fails to challenge the apparent meaning of Paul’s teaching in Romans 9:6-24. And so we see that the meaning intended by Paul is exactly what is indicated in the language of the text.

What Paul intended to communicate is that God chooses some people to receive His mercy, while others do not receive His mercy; rather they are left in their sins. Those whom God chooses to receive His mercy Paul described as “vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not only from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles” (Romans 9:23b-24). Those who do not receive God’s mercy but are left in their sins, Paul described as “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22b).

Further, Paul emphasized in this passage of Romans 9 that man's own will or desire or decision is not the determining factor in his salvation, but his salvation depends solely upon whether he is one to whom God has decided to show mercy. This teaching is given to us clearly in Romans 9:16 where Paul said: "***So then it does not depend on the man who wills*** or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (emphasis added).

Paul also said in Romans 9:18: "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." And once again, the very fact that Paul anticipated objections and protests to what he was teaching (Romans 9:14, 19) tells us that he was indeed teaching what many would consider to be hard, unfair and unjust.

Doesn't the Bible Say that God Wants All Men to be Saved?

Another objection that is often raised by those who say that man's own decision either to accept Christ or reject Him is the determining factor in his salvation is the use of the phrase "all men" which occurs in several Bible passages. One such example is found in John 12 where Jesus said: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). Some interpret the "all men" in this verse as meaning that God has offered salvation to each and every individual who has ever been born, and all they have to do to take advantage of this offer is to make the decision to accept Christ.

As always when we are interpreting Scripture, we must consider the context of the passage within which the particular verse or verses is found, and we must also consider if our interpretation is contradicted by any other passage of Scripture. John 12:32 referenced above is found within a passage that begins in John 12:20. So we must consider the context of the entire passage in our interpretation of what Jesus was saying in John 12:32. In John 12:20-22, we find that there were Greeks present who were interested in what Jesus had to say, and they came to Philip asking to see Jesus. Philip told Andrew of their request, and the two of them told Jesus.

Jesus, being the Son of God, already knew that there were Greeks (who are Gentiles) present who were interested in what He would say. However, in order to emphasize this to those who would later read his account of the Gospel, John stated very clearly that Andrew and Philip told Jesus that some Greeks were there and wanted to see Him. After this, Jesus then began speaking to all of those present

with His teaching about the fruitful grain of wheat starting in John 12:23. Later in the passage, He said that when He was “lifted up from the earth” (which everyone in those days understood to be a reference to crucifixion), He would draw “all men” to Himself.

Jesus, knowing that there were Greek Gentiles present who wanted to see Him, was communicating to the crowd that He would draw not only those from among the Jews to Himself, but also Gentiles as well. A Gentile is anyone who is not of the Jewish race. So when we consider those who are of the Jewish race, along with those who are not of the Jewish race (Gentiles), then we are considering all races of men, which is to say that we are considering “all men” categorically. This is not to say that we are considering all men individually, or each and every individual who has ever been born.

It was widely understood by both Jews and Gentiles in Jesus’ day that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the God of the Jews, and that all of His promises applied only to the Jews, who were God’s chosen people. However, contrary to this widely held view at the time, Jesus was communicating to all who were in the crowd, both Jews and Gentiles, that the Gentiles were also included in God’s plan of redemption and salvation. This was also prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 49:6 and 65:1), and affirmed again in the Book of Revelation where we read:

“...Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

When Jesus said in John 12:32 that when He was “lifted up from the earth” He would draw “all men” to Himself, He was saying that He would draw not only men from among the Jewish race, but also men from among the Gentile races as well. To interpret the phrase “all men” in this passage as meaning each and every individual who ever lived would be an interpretation that is contradicted in passages such as Romans 9:6-24, which we have considered in depth previously. And again, since the context of the passage mentions that Jesus was aware there were Greek Gentiles present who wanted to see Him, we have more confirmation that the “all men” Jesus referred to here, indeed refers to “all races of men”, which is to say both the Jewish race and the non-Jewish (or Gentile) races, or those “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”.

Another reference to the phrase “all men”, which some claim to be evidence that God’s salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is available to each and every

individual who has ever lived, is found in Paul's first letter to Timothy. The passage reads:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-7).

Here again we must consider the context of the passage, and also who is being addressed in the passage, for a proper interpretation and understanding of whom Paul referred to when he spoke of "all men". Paul was writing to Timothy, whom he had charged with caring for the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Ephesus was located in what today is the nation of Turkey. All native Ephesians would therefore be Gentiles. Timothy himself was the son of a Greek Gentile father and a Jewish Christian mother (Acts 16:1).

The purpose of Paul's letter to Timothy was to instruct Timothy on how to care for the church at Ephesus. One of the fundamental truths that Paul wanted to communicate to the Gentile churches was that they too were included in God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and not only the Jews. This is emphasized in verse 7 of this passage of 1 Timothy 2, where Paul described himself as "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth". The message that the Gentiles races were also included in God's plan of salvation is the same truth that Jesus made clear as He spoke to the crowd as recorded in John 12:20-33, when it was known that Gentiles were present who were interested in His message.

Paul was saying in this passage of 1 Timothy 2:3-7 the same thing that Jesus said in John 12:32, which is that God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ includes not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles. A Gentile is anyone who is not directly descended from the twelve tribes of Israel. Once again, when we include Jews, and all of those who are not Jews, then we have "all men" categorically, or all races of men, or those "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation", as John wrote in Revelation 5:9.

To interpret the phrase "all men" found in either 1 Timothy 2:4-5 or John 12:32 as meaning each and every person who has ever lived would be to insist on an interpretation that is not born out in the context of the passages in which these verses are found. Such an interpretation would also be contradicted by other

passages of Scripture that we have considered previously, which teach that God chooses some to receive His mercy and be saved, while others are hardened, being left in their sins, with no desire or ability to come to Christ at all.

In Acts 2, the Apostle Peter also taught that the promise of salvation through faith in Christ is extended to all races of men, or “all men” categorically. Speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem, Peter called upon them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

Peter’s exhortation to the crowd again illustrates the outward call of the proclamation of the Gospel message spoken in the hearing of men, calling upon them to put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation to God. Though many hear this outward call, only few are chosen by God (Matthew 22:14), and these few are called to faith in Christ with the inward, effectual calling of God that Jesus spoke about in John 6:44 and John 6:63-65.

Immediately after Peter called upon those in this crowd in Jerusalem to put their faith in Christ, he said to them: “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” (Acts 2:39). When Peter said that the promise is for “you and your children”, he was speaking to the Jews. When he then said that the promise is also for “all who are far off”, he was speaking of Gentiles. So Peter was teaching that the promise is for Jews and also for those who are not Jews. And so we see that the promise is for not only for the Jewish race, but for all races of men.

Peter then qualified his statement by saying that the promise is for “as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself”, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles as well, just as Paul also taught in Romans 9:22-24. Therefore, we see that the promise of salvation through faith in Christ *is for all races of men, for as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself from among them all*. The determining factor mentioned here by Peter is God’s calling, which is consistent with many other passages of Scripture that we have already considered.

From an examination of the context of the broader passages within which John 12:32 and 1 Timothy 2:4-5 are found, we see that the reference to “all men” in both of these passages refers to “all races of men”, or all men categorically, and not to all men individually, as in the sense of each and every person who has ever been born. These verses cannot be interpreted as meaning that an “offer” of salvation is “available” to each and every person who has ever been born. Rather

these passages mean that God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ includes all races of men, as many individuals as the Lord our God will call from among them all, as Peter also taught in Acts 2:39.

Doesn't the Bible Say that God Does Not Want Anyone to Perish?

Another Scripture verse used by some to say that God desires everyone would be saved is 2 Peter 3:9. Peter began in 2 Peter 3:3 by warning us about scoffers who will question why Jesus has delayed His second coming, implying that He will never return at all. And then in verse 8, Peter said we should not forget that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Immediately following, we read: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

Some interpret this verse as saying that God is not willing that anyone ever born should perish, but that all of them should come to repentance. Such an interpretation would contradict many Scriptures that we have already examined, which teach that God chooses some, His elect, to come to faith in Christ, while others He hardens. Contradiction is confusing, but when we interpret this verse in the light of the context of 2 Peter, and in the light of the rest of the Bible as a whole, the meaning becomes clear, and the apparent contradiction is resolved.

When Peter said that God "is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" we must ask ourselves to whom Peter referred. Is he referring to each and every person who has ever lived, or does the "you" in this verse refer to a particular group of people? The letter of 2 Peter is addressed to believers (2 Peter 1:1). Therefore the "you" in 2 Peter 3:9 refers collectively to all believers.

And further, when we consider the context of 2 Peter 3:3-15, within which 2 Peter 3:9 is found, we see that Peter referred to the span of time between when Jesus ascended into Heaven, and His second coming (2 Peter 3:3-4, 10). So when he wrote in verse 9 that the Lord is patient toward "you", and "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance", Peter was teaching that God is patient with His elect, and not willing that anyone among them should perish, but that all of them will come to repentance (see also verse 15). This was the reason that he gave to believers as to why Christ's second coming had not yet occurred. When all

of God's elect are in His time brought to faith, then Christ's second coming will occur.

Jesus taught in John 6:37-39 that there are a certain number of people whom the Father has given to Him. These are God's elect, and He is not willing that any of these will be lost. Paul taught that there are a certain number of Jews who will be numbered with spiritual Israel, or those who will be brought to faith in Christ (Romans 9:6-8, 11:1-5). These have or will receive God's mercy, in that they are chosen by grace (Romans 11:5), whereas the others are hardened and unable to come to Christ, being blinded by God Himself (Romans 11:7-8). Paul also spoke of a certain number of Gentiles who will be brought to faith in Christ (Romans 11:25-26).

If Jesus had hastened His second coming and returned the day after He ascended into Heaven, the Apostle Paul would not yet have been brought to faith, as he was sometime later on the Damascus road, in God's time. Likewise, many of us who have been brought to faith in Christ over the succeeding centuries would never have been born into the world and brought to faith, also in God's time. The message of 2 Peter 3:3-15 is that Christ's second coming will occur as all things do, in God's time and according to His plan and purpose for His creation.

Some of God's elect are still hostile to the Gospel message, having not yet been brought to faith, just as Saul himself was also hostile to the Gospel message until God intervened in his life to bring him to faith on the Damascus road. Also, some of God's elect have not yet even been born into the world. In God's time these will be born into the world, and again in God's time, they will be brought to faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

The message of 2 Peter 3:9 is that God is not willing that any of His elect will perish, and some of His elect have not yet been brought to faith. When all of those whom the Father has given to Jesus finally do come to Him (John 6:37), He will return the second time. And at that time: "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10).

Therefore, once again we see that a Scripture verse which some would say teaches that salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is "available" to each and every individual who has ever been born, does not teach that at all. Rather, when we interpret 2 Peter 3:9 in the context in which it appears in the Bible, and in the light

of all the rest of the Scriptures as a whole, we see a different meaning than what the verse would suggest if it were isolated by itself. 2 Peter 3:9 teaches us that God is not willing that any of His elect will be lost, but that all of them will come to repentance (Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 Peter 1:1-2).

What about John 3:16?

In the Gospel of John we read: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Many of us will read John 3:16 and in our own minds we will add the thought that everyone is free and able to believe the Gospel message as they choose. However, the text of John 3:16 says nothing about a man’s freedom or his ability to believe the message.

It is fine to add thoughts and conditions to a passage of Scripture, as long as those thoughts and conditions are stated elsewhere in the Bible. However, the thought or the idea that everyone who hears the Gospel message is free and able to believe the message is stated nowhere in the Bible. What is clearly stated in the Bible is that unregenerate men are indeed not free or even able to believe the message at all, unless and until God intervenes in their lives to call them to faith in Christ.

By way of a brief review, we will consider just a few Scriptures that challenge the interpretation of John 3:16 as teaching that everyone is free and able to come to Christ if they should choose to do so. These Scriptures are John 6:44, 6:65, and Romans 8:7.

In John 6:44 and 6:65 Jesus taught about the inability of man to believe in Him apart from God’s intervention in his life. In John 6:44 He taught that no one can come to Him unless they are drawn by the Father. And in John 6:65 He taught that no one can come to Him unless it has been granted to them by the Father to do so. Jesus also taught in John 6:44 that whoever is drawn to Him by the Father will be raised up at the last day.

In Romans 8:7 Paul taught that “the mind set on the flesh”, or the mind of unregenerate man, is hostile toward God; it will not submit to God’s law, nor is it even able to do so. Therefore, if unregenerate man who cannot submit to God’s law is to be saved, then God Himself must intervene in his life to forcefully overcome his hostile will and bring him to faith. We can see this reality

demonstrated in the life of Paul himself as we read in the Scriptures of his conversion on the Damascus road, even while he was still intent on persecuting the church.

Believing in Christ is not an act of our own will or volition that we choose to do when we are still dead in our sins, whereby we take advantage of a perceived “offer of salvation that is available to every individual”, as some would say. Rather our believing in Christ is *evidence* that we have already been called by God to faith in His Beloved Son.

The Scriptures teach us that when anyone believes in Christ, it is not because they chose to believe; it is because God has chosen to intervene in their lives to cause them to believe. The Scriptures teach that man cannot, and therefore he does not, choose to believe the Gospel message. Rather God chooses certain men, His elect, and these He brings to faith in Christ.

In Conclusion

The Bible teaches us that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17). Many receive the proclamation of the Gospel message in their hearing, but again as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, though many are called outwardly when they hear the message, only few are actually chosen to come to faith (Matthew 22:14).

And once again as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Sower: in the same way that the seed sown by the farmer yielded a crop only where it fell upon the “good soil”, so also the seed of the Gospel message produces a harvest only where it is received in the hearing of God’s elect. His elect not only hear the word, but they also understand it, and they bear fruit: some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times what was sown (Matthew 13:1-23). By this bearing of fruit, we demonstrate that we are indeed Jesus’ disciples (John 15:8).

Jesus also said: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing...” (John 6:63). If man were able to come to Christ while he was still unregenerate and dead in his sins, or still in the flesh, then a decision made while in the flesh could potentially profit him everything. But Jesus said that the flesh profits nothing; rather it is the Spirit who gives life. Further, the Apostles John and Paul both taught clearly that a man’s salvation does not come about by way of his own will or decision (John 1:13, Romans 9:16).

In addition to being incapable of coming to Christ without being drawn by the God the Father, the unregenerate man has no desire to come to Christ, because as Paul taught, all unregenerate men are hostile toward God (Romans 8:7). Paul also wrote: “***There is no one who seeks for God... not even one***” (Romans 3:10-11). Since no man seeks God, God must seek men and Himself bring them to faith if any are to be saved.

When anyone has a genuine desire to come to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation to God the Father, they can be assured that this desire is evidence of a work of regeneration that God has already done in their life. They are one of God’s elect, and they have already been called to faith in Christ. As a result of this work that God has wrought within them, they now believe in Christ. Unless and until an individual is called by God to faith in Christ, they will not come to Christ; they will refuse to believe, because they are in fact not even able to believe (again, Romans 8:7).

God’s calling of an individual is effectual, meaning that all of those who receive God’s calling to faith in Christ do indeed come to Christ, and none refuse. And once again, this effectual calling of God is demonstrated clearly and powerfully in the life of Saul, as recorded three times in the Bible (Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:1-16, and Acts 26:9-18).

In reading these passages, we find that Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul, remained hostile toward the Gospel message right up until the moment in time when God intervened in his life to forcefully overcome his own stubborn will and bring him to faith in Christ. ***Saul was brought to faith contrary to his own will and apart from his own decision*** (Acts 9:1-4, Acts 22:4-7 and Acts 26:9-15). In the same way, we will all remain hostile toward God unless and until He forcefully intervenes in our lives to bring us to faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

Our believing in Christ is evidence that we have already been called to faith. It is evidence that we have already received Christ and have therefore crossed over from death to eternal life (John 5:24). God chose to bring us to faith, apart from our own will and apart from any decision of our own. He has called us to faith in His Son, and as a result of His calling we believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Our believing is not a choice or decision that we made whereby we took advantage of an “offer” of salvation, as some would say. If a man believes in Christ, it is not because he thoughtfully considered the Gospel message and

decided that he would believe, when he just as easily could have decided that he would continue not to believe. The Bible teaches that God has already made that decision for him, and God Himself brings each of His elect to faith in His time.

This is the lesson given to us from Saul's conversion, and this is the teaching given to us through many other passages of Scripture as well. When a man is called to faith in Christ, he comes to Christ, and he will be raised up at the last day (John 6:37, 6:44). Man does not choose to believe in Christ, rather God chooses certain men; God decides who will be brought to faith in Christ, and who will be left in their sins (John 15:16, Romans 9:6-24).

Those who desire to come to Christ can also be sure that God does not give that desire to everyone, but only to His elect, or His chosen people whom Jesus referred to as His "sheep" in John 10:1-30. These and only these will hear His voice; others will not be able to hear (John 6:63-65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:24-26). These and only these are the ones foreknown by God from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5) and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). These and only these are then called by God to salvation and redemption through Christ, and we know that those whom God calls He also justifies, and those He justifies He also glorifies (Romans 8:30).

Our salvation as God's elect who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ is the work of God from beginning to end. He calls us to faith in His Son, and He brings our faith to its completion, as all of us who are called are then justified and finally glorified together with Christ for eternity. Let us therefore rejoice and give thanks to God our Father, together with all of His saints, for His grace and mercy which He showed to us when He chose to call us to faith in His Son.