

## In Opposition

Two men dominated the spiritual landscape of 18<sup>th</sup> century England and Colonial America. Both John Wesley and George Whitefield lived and died as members of the Church of England. Both men were called “Methodists” and freely participated in what they considered to be the renewal of the church via that Methodist movement. They were dynamic speakers, drawing crowds of many thousands both in the greatest churches available and in the streets and fields.

But there came a time when both men eyed the other with serious suspicion, especially when it came to the doctrine that we call today “Calvinism”. Both considered the other as perpetrators of serious heresy, and their relationship became strained, to say the least. Both were willing eventually to divide true believers rather than keep silent about their convictions.

My conviction in the following study is that no division over this doctrine has ever been necessary. Stepping back and looking at the Scriptures as a whole, I believe there is perfect unity in the “two sides” of the argument that has separated us.

Ever heard of “thesis, antithesis, synthesis”? The concept, known as the dialectical method, is from the sciences, and is defined in this way by the *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*:

- (1) a beginning proposition called a thesis, (2) a negation of that thesis called the antithesis, and (3) a synthesis whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled to form a new proposition.<sup>[3]</sup>

Let me bring this notion over to the study of some Biblical ideas, some of which seem to be in contradiction:

1. Jesus is God, thesis proved by a great number of Biblical texts.
2. Jesus is man. This also is unquestionable.

At this point the world stumbles, speaks of contradictions in the Bible, and writes it all off. We who know the Truth simply respond that both ideas are true. We synthesize the two opposites into one, and say

3. Jesus is/was the God-Man. The only such Person in history. Emmanuel. God with us.

And for us, the case is closed. No contradiction.

My example is an over-simplification of Hegel and his theory. To make it work, we must come up, in the Scripture, with two seemingly opposite concepts, step back, take a long look, pray, and see where the two ideas can become one new one without damaging the originals.

Let’s try another one.

1. The soul that sins shall die. All have sinned therefore all deserve eternal death. In other words, the justice of God.
2. A select group of people from all people groups and all ages will indeed live with God in perfect fellowship forever.

How can this just God allow into His Fellowship unholy humans?

3. God has decided to accept the perfect sacrifice of His Son to atone for sin, make it as though it never happened, wipe the slate clean, allowing some to enter Heaven.

This should set the stage for you mentally. This document examines the thorny issue only hinted at in the previous example, namely, God's election process, somehow incorporated into the free will of man. Or better, man's alleged free will incorporated into the election process of Jehovah.

"The Bible Contradicts Itself."

Liberal scholarship has grown fat on placing one Bible statement against another to prove there are contradictions in Scripture. The ones quoted above are two examples. James vs Paul on salvation. Is it by faith or by works? Looks like the apostle and the half-brother of Jesus are at odds with one another. The genealogies of Matthew and Luke. They're not the same in every detail. Contradiction!

Not so. Those who love Scripture have shown us how these accounts harmonize. No, the dividing up of the church over these things doesn't even work when one Biblical author is set up against another.

Much more than, when one author seems to come against *himself*? Oh, yes, it happens a lot! In this study I wish to place authors seemingly at odds *with themselves* in harmony with themselves, so that the full truth of a teaching is in view. And as I have already indicated, not just any teaching. I wish to examine the doctrine of election and predestination. Some call it "Calvinism". Spurgeon called it "Bible". They are calling it "doctrines of grace" today. Whatever it is called, it has unnecessarily divided true believer from true believer to the point where the separate factions have been willing to consign the other to God's wrath.

My conviction is that there never needed to be even one church split over this issue. Calvin-style predestination and Arminian-style free will are *both* taught in the Scriptures! May you come out of this treatise a *Calminian* or an *Arvinist*. Or better yet, simply a believer, a disciple, with no human name attached.

Yes, it's true. No more Calvin vs Arminius. No more Wesley vs Whitefield. No more Spurgeon vs Graham. No more Methodists against Presbyterians. Let me take away that need for ongoing strife...

We will look at the words of Paul, *opposed to himself*. Then John vs John. Luke against Luke. Peter against Peter. The writer of Hebrews at odds with his own writing. Finally we will carefully show the very words of our Savior Jesus, that show Him to be on *both sides* of the issue, from which we conclude that there are not two sides after all, but one huge marvelous mind of the Father, who does what He wills, whether we like it or understand it or not.

Those steeped in free will theology could right away say that the entire New Testament is *against* the idea of election and irresistible grace, based on the constant calls to holiness, obedience, to do this and that. Commands assume responsibility. Responsibility assumes choice. And that's all true.

But the free grace folks respond that it is only grace that makes all this possible, that a person cannot in his own flesh, dead to sin, suddenly become alive to God and serve God as He desires. The will and the power to do good, they would say, comes directly from Heaven.

So there is the argument in a nutshell. And in so summarizing, I have shown you how the entire New Testament is opposed to itself! A thesis is formed: It takes free will to please God. Then there is the antithesis: Dead, flesh-controlled people cannot choose good things. Synthesis: God's grace must enable man to do what he cannot do by his nature.

Over-simplified? Perhaps. So let me take you to the principal men of the New Testament, to show you how they were "opposed" to themselves, yet spoke actually two sides of the same truth. Jesus appears first in the New Testament, but let us save His wisdom until last, to leave the flavor of His direct statements ringing in our ears. Let's start with Paul...

PAUL

The great apostle is all over the map on the subject of election. Persons trying to prove their point, regardless of the side they have chosen, can readily find a passage from Paul to vindicate themselves. But the "map" is just a piece of the mind of God that narrower men have only seen in bits and pieces, after which they have hoisted their flag, and held their position whatever the cost, even the cost of piercing again the body of Jesus. Let's look at Paul a letter at a time. We will not have to force Paul to fight with himself in different letters to different churches, thinking that perhaps he was in a totally different state of mind writing to church A than he was to church B. There is "contradiction" within each of his letters.

ROMANS

*Romans 1:1 “Paul...called to be an apostle and separated to the gospel of God.”*

Paul begins this magnificent treatise to the Romans with a clear statement about God’s calling and choosing. Paul knows that he was not looking for Jesus when Jesus appeared to Him. Rather, he wanted to eliminate that holy Name from the lips of all Jewish people. He certainly was not seeking to be an apostle of this Jesus, one who is commissioned to spread the story of the Galilean to the ends of the earth. Yet in retrospect Paul sees that it was God Who called, God Who had chosen, God Who had separated him. In other words, pure grace.

*Romans 8:28-30, 33. “...those who love God...are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified...Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?”*

Here is the classic passage on the subject at hand. This one is the Rosetta Stone to some, the defining verse of election and predestination. Indeed, it is difficult to get around the notion that it is God doing all the choosing, all the calling, all the predestinating, all the justifying, all the glorifying. What part does man have in it all, viewing the eternal purposes of God from this passage?

So where’s the opposition, the seeming conflict? The Paul vs Paul? It all starts in chapter 9. Please read both of the following passages carefully, and see if you can pick up on these contradictory ideas.

*Romans 9:13-23. “...it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated’. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘**I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.**’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God Who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore, **He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.** You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”*

Pretty powerful, no? God has mercy on anyone that He chooses. It's not a matter of trying to be a child of God, running and proving I am worthy. God either saves me or hardens me.

But, same chapter, same author:

*Romans 9:30-33. "... Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith but ... by the works of the law... as it is written,... **"Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."***

So, the Gospel goes out. If I believe it, I am saved. No mention of election here. It all seems to be up to me. I can take it or leave it. God is not forcing me to accept Him. I have my free will. As long as I do not try to be saved by my works, and I trust wholly in Christ, I will make it.

Ok, synthesizers. Put it together. Here's my attempt:

1. Thesis: God has mercy on whomever He wills. It's all up to God.
2. Antithesis: I can be saved if I approach God by faith. It's all up to me.
3. Synthesis: God wills for me to have the faith that saves.

It's true that faith comes by hearing the Word of God and that that faith saves us. It is also true that it is God working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. Step back. Look at the whole scene. God wills, and then I will. There is no accident about my believing. God's mercy singled me out and placed saving faith in my heart. He did it in such a way that it was my faith, my desire, my will. Let all that Arminius preached be believed, then let it be connected to the will of God spoken of by Calvin, and you have the whole picture.

Not convinced? Take a hard look now at chapter 11.

*Romans 11:5-8, 11, 25-26, 29, 32-34 "...at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace... Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. As it is written, 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day... through their fall, to provoke [Jews] to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles... blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved... for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable...For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?'..."*

Once more, a slam dunk in favor of predestination, election, God's will being done on earth, and all the rest. God chooses and calls, and nothing can change His perfect will. God gives people a spirit of "stupor", actually blinding their eyes! Then has mercy. How can man be said to be a part of all this? Who put this whole plan together, you? Me? I think not.

But, wait, not so fast. Looks like things can change after all:

*Romans 11: 17-22. "If some of the branches [Jews] were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree [a Gentile], were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."*

Wait a minute! Too many "if's" in that passage. How can Paul be so rock-ribbed sure in one breath and in the very next say "if"? You mean I can be cut off of the tree even though I once was grafted into it? What if I don't continue "in His goodness"? What if I fall away? Can I fall away?

Here is a clear look at Paul vs Paul. Not that he really opposes himself, but that it looks like he does. Calvinists jump for joy reading that first collection of chapter eleven Scriptures. Arminians ignore all that and base their faith on the latter verses. How in the world do we put it all together? Surely Paul is not confused! But we are. And divided, for no reason!

First, does it seem probable to you that a God who calls a Gentile to grace will at a later time not call him to grace? If the gifts are irrevocable, can He revoke them based on our disobedience? Is salvation based on works after all?

Second, is it not possible that Paul is speaking to Gentiles as a body, and not to individual believers? All believers will persevere. But some Gentiles are not truly believers, will turn away, will lose whatever faith they seemed to have, will be cut off, though they were offered salvation.

Many Gentiles in this Roman church. Paul addresses them as a unit. Yes, Jews were taken off of the tree so that Gentiles could come in. Many Gentiles will come in with saving faith and experience the irrevocable call of God on their lives. Many Gentiles will be good church members for a while, outwardly conforming to Christ and His ways. But nothing on the inside. Never truly called and chosen from the foundation of the world.

So,

Thesis: God chooses some, hardens others. His gifts are irrevocable.

Antithesis: Many “called” Gentiles can fall away if they do not continue in faith and the goodness of God.

Synthesis. Many (Gentiles) are called, but few are chosen “from the foundation of the world.”

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## I CORINTHIANS

Paul shows in a number of ways to the church at Corinth that God is sovereign, that He designs and chooses and appoints. See for example:

*I Corinthians 1:27. “You see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”*

Does Paul “contradict” any of the above in his further teachings to Corinth? Perhaps one could see it in:

*I Corinthians 1:21. “...it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe...”.*

You must believe to be saved. But God has ordained preaching to be the instrument of salvation. God brings the preacher to the sinner, and the grace to believe that preacher.

We see from the first passage above that God deliberately chooses the underdog. And,

*I Corinthians 7:17, 12:7, 11. “As God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”*

God distributes gifts as He pleases. Further,

*I Corinthians 12:14, 18. “The body is not one member but many... God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased...”*

God ordains specific members of the Body of Christ to be in the positions that please Him. This is brought out again in

*I Corinthians 12:28. "God has appointed these in the church: first, apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."*

But, what about I Corinthians 12:31, 14:1.

*"Earnestly desire the best gifts...Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts..."*

Looks to me like the way God places gifts and men in order is to place within them the desire to have certain gifts. When we step back into eternity past we see God arranging the church just as He desired it to be. Whether men or their gifts, all is set in order by God.

Even down to each individual life, things are set in order beforehand, not by man. Look at

*I Corinthians 15:10. "By the grace of God I am what I am... I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

Paul himself was a man directed by the grace of God. He did nothing on his own. Just like nature, that preceded all of us...

*I Corinthians 15:41. "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory..."*

Even the universe and its various shades of brilliance is totally set in order by God to fulfill His specific purposes.

The first letter to the Corinthians, with some minor suggestions of disharmony, is easily arranged into a unified statement of God, that He is in charge, that He does all things according to His will and plan.

No opposition here!

## I TIMOTHY

Paul writes to a younger brother in the Lord, a man in whom he has placed much confidence. He appoints Timothy as temporary leader of the Ephesian church, counseling him to ordain elders and allow them to feed the flock after he leaves. He has other wise words to a minister of God, which all of us can take to heart.



First he reminds Timothy of his own (Paul's) calling, an unexpected manifestation of the grace of God, if ever there was one!

*I Timothy 1:12-16. "Jesus... enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man...I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief... that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."*

In Paul, Jesus establishes a pattern of grace. Former blasphemers, persecutors, *anything*, take note: whatever God did for me He can do for you. What He did for me was show unmerited favor. Grace. He called me specifically, out of all the Pharisees and Sadducees he could have called. God truly has a people... But wait,

The same apostle says, a little later in the letter, that God is for everyone! He wants all to be saved!

*I Timothy 2:3-4. "God... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

*I Timothy 4:10. "God is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."*

Problem here? Let's see. God wants everyone to be saved. Does not God have the power, then, to save everyone? It seems certain to me that not all *will* be saved. So what must we say about God's "will"?

Since we were made in His image, perhaps there is a bit of ourselves that will explain His nature. I too desire things. Many things. Wonderful things. Most of them never happen. Willing, or wanting, is not the ultimate decree of God.

Our God did not create a planet full of people in hopes that they would – mostly – be lost forever. He wants all to be saved. He wishes it. He desires it. But He knows that not all will be saved. Yes, He is the Savior of *all* but in a special sense He is the Savior only of the believers.

That is in accord with John 3:16. God loved the world so much, that is, wanted it to be saved, that He gave Jesus to die for – in that same special sense - those who are believers.

A great mystery here. Paul has uncovered it for us and not fully solved it. God calls men like Paul to know and serve Him, while not calling others. Yet He loves even the ones He does not call and has not called from the foundation of the world.

Both truths are here. But "who has known the mind of the Lord?"

The point I am making in this work is that this whole "election" matter is not about Paul versus Peter or an early Paul versus a later one, more matured in his opinions. These two great truths

stand side by side in the same epistle from the same man, and call us to “go figure”, not to start a new denomination...

Let's see if Paul speaks against himself in another letter to that same Timothy:

*II Timothy 1:9. “(God) has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”*

Why me, we ask, and not him? Why you, and not her? Why, why, why? The answer is clear, or at least as clear as we will have it on this side of things: His own purpose and grace! And it was done before there was a world, a person, much less you or me. No one knows who they are yet, but Paul in his day served these “invisible” believers night and day...

*II Timothy 2:10. “... I do all things for the sake of the elect (chosen ones), that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”*

But here it is again. After Paul's clear declaration that there is a chosen people, after He tells us they were clearly and definitely saved before time began, he introduces the element of doubt again!

*II Timothy 2:11-13, 20-21. “...IF we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. IF we endure, we shall also reign with Him. IF we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.... IF anyone cleanses himself... he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master...”*

Put it all together before you choose sides. Both truths are before us again: a clear plan and a doubtful now. Doubtful to us. We see through a glass darkly. He sees in bright splendor every name that is in that Book of Life. In other words, the true elect WILL die with Jesus. The non-elect will play along. The true elect WILL endure. The non-elect will be as the seed in Jesus' parable, scorched by the heat of trouble and persecution. The true elect WILL cleanse themselves. The non-elect will muddle through, taking on the colors of the world some days, and people of God others.

After all,

*II Timothy 2:19. “...the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’”...*

And that has to be remembered in the midst of the questions, the “if's”. So encourage everyone, because you don't know who will overcome at last and who will fall away at last...

*II Tim 2:25. “(Correct) those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth...”*

But Paul was sure of one thing:

*II Tim 4:18. The Lord WILL preserve me.*

Oh to have such assurance!

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## HEBREWS

Look at how many if's are in the following passage. It would seem that the entire book of Hebrews totally debunks the notion of election as spelled out by Calvin and his spiritual descendants.

*Hebrews 3:6-19. "[We are Christ's house] if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end...The Holy Spirit [in Psalm 95:7-11] says, 'If you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...' Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... we see that they [Israel] could not enter in [to Canaan] because of unbelief."*

And who can deal with this next series of verses? Did the writer of Hebrews not "get the memo"? Clear statement. The possibility of falling away is real, and serious.

*Hebrews 6:4-10. "...It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance... if [the earth] bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. ..."*

But not so fast. Are we confident that the people being described above are true believers? Enlightened means they understood what they were to do. Partakers of the Holy Spirit, as was Judas. Tasted and delighted in the Scriptures, saw and even experienced miracles. But are we sure there was a time when such people truly came to Christ and were received by Him?

You say, yes, we are sure of this. Then consider the rest of the passage, and read the whole in its light:

*"We are confident of better things [than falling away and being cursed] concerning you, yes and things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister..."*

So there are such people, close but not the real deal? And then there are the ones for whom the writer intended his work. The God who calls, remembers your works and will cause you to persevere. The ones He saw from the foundation of the world cannot turn away finally.

Following is, for me, another clear insight into the way God does His work, the way we come to grace. Here is the announcement, via Jeremiah, of a New Covenant, a New Way of God's working. Before, it was, "Read the Book, try your best," but now... well, read it for yourself...

*Hebrews 8:8-12, 10:16-17. (Quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34) "... This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts... all shall know Me... for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

If ever "I" am "good", it is because God Himself has written His own law on my heart. And of course it is out of the heart that proceed the issues of life. We may say one thing and do one thing with our actions, but eventually it is the heart that tells the story about our lives.

Confirmation is in chapter 9:

*Hebrews 9:15. "(Jesus) is the Mediator of the new covenant... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*

Get it? The called need an assist. They receive it by the New Covenant, God's etching of His own will on ours.

But lest we get carried away too far on this line of thinking, we have to deal with the ever-present Hebrews 10, reminding us of the same cautions we saw in chapter 6.

*Hebrews 10:26. "...If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment... Of how much worse punishment [than those who rejected Moses] ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?... [He] said [Deuteronomy 32:36], 'the Lord will judge His people.'"*

Meaning, if we continue on in sin after we have heard the Gospel, if we reject His offer of salvation, there is no hope. Others want it to say that it refers to the possibility of falling away after we have come to Christ. The Hebrews author seems to want to rule out that possibility by reminding his readers that they have endured so far...

*Hebrews 10:32. "... Recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings..."*

He then goes on to compare those who persevere with those who do not:

*Hebrews 10:38. "Now the just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."*

In case there is any doubt as to the subject of this denunciation, he quickly adds:

*Hebrews 10:39. "We are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."*

After all, the One Who started this thing in us will complete it. He is...

*Hebrews 12:2. "... Jesus, the author [originator] and the finisher [perfecter] of our faith..."*

So why this warning only a few verses later?

*Hebrews 12:15. "[Be careful] lest anyone fall short of the grace of God..."*

It is admonitions such as these that produce life in the true believers. They read such statements and they decide they will not fall short, they will not draw back. God uses His words as the means of producing what He has promised to produce.

God has a people. Their names are in the Book of Life and will not be erased:

*Hebrews 12:22-23. "...You have come to... the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are registered in heaven... to the spirits of just men made perfect."*

God has been perfecting His own through the years, and will finish what He started.

*Hebrews 13:5. "...He Himself has said [in Deuteronomy 31:6,8, Joshua 1:5], 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Hebrews 13:20-21. "Now may the God of peace... make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight..."*

Seems like Hebrews is saying the same thing from start to finish. Those Who are His are secure if they persevere. And they will do just that.

JOHN

Outside the sayings of Jesus in the books of John are the Spirit-inspired words of John himself. What do you make of this combination of ideas from the apostle of love?

*John 1:12. As many as received Him to them he gave power to become children of God, who believe in His name." John 1:13. "...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

First it seems as though salvation is a matter of receiving Christ, followed by God's response of accepting the said receivers into His family. But then John tells us that man's rebirth has nothing to do with man's will at all, but is simply a gift from God. Which is it? Was John confused? Or as usual, only us?

Perhaps the way to put it all in order is to start at the beginning: God. God working in the human heart. God introducing Himself to a sinner via the preached God. God being received by that sinner. God then allowing him the right to become a son of God. No contradiction.

The same author shows up toward the end of your Bible in three short letters, one of which is of interest to this study. Once again, a seeming problem. God is first seen as the giver, through Christ, of a universal salvation.

*1 John 2:2. "He Himself [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."*

The "our" of this passage is, no doubt, the born-again believer. But how does the "whole world" profit from Jesus' sacrifice? John is looking here at the spread of the Gospel into the whole world, as Jesus commanded. Those who believe after that proclamation will be added to the "our" that has already been taken in. He merely states what we already know: the present number of true believers in the world will not remain static. As the Gospel is preached, the number will increase until the return of Christ.

We will talk more of this when discussing John 3:16 later. Meanwhile John sees the "other" side very clearly:

*1 John 4:10, 19. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love Him because He first loved us."*

Once more the "our" and "we" refer to believers. Here it is made clear that the initiative for salvation was begun in Heaven. He died for us, then came to us and told us about it. What did we add to His invitation?

## JESUS

It's almost shameful to ask ourselves, "Was Jesus a Calvinist or an Arminian?" He was neither. He was both. There is no question about His awareness of being chosen Himself, and of choosing the men who walked with Him for three years. But there is equal insistence on personal responsibility. We will see if two of the Gospel writers, Matthew and John, seem to have in their books any contradictions. Then, as in Paul, we'll see if the seeming clashes can be harmonized. I can tell you up-front, the "contradictions" abound. Some harmonize. Some don't. But no fair starting another church if you can't make peace out of two opposing statements. Live with the tension. Go deeper. Stop dividing!

We'll browse Matthew statements in chronological order:

First a clear call for human action:

*Matthew 7:7-8, 13. "Ask... seek... knock.... Enter by the narrow gate."*

But soon we veer off into selecting, choosing:

*Matthew 9:13. "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

So those who do not have an ear to hear Him will not be approached by Him. Left without explanation, this text can be made to fit both "sides." One can say that the "sinners" are being "chosen" because they are not self-righteous. Thus, salvation comes about because of my and your availability. Or, it could be argued that the "sinners" were chosen from the foundation of the world to be in the state in which Jesus found them. They are available because God has made them so.

More choosing in the next chapter:

*Matthew 10:5-6. "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans."*

So how could God overlook the needs of the Samaritans and Gentiles, who were in the "neighborhood" when Jesus walked here? Of course, some of both categories actually did hear the Truth and profit from It. But for the most part they were ignored. How can this be, unless God chooses people according to His will, and in His time?

*Matthew 11:25-27. "I thank You, Father... that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes... for so it seemed good in Your sight... No one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."*

Oh, now that is clear! The Son wills to reveal the Father to certain chosen ones only. These are the ones given to Him by the Father, we discover in John. This is not about the will of man, but the will of God. Period. So how does one explain the universally loved invitation of Jesus found in the very next verse?

*Matthew 11:28. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

Armed with 27, that states that no one knows the Father unless the Son wills it, it is easy to see that it is the Spirit of God that speaks these words of 28 into the desolate heart of man. Those "given", will hear that invitation. Others will not.

Not fair, you say? Then is God's power of choice limited to your fancies? Cannot God choose whom He will? Will you object to His choice of Jesus?

*Matthew 12:18 ( Isaiah 42:1). "Behold My Servant Whom I have chosen, My Beloved in Whom My soul is well pleased..."*

Then why balk at His choice of you, by giving you "ears" that no one around you had when the message went out?

*Matthew 13:9. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Is it not clear that God calls whom He wills, and hardens the rest? Is not Paul's principle being applied by Jesus in the following text?

*Matthew 13:11-17. "...it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (multitudes) it has not been given... seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear, for assuredly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

Matthew does not let up in chapter 15:

*Matthew 15:13. "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted..."*

Or 16:

*Matthew 16:17. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*



Did Peter think up his conviction on his own? Did Jesus choose Peter randomly, or was Peter not one of the “given” ones? Along with all the disciples?

Chosen ones speak chosen words and believe chosen ideas, the Truth. Even in dealing with things such as divorce, Jesus proclaims that it takes enlightenment from Heaven to understand properly:

*Matthew 19:11. “...All cannot accept this saying [about divorce] but only those to whom it has been given...”*

Actually, most of Matthew’s comments on this subject (that is, Jesus’ comments in Matthew), say one thing: God is in charge of the choosing process, not you, not me.

*Matthew 20:16. “...many are called but few are chosen.”*

*Matthew 20:23. “...[to sit on my right or left hand] is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.”*

*Matthew 25:34. “...Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

As helpful as was Matthew, John even surpasses him in references to the free grace doctrines, or as some would have it, the absence thereof. Moving again in the order of appearance in the Gospel, we first take a look at everyone’s favorite verse...

*John 3:16-17. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”*

Incontrovertible fact: God loves the world. He loved it from the beginning and desired all to follow Him. But all did not follow Him, and that too is incontrovertible. Does the blood of Jesus cover those who oppose Jesus until the day they die? This verse says no.

God gave His Son that believers will have everlasting life. Isn’t that what it says? Believers. The world was already condemned when Jesus entered it. The entire world! The world that God loved! John 3:18 makes it clear that those who did not/do not believe are condemned, and rightly so. No apologies.

Was this God’s ultimate desire for mankind? No, He loved mankind. So much so, that He called some to believe, and those who believe are saved.

Is your mind going back and forth here? Deal with it! That's the tension of this subject. You don't have to resolve the conflict! "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" Not me. But the mind of the Lord is on both sides of this delicate issue. Step back. Look at it all. Then lay down your weapons and join the church again. The whole church.

Moving on through John, the mystery increases. Look at this:

*John 5:2-3, 5-6. "There is in Jerusalem...a pool... having five porches...In these lay a great multitude of sick people... A certain man was there... when Jesus saw him lying there... He said, 'Do you want to be made well?'"*

Think. Great multitude. One man chosen. Why? The man was surprised, and had little if any faith, except in the common story that one day an angel's moving of the water might save him. Here is another of those "sovereign" cases we must deal with. And it happens to this day. One person healed, the other with so much faith, not healed. Why? Election? Confirmed in our next verse...

*John 5:21. "As the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, so the Son gives life to whom He will..."*

And especially shouted out in the following passage:

*John 6:37-45. "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out... This is the will of the Father Who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day, and this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life....No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him... everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."*

It's hard to comment on a passage like that except to say "Amen."

But lest we forget the tension, Jesus adds the other way of looking at things:

*John 8:31. "IF you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."*

There's that "if" again. Not so intimidating when we read all the verses showing us security. But something that needs to be dealt with. Could it be that Jesus is saying that the proof of their discipleship — their calling, if you will — is the fact that they do indeed abide in His Word?

The seeming doubt displayed by the word "if" is countered in a large way by the "Shepherd" passage:

*John 10:14-29. "I am the good shepherd, and I know My sheep...you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me... I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."*

So, so, clear. So, so obvious. Once eternal life is given to a person, no one snatches that person away from it. Never.

Now look at this curious comment:

*John 13:18. "... I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'"*

Jesus is talking, is He not, about the eleven remaining disciples when He says, "I know whom I have chosen." But did He not choose all twelve? That's what John 6:70 says. So here we see two kinds of choosing, some to eternal life, some to eternal punishment. Surely the Father knew who Judas was and what he would do. But He moved His Son to choose Judas anyway. "Choosing" takes on new possibilities with this incident.

*John 12:40. (quoting Isaiah). "[God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them."*

*John 15:6-14. IF anyone does not abide in Me, cast out as a branch. IF you abide... IF you keep my commandments... you are My friends IF you do whatever I command you...*

Here we have the language of the book of Hebrews, and His own words in 8:31 above, words that seem to indicate the possibility of falling away. In our rush to one opinion, let us not bypass these sentiments. But in the light of the rock-solid security of the "Shepherd" passage and the words in chapter six, how can we reverse course here and say that Jesus has changed His mind, and things aren't so secure after all? Why not rather suggest that His elect *will abide in Him*, His elect *will keep His commandments*? He Who begins the work in us by choosing and calling us, will be sure that we become obedient servants and friends.

After all,

*John 15:16. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...*

You see? The righteous, the called of God, will bear fruit, the sort that springs up to eternal life.

There is a serious reason why all this is true, if the seriousness of the Son is not enough. Behold the seriousness of the Father, as viewed in the “high-priestly” prayer of Jesus in John 17:

*John 17:2-20. “...[Jesus] should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him...I have manifested Your name to the men You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me... I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me... those whom You gave Me I have kept... I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am...*