

TTS Foundations 2023/24: [S9] "For Our Sake..." **(P1/5)**

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Appendix: Recommended Resources

[1] Introduction to Soteriology

Opening a new chapter in our studies together:

"For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again..."

[1A] The Breadth of Soteriology – **READ:** Rom 5:8-11

- This isn't *just* a doctrinal locus. This isn't *just* a theological topic. This isn't *just* a dogmatic category. This must be the stuff of **joy!**
 - If theology can't sing about this, then it shouldn't sing at all.
 - "The theologian who labours without joy is not a theologian at all. Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this field" [Barth]
- **This is the first in a five-part series on Soteriology.**
 - The doctrines of salvation.
 - **REFLECT:** What do you think is included here?
 - Indeed, this is a massive subject. Where to begin?

[1B] Biblical Images for Salvation

- **When you read Scripture with soteriology in mind, the first thing that strikes you is the variety of images used.**
 - **LOOK:** Eph 1:7 – *Salvation's like Redemption from Slavery.*
 - "Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them'" [Exo 6:6]
 - "[You], having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" [Rom 6:18]
 - **LOOK:** Matt 18:12-13 – *Like a Shepherd rescuing Sheep.*
 - (Cf. Ezek 34:10-12.)
 - **LOOK:** Col 1:13 – *Like a Conquering King taking captives.*
 - "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him" [2 Cor 2:14]
 - "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives; he gave gifts to men'" [Eph 4:8]
 - **LOOK:** Rev 19:6-8 – *Like a Bridegroom marrying his Bride.*
 - (cf. Eph 5)
 - **LOOK:** 1 Pet 2:9-10 – *Like a mirror to Israel's story.*
 - Re: twelve tribes, temple, ark, etc.
- **This isn't meant to be exhaustive or definitive.**
 - E.g. some overlap (e.g. redemption of Israel out of Egypt).
 - Also some we haven't mentioned – e.g. adoption, sacrifice, etc.
 - BUT – it highlights the nature of Biblical theology.
 - I.e. Interweaving images and themes.

This is what we're going to be studying over five sessions – building our theology of salvation together.

- [A] Part One – today.
 - More in a moment.
- [B] Part Two:
 - The Power of the Cross – Christ the servant King.
- [C] Part Three:
 - The Work of the Cross – our Champion, the God-Man.
- [D] Part Four:
 - The Victory of the Son – the Resurrection of the Messiah.
- [E] Part Five:
 - The Order of Salvation – the deliverance of God's people.

[2] On the Complicated Reputation of Election

What is our focus here?

- Think back to those five images of salvation.
 - They all illustrate **HOW** God has chosen to save us.
 - BUT – they all assume **THAT** God has chosen to save us.
 - We can't let this pass us by – God has **chosen** to be a Saviour God.
And this is significant in and of itself.
- We're referring, of course, to the **doctrine of 'Election'**.
 - God's free choice to be a Saviour God.
 - **REFLECT:** What is your understanding / experience?

[2A] Summary of Positions on Election¹

- **Part of the challenge here is that there are so many different positions and schools of thought.**
 - Two key terms get bandied about:
 - Monergism – 'mono' (one) + 'ergon' (work).
 - Synergism – 'sún' (together) + 'ergon' (work).
 - Pelagianism (re: Pelagius / monergistic):
 - Man enjoys a free will untainted by sin, and so can work towards perfection with God.
 - Semi-Pelagianism (synergistic):
 - Man is tainted by sin, but he must cooperate with God towards his salvation – man uses his natural free will, and God guides him through the rest.
 - Arminianism (re: Arminius and Wesley / synergistic):
 - Man is dead in sin – he needs God's grace to free his will before he can respond, one way or the other.
 - God sends grace to humanity to free their wills and predestines the Church – i.e. all those whom he knows will accept him.
 - Lutheranism (re: Luther / monergistic):
 - God predestines a specific people to salvation.
 - Man is dead in sin – God unilaterally changes the hearts of his elect people so that they'll believe.
 - Reformed (i.e. not just Calvin / monergistic):
 - God predestines a specific people to salvation and passes over a specific people for damnation.
 - Man is dead in sin – God unilaterally changes the hearts of his elect people so that they'll believe.

¹ The **Roman Catholic position** is similar to the Arminian position, vis. God's enabling grace and predestination on the basis of foreknowledge. However, the RC Church disagrees with the idea that man is radically dead in sin. Instead, it's argued that free will isn't gifted by grace but is natural to the image of God, still intact. The **Molinist position** is inspired by the 16th Century Jesuit, Luis de Molina. According to Molina, man is dead in sin and needs God's grace to free his will before he can respond, one way or the other. God predestines a people whom he knows will accept him using his 'middle knowledge'. God has necessary knowledge (e.g. all bachelors are unmarried) and free knowledge (e.g. that I will get married) – but in-between is 'middle' knowledge (e.g. what would happen if I didn't get married). God thus creates the universe in which the maximum number of people are saved.

In my experience – the vast majority of Evangelicals are neither Arminian nor Calvinist, but semi-Pelagian. This of course is made worse by the fact that these positions are often at each other's throats. Combine this with the prevailing 'a-doctrinalism' of modern Churches (remember our first session?), and we see why this study is so important.

[2B] A Controversial Doctrine

- **Indeed, I think it's fair to say that the doctrine of election is controversial...!**
 - "[The] 'doctrine of predestination', the doctrine of the divine election of grace has fallen under something of a shadow during the course of its history. The shadow has become so pronounced that when one mentions the terms 'election of grace' or 'predestination' one must expect to awaken in one's hearers or readers associations which necessarily confuse and thus make impossible the necessary recognition of the great truth with which we have to do at this point. The association may be resentment against the 'pathetic inhumanity' of the doctrine [as in Max Weber], or perhaps against the danger of dialectical ambiguity, or worse than both these, against what we mentioned earlier: the idea that in this matter we are dealing only with an abstract and neutral theorem. ... A good deal has, in fact, been said in such a way as to give rise to confusion, to savage hostility, to well-meant but fatal misrepresentations of what ought to be received, indeed to a whole mass of misunderstanding and indifference with regard to the doctrine. 'I may go to hell, but such a God [as that of the Calvinistic teaching] will never command my respect' – that was the cry of John Milton, and openly or secretly how many others have made some similar utterance." [Barth – *CD* II.II]

REFLECT: Why do you think this doctrine is so controversial?

What is it about election that attracts so much strife?

We can identify a handful of reasons.

[2C] Reasons for the Controversy²

- **FIRST: we cannot escape the weight of our history.**
 - By the 18th / 19th Century, tensions were high.
 - Re: Spurgeon's anecdote – Calvinist preacher on Isa 11:8 – "*The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp*". *b*The child = a new Christian / the asp = an Arminian / the hole of the asp = the

² It might not be as significant as these other factors, but one might also observe the return of a 'latitudinarian' spirit. Latitudinarianism was a 17th / 18th Century reaction to the conflicts of the past – rejecting Puritan Calvinism, on the one hand, and High Church Arminianism, on the other. It emphasised the importance of theological and ecclesiastical 'latitude', i.e. breadth and variety. In the modern Church we see this approach resurrected and then applied to the more 'sticky' points of Christian doctrine, such as election and predestination. There is an emphasis on balance – i.e. "well, we need to maintain a 'latitude' of opinion on predestination – after all, there are a great diversity of views." (BUT – there are a great diversity of views on the Incarnation, for example. We don't insist on balance here – why not?) Then there's the prevalence of 'hermeneutical absurdism' – i.e. "there are all sorts of interpretations of Scripture, there's no way this one you're suggesting can possibly be correct!" (The implication being, that Scripture isn't perspicuous, or that we shouldn't be certain about some subjects as we would others.)

- Arminian's mouth. (I.e. Arminian is a snake who even a child can rebuke!)
- In the other direction, re: Charles Wesley's hymn – "They think with shrieks and cries / To please the Lord of hosts / And offer thee, in sacrifice / Millions of slaughtered ghosts / With new-born babes they fill / The dire infernal shade / 'For such', they say, 'was thy great will' / 'Before the world was made' [The Horrible Decree]
 - Why were tempers so fraught?
 - Part of the push and pull of English history.
 - These differences once scarred England – e.g. Charles I appointed anti-Calvinists (Richard Montagu, William Laud) [1625AD], MPs spoke against Arminianism [1629AD], *etc.*
 - And then, the Civil War – one side seen to be 'Calvinistic'!
 - The modern Church shoulders the legacy of these tensions.
 - Not only is there a latent sense that we must 'pick a side' in a pitched battle – but also the division of UK Evangelicalism between Wesley + Whitefield.
 - **SECOND: people who love Jesus read texts differently.**
 - It's important to be charitable here.
 - Great men and women have differed – e.g. Chesterton, Gregory of Naz, Chrysostom, Wesley.
 - Some texts – *prima facie* – suggest a cosmic scale to God's salvation, and the importance of human responsibility.
 - **REFLECT:** Can you think of any?
 - **LOOK:** John 1:12 / 2 Pet 3:9
 - KEY POINT:
 - Charity doesn't mean that we can't robustly disagree [1 Cor 11:19] – nor that the Scriptures aren't clear.
 - But simply – "*love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour*" [Rom 12:10].
 - **THIRD: we're not always speaking the same language.**
 - Depending on what it is we're talking about, we may or may not be agreeing with one another.
 - E.g. "I think we've got free will, we're not robots" – BUT almost everyone agrees the will is capable of genuine choice. The only Q is whether it's free to choose against its nature.
 - E.g. "They don't believe in predestination" – BUT almost everyone believes in predestination. The Q is not *whether* God has predestinated, but *who* and *why*.
 - **FOURTH: people who are people love people – it's only human!**
 - I.e. this isn't a game, with pieces made of ivory or plastic.
 - We're talking about human beings whom we love – family members, co-workers, friends, etc.
 - In my experience, this doctrine is as emotionally challenging as it is theologically tricky.
 - That's not insignificant – "*If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing*" [1 Cor 13:2].
 - **FIFTH: some who promote election have abused it.**
 - Doctrines of grace have been handled ungraciously.

- “It is a terrible thing when the healing balm loses its efficacy through the blunderer who administers it. You all know the injurious effects frequently produced upon water through flowing along leaden pipes; even so the gospel itself, in flowing through men who are spiritually unhealthy, may be debased until it grows injurious to their hearers. It is to be feared that Calvinistic doctrine becomes most evil teaching when it is set forth by men of ungodly lives” [Spurgeon – Lecture 1]

The result of all this controversy and bad blood? The majority of evangelical Christians do not possess a **positive doctrine of election**. What do I mean by this?

- NOT JUST that we don't think of it as a good thing.
- BUT RATHER that we have no *PLACE* for it in our theology.
 - **When we come to construct our theology of salvation, we don't know what to do with it.**
 - We stumble across it in Scripture as we would left-over jigsaw pieces. It's an anachronism.

[3] The Need for a Positive Doctrine of Election

REFLECT: What's the problem with not having a place for election?

[3A] Biblically, it's everywhere.

- The Greek verb often translated as 'predestined':
 - Προορίζω (*proorizō* [proh-reedz-oh])
 - Appears in Acts, Rom, 1 Cor and Eph.
- The Greek adjective often translated as 'elect':
 - ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos* [eh-cleck-toss])
 - Appears in all three Synoptic Gospels, Rom, Col, 1+2 Tim, Titus, 1 Pet, 2 John and Rev.
- The Greek noun often translated as 'election':
 - ἐκλογή (*eklogē* [eh-kloh-gay])
 - Appears in Acts, Rom, 1 Thess and 2 Pet.
- The Greek verb often used for God 'choosing' or God's 'chosen':
 - ἐκλέγω (*eklegō* [eh-kleg-oh])
 - Appears in Matt, Luke, John, Acts, 1 Cor, Eph and James.
- **That's close to 70% of all the NT.**

[3B] The Biblical authors almost never treat it as 'problematic'.

- Only once does Paul give voice to objections – e.g. Rom 9.
 - (And John 6 highlights a negative response.)
- Indeed, the authors of Scripture treat this doctrine with joy.
 - "Men treat God's sovereignty as a theme for controversy, but in Scripture it is a matter for worship" [Packer]
 - **LOOK:** Ps 135:3-4 / Eph 1:3-5 / 2 Tim 2:10 / 2 Pet 1:10
 - "The [godly] consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves ... [the] drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things" [Irish Articles of Religion – 1615]

[3C] The doctrine of election is a staple of historic Christian thought.

- **It's hard to overstate just how unusual our modern antipathy really is.** (Especially in the western Church.)
 - Doesn't necessarily make it true, of course – but it should at least give us pause for thought.
 - "Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise rebuke to a listening ear" [Prov 25:12]

Clement of Rome:

- "Day and night ye were anxious for the whole brotherhood, that the number of God's elect might be saved with mercy and a good conscience" [*First Epistle I*]

Tertullian:

- "We have been predestined by God, before the world was, (to arise) in the extreme end of the times" [*On the Apparel of Women II.IX*]

Augustine:

- "Therefore God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestinating us to the adoption of children, not because we were going to be of ourselves holy and immaculate, but he chose and predestinated us so that we might be so. Moreover, he did this according to the good pleasure of his will, so that nobody might glory concerning his own will, but about God's will towards himself" [*On the Predestination of the Saints* XXXVII]

Fifth Council of Orange [529AD]:

- "The sin of the first man has so impaired and weakened free will that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded him" [*Concluding Canon*]

Lombard [1150AD]:

- "God elected whom he willed by a freely given mercy, not because they would be faithful in the future, but so that they might be faithful" [*Sentences* I]

Aquinas [c.1261AD]:

- "[The] predestination of some to eternal salvation presupposes, in the order of reason, that God wills their salvation; and to this belong both election and love" [*Summa* I.XXIII.4]

Gregory of Rimini [c.1340AD]:

- "It is clear to me from the statements of Scripture and of the saints that the following conclusions must be accepted as true, and taught and preached as such. First, that no one is predestined on account of the good use of the free will... [Also], that whoever, God predestines, is predestined in a manner which is gracious and merciful" [*Sententiarum* XL-XLI.1.2]

Luther [1522AD]:

- "[In Rom 9, Paul] teaches concerning God's eternal predestination, from which it originally comes that one believes or not, is rid of sin or not rid of it. Thus our becoming righteous is taken entirely out of our hands and put in the hand of God. And that is most highly necessary. We are so weak and uncertain that, if it were in our power, surely not one man would be saved, the devil would surely overpower us all; but since God is certain, and his predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand him, we still have hope against sin" [*Preface to Romans*]
 - Also all the other Reformers, and Jansenism.

Church of England – 39 Articles [1563AD]:

- "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation" [Article XVII]

EVEN Arminius [c.1605AD]:

- “This is my opinion concerning the free-will of man: In his primitive condition as he came out of the hands of his creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform the true good... But in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good” [*Declaration of Sentiments* V.III]

EVEN Charles Finney [1851AD]:³

- “[The] Bible everywhere assumes and implies the truth of [election]... [The] Scriptures in a great variety of ways speak of the elect, of election, etc., as a truth known by irresistible inference from [God’s] known attributes. To deny it involves a denial of the attributes of God. I have been surprised at the laboured and learned efforts to show that this doctrine is not expressly taught in the Bible” [*Lectures on Systematic Theology* LXXIV.IV]

[3D] Building a Positive Doctrine of Election

- **As we start to build our theology of salvation together, we must recognise that the doctrine of election exists at the heart of soteriology.**
 - I DON’T MEAN that you need to believe it to be saved.
 - BUT RATHER that it’s an essential part of the engine.
 - It’s not an irrelevance.
 - It’s not a distraction.
 - It’s not an anachronism.
 - It’s not some leftover jigsaw piece.
- **Fundamentals from *to* this doctrine, and fundamentals flow *from* this doctrine.**
 - This is much bigger than the parochial debate about ‘Calvinism vs. Arminianism’ – which I tire of, frankly.
 - We’re seeking a mature, catholic, and systematic theology – one that is honest to the Scriptures.
- **In what follows, my desire isn’t to make ‘little Nathans’.**
 - Nor to be reactive or polemical.
 - BUT – to be constructive. Building a positive account, layer by layer. Can we find unity?
 - Remember – this is an open forum!
 - I’ll do my best to answer questions.
 - BUT – we’re focusing on election and predestination, not what follows from that, e.g. OSAS and Definite Atonement. Those will come later!

³ Finney [1792-1875AD; b. Connecticut USA] has had an enormous influence on modern evangelicalism, and Charismaticism especially. He’s been described as “the father of modern revivalism”. A lot of the modern charismatic antipathy towards election might be attributed to his legacy. To quote G.M. Rosell: “[Finney’s] preaching and teaching, always pointed and dramatic, stressed the moral government of God, human ability to repent and create new hearts, the perfectibility of human nature and society, and the need for Christians to apply their faith to daily living. For Finney, this included the investment of one’s time and energy in establishing the millennial kingdom of God on earth by winning converts and involving oneself in social reform”.

[4] First Foundation: The Freedom of God & Bondage of Man

[4A] What Have We Established Already?

- **DISCUSS:** When we talk about 'GIGAWAN', what do we mean?
 - God is categorically unique – the only un-conditioned One.
 - Transcendent, sovereign, working for his own glory.
 - This gives us our first foundation.
- **First, the Freedom of God – LOOK:** Ps 115:3
 - "Shall the axe vaunt itself over the one who wields it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it? As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up, or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!" [Isa 10:15]
 - He is not compelled by anything.
 - He alone possesses absolute freedom.
 - Connected to the Aseity of God.
 - He is 'from self'. Independent. Doesn't need us, etc.
- **Second, the Bondage of Man – LOOK:** Isa 64:6 / Jer 10:23
 - In bondage to sin and death, in all respects.
 - Total Depravity – "There is no health in us..." [CBP]
 - Society / Speech / Relationships / Desires.

[4B] All Things Are Decretal

- **If God is not compelled by anything, unconditioned and free, but his creatures are contingent + enslaved to futility, what must we conclude?**
 - **LOOK:** 1 Chron 29:14 + 1 Cor 4:7
 - ALL things are unprovoked.
 - ALL things are unmerited.
 - ALL things are decretal – not just salvation.
 - We observed this about *Creatio ex Nihilō*.

God chooses to be a Creator God (and therefore elects us to be creatures).

God chooses to be a knowable God (and therefore elects us to be knowers of him).

God chooses to be a revealed God (and therefore elects us to be students of revelation).

God chooses to be a listening God (and therefore elects us to be a praying people).

God chooses to be a just God (and therefore elects us to be held accountable).

God chooses to be an interruptive God (and therefore elects us to know him in time, through means and forms).

God chooses to be a worshipped God (and therefore elects us to be a worshipping people).

[5] Second Foundation: The Choice of God to Save in Christ

We must pay attention to what we're establishing here.

Everything God does, he **chooses** to do *freely*, without compulsion.

There is nothing that doesn't flow from the free choice of God.

Election is therefore at the heart of all things – indeed, **Christian theology requires the free, unmerited choice of God to be God.**

- "This is the freedom of the divine life and love. In this positive freedom of his, God is also unlimited, unrestricted, and unconditioned from without. He is the free Creator, the free Reconciler, the free Redeemer" [Barth – *CD* II.1 §28.3 p.301]

Soteriology is no exception – **LOOK:** Rom 5:8

God freely chooses to be a Saviour God.

Not because we're beautiful – but **DESPITE** our ugliness.

The question for us is: **HOW?**

[5A] God Chooses to be a God of Covenant

- **LOOK:** Gen 18:17-19
 - A God for a people, through Abraham.
 - "And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power" [Deut 4:37]
 - "Thus I will make a distinction between my people and your people" [Exo 8:23]

[5B] God Chooses to be the God of a Covenant People

- **LOOK:** Deut 7:6-8
 - Unconditional, unmerited, unprovoked.
 - NOTE: he doesn't elect Egypt, Canaan, etc.
- **DISCUSS:** Why does he choose her?
 - Out of love [Deut 7:8]
 - To be his friends [Isa 41:8]
 - To be his witness [Isa 43:10]
 - BUT – the reason given the most?
 - **LOOK:** Ps 33:12 / Ps 135:4 / Isa 42:1
 - To be his "treasured possession" [Deut 7:6]

[5C] God Chooses to Use his Covenant People to Bring Salvation

- **LOOK:** Isa 44:1-3 + Isa 49:7
 - **FIRST:** God promises to rescue his chosen people.
- **LOOK:** Isa 56:6-8
 - **SECOND:** Hint that all chosen people =/= biological Israel.
- **LOOK:** Ps 89:19-21
 - **THIRD:** All this through his chosen Son of David!

[5D] God Chooses to Save his Covenant People IN Christ

- **Does this remind us of anything?**
 - **LOOK:** Matt 12:18 + 1 Pet 1:20 – “*chose us IN X*” [Eph 1:3]
 - Election not just at the heart of all theology proper.
 - It’s not just at the heart of the OT and Israel’s story.
 - Election is at the heart of the Triune life of God himself – the Father has predestined the Son of David to rescue his people, by the Spirit.
- **KEY POINT: the Son of God is the Chosen One – through whom God elects to be God, and the Father predestines a people for himself.** ⁴
 - God chooses to be a Creator God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be a knowable God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be a revealed God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be a listening God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be a just God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be an interruptive God – *through Christ!* God chooses to be a worshipped God – *through Christ!*
 - “Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge. ... We see here that God begins with himself when he sees fit to elect us; but he will have us begin with Christ so that we may know that we are reckoned among his peculiar people” [Calvin – *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* VIII.6]⁵

SUDDENLY election makes sense – it’s not an anachronism.

SUDDENLY the jigsaw piece snaps into place – it’s not some leftover.

The doctrine of election is truly at the heart of the Gospel.

Why? Because the doctrine of election is primarily about *Christ*.

He is the Chosen One – and because we’re found in him, we are chosen, too.

⁴ See Acts 2:22-24 – in which Peter [a] promotes the centrality and fame of Christ; [b] affirms the predestination of the Son (and his death on the cross specifically); [c] insists that he was murdered at the hands of “lawless men”, affirming that predestination and human culpability are indeed compatible, and [d] describes how the Father has vindicated and exalted the Son – the *modus operandi* of God.

⁵ By no means only Calvin’s point – we see this point in Athanasius, Augustine, Barth, and even Arminius.

[6] The Doctrine of Election and the NT Witness

Again, fundamentals flow FROM this doctrine and fundamentals flow TO this doctrine. It's because it's so important that we see it taught across the New Testament.

[6A] Explicitly, we find this doctrine taught repeatedly.

- **LOOK:** Matt 11:27 / Matt 22:14 / John 6:44 / John 15:16 / Acts 13:48 / Eph 1:11 / Eph 2:8-10 / 1 Thess 1:4-5 / 1 Thess 5:9 / Heb 12:2 / 1 Pet 1:1-2 / 1 Pet 2:9 / 2 Pet 1:10

[6B] Implicitly, remember the five NT images for salvation?

- **We must be attentive to what the images entail.**
 - *God as Redeemer:*
 - Buying slaves out of powerlessness.
 - *God as Shepherd:*
 - Rescuing sheep in their helplessness.
 - *God as Conquering King:*
 - Taking captives as his reward, adopting them as children.
 - *Church as Israel:*
 - Mirroring the unconditional election of God's people.
 - *Church as Bride:*
 - A marriage arranged by the Father, for the Son.
- **All these images presume the activity of God and the passivity of man.**
 - God's freedom to act – to break in, to invade, to take, to claim, to seize.
Man's bondage to sin – incapable to help.
 - "God's forgiveness does not burst into our willingness, but into our unwillingness. Our only contribution is the sin that has been forgiven" [Barth – CD IV/I]
 - Indeed, this shouldn't surprise us – remember Rom 5:8?
 - He proved his love for us *while we were still sinners*.
 - "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it" [LW 31]
 - (Re: Bernard of Clairvaux – the cause of our love FOR God is the love OF God.)

[7] Conclusion – Coming to a Point

[7A] A Shared Basis for Fellowship and Unity

- **Let's think about what we've established together.**
 - [A] God is free and sovereign.
 - [B] Man in Adam is helpless, enslaved to sin.
 - [C] The doctrine of election is at the heart of salvation history and of the Triune life of God.
 - [D] Election and predestination are unavoidable facts of Scripture – we shouldn't brush them under the carpet.
 - A solid basis for mission, fellowship, and friendship.
- **We're not just treating the doctrine of election like some sub-par 'off-cut'.**
 - We dishonour God when we treat it as such.
 - It's the stuff of amazing grace.
 - Instead, this is something special:
 - Is God sovereign? Did he choose us in Christ and deliver us when we were helplessly enslaved to sin? Did he predestine us to be conformed to his image? Is salvation by grace alone and faith alone?
 - Well, amen! We can work and fight together.

BUT – as a teacher of God's Word, I'm given a command:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth" [2 Tim 2:15]

AND YET – all these years later, I can't ignore this – **LOOK:** Eph 1:3-12

I am convinced that the Scripture teaches the Reformed position.

It's therefore my responsibility to give an account. Please bear with me!

[7B] FIRST: Evaluating the Average Evangelical Position

- **It should concern us that we can point to dozens of Scriptures that speak explicitly about God's sovereignty in all things – but not a single one that describes Free Will.**
 - The closest we get to the modern mindset?
 - **LOOK:** 1 Sam 6:9 – only the Pagans speak like this.
- **It should concern us that the average Evang defending FW has more in common with the Enlight than Church history.**
 - Re: Lewis *On the Reading of Old Books* – we must be vigilant against an accidental synthesis.
 - An example of which would be the prevalence of Enlightenment ideas, even in the Church.
 - The problem? Many Enlightenment ideas grate – intentionally – against classical Christian instincts.
 - For example, the idea of a natural freedom.
 - Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and *The Age of Reason* (1794-1807).
 - Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712-1778 / Swiss-born]: **"It is not, therefore, so much the understanding that constitutes the**

specific difference between the man and the brute, as the human quality of free-agency. ... [It] is particularly in his consciousness of this liberty that the spirituality of his soul is displayed. For physics may explain, in some measure, the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas; but **in the power of willing or rather of choosing, and in the feeling of this power, nothing is to be found but acts which are purely spiritual** and wholly inexplicable" [Rousseau – *Discourse on the Inequality Among Men* I]⁶

- **It should concern us that those Churches which reject the sovereignty of God TEND to become more liberal.**
 - Are there liberal Reformed Churches? Some, esp post-BLM.
 - BUT – in general, which Protestant Churches are resisting the current madness? Which have capitulated?

[7C] SECOND: Evaluating Arminian Claims in Particular

- **If you sympathise with Arminianism, then God bless you; yours is a noble heritage.**
 - BUT - I do have my concerns.
 - There are flaws and inconsistencies which have a corrupting influence.
 - With no animus whatsoever, bear with me as I share my thoughts.
- **First, God's foreknowledge is the great problem here.**
 - For example:
 - Arminianism says that predestination is based on God's foreknowledge – seeing ahead who believes.
 - Arminianism also says that if God creates a reality for someone ahead of time, that would be unjust.
 - BUT - this presents three problems for the Arminian view.
 - [A] **LOOK:** Eph 1:11 – God's predestination is active and grounded in God, not passive or grounded in factors outside his control.
 - [B] If God looks down corridors of time and sees who believes, that implies God is learning something.
 - [C] If God has perfect foreknowledge, we **STILL** have a God who creates knowing some will never believe.
 - (Re: Open Theism / Process as dangers here.)
- **Second, the Crucifixion demonstrates to be true what Arminianism says is impossible.**
 - I.e. Arminianism says that predestination makes human beings into robots, who can't be held accountable for sin.⁷
 - **BUT LOOK:** Acts 2:22-24 – Golgotha was predestined *and yet* the Jews / Romans are "lawless".
 - **(ALSO LOOK:** Isa 45:21-22)

⁶ Re: Immanuel Kant and Descartes on free-will, also. Also the general influence of Rousseau on modern thinking – oneness of nature, the priority of immediate feeling, introspectiveness, etc.

⁷ Also – if there's no way for someone to be moral if it's impossible to act another way, what about God and the angels? If God can sin, he's not God; if the angels can sin, then another Satan is possible. We'd deny both, and yet wouldn't dream to question (e.g.) God's ability to be genuinely moral and good.

- **Third, whilst it's good that Arminianism recognises Total Depravity, its solution to this doesn't work.**
 - I.e. 'prevenient grace' – famously the position of J. Wesley.
 - A universal grace – 'prevenient', i.e. *prae venīre* – 'to come before'.
 - Given to every human being, neutralising our bondage to sin, giving us back our capacity to choose.
 - Where did Wesley get this from? **LOOK:** John 1:9
 - My humble suggestion is that this doesn't work. Why?
 - [A] EITHER he gives more prevenient grace to some than to others (hence why they choose);
 - [B] OR he gives it equally – but then we'd have to explain why some choose and others don't. Would we not have something to boast about? Smarter, more spiritual, etc?
 - BUT ALSO – there is simply no Biblical evidence for this idea.
 - E.g. John 1:9 does not teach prevenient grace – there's no suggestion that the light which "*lightens*" [*phōtizei*] upon every man enables anything in them.
 - The verse is explained by John 1:10-11 – Jesus is the invasion of true light which shines on all men, provoking some to cower and some to bask.
 - I.e. it's not an *enabling* light – it's an *exposing* light.

[7] THIRD: The Beauty of the Reformed Position

- **For all these reasons, I believe that the Reformed position is the most Biblical, consistent account of things.**
 - NOT JUST THAT – I also think it's the most beautiful.
 - I can't force you to see or feel that for yourself.
 - But in my mind, this is important.
 - **LOOK:** Jer 25:8-9 – providence in their falling.
 - **BUT:** Jer 50:11ff, 17-20 – sovereignty in their saving.
- **Think about how you were saved – the intricate kaleidoscope of factors that led you to this point.**
 - The Bible says: that wasn't an accident.
 - God was bending all space and time to rescue YOU.
 - Re: Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*.
 - "From heaven he sought her..."
 - All your griefs and darkest moments, they're not just chance or human decision – they are tools in his hands.
 - "*But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand*" [Ps 10:14]
 - ("[That] ye may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Illuvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth... And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" [Tolkien – *The Silmarillion*])

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing,
brought me.

Appendix – Recommended Resources

Useful Reading:

- **Key Biblical texts:** John 6 / Eph 1 / Rom 9.
- **James White:** *The Potter's Freedom*.
- **RC Sproul:** *Chosen By God*.
- **John Owen:** *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.
- **Thomas Aquinas:** *Summa Theologiæ* [Part One, Section 23] – [click here](#).
- **Martin Luther:** *Bondage of the Will* – [click here](#).
- **John Calvin:** *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Book 3, Chapter 21] – [click here](#).
- **Peterson & Williams:** *Why I Am Not An Arminian*.
- **David Gibson:** *From Heaven He Came And Sought Her*.
- **Lorraine Boettner:** *The Doctrine of Predestination*.
- **Augustine:** *Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints* – [click here](#).
- **John Piper:** *Five Points*.
- **Sam Storms:** *How Can God Be Loving?* – [click here](#).
- **Triablogue:** *Annotated Proof-texts for Calvinism* – [click here](#).
- **Jimmy Needham:** *The Doctrine of Election Saved Me From Depression* – [click here](#).
- **George Whitefield:** *Letter to John Welsey On Election* – [click here](#).
- **Jl Packer:** *God Chooses His Own* – [click here](#).
- **Wayne Grudem:** *Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election* – [click here](#).
- **Charles Spurgeon:** *Election* – [click here](#).
- **Charles Spurgeon:** *Election, Its Defenses and Evidences* – [click here](#).
- **Jonathan Edwards:** *Christians A Chosen Generation* – [click here](#).
- **AW Pink:** *The Sovereignty of God* – [click here](#).
- **AW Pink:** *The Doctrine of Election* – [click here](#).
- **BB Warfield:** *Some Thoughts on Predestination* – [click here](#).
- **Jonathan Edwards:** *Concerning the Divine Decrees* – [click here](#).
- **Jonathan Edwards:** *Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men* – [click here](#).
- **John Newton:** *Letter on the Doctrines of Grace* – [click here](#).
- Piper video – The Doctrines of Grace
- Amazing Grace documentary (parts 1-3)