



THEOLOGICAL INQUIRIES

Questions and Answers for
Understanding the Christian Faith





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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[1. What is theology?](#)

[2. Why is the study of theology important?](#)

[3. Where do we go to learn about theology?](#)

[4. What is the Bible About?](#)

[5. What makes the bible unique?](#)

[6. Can anyone read and understand the bible on his own?](#)

[7. Does the Church have to interpret the bible?](#)

[8. What principles of interpretation are necessary to study the bible?](#)

[9. What does the term "grammatical-historical hermeneutic" mean, and why is it important?](#)

[10. Is a "grammatical-historical hermeneutic" different from a "Christ-centered hermeneutic"?](#)

11. Is the whole bible about Christ, or just the New Testament?

12. Isn't it reading too much into the Old Testament to see references to Christ on every page?

13. Wasn't the Old Testament written especially Jews, so that it doesn't apply in the same way to Christians?

14. What does the term "sensus plenior" mean?

15. Is a grammatical-historical hermeneutic opposed to sensus plenior?

16. What does the term "analogy of faith" mean?

17. What is the Gospel?

18. What is Dispensationalism?

19. Is Dispensationalism biblical?

20. Does the bible teach a pre-tribulational rapture?

21. Does the bible teach that in the end times there will be a restored Jewish state and a restored temple?

22. Does the bible teach that there are two peoples of God, Israel and the Church?

23. What is Amillennialism?

24. What is Postmillennialism?

25. What is Premillennialism?

26. Is Premillennialism always dispensational?

27. Does the bible clearly teach pre-, a-, or postmillennialism?

28. What is the difference between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology?

29. Why is Biblical Theology important?

30. Why is Systematic Theology important?

31. What is Covenant Theology?

32. Why is Covenant Theology important?

33. Is Covenant Theology the same as Replacement Theology?

34. What is the difference between the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption?

35. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Works?

36. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Grace?

37. Is there a biblical basis for the Covenant of Redemption?

38. What is Reformation Theology?

39. What are the "five solas," and what do they mean?

40. What does monergism mean?

41. Doesn't the bible teach that we're born again through faith?

42. Is being born again the same thing as being saved?

43. What does "ordo salutis" mean, and why is it important?

44. Is God sovereign over every single event that takes place on earth?

45. How can God be sovereign and man still be free?

46. What does the term "compatibilism" mean, and is it biblical?

47. Does the bible teach that man has free will?

48. What is Calvinism?

49. What do the terms "Pelagianism," "Semi-Pelagianism," and "Arminianism" mean, and how do they relate to each other?

50. What does "prevenient grace" mean and is it biblical?

51. What does the term "total depravity" mean and is it biblical?

52. Even though a depraved person cannot do good works, he can still believe, can't he?

53. What does the term "unconditional election" mean?

54. Doesn't the bible teach that God chooses those whose faith he foresees?

55. Doesn't the doctrine of unconditional election make God an arbitrary tyrant?

56. Doesn't the doctrine of unconditional election take away human responsibility?

57. Doesn't the doctrine of unconditional election make people into robots?

58. Doesn't the doctrine of unconditional election hinder evangelism and missions?

59. What is "double predestination"? and does the the bible teach it?

60. What do the terms "supralapsarianism," and "infralapsarianism" mean, and does the bible teach one or the other?

61. What does the term "limited atonement" mean?

62. What about the passages that speak of Christ's work being for the whole world?

63. What about the passages that speak of God's desire for all to be saved?

64. What does the term "irresistible grace" mean?

65. Does irresistible grace mean that human response is forced and artificial?

66. What is "perseverance of the saints" and does the Bible teach it?

67. Is perseverance of the saints the same thing as eternal security?

68. What is meant by the expression "once saved, always saved"?

69. Is the doctrine of perseverance opposed to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone?

70. What is "easy-believism"?

71. What are Patristics, and why should we study them?

72. What is Post Modernism?

73. What are the "New Perspective(s)" on Paul?

74. Fallacy: God Would Not Command Us To Do What We are Unable to Do.

75. What is Monergistic Regeneration?

76. Does God Demand Perfection?

77. Does God Elect Us Based on Foreseen Faith?

78. How Does the Doctrine of Divine Providence Relate to the Problem of Evil and Suffering in the World?

78. How may I, an ill-deserving sinner, draw near to God in whom there is no sin, and look upon His face in peace?

Introduction

Christianity is one of the oldest and most influential belief systems in the world, with a rich history spanning thousands of years and encompassing teachings from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. It has shaped the course of human history and continues to influence millions of people today. Yet, despite its profound impact, the Christian faith is also complex and multi-faceted, encompassing profound questions and answers about God and our existence.

For those seeking to deepen their understanding of the Christian faith, or for those simply curious about its teachings, the journey can be daunting. With so much to explore and learn, it can be difficult to know where to begin. This is where "Theological Inquiries: Questions and Answers for Understanding the Christian Faith" comes in.

This book is a comprehensive guide to the key questions and concepts of Christian theology. Written from a Reformed perspective, it offers clear and concise explanations of everything from the nature of God to the meaning of salvation. The book is designed to be accessible to readers of all backgrounds, whether you are a lifelong Christian or new to the faith.

Theological Inquiries is organized around a series of frequently asked questions, ranging from the basic ("What is the Bible about?") to the complex ("How does the doctrine of divine providence relate

to the problem of evil and suffering in the world?"). Each chapter is structured to provide a clear and concise answer to the question posed, while also providing additional context and background to deepen your understanding.

Whether you are seeking answers to your own theological questions, or simply want to better understand the Christian faith, *Theological Inquiries* is an indispensable resource. With its clear, engaging writing, it is sure to be a valuable addition to your library.

1. What is Theology?

The study of God and the doctrines of Christianity is commonly referred to as “theology”. This term is derived from the Greek words “theos”, meaning God, and “logos”, meaning word or knowledge. Theology, in its strictest sense, concerns only the knowledge of the Godhead, but in modern usage, it is understood to encompass the entire body of knowledge related to the Christian worldview. This includes all the various truths found in the Bible, as well as the Christian doctrines which the Church has derived from the study of the Scriptures over the course of her history.

The doctrine of God, specifically the doctrine of the first person of the Trinity, is commonly referred to as “theology proper”. Theology proper is a subset of theology, meaning the study of all the doctrines of Christianity. Other important categories in theology include christology, the study of Christ; pneumatology, the study of the Holy Spirit; bibliology, the study of the Bible; anthropology, the study of man; angelology, the study of angels; hamartiology, the study of sin; soteriology, the study of salvation; ecclesiology, the study of the Church; and eschatology, the study of last things. These categories

are all part of systematic theology, one method of organizing the doctrines encountered in theology.

Theological doctrines can also be arranged in other ways, such as biblical theology, which studies theology as it is progressively revealed in redemptive history. Historical theology is the study of the development of theology in different periods of church history. Dogmatic theology is the study of the theological teachings of different denominations and movements, while contemporary theology is the study of the theological issues currently being discussed and debated on a wide scale.

In summary, theology is the study of God and the doctrines of Christianity. It encompasses a broad range of categories and methods of organizing theological doctrines, including systematic theology, biblical theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, and contemporary theology. Through the study of theology, Christians gain a deeper understanding of God and the truths revealed in Scripture, which helps them to live out their faith more fully and effectively.

2. Why is the Study of Theology Important?

The study of theology is of vital importance because it addresses the fundamental questions of human existence and provides answers that can only be found in God. As the Reformed tradition teaches, theology is not simply an intellectual exercise, but rather it is deeply practical and personal, shaping our worldview, attitudes, and behaviors. Theology enables us to understand the nature and character of God, the purpose of our existence, and the means of achieving ultimate fulfillment.

One of the key functions of theology is to provide a framework for understanding God's revelation to humanity. Theology provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting the Bible and understanding the teachings of the Church. Without this framework, it is easy to misinterpret or misunderstand the teachings of Scripture and the Church, leading to error and confusion. Moreover, theology helps us to better appreciate the continuity and coherence of the Christian faith across different times and cultures.

Theology also helps us to discern truth from falsehood. In a world where there are many competing claims about the nature of reality, theology provides a reliable guide to what is true and what is false. It provides a solid foundation for faith and helps us to distinguish between authentic Christian teachings and false teachings that might be attractive but ultimately harmful. Moreover, the study of theology strengthens our faith and enables us to better defend it against challenges from outside and within the Church.

Finally, theology provides a framework for ethical reflection and action. It helps us to understand the nature of good and evil, and to discern right from wrong. It helps us to develop a moral compass and to navigate the complexities of life in a fallen world. Theology also provides the motivation and direction for compassionate service to others, based on the love of God and our fellow human beings.

In sum, the study of theology is vital for a robust and meaningful Christian life. It enables us to understand God's revelation, to discern truth from falsehood, to strengthen our faith, and to live a life that is pleasing to God. As the Reformed tradition teaches, theology is not simply an intellectual exercise, but a deeply personal and practical discipline that shapes every aspect of our lives.

3. Where Do We Go to Learn about Theology?

The study of theology is essential for gaining an understanding of the nature and character of God. As finite beings, humans are unable to know God fully through their own thoughts and reasoning. Rather, the only way to truly understand God is by examining where He has revealed Himself.

God has revealed Himself in two primary ways: through general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is available to everyone and is found in nature. This revelation can be seen in the beauty and complexity of the natural world and in the laws and order of the universe. Through general revelation, humans can know that there is a God who created everything.

However, general revelation is not enough to bring humans into a personal relationship with God. This is where special revelation comes in. Special revelation is found in the Bible, which is the only infallible record of God's revelation of Himself in human history.

Through the Bible, humans can come to understand who God is and what He has done throughout history. The Bible reveals that God is a triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and that He has created everything for His own glory. It also reveals that humanity is sinful and in need of redemption, and that this redemption is found through faith in Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully human.

In studying theology, Christians must go to the Bible to understand God's special revelation of Himself. Through the study of the Bible, Christians can gain a deeper understanding of God's character and nature, as well as how to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Additionally, the study of theology can help Christians to better understand the doctrines and teachings of the Church, and to defend these teachings against false teachings and heresies.

Overall, the study of theology is crucial for Christians who desire to deepen their relationship with God and to grow in their understanding of His nature and character. By examining where God has revealed Himself – through both general and special revelation – Christians can come to a more complete understanding of who God is and what He has done for humanity.

4. What is the Bible All About?

The Bible is a unique book in that it presents an overview of world history from God's own perspective, with a doxological purpose, divine superintendence, and victorious end. According to this divine perspective on history, all things were designed to be brought together in Christ, who is the reason for world history and the one in whom all things are summed up. The Bible teaches that the entire Old Testament, from the first books of Moses to the last books of the prophets, was written to testify of Christ and his redemptive work.

The great theme of the Bible is the redemption of mankind, and the eternal growth of the Kingdom of God. Its great hero is Jesus Christ, who entered into an eternal covenant with the Father to redeem a people, and who was promised immediately after Adam's fall in Genesis 3:15. The rest of the Bible unfolds that first gospel promise and shows the great steps that God took throughout human history to foreshadow Christ, confirm the promise of his coming, and prepare to bring him into the world to fulfill the promise "in the fullness of time".

The climax of the Bible and of all human history is the Cross of Calvary, where Jesus, the promised Christ, fully accomplished the covenanted redemption, offering himself up as an atoning sacrifice for all the people that he had covenanted with the Father to save. The great conclusion of the Bible is paradise regained, where God dwells

once again in the midst of his redeemed people, with Jesus Christ, their Immanuel, enjoying eternal fellowship with them, and exulting in their unending praises.

Ultimately, the great theme of the Bible, the redemption of a people through the promised Christ, was designed to reveal the inexhaustible and diversely excellent glory of God, so that his people might glorify him for all eternity. Therefore, the Bible is not just a historical document or a collection of moral teachings, but it is the very Word of God, given to us for the purpose of revealing himself to us, and showing us the way to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

5. What Makes the Bible Unique?

One of the unique aspects of the Bible is its divine origin, which sets it apart from all other literature. The Bible is God's own revelation of himself to mankind, and as such, it is the only source of authoritative knowledge about God's character and will. Its divine origin is evidenced by its infallibility and perfection, as well as its divine inspiration, which means that the words of the Bible were given by God through human authors who were guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because the Bible is the product of God's own self-revelation, it is able to reveal to us God's plan, will, motives, and agenda in a way that no other book can (Isa. 45:21-23).

At the same time, the Bible is also a thoroughly human book, written by human authors within the context of human history and addressing human needs. The diversity of its human authors is reflected in the unique styles and personalities that are evident throughout the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible was written in human languages, which means that it has undergone a process of translation and interpretation in order to be understood by people of

different cultures and languages. Yet, despite its human authorship and transmission, the Bible retains its divine character and authority.

The Bible is also unique in its completeness and sufficiency. It contains everything that God has determined we need to know in order to live the lives he created us to live and be pleasing to him. It is the only source of knowledge that we can fully rely on for our faith and practice, and it provides us with everything we need to know in order to be saved and live a life that is pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

In sum, the Bible's unique combination of divine origin and human authorship, along with its completeness and sufficiency, sets it apart as the one true and reliable source of knowledge about God and his will for our lives.

6. Can Anyone Read and Understand the Bible on his Own?

The question of whether anyone can read and understand the Bible on their own is a complex one. The Bible itself teaches that the natural man, that is, someone who has not been born again by the Spirit of God, will never be able to understand the truths contained in the Bible on his own. This is because the truths of God are in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world, and can only be revealed by the Spirit of God who understands the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-16).

However, the Bible also teaches that when the Word of God is read or heard, the Spirit of God works as He chooses, giving understanding and producing faith in many who hear it (John 3:4-12; 16:7-14; Acts 16:14). Therefore, it is beneficial for anyone who desires to study the

Bible to do so, with the understanding that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17), and that God gives His wisdom liberally to all who ask Him in faith (James 1:5-6). Those who hunger and thirst for God's truth will not be turned away, as Jesus Himself has invited all to come to Him and drink (John 7:37).

For true believers who have come to Christ in faith, there is every reason to be confident in studying the Bible. The apostle Paul tells us that we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), and the apostle John tells us that we all have knowledge and understand the truth because the Spirit has given us an anointing so that we might not be deceived by the lies of the enemy (1 John 2:20-27).

However, it is important to note that while believers can understand the Bible through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, this does not mean that everyone will interpret the Bible in the same way. Interpretation requires careful study of the text, attention to context, and an understanding of the original languages and historical context in which the text was written. This is where the guidance of pastors, teachers, and other trusted Christian resources can be helpful in providing insight and understanding of the Word of God. Ultimately, the Bible is a complex and deep book, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and others can be instrumental in gaining a greater understanding of its truths.

7. Does the Church Have to Interpret the Bible?

In the current era of redemptive history, God has chosen to preserve His truth within the universal Church that He established with His blood. As such, the Church is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and believers are urged to obey the elders who labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).

However, the Bible also indicates that it is necessary and honorable for individual believers to study the Scriptures daily to discern if the teachings of Church leaders, regardless of their prominence, align with the Bible (Acts 17:11).

While it is true that the truth is preserved in the universal Church, it takes biblical discernment to recognize what constitutes the true Church. The Bible warns of false prophets and false doctrines arising within the Church and indicates that entire churches may become apostate (1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Revelation 2:5; 13:11). Therefore, one must understand what the Bible teaches to recognize what constitutes the Church in which the truth of the Bible has been preserved. Any “church” that denies the gospel proclaimed in the Bible is not a true Church at all. The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 1:6-10, stresses the importance of the gospel he preached, proclaiming that if any apostle, teacher, or angel from heaven, or even himself, should preach a different gospel, he would be eternally cursed.

In light of the fact that God has superintended the preservation and formulation of the doctrinal truths of the Bible throughout the history of the Church, no individual believer should go lightly against the clear doctrinal statements of the early ecumenical councils on such doctrines as the Trinitarian conception of God and the acceptance of the several books of the canon. However, no believer should accept any of the blasphemous and unbiblical teachings that have sprung up in many corrupt false churches under the guise of submitting to the authority of the “church.” For any so-called “church” that has corrupted the gospel is a false church and should not be obeyed even for a moment.

8. What Principles of Interpretation are Necessary to Study the Bible?

To properly study and understand the Bible, one must be mindful of certain rules or principles of interpretation, collectively known as hermeneutics. The hermeneutic one employs when approaching the text is of paramount importance, as it shapes one's understanding of everything that is read. While many Christians may be unfamiliar with the term "hermeneutics," they all have a hermeneutic that guides their understanding and application of scripture.

Unfortunately, contemporary western Evangelicalism has largely adopted a post-modern, individualistic hermeneutic that is destructive to a Christian's ability to truly understand what the Bible is saying. This hermeneutic is often demonstrated in home Bible studies where participants are encouraged to share what a particular verse or passage "means to me," with no regard for objective truth. Such an approach merely confirms individuals in their own wisdom, rather than leading them to rely on the wisdom of God as expressed in the Bible.

Other erroneous hermeneutics exist today, such as a literalistic reading of Old Testament prophecy that ignores the New Testament's teaching that all prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ and inherited by those who are in Him. To avoid these and other false hermeneutics, one must understand the true and proper principles of hermeneutics. A proper hermeneutic should be characterized by adjectives such as grammatical, historical, contextual, and Christ-centered.

At its core, the Bible is not primarily about what individuals must do to be right with God. Rather, it is all about Jesus Christ and what He has done to make people right with God. Understanding this central message of salvation by grace is key to having a sure and certain hope for the future. As John Calvin observed, one must read the Scriptures with the express purpose of finding Christ in them. Failing to do so will result in a lifetime of learning without ever attaining the knowledge of the truth.

9. What does the term “grammatical-historical hermeneutic” mean, and why is it important?

The grammatical-historical hermeneutic is an approach to interpreting the Bible that seeks to understand each passage in its historical and grammatical context. This hermeneutic emphasizes that the meaning of a text is grounded in its original historical and cultural context, and that understanding the original language and grammar is essential for interpreting the text accurately.

The grammatical aspect of this hermeneutic emphasizes the importance of understanding the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of the original language in which the text was written. This involves understanding the meaning of individual words and phrases, as well as how they relate to each other within sentences and paragraphs. The historical aspect of this hermeneutic emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context in which the text was written, including the culture, customs, and worldview of the original audience.

By using the grammatical-historical hermeneutic, interpreters are able to determine the meaning of a text based on its original context, rather than imposing their own ideas or agendas onto the text. This approach helps to ensure that the text is interpreted in a way that is faithful to the author’s intended meaning.

The importance of the grammatical-historical hermeneutic cannot be overstated. Without this approach, interpretation can become subjective and arbitrary, leading to a wide range of conflicting interpretations. By adhering to this hermeneutic, interpreters are

able to establish a solid foundation for their interpretations, rooted in historical reality and linguistic principles.

Furthermore, the grammatical-historical hermeneutic helps to safeguard against the danger of allegorizing or spiritualizing the text, which can lead to interpretations that are divorced from their original context and meaning. This approach encourages a careful and nuanced understanding of the text, and promotes a deeper appreciation for the historical and cultural context in which the Bible was written.

In conclusion, the grammatical-historical hermeneutic is an essential tool for studying and interpreting the Bible. By adhering to this approach, interpreters are able to establish a solid foundation for their interpretations, rooted in historical reality and linguistic principles, which helps to safeguard against the danger of arbitrary or subjective interpretations.

10. Is a “Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic”

Different from a “Christ-Centered Hermeneutic”?

A grammatical-historical hermeneutic and a Christ-centered hermeneutic are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. In fact, the former is a necessary foundation for the latter. A grammatical-historical hermeneutic is concerned with discovering the original meaning of a text, taking into account its historical and literary context, and interpreting it in light of the ordinary rules of grammar and syntax. This approach recognizes that the Bible is a book written by human authors in specific historical contexts and

languages, and therefore, its meaning is not divorced from these realities.

However, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The ultimate goal of interpretation is to arrive at a Christ-centered understanding of the text. This means that every passage of Scripture should be read in light of its relationship to Christ and his redemptive work. As Martin Luther said, the ultimate purpose of interpretation is to "drive home Christ" and lead the reader to the cross.

This approach to interpretation is not arbitrary or fanciful, but is grounded in the Bible's own claims about itself. The New Testament teaches that the Old Testament is full of types, shadows, and prophecies that point forward to Christ and find their fulfillment in him. For example, Jesus himself said that all the Scriptures testify about him (Luke 24:27), and the apostle Paul wrote that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).

Therefore, a Christ-centered hermeneutic is not a departure from a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, but a natural and necessary extension of it. A grammatical-historical approach provides the necessary foundation for understanding the original meaning of a text, while a Christ-centered approach shows how that meaning ultimately points to Christ and his work of redemption. Together, these two approaches provide a robust and faithful framework for interpreting the Bible.

11. Is the Whole Bible about Christ, or Just the New Testament?

The question of whether the entire Bible is about Christ, or only the New Testament, is a crucial one for understanding the overarching message of Scripture. Reformed theologians hold that the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is ultimately about Jesus Christ. This understanding is grounded in the teachings of Christ and the apostles, who saw Christ as the central figure of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Christ himself affirmed the Old Testament's witness to him, saying that the Scriptures bear witness to him and that Moses wrote about him (John 5:39, 46). In Luke 24, Jesus shows his disciples that the whole Old Testament Scriptures, including the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, all point to him. He explains how his life, death, and resurrection fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and foreshadowings.

The apostle Paul also teaches that the Old Testament Scriptures are about Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:15, he speaks of the Scriptures that Timothy had known from childhood, which were able to make him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul also teaches that the Old Testament Scriptures contain types and shadows of Christ, pointing to his person and work (Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 10:1).

Reformed theologians see the entire Bible as a unified whole, with Christ as the central figure and theme. The Old Testament points forward to Christ, foreshadowing his coming and work, while the New Testament records his life, death, and resurrection, and his ongoing work through the Holy Spirit and his church.

This understanding of the Bible as a Christ-centered book has important implications for how Christians read and interpret Scripture. It means that all of Scripture must be read in light of Christ, with an eye to how it points to him and his redemptive work. This requires a careful and thoughtful approach to Scripture, one that takes into account the historical and literary context of each

passage while seeking to understand its ultimate meaning and significance in light of Christ.

In conclusion, Reformed theologians affirm that the entire Bible is ultimately about Jesus Christ, and that understanding this central theme is crucial for properly interpreting and applying Scripture. This Christ-centered approach to Scripture emphasizes the unity and coherence of the Bible, and helps us to see how God's plan of salvation unfolds throughout the entire canon of Scripture.

12. Isn't it Reading Too Much into the Old Testament to See References to Christ on every page?

To claim that reading references to Christ on every page of the Old Testament is reading too much into the text is to deny the hermeneutical principles of the New Testament authors, who without exception saw Christ in the Old Testament scriptures. This is not a new approach, but is based on the hermeneutic of the earliest Church Fathers, who saw the Old Testament as a book about Christ, and who developed the principles of typology to show how Christ was foreshadowed and prefigured in the events, persons, and institutions of the Old Testament.

The New Testament authors also demonstrate how the Old Testament scriptures were fulfilled in Christ, providing a clear continuity between the two testaments. For example, in Matthew's gospel, the author explicitly shows how Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Furthermore, the apostles repeatedly used Old Testament passages to explain the significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, for instance, cites Joel 2:28-32 as a

prophecy fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21).

The principle of typology, which underlies the New Testament authors' approach to the Old Testament, involves understanding certain people, events, and institutions in the Old Testament as prefigurations of Christ and his work. This does not mean that the Old Testament is solely about Christ, but rather that it prepares the way for Christ by anticipating and pointing towards him in various ways. Christ himself affirmed the importance of the Old Testament in relation to himself, saying that the scriptures testify of him (John 5:39).

In light of this, it is not a matter of reading too much into the Old Testament to see references to Christ on every page, but rather it is a matter of reading the Old Testament in light of its fulfillment in Christ. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the Old Testament as a book that prepares the way for Christ and points towards his work of redemption. It also enriches our understanding of Christ's life, death, and resurrection by showing how they are the culmination and fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, as revealed throughout the Old Testament.

13. Wasn't the Old Testament written especially to the Jews, so that it doesn't apply in the same way to Christians?

The Old Testament was written particularly to the Jews, whom God called out from all nations to be His special people (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:6). Therefore, Paul, in Romans 3:1-2, speaks of the Jews' privilege, which was the oracles of God. In addition, Paul consistently speaks of the Jews as having a definite temporal priority

in God's redemptive plan, as Christ had taught before him (cf. Matthew 15:24), declaring that the gospel was first for the Jew and afterward for the Gentile (Romans 1:16-17).

However, the Jews should have recognized and embraced Christ, having been instructed about Him in the Scriptures. Indeed, their forefathers, to whom the gospel first came, looked ahead to Christ in true faith and rejoiced (e.g., John 8:56; Hebrews 11:13-16). Still, as a whole, they rejected Him, and thus, all those who disbelieved were cast off. Yet, this rejection and casting-off of the majority of the Jews were not without a purpose. According to God's plan, Paul teaches in Romans 11, the Gentiles would be brought in to know God's mercy through the stumbling of the Jews. Thus, many Jews would be broken off from God's people, but His nation would then expand as many Gentiles were grafted into Israel by faith.

This means that true Israel and the true Jewish people are not merely those ethnically descended from Abraham. Rather, they are the remnant of ethnic Jews who believe, together with those Gentiles who have been made a part of true Israel through faith. Therefore, the New Testament often speaks of Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, as the true Jews (e.g., Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Philippians 3:3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 2:9). Consequently, all the promises and teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were written for the Jews, belong to those who are in Christ, the one true Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). For those in Christ are now Abraham's children through faith and, therefore, heirs of the promises made to Abraham and his offspring (Galatians 3:26-29).

14, What does the term “sensus plenior” mean?

The term “sensus plenior” refers to the deeper, fuller meaning of a passage of scripture beyond its most obvious level of meaning. The concept acknowledges that some historical persons and events in the Old Testament are not only factual occurrences, but also “types” that point to “antitypes,” or fulfillments of those types, in Christ. This concept is commonly used in the Reformed tradition to interpret the Old Testament.

For example, the story of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness to bring forth water for the Israelites is not only a historical event, but also a type that points to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul identifies the rock from which the Israelites drank as a spiritual rock that followed them, which he identifies as Christ. Thus, the striking of the rock can also be seen as a type of how Christ was struck with the rod of divine justice, and from his wounded body flowed the forgiveness and spiritual life that we need.

The principle of “sensus plenior” is not limited to this one example but can be applied to many other passages throughout the Old Testament. Paul encourages believers to see types and foreshadowings of Christ throughout the Old Testament, writing that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4 ESV).

While acknowledging the historical context of the text, the “sensus plenior” allows readers to see the fuller, spiritual meaning of the text as well. This is not to say that the original human author of the text had this deeper meaning in mind, but rather that the Holy Spirit intended it to be understood in this way. Thus, the “sensus plenior” is a valuable tool for interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, as it helps to uncover the deeper, spiritual truths that point to Christ.

15. Is a Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutic Opposed to Sensus Plenior?

The question of whether a grammatical-historical hermeneutic is opposed to *sensus plenior* has been a topic of debate among scholars. Some believe that the grammatical-historical method, which seeks to understand the original author's intended meaning through a study of the text's grammar, syntax, and historical context, precludes any deeper or fuller sense in the text. However, this understanding is based more on a naturalistic or literalizing hermeneutic, rather than the grammatical-historical hermeneutic of the Church Fathers and Reformers.

The fact is that the Old Testament gives explicit indications that its historical events and persons recorded signify something deeper, that has to do with God's eternal design. Although these events must be read "literally" as actual events in time and space, they often have a spiritual or Christ-centered meaning. For instance, the struggles between Jacob and Esau in the womb, although a real historical occurrence, indicate the future struggle of the nations of Israel and Edom.

The New Testament also teaches that the whole Old Testament has a spiritual and Christ-centered meaning, to which all the recorded historical occurrences point. Furthermore, the prophecies, which had to do with Israel, the tabernacle, and so on, had a deeper meaning involving Christ and the Church, and were ultimately fulfilled according to this deeper meaning. The Psalms, although they often had an immediate reference to David, still had an ultimate reference to Christ, the seed of David. Every part of the Old Testament is typological and ultimately points to Christ and His redemptive work.

Those who argue against any *sensus plenior* in scripture often suggest that to allow this deeper sense would be to open up the bible to fanciful allegorizing, according to the whims of the interpreter.

However, the principle of *sensus plenior*, or the typological understanding of every part of the Old Testament, is vastly different from fanciful allegorizing. It is rooted in actual, concrete history, and tethered always to Christ and His redemptive work alone. These principles, which are borne out everywhere in New Testament expositions of Old Testament scriptures, will keep all interpretation from wandering astray from the truth. Therefore, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic is not opposed to *sensus plenior* but complements it, providing the necessary context for understanding the deeper, spiritual meaning of the text.

16. What Does the Term “Analogy of Faith Mean?”

The "analogy of faith" is a hermeneutical principle used in the Reformed tradition that underscores the coherence and unity of the Scriptures, without any fundamental contradictions. This principle requires that all interpretations of any passage of Scripture should be compared with what the rest of the Bible teaches. The idea is that the body of doctrine, or the "faith," that the Scriptures as a whole proclaim will not be contradicted in any way by any passage.

To apply this principle, if two or more possible interpretations of a verse exist, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other Scripture must be ruled out from the outset. This means that the interpretation of any passage must be consistent with the Bible's broader teaching, and it cannot be taken in isolation from the rest of the Scriptures.

This principle is particularly helpful in interpreting prophecy and apocalyptic literature, which often contain highly symbolic visions and imagery. In such cases, the clear and didactic teachings of other passages in the Bible should be used to help understand the more

obscure or ambiguous sections. For example, the clear teachings of Paul's epistles could be used to interpret the symbolic visions in John's Apocalypse. In this way, the "analogy of faith" principle guards against the misuse of symbolic or figurative language in the Bible to support a novel or erroneous doctrine.

Overall, the "analogy of faith" is a vital principle for biblical interpretation, as it underscores the unity and coherence of the Scriptures and ensures that interpretations of individual passages do not contradict the clear teaching of the Bible as a whole.

17. What is the Gospel?

The gospel is not about behavior modification, becoming a better person, or learning to become more moral. It is not about taking the life of Jesus as a model for the way to live or transforming and redeeming the secular realm. It is not about living in highly communal lives with others and sharing generously in communities that practice the way of Jesus in local culture. These may all be good things, but they are not to be confused with the gospel. They may be the fruit of the gospel, and they will surely accompany the gospel. While God may use them as means to authenticate the gospel and make our proclamation of the gospel more fertile in hardened hearts, they are not to be viewed as replacements for the gospel.

Did you notice that the one characteristic of all of the above activities has nothing to do with what Christ has done for us, but everything to do with what we do for him? The true gospel, rather, is news about what Christ the Savior has already done for us (in his life, death, and resurrection), rather than instruction and advice about what we are to do for God. Christ's accomplishment, not ours, is the essence of the gospel. Above all, the gospel of Christ brings good news, rather than instruction about our behavior. The gospel is not about what we

do, but our acts inevitably spring up and overflow in thanksgiving due to what Christ has done for us.

In short, the gospel is the life-altering news that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man, lived a sinless life under the Law, died for sinners, and rose again to reconcile them to himself, eternally victorious over every enemy that stood between God and man. Now, because of this redemptive work, there is nothing that separates those who believe from their Creator and all the benefits that He promises in Him. D.A. Carson says the gospel centers "upon Jesus Christ and what God has done through him. The essential points of the gospel are Jesus Christ's status as the Son of God, his genuine humanity, his death for our sins, his burial, resurrection, subsequent appearances, and future coming in judgment. No one is justified but in the gracious work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. It is not merely a recital of theological truths and historical events; rather, it relates these truths and events to the situations of every individual believer."

To fully understand the Gospel, it is important to understand why it is needed. The Gospel can be viewed in the context of human history, starting with God's creation of all things, humanity's rebellion against the Creator, their subsequent fall into corruption, and God's redemption of that which was lost. Adam, the first man, had the capacity to do every good work the law required, which people have not had since the fall. After falling headlong into sin, God cursed Adam with death (Genesis 2:17; 3:19-22) and removed His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14), a penalty he passed on to all of his descendants. Mankind's spiritually bankrupt condition and fallen nature, which are beyond repair, make it necessary for restoration to come from outside of humanity. God provides redemption through the Gospel, which is not something that humans made up, but is good news directly revealed from Almighty God regarding what He has done in Jesus Christ to rescue all those who have called on His name. It is a divine rescue, a complete deliverance, not advice, a moral improvement program, or a philosophy of life. Since people need

sovereign mercy, not assistance, this is not something they can achieve on their own. The proud or those who fail to see their moral impotence to save themselves will reject this Gospel, but it is GOOD NEWS to the poor and broken-hearted, the spiritual bankrupt who have lost all confidence in their efforts. Therefore, all those who are poor, broken sinners should abandon despair and banish their laments because of what God has done in His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to deliver His people from their sins.

I once heard it said that there are two religions in the world: 1) human attainment and 2) Divine accomplishment. Let's consider the first one - human attainment - which is the natural inclination of us all. In His Law, God calls us to perfect obedience to His holy commands, yet an honest assessment of ourselves will force us to acknowledge that we all fall woefully short of doing so, leaving no hope in ourselves. But in the Gospel, Jesus mercifully obeys the commands for us. Christ's full obedience to all the prescriptions of the divine law, and His willing obedience in bearing all the sanctions imposed for our disobedience to that law, is both the ground of God's justification of sinners like us and makes available a perfect righteousness that is imputed or reckoned to those who put their trust in Him. In other words, the Gospel is not about any merit we have, but is based upon Jesus' Person and merit alone. It is not what we have done for Jesus, but what Jesus has done for us (Rom 5:19, 2 Cor 5:21, Phil 2:8).

Where Adam failed, Jesus prevailed. It is God's promise to us, not our ability to keep our promise to Him. In the covenant rainbow sign with Noah, God says He "remembers" never to flood the world again. So likewise, in the covenant in Christ's blood, God "remembers" not to treat us as we justly deserve for our sins. The mystery of God has been made manifest in the Person and work of the Son, who, in His wrath-absorbing sacrifice, frees the prisoners, gives sight to the blind, breaks loose the chains, and changes hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. We were once taken captive to do Satan's will and could not escape using our resources, but Christ has set us free.

Christ, in His cross work, does for us what we could not do for ourselves. He lived the perfect life that we should have lived and died the death we should have died, to free us so that we might then proclaim His excellencies, make known His gospel, and spread justice and mercy to the poor.

There is no salvation outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. So trust in Christ and not in your own righteousness. But some refuse the free gift of God because they trust in their own goodness. As the Puritan Thomas Watson once said:

[Some people think] ...they are so good, that they scorn God's offer of mercy. Indeed these are often in the worst condition: these are they who think they need no repentance (Luke 15:7). Their morality undoes them. They make a "savior" of it, and so on this rock they suffer shipwreck. Morality shoots short of heaven. It is only nature refined. A moral man is but old Adam dressed in fine clothes. The king's image counterfeited and stamped upon brass will not go current. The moral person seems to have the image of God—but he is only brass metal, which will never pass for current. Morality is insufficient for salvation. Though the life is moralized, the lust may be unmortified. The heart may be full of pride and atheism. Under the fair leaves of a tree, there may be a worm. I am not saying, repent that you are moral—but that you are no more than moral. Satan entered into the house that had just been swept and garnished (Luke 11:26). This is the emblem of a moral man, who is swept by civility and garnished with common gifts—but is not washed by true repentance. The unclean spirit enters into such a one. If morality were sufficient to salvation, Christ need not have died. The moral man has a fair lamp—but it lacks the oil of grace."

Jesus is the Lord and Creator and therefore the rightful King of all creation, both visible and invisible. For those who worship false idols, take heed, as Jesus will soon invade with His armies to overthrow His enemies and all injustice with the breath of His

mouth. However, He offers pardon in advance to all those who receive Him (John 1:12, 13). Those who have joined themselves to Him before His invasion will be considered His allies, and He will raise them up to be co-heirs with Christ as sons. The alternative is to be under the wrath of the King. Therefore, the gospel is not merely an invitation, but a command to all those going their own way. Will you heed the command? Repent and believe, for Jesus is Lord (Bill Wilder).

But because of the blindness that sin has cast over us, no one can believe in Jesus unless the Father grants it through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:63-65). Those who, by the grace of God, trust in Jesus and His work can be assured, on the sure testimony of Scripture, that their sins are forgiven, and they have the promise of eternal life.

To summarize:

Man was created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

"Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things" (Rev. 4:11). "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Man has failed to glorify God and is under His just condemnation. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:9).

Jesus fully bore the wrath and suffered the punishment sinners deserve. Not wishing that sinners perish forever, God determined to save a people for Himself in the Eternal Son, who became a man and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we justly deserve. God loves sinners and sent His Son

to be the wrath-absorbing sacrifice for their sin (1 John 4:10; John 6:37). He "... gave His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) and "rose again" from the dead (2 Cor. 5:15) on their behalf.

All who, by the grace of God, turn to Jesus in submissive faith are forgiven. If you confess you are a sinner in need of Christ, then God has begun to work in you a life-changing, eternally satisfying relationship with Himself! "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence, there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). So, leave your self-righteousness and your sins. Fly unto the Lord Jesus Christ and receive His righteousness to be your covering and His blood to be your atonement. If your trust is in Jesus alone for your salvation (that is, if you have no hope save for Christ's mercy alone), then you can be assured that your sins are forgiven, and He has granted you eternal life.

18. What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensationalism is a modern hermeneutical approach to interpreting the scriptures with roots in the teachings of John Darby. C. I. Scofield played a significant role in popularizing this system through the notes in his study bible, and it gained influence through the establishment of Dallas Theological Seminary and its professors, including Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Ryrie. The Dispensationalist movement has been sensationalized through the fiction and dramatic predictions of authors such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. Today, it remains a widely influential doctrine, impacting not just the Church but even global politics. The Dispensationally-driven Christian Zionist movement, led by figures

such as John Hagee, has shaped America's Middle Eastern policies for many years.

While Dispensationalism is not a monolithic school of thought, it is primarily characterized by its belief in two distinct peoples of God, Israel and the Church, each with a distinct destiny. Although there is significant variation within Dispensationalism, classic or "revised" Dispensationalism generally adheres to a set of core beliefs:

1. The Church, born on the Day of Pentecost, is not a continuation of God's Old Testament people, but a distinct body.
2. The New Testament never equates the Church with Israel, and Christians are not considered Jews or true Israelites.
3. The prophecies made to Israel in the Old Testament are not being fulfilled in the Church, nor will they ever be.
4. The Church does not participate in the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament. It is for ethnic Israel and will be established in a future millennial kingdom.
5. The Old Testament saints were saved by faith alone, based on the Calvary-work of Christ alone. However, the object of their faith was not Christ, but the revelation unique to their dispensation.
6. The Old Testament saints did not know about the coming "Church Age," the resurrection of Christ, or the gospel as we know it today.
7. When Jesus came to earth, He offered the Jews a physical kingdom, but they rejected Him.
8. When Jesus proclaimed "the gospel of the Kingdom," it was the news of how ethnic Jews could enter and receive rewards in the

physical kingdom. It is distinct from the gospel as defined in I Corinthians 15:3-4, which the apostles later proclaimed to the Church.

9. After the Jews rejected Jesus' kingdom offer, a parenthetical "Church Age" was inaugurated, which will conclude just before God resumes His dealings with His national people, ethnic Israel.
10. During the "Church Age," Jesus is not reigning from the throne of David; instead, He is engaged in His priestly work, and His kingly work will take place in the future millennial kingdom.
11. At an unspecified but imminent time, Jesus will return (but not all the way to earth, just to the air) and rapture His Church, also called His Bride. They will feast with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb for seven years while on earth, He will deal with His national people, ethnic Israel again. During this time, He will call them to Himself and preserve them in the midst of seven years of great tribulation. At the midpoint of which, the Antichrist will set himself up as god in the rebuilt Jewish temple and demand worship from the world.
12. After these seven years, Christ will return, this time all the way to earth. He will defeat the forces of evil, bind Satan and cast him into a pit, and inaugurate the physical Jewish Kingdom that He had offered during His life on earth. The Jews who survived the tribulation will populate the earth during this blessed golden era, and the Christians will reign spiritually, in glorified bodies.
13. After these thousand years, Satan will be released and will gather an army from the offspring of the Jews who survived the tribulation. He will be finally defeated and cast into hell. At this time, the wicked dead will be resurrected and judged, while the righteous dead were already resurrected 1,007 years previously, at the rapture. Christ will then usher in the New Heavens and

New Earth, and the destinies of all mankind will be finalized. Dispensationalists are divided as to whether there will remain a distinction between Christians and Jews in the New Earth.

Dispensationalism has been subject to much criticism, including charges of promoting a form of Christian nationalism, of elevating the status of Israel above that of the Church, and of being inconsistent with the historic Christian faith. Many Reformed theologians have rejected Dispensationalism, arguing that it is based on faulty hermeneutics and leads to theological confusion. Despite these criticisms, Dispensationalism remains a significant and influential theological perspective in many Christian circles.

19. Is Dispensationalism Biblical?

Classic Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a hermeneutical approach to the Bible that has gained significant popularity over the past century. According to Charles Ryrie, a prominent Dispensationalist theologian, there are three non-negotiables of Dispensationalism: a doxological view of history, a literal hermeneutic, and an ongoing distinction between the two peoples of God, Israel and the Church. While a doxological view of history is held by many non-Dispensational theologians, the question of whether Dispensationalism is biblical hinges on the literal interpretation of the Bible and the insistence on two peoples of God.

Dispensationalism teaches that all promises made to Israel in the Old Testament must be fulfilled in a literal way, mandating the continuation of all Old Testament types, regardless of whether or not anti-types, or ultimate fulfillment of those types, have come. For example, the physical land of Palestine must belong by divine right to

ethnic Jews who will one day possess all of its geographical borders. However, the Bible declares that these prophecies have already been fulfilled in the coming of Christ and are for all who believe in him. Romans 4:13 declares that the land promise made to Abraham is now too great to be fulfilled in the Middle East alone, and he was promised to inherit the whole world. His offspring who inherit it with him are not just believing ethnic Jews but also his Gentile children by faith. All the promises made to Abraham and every Old Testament saint were ultimately fulfilled in Christ, the true Seed of Abraham, and therefore, belong to all who are in Christ.

The second non-negotiable of Dispensationalism, an ongoing distinction between Israel and the Church, is also argued against in the New Testament, as anticipated in the Old Testament. Isaiah 66:18-24 looks ahead to a time when God would choose people from every nation to make them his true priests and Levites, which we find proof of in the New Testament. New Testament passages that indicate Christians as true Jews, some of which are very explicit, include Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Philippians 3:3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; and Revelation 2:9. The biblical evidence clearly shows that the “sine qua non” of Dispensationalism are unbiblical and explicitly argued against in the Scriptures.

Progressive Dispensationalism

Progressive Dispensationalism is a relatively new school of thought within Dispensationalism, which attempts to address some of the shortcomings of traditional Dispensationalism, particularly in light of the critiques leveled against it by Reformed and Covenantal theologians. However, despite its attempts to improve upon the staggering weaknesses of Dispensationalism, Progressive Dispensationalism still falls short of being biblically sound.

One of the main critiques of Dispensationalism is its insistence on a radical separation between Israel and the Church, leading to a

bifurcated understanding of God's redemptive plan. Progressive Dispensationalists attempt to address this by emphasizing the continuity between Israel and the Church, particularly in terms of the kingdom promises made to Israel. They argue that the Church is now participating in the kingdom of God promised to Israel, and that Christ's reign as king has already begun in the Church.

However, this view still falls short of a biblically sound understanding of God's redemptive plan. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ is now reigning as king in heaven, but that his kingdom is not yet fully realized on earth. In other words, the kingdom of God is both now and not yet. While the Church does participate in the kingdom of God, it is not the complete fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. The Bible teaches that there will be a future restoration of Israel, in which the nation of Israel will repent and turn to Christ as their Messiah (Romans 11:25-27). This restoration will not be a merging of Israel and the Church, but a distinct event in which God fulfills his promises to Israel.

Furthermore, Progressive Dispensationalism still holds to a fundamentally flawed hermeneutic, which insists on a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies, regardless of their fulfillment in Christ. This hermeneutic is based on a flawed understanding of the nature of biblical prophecy, which is fulfilled in a Christ-centered way, rather than in a strictly literal sense. The New Testament writers consistently interpret the Old Testament prophecies as being fulfilled in Christ and the Church, rather than in a strictly literal sense. Progressive Dispensationalists attempt to address this by acknowledging a Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament, but they still insist on a literal interpretation of the kingdom promises made to Israel, which leads to an inconsistent hermeneutic.

In conclusion, while Progressive Dispensationalism attempts to address some of the weaknesses of traditional Dispensationalism, it still falls short of being biblically sound. Its emphasis on continuity

between Israel and the Church is a step in the right direction, but it still falls short of a biblically sound understanding of God's redemptive plan. Furthermore, its insistence on a literal interpretation of the kingdom promises made to Israel leads to an inconsistent hermeneutic that is at odds with the way the New Testament writers interpret the Old Testament prophecies. From a Reformed and Covenantal perspective, Progressive Dispensationalism is not biblically sound.

20. Does the Bible Teach a Pre-Tribulational Rapture?

The doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture is nowhere clearly articulated in the Bible, but rather derives from several Dispensationalist presuppositions. These premises include the belief that Christ's second coming is imminent, the Church Age is a temporary interruption of God's plan for Israel, and that the Great Tribulation is a future seven-year period of judgment on the earth. From this framework, the pre-tribulational rapture asserts that Christ will return before the tribulation to take his Church, and then focus on dealing with Israel.

However, this doctrine is problematic. Firstly, it rests on the false assumption that there are two distinct peoples of God, a view challenged by Reformed and Covenantal theologians. Secondly, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 suggests that the church's gathering to Christ cannot happen before the "Man of Lawlessness" is revealed, which Dispensationalists identify as the Antichrist. Thus, even if one accepts the Dispensationalist view of the tribulation's timing, the pre-tribulational rapture cannot occur before at least three and a half years of the tribulation have passed.

Moreover, the Bible does not explicitly support the idea that the tribulation is a future seven-year period of judgment. Instead, the New Testament describes Christ's second coming as an event that no one can know the exact timing of, but which will include the simultaneous resurrection and judgment of both the righteous and the wicked, the creation of the new heavens and earth, and other events. The Bible does not present Christ's return as a two-stage process, where he removes the Church before the tribulation, only to return later to deal with Israel. Rather, the Bible envisions a single climactic event that will culminate in the ultimate triumph of Christ over sin and death.

In light of these considerations, it is difficult to conclude that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture. Instead, the Bible presents a more complex and nuanced picture of Christ's return, emphasizing the unity of God's people, the triumph of Christ, and the ultimate consummation of all things.

21. Does the Bible Teach that in the End Times there will be a Restored Jewish State and a Restored temple?

The question of whether the Bible teaches the restoration of a Jewish state and temple in the end times is a complex one. The Old Testament certainly prophesies a restoration of Israel and a more glorious temple, as seen in Amos 9:11-12 and Ezekiel 40-48. The initial fulfillment of this prophecy occurred with the return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple under Nehemiah and Ezra, but this was only a foretaste of the ultimate fulfillment.

When Jesus came to earth, his incarnation brought the presence of God to humanity in a way that the tabernacle and temple had been

designed to do. John describes Jesus as having "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14). Jesus prophesied the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, but he was speaking of his own body as the true temple (John 2:13-22). After the resurrection of Jesus, there was no longer a need for the typological temple of stone in Jerusalem, and Jesus prophesied its destruction, which occurred in 70 AD (Matthew 24:1-2).

Today, the prophecy of the restored temple and Jewish people is being fulfilled in the spiritual body of Christ, the Church. This is the "Israel of God" (see Gal. 6:16; and also Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29; 4:21-31; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 2:9) that is being made into a holy temple built upon Christ the Cornerstone (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Timothy 3:15; Revelation 3:12). In this sense, the restored Jewish state and temple are not physical, but spiritual.

One of the clearest Old Testament prophecies regarding the restoration of the tabernacle is found in Amos 9:11-12, which James applies to the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 15:14-17. This suggests that the restoration of Israel and the temple is being fulfilled in a spiritual sense through the spread of the gospel.

It is important to note that a restored temple would violate the teachings of the book of Hebrews. In the book of Hebrews, the author presents Christ as the ultimate and final high priest and sacrifice, who has made atonement for the sins of his people once and for all. The author argues that the Old Testament sacrificial system, including the temple and its rituals, were only shadows of the reality that is found in Christ (Heb. 8:5; 9:9-14; 10:1-14).

Therefore, if a restored temple were to be built and the sacrificial system reinstated, it would be a regression back to the shadows and a denial of the sufficiency and finality of Christ's sacrifice. This is why the book of Hebrews warns against going back to the Old Testament system of worship and emphasizes the need to hold fast to the faith

in Christ (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:6, 14; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 10:22-25). The cautionary warnings of the book of Hebrews against going back to the shadows should be taken seriously and we must always keep our focus on Christ as the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin.

Therefore, while the Old Testament prophesies of a restored Jewish state and temple, the New Testament teaches that this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the true temple of God and in the Church as the spiritual body of Christ.

22. Does the Bible Teach that There are Two Peoples of God, Israel and the Church?

The question of whether the Bible teaches that there are two distinct peoples of God, Israel and the Church, is a complex and contentious issue in Christian theology. However, the Reformed tradition holds that the Bible does not support the idea that there are two separate peoples of God. Rather, the Church is the continuation and fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel.

The New Testament affirms that the Church existed in the Old Testament, as seen in Acts 7:38, where Stephen refers to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness as "the church." Furthermore, the New Testament consistently uses the language of adoption to describe the relationship between the Church and Israel. According to this view, being an Israelite is not based on ethnic identity, but on faith in God's promises to Abraham. As Paul explains in Romans 2:28-29 and 9:6-8, those who are called according to God's promise are Abraham's true descendants.

Paul also teaches that the Church and Israel are not two separate peoples, but one people of God. In Romans 11, Paul uses the metaphor of an olive tree to describe the relationship between Israel and the Church. The natural branches of the olive tree represent ethnic Israel, while the grafted-in branches represent Gentiles who have faith in Jesus Christ. However, there is only one tree, one body, and one people of God. Paul affirms elsewhere that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:11), and that all believers are members of the same body, citizens of the one commonwealth of Israel, inheritors of all the promises made to Abraham (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6; Gal. 4:26-31; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22-23).

Therefore, the Reformed tradition teaches that the idea of two separate peoples of God, Israel and the Church, is not supported by the Bible. Rather, there is only one people of God, composed of those who have faith in Jesus Christ, whether they are ethnic Jews or Gentiles. This view is supported by the language of adoption used throughout the New Testament to describe the relationship between the Church and Israel, as well as by Paul's metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11.

23. What is Amillennialism?

Amillennialism is an eschatological position within Christian theology that holds that the millennium described in Revelation 20 is a figurative description of a long period of time that began with Christ's resurrection and will continue until his second coming. The term "amillennialism" is a misnomer, as amillennialists do not deny the existence of a millennial period, but rather interpret it differently than premillennialists.

According to amillennialism, the reign of Christ in his kingdom is not a future event but is currently taking place spiritually. Satan has been

bound by Christ's work on the cross, so he can no longer deceive the nations. Believers are currently reigning with Christ, and the Kingdom of God is spreading throughout the world. Amillennialists believe that the thousand-year period in Revelation 20 is symbolic of this current spiritual reign of Christ, rather than a future literal reign on earth.

Amillennialists also believe that there will be no future golden age of the Kingdom before Christ's second coming and the eternal state. This position is in contrast to premillennialism, which posits that Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign on earth.

The amillennial view finds support in John 5, where two resurrections are described, one spiritual and one physical at the end of the age. Amillennialists argue that this passage shows that the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked will occur simultaneously when Christ returns to judge the earth, which is incompatible with the premillennial view of a thousand-year separation between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked.

In summary, amillennialism is a Christian eschatological position that interprets the millennium described in Revelation 20 as a figurative description of a long period of spiritual reign by Christ and his people, with no future literal reign on earth before the eternal state.

24. What is Postmillennialism?

Postmillennialism is a view of eschatology, or the study of the end times, that emphasizes the idea that the world will gradually be transformed by the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a long period of peace and prosperity on earth. According to Postmillennialism, this period of peace and prosperity will eventually

culminate in the return of Christ, after which will follow the final judgment and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth.

Postmillennialism is grounded in a belief that the gospel will have a victorious impact on the world, gradually transforming individuals, societies, and cultures, such that the earth will be increasingly conformed to God's will. This progress, according to Postmillennialists, will not be without setbacks and challenges, but the ultimate outcome will be a glorious triumph of Christ over all his enemies.

Postmillennialists see the "thousand years" mentioned in Revelation 20 as a figurative description of a long period of time, rather than a literal, chronological duration of exactly 1000 years. This period of time, according to Postmillennialists, corresponds to the gradual growth and spread of the Kingdom of God on earth. They view the binding of Satan as a present reality that occurred at the time of Christ's first coming, and they see the release of Satan after the thousand years as a reference to a brief period of tribulation that will precede the return of Christ.

While Postmillennialism shares some similarities with Amillennialism, which also views the thousand years as a symbolic period of time, Postmillennialism is distinguished by its optimism about the future of the church and the world. This optimism is grounded in a belief that the gospel will have a transformative impact on the world, bringing about a period of unprecedented peace, prosperity, and cultural renewal before the return of Christ. Postmillennialism is a minority view among evangelicals today, but it has had a significant influence on the church throughout history, particularly during the Puritan era in the 17th century.

25. What is Premillennialism?

Premillennialism is an eschatological view that centers on the belief that Christ will return to the earth before the thousand-year reign described in Revelation 20. This interpretation views the chronology of Revelation as linear, with each event unfolding in a sequence, rather than as different ways of describing the same period of time. In this view, Christ's visible presence on the earth during a literal thousand-year reign will bring about a time of peace and prosperity. After this reign, Christ will put an end to the final rebellion, judge all people, and usher in the eternal state with a new heaven and a new earth.

Premillennialists see the Old Testament prophecies of a coming earthly kingdom as evidence of the future reign of Christ on earth. The coming of Christ will trigger this thousand-year reign, in which he will reign over the entire earth with his people, including the resurrected and transformed saints. This earthly kingdom will be characterized by peace, justice, and prosperity, and the gospel will continue to spread throughout the world.

Premillennialists typically believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, where believers will be taken up to be with Christ before the Great Tribulation, a time of great suffering and persecution on the earth. This view is based on passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and Revelation 3:10.

Critics of Premillennialism argue that it presents an overly literalistic interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and that it imposes a distinction between Israel and the church that is not supported by Scripture. Despite these criticisms, Premillennialism remains a popular eschatological view among many Christians today.

26. Is Premillennialism Always Dispensational?

Premillennialism is not always dispensational in nature, although many premillennialists may also be dispensationalists. The early Church held to a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, and some premillennialists today, such as George Ladd, distance themselves from dispensational theology by using the term “historic premillennialism.”

The primary difference between historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism is the latter's emphasis on the distinction between Israel and the Church. Dispensationalists hold that the millennium will be a period in which God reverts back to fulfilling his Old Testament promises to ethnic Israel, with the Church Age being a parenthesis in between. According to this view, the millennium will be characterized by Jewish ascendancy over the world, complete with a restored Jewish temple and priesthood. Christians who reign with Christ will do so spiritually, while Jews will possess the world physically, living, marrying, and dying, albeit with incredible longevity. Christ will put down a final rebellion after the thousand-year period, ushering in the eternal state.

In contrast, historic premillennialism does not require a strict separation between God's spiritual people, the Church, and his physical people, ethnic Israel. Instead, it looks ahead to a time when Christ will reign visibly on earth before ushering in the eternal state. Historic premillennialism does not insist on the restoration of a Jewish temple or priesthood, nor does it maintain the idea of a strictly Jewish millennium.

27. Does the Bible Clearly Teach Pre-, A-, or Postmillennialism?

The Bible's teaching on millennialism has long been debated by scholars and theologians, with pre-, a-, and postmillennialism all

being proposed as possible interpretations of Revelation 20. Dispensational premillennialism has been ruled out by most theologians due to its many inconsistencies and flaws. However, the other three millennial positions all have a biblical basis and should be given serious consideration.

Both premillennialists and postmillennialists point to Old Testament prophecies of a time of great gospel success on earth, where peace and prosperity reign. These prophecies, such as Psalm 22:25-31, Psalm 72, and Isaiah 2:1-5, demand a time when the earth will be vastly more prosperous than it is now, but not in its eternal state where no one marries or dies. Amillennialists, however, see these prophecies as having a spiritual fulfillment and anticipate the eternal state as the fulfillment of the prophecies. In the meantime, the Church is always afflicted and persecuted, and evil men and imposters will be waxing worse and worse. When Christ returns, he will immediately raise the dead, enact his final judgment, dissolve the old heavens and earth, and bring in the new eternal state.

Amillennialists have a strong case for their interpretation of Revelation 20. Passages such as 2 Thes. 1:6-10 clearly teach that Christ's coming and eternally judging the wicked, while glorifying the saints, will take place at a time of persecution of the Church. Christ's coming demands an immediate and final judgment and establishment of the eternal state. The mention of Satan's binding in Revelation 20 also corresponds well with related New Testament teaching. It is reasonable to interpret the highly symbolic and recapitulatory visions of John's Apocalypse in light of the clearer didactic teachings of the New Testament epistles.

Historic premillennialists and postmillennialists, on the other hand, argue that Old Testament prophecies must be taken literally and that Christ's reign on earth will be visible for a thousand years. In historic premillennialism, Christ's return will take place before the millennium, while in postmillennialism, Christ's return will take place after a future golden age of gospel success on earth.

In conclusion, the Bible does not clearly teach pre-, a-, or postmillennialism, and there are valid arguments for each position. It is important for theologians and scholars to approach these interpretations with an open mind and to carefully weigh the evidence before drawing conclusions. Ultimately, it is up to individual believers to study the Scriptures and come to their own conclusions about the nature and timing of Christ's reign on earth.

28. What is the Difference Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology?

Biblical theology and systematic theology are two distinct approaches to organizing the teachings of the Bible. Biblical theology, also known as redemptive history, seeks to understand the progressive unfolding of God's special revelation throughout history. It is concerned with the historical and chronological development of themes in the Bible, from the beginning of revelation until the end. Biblical theology can be approached in a broad sense, accounting for all of special revelation, or in a narrower sense, focusing on a specific time period, author, or theme. Regardless of its focus, biblical theology seeks to advance an understanding of the progression of redemptive history as a whole.

Systematic theology, on the other hand, is arranged thematically and seeks to present the complete form of revelation as a whole. It takes into account the full extent of the truth that can be known about a particular doctrine, such as sin, salvation, or the Holy Spirit. Systematic theologies progress from the doctrine of the Godhead, or theology proper, to christology, pneumatology, angelology, soteriology, and other themes, treating each exhaustively. Systematic

theology is not concerned with the historical development of themes, but rather with presenting a comprehensive and coherent understanding of specific doctrines.

While the two approaches are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary and necessary for a full understanding of the Bible. Biblical theology provides the historical and chronological context for the development of doctrines, while systematic theology presents a complete and coherent understanding of specific doctrines. Both approaches are essential for a comprehensive and balanced theology.

29. Why is Biblical Theology Important?

Biblical theology is an essential discipline for the serious student of the Bible. By focusing on the themes, motifs, and progression of the biblical narrative, biblical theology helps us to understand the true significance and importance of different aspects of Scripture. It enables us to grasp the historical and theological connections between different parts of the Bible, and to discern how the various pieces of the puzzle fit together to form a coherent whole.

One of the key advantages of biblical theology is that it helps us to distinguish between what is truly important in the biblical message and what is less significant. If we relied on systematic theology alone, we might come to know many truths about angels and men and sin and redemption, but which of those truths are the most important? By tracing the development of various themes throughout the biblical narrative, we can identify which concepts are most prominent and which are subsidiary. This enables us to prioritize our study of the Bible and to focus on the aspects of the biblical message that are most essential.

Another key benefit of biblical theology is that it provides a big-picture view of the Bible. Rather than treating the Bible as a collection of isolated texts, biblical theology shows how the various parts of Scripture fit together to form a single overarching narrative. This narrative centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ and unfolds through the Old and New Testaments as the story of God's redemption of his people.

Biblical theology also helps us to approach the biblical text with a greater appreciation for the historical and cultural context in which it was written. By understanding the historical background of each biblical book, we can better appreciate the message that the biblical authors were seeking to convey to their original audiences. This can help us to avoid misinterpretations of the text that are based on anachronistic or culturally insensitive assumptions.

Finally, biblical theology is an important corrective to the tendency to engage in proof-texting or to isolate individual verses from their larger biblical context. By studying the themes and motifs that run throughout the Bible, we are reminded of the importance of reading each biblical text in light of the broader biblical narrative. This can help us to avoid misinterpreting individual verses or passages and to better appreciate the richness and complexity of the biblical message.

The bible was not given to us merely as a handbook that contains various truths and doctrines, but fundamentally as an epic story, in which all truths exist to portray the glory of one great Hero, promised, foreshadowed, and prepared for in the Old Testament, and finally coming to accomplish his magnificent and many-faceted work in the New Testament. Systematic Theology alone does not give this epic, Christ-centered sense of the bible as one great unified whole, testifying to the mighty work of God's redemption through his eternal Son, the triumphant Christ.

In sum, biblical theology is a vital discipline that helps us to appreciate the unity, coherence, and significance of the biblical message. It enables us to prioritize our study of Scripture, to

appreciate the historical and cultural context in which it was written, and to avoid misinterpretations that can arise from a lack of attention to the larger biblical narrative. Ultimately, biblical theology helps us to better understand the God who speaks to us through his word and the magnificent work of redemption accomplished through his Son, Jesus Christ.

30. Why is Systematic Theology Important?

Although systematic theology has its potential weaknesses and pitfalls, to which biblical theology may serve as a helpful corrective, it also has its strengths and may prove to be the remedy for certain possible shortcomings of biblical theology. For instance, systematic theology ensures that all the doctrines of the Bible find a place in the Christian's understanding; every doctrine is treated exhaustively from the entire testimony of the scriptures so that nothing "falls through the cracks" or is overlooked. Systematic theology also ensures that one's understanding of a given doctrine is the most developed and up-to-date that it can possibly be. It demands the fullest and most final expression of a doctrine that revelatory history has made possible, so that no later clarification in the scriptures is overlooked or forgotten.

Along the same lines, systematic theology, by comparing scriptures with scriptures, according to the so-called "analogy of faith," precludes any potential inconsistencies in one's doctrinal understanding. The scriptures are all brought together and compared side-by-side, in relation to any particular theme, and any scriptures that seem contradictory are ironed out and brought into harmony. Finally, systematic theology is valuable as a comprehensive explanation of the Christian worldview. Because it brings all the truths of the Bible into a well-organized system, it is invaluable for

explaining to the world what Christianity is, defending it logically and scripturally, and edifying and equipping Christians to interact knowledgeably and reasonably with others.

31. What is Covenant Theology?

Covenant Theology is a framework for interpreting the overall narrative of the Bible, which emphasizes that God's redemptive plan and his dealings with humanity are always executed in accordance with the covenants that he has established. Though the significance of divine covenants was recognized by the earliest church fathers, Covenant Theology was not fully developed until the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with figures such as Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a seminal seventeenth century document that presents a comprehensive Covenant Theology.

Essentially, Covenant Theology organizes biblical revelation into three unified but distinct covenants: the Covenant of Redemption, made between the persons of the Trinity in eternity past, where the Father promises to give a people to the Son as his inheritance, and the Son undertakes to redeem them; the Covenant of Works, which God enjoined upon Adam in the Garden, solemnly promising him eternal life if he passed the probationary test in the Garden of Eden; and finally, the Covenant of Grace, which God made with Adam immediately after the Fall, when he promised to send a Seed of the woman who would defeat the serpent. In the Covenant of Grace, God promises a champion to fulfill the broken Covenant of Works as a federal representative of his people, and thus to earn its blessings on their behalf. The subsequent covenants, such as those given to Noah, Abraham, David, and the New Covenant which promises to fulfill these prior covenants in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are all organically linked, representing different administrations of the

one eternal Covenant of Grace, which builds upon each other and is ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ's sacrifice.

Theologians have proposed various definitions of a biblical covenant, but O. Palmer Robertson's phrase, "A bond-in-blood sovereignly administered," may be the most comprehensive (The Christ of the Covenants, P&R Publishing, p. 15). Covenants are generally characterized by a visible sign and seal, which serve to "remind" God of his promises to those with whom he has entered into a covenant. Examples of these covenant signs include the rainbow given to Noah, circumcision given to Abraham, and baptism and the Lord's Supper given to believers after the coming of Christ.

32. Why is Covenant Theology Important?

Covenant Theology is a framework for understanding the biblical narrative, which emphasizes that God's redemptive plan and his dealings with mankind are in accordance with the covenants that he has sovereignly established. The importance of divine covenants has been recognized since the earliest church fathers. However, Covenant Theology was not fully articulated until the days of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century reformers such as Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a landmark seventeenth-century document that displays a robust, fully-developed Covenant Theology throughout.

If Covenant Theology is what it claims to be, then its importance should be obvious. It lays out the biblical understanding of the only manner in which the God of history has ever dealt with his people or revealed himself to them. If we are not in covenant with God, we will never know him at all. If we do not understand the importance of the covenants, we will not be able to make sense of vast portions of the

Bible. Jesus shed his blood to accomplish the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28). Without an understanding of covenant terminology and the unity and organic connectedness of divine covenants, we will miss the coherence of the Bible, the unity of God's redemptive design, and the centrality of the Christ of the covenants.

J. I. Packer summarizes the importance of Covenant Theology in his article introducing the work of Herman Witsius.

First, the gospel promises are all invitations to sinners to enter into the Covenant of Grace and enjoy its benefits.

Second, the story that forms the backbone of the Bible, a story with one great Hero and the one great work that he undertakes to perform, has to do with man's covenant relationship with God first ruined then restored. The unifying strands that bind together the books of the Bible are the one covenant promise, the one messenger and mediator of the covenant, the one people of God, and the one pattern of covenant piety.

Third, the reality of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame, since God has revealed his essential inter-trinitarian love and unity, and the otherwise unfathomable attributes of his person, only in and through the Covenant which he worked out in human history, and which is an expression and reflection of the trinitarian Covenant of Redemption.

In conclusion, Covenant Theology is crucial for understanding the biblical narrative, the gospel message, and the nature of God. It provides a framework for understanding the unity and coherence of the Bible, and the centrality of the Christ of the covenants. Covenant Theology also emphasizes the importance of covenant relationship with God and covenant piety, highlighting the responsibilities of God's people in light of the covenants.

33. Is Covenant Theology the same as Replacement Theology?

Covenant Theology is often accused of being anti-semitic and of teaching that the New Testament Church replaces ethnic Israel as God's people. However, such a characterization of Covenant Theology is inaccurate and unfair. Covenant Theology does not teach that the Church replaces Israel, but rather emphasizes the unity of God's people throughout redemptive history. The Church has been in existence ever since God first established his Covenant of Grace with Adam, and God's plan was always to expand it and bring all the nations into its fold, just as he promised Abraham. Thus, while the Church was composed of the believing remnant of national Israel during the Old Testament era, it is now composed both of the believing remnant of the Jewish nation and of a believing remnant of the Gentiles.

Covenant Theology does not support the notion that Israel has been replaced, but rather that it has been expanded to include all Abraham's children by faith from every nation on earth. In fact, the biblical framework of Covenant Theology demands an ongoing acceptance of the believing remnant of the Jewish nation as a necessary part of God's Church. This is made clear in Romans 11, which teaches that God has not rejected his people Israel, but has preserved a remnant according to his grace.

It is true that some Christian theologians of the past have been anti-semitic, both before and after the crystallization of the biblical framework of Covenant Theology. However, such anti-semitism is not intrinsic to Covenant Theology. On the contrary, when properly understood, Covenant Theology upholds the essential unity of God's people and affirms the importance of the believing remnant of the Jewish nation as a part of God's Church.

In contrast, Replacement Theology, as it is commonly understood, is a theological framework that teaches that the Church has replaced ethnic Israel as God's chosen people, and that the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament have been transferred to the Church. This is not a position that Covenant Theology holds, and therefore, the term "Replacement Theology" is an inaccurate and pejorative way of describing Covenant Theology.

34. What is the difference between the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption?

Covenant Theology is a comprehensive framework that structures all of redemptive history from eternity past to eternity future. Within this framework, three basic covenants exist: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace. These covenants are closely interconnected, yet each one is distinct.

The most fundamental of these covenants is the Covenant of Redemption, which refers to the inter-trinitarian pact made in eternity past. In this covenant, the Father designed the plan of redemption, the Son agreed to undertake the work of redemption, and the Spirit agreed to apply the results of redemption to the elect. Every person whom Christ would redeem and whom he would be given as the reward for his sufferings was chosen by the Father before the creation of the world. This covenant serves as the foundation for all subsequent covenants and provides the basis for the work of salvation.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:3-5 ESV).

'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. (John 17:1-2 ESV).

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24 ESV).

The Covenant of Works is related to the Covenant of Redemption in that it sets the stage for the work that the Son undertook to accomplish. This covenant gives the terms of what the Son would have to do in the pursuance of the redemption that he had covenanted with the Father to provide for his people. In this covenant, the Father lays certain stipulations upon man, his climactic creature formed in his image, with the promise of eternal life in his most blessed presence as the outcome of successfully fulfilling his terms. If Christ would accomplish what the Covenant of Redemption requires of him, then, he must fulfill the terms of the Covenant of Works perfectly. He must do so as a man and as the federal head or representative of the people he had covenanted to save.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17 ESV).

"Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28 ESV).

"For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them" (Romans 10:5 ESV).

The Covenant of Grace is closely related to the Covenant of Works, as it is basically a republication of that Covenant, promising the same end of eternal life in God's presence on the condition of the perfect fulfillment of God's commands. However, it has an added proviso: because Adam, the first federal head of the human race, failed to keep the terms of the covenant, God freely promised to send a new federal head, the Christ, to do what Adam had failed to do and to win the rewards of the covenant that Adam had broken. In the Covenant of Grace, God unilaterally promises the reward of his eternal, favorable presence, and he pledges by his own person and at his own expense to do so. This may be seen in the animal he provided and killed to clothe Adam's shame, in the bow drawn back against himself after Noah's flood, in his walking alone through the severed animal halves before Abraham, and ultimately in Christ, who underwent the covenant curses for us who had merited them in Adam and won for us as our new federal head, by a life of perfect obedience, all the covenant blessings.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15 ESV).

"And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21 ESV).

"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you" (Genesis 17:7 ESV).

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of

Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31 ESV).

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12 ESV).

"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19 ESV).

"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20 ESV).

All the historical covenants mentioned in the scriptures are organically-connected expressions or administrations of the Covenant of Grace. The covenantal relationship between God and his people, first established in the Garden of Eden, is maintained and developed throughout redemptive history through the various administrations of the Covenant of Grace. As such, the Covenant of Grace is the overarching covenant that provides the framework for God's plan of salvation and the ultimate goal of all redemptive history.

35. Is there a Biblical Basis for the Covenant of Works?

The idea of the Covenant of Works, although not designated by this precise term in the Bible, has a strong biblical basis. First, the very fact of creation being portrayed in a covenantal relationship with God, as seen in Jeremiah 33:20-26, suggests that Adam, created in

God's image, must also be in covenant with God. Second, the account of Adam's creation in Genesis contains all the elements that characterize later covenants, including a preamble emphasizing God's prior works, stipulations, and sanctions for obedience and disobedience. Third, the Tree of Life may be functioning as a covenant sign or sacrament. Fourth, the most likely translation of Hosea 6:7, "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant," implies the existence of a covenant with Adam. Fifth, Romans 5:12-21 portrays Adam as our federal head whose failure rendered us all guilty before God, in contrast to Christ, our second federal head, who established us as righteous before God. This passage suggests that just as Christ accomplished our salvation as a federal champion in the Covenant of Grace, Adam was our federal head who failed to fulfill the terms of a covenant for us. Thus, his failure in the Garden was a transgression of a covenant, which is known as the Covenant of Works.

While some theologians argue that the term "Covenant of Works" detracts from the personal and favorable relationship between God and man in the Garden, and undermines the unmerited benevolence of God toward humanity, other terms have been proposed, such as the "Covenant of Nature," "Covenant of Life," "Covenant of Creation," and "Covenant of Eden." Nonetheless, the essential concept remains the same: God entered into a relationship with Adam that was based on obedience to stipulated conditions, and Adam's disobedience resulted in the forfeiture of the favorable relationship with God that he previously enjoyed. The biblical concept of the Covenant of Works remains an important part of Reformed theology, highlighting the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the need for a Savior to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity.

36. Is there a Biblical Basis for the Covenant of Grace?

The idea of the Covenant of Grace, while not designated as such in the Bible, is a biblical concept that emphasizes the unity and coherence of God's promise to redeem a people for His name's sake. The existence of one unified Covenant of Grace is indicated by the nature of God's first gospel-promise in Genesis 3:15, which promises a coming Redeemer born of the woman's seed. The rest of the Bible unfolds and makes clear the way in which this promise will come to fruition, with each successive covenant that God makes with His people being another step toward the fulfillment of that original covenant promise. Therefore, each covenant does not replace or abrogate the first covenant made with Adam after the Fall, but rather builds upon and preserves it. Paul's argument that the Covenant made on Mount Sinai could not abrogate the Abrahamic Promise further reinforces this point.

While some may object to calling the gospel promise of Genesis 3:15 a covenant, its nature as a sovereignly administered bond of promised grace, ratified through the shedding of sacrificial blood in Genesis 3:21, is clearly cast in covenantal terms. The first appearance of the term "covenant" in the Bible, in the days of Noah, further suggests the existence of a covenant already in force when God made the covenant with Noah.

It is essential not to diminish the specific, historical covenants that God established with different people at various times, including the Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic, and New Covenants, which brings all others to fulfillment. Nonetheless, we must also recognize the organic connection and unity between these covenants, as they unfold God's unified plan of redemption one step at a time until the promised Christ finally comes and brings them all to perfect fruition. As such, the idea of the Covenant of Grace is essential for

understanding the unity and coherence of God's redemptive plan throughout history.

1. Galatians 3:16-18 - Paul argues that the promises made to Abraham were ultimately fulfilled in Christ, and that the covenant made with him was a covenant of grace, not of works.
2. Hebrews 8:6-13 - The author of Hebrews explains that the new covenant, which is established on better promises than the old covenant, was prophesied by Jeremiah and has now been fulfilled in Christ.
3. Jeremiah 31:31-34 - God promises a new covenant, one that will be written on the hearts of his people, in which he will forgive their sins and remember them no more.

37. Is there a Biblical Basis for the Covenant of Redemption?

The concept of the Covenant of Redemption, while not explicitly referred to as such in the Bible, is undoubtedly biblical. The Covenant of Redemption is the teaching that before the creation of the world, the persons of the Trinity entered into a solemn pact to accomplish the work of redemption, with the Father promising to give a people to the Son as his inheritance, the Son undertaking to accomplish their redemption, and the Spirit covenanting to testify to Christ and apply his redemption to the hearts of his people.

There are several biblical passages that attest to the concept of the Covenant of Redemption. For instance, Psalm 2 presents Christ as relating the terms of the covenant that the Father established with him. Similarly, Isaiah 53:10-12 speaks of the covenantal agreement between the Father and the Son in the accomplishment of

redemption. Ephesians 1:3-14 also provides a trinitarian picture of the roles that each person of the Godhead undertook from eternity to perform.

However, the clearest and most significant passages that depict the Covenant of Redemption are found in the Gospel of John. In this Gospel, Jesus repeatedly speaks of the work that the Father gave him to do, the glorious reward that he was promised, and the sending of the Spirit to apply the benefits of his redemption and bring about the promised reward of a redeemed people. John 17, known as the high priestly prayer of Jesus, is particularly important for understanding the Covenant of Redemption. In this prayer, Jesus explicitly asks the Father to glorify him so that he can give eternal life to all whom the Father has given him (John 17:1-2). Jesus also mentions that he had accomplished the work the Father had given him to do (John 17:4), thereby fulfilling the terms of the covenant. Additionally, Jesus prays for his disciples who have been given to him by the Father (John 17:6-9), emphasizing the Father's role in giving a people to the Son. (see John 5:17-31, 36-37, 43; 6:37-40, 57; 7:28-29, 38-39; 8:16-19, 26-29, 38, 42, 49-54; 9:4; 10:14-18, 25-30, 36-38; 12:23-28, 44-50; 13:3, 20, 31-32; 14:9-14, 16-20, 24-26; 15:8-15, 24-27; 16:7-16, 27-28; 17).

In conclusion, while the term "Covenant of Redemption" is not found in the Bible, the concept is present in Scripture. The Covenant of Redemption is an essential part of the biblical narrative, providing the theological framework for the plan of salvation. It highlights the unity of purpose and cooperation within the Trinity in the accomplishment of salvation, as well as the centrality of Christ in the plan of redemption.

38. What is Reformation Theology?

Reformation Theology refers to the doctrinal beliefs shared by the leading Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Philip Melancthon. While these reformers differed in certain areas, they were united in their opposition to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on key doctrines.

One of the central tenets of Reformation Theology is the belief that the Scriptures are the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. This is based on the conviction that God has revealed His truth to us through the Bible, and that the traditions and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church were not authoritative in and of themselves.

Another foundational belief of Reformation Theology is the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This doctrine emphasizes that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, received by faith alone in Jesus Christ, and that good works are a necessary fruit of that faith, rather than a means of earning salvation.

Reformers also stressed a federal, or covenant theology, which emphasizes God's covenantal relationships with His people throughout history. They held that man's will is wholly bound in sin and unable to choose God, and that only the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit can give the faith that results in justification.

To understand the specific beliefs that united these reformers, one can look to the various creeds and confessions that were composed during this time. The "three forms of unity," including the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dort, provide a clear explanation of the common faith of the first reformers. The Westminster Standards, which include the Westminster Confession of Faith and the shorter and longer

catechisms, were also important documents that codified the doctrines of the Reformation.

Overall, Reformation Theology represents a return to the authority of the Scriptures and a renewed emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation. Its doctrines have had a profound impact on the church and the world, shaping the faith and practice of millions of believers.

39. What are the “Five Solas,” and What do they Mean?

The “five solas” are five Latin phrases that encapsulate the key teachings of the Protestant Reformation, which began in the 16th century. The five solas are “Sola Scriptura” (Scripture Alone), “Sola Gratia” (Grace Alone), “Sola Fide” (Faith Alone), “Solus Christus” (Christ Alone), and “Soli Deo Gloria” (To God Alone Be Glory).

The first of the five solas, “Sola Scriptura,” means that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority for Christian faith and practice. This doctrine rejected the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching that Scripture, tradition, and the teaching of the Magisterium are all sources of authority.

The second sola, “Sola Gratia,” emphasizes that salvation is a free gift of grace from God and cannot be earned or merited by human effort. This doctrine rejected the Catholic Church’s teaching that salvation is achieved through a combination of God’s grace and human effort.

The third sola, “Sola Fide,” teaches that justification, or being declared righteous before God, is by faith alone, apart from any works or merit on our part. This doctrine rejected the Catholic Church’s teaching that justification is achieved through faith and works.

The fourth sola, “Solus Christus,” emphasizes that salvation is through Christ alone, and that He is the only mediator between God and man. This doctrine rejected the Catholic Church’s teaching that Mary and the saints could intercede on behalf of believers.

The fifth and final sola, “Soli Deo Gloria,” teaches that all glory belongs to God alone, and that salvation is solely the work of God’s grace. This doctrine rejected the Catholic Church’s teaching that salvation was partly the work of human merit and partially the work of God’s grace.

These five solas were developed as a response to the specific teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. However, they remain central to Protestant theology today, serving as a reminder of the essential truths of the gospel and the need to guard against any teaching that would compromise or distort them.

40. What Does Monergism Mean?

Monergism is a theological term that describes the belief that the Holy Spirit is the only agent involved in the regeneration of an individual's soul, and that human nature is completely uncooperative in this process. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Word to quicken individuals, and he removes their innate hostility, blinds them, and illuminates their mind, creating understanding and a willingness to embrace Christ. This process is described in the Bible, where Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord would give people a new heart of flesh and a new spirit, and they would follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws. Paul also wrote about this concept, stating that the gospel was received by the Thessalonians in power and with full conviction.

In simpler terms, monergism means that the desire for faith comes to individuals through regeneration, and not through their own natural inclination. The Holy Spirit amends the will and turns it from unbelief to faith and from godlessness to godliness, enabling individuals to believe in Him who justifies the ungodly. Monergism is in contrast to synergism, which suggests that the human will and the divine Spirit cooperate in the process of regeneration. The synergistic theory holds that the soul has not lost all inclination towards holiness or the power to seek it under the influence of ordinary motives.

The Bible supports monergism, with many passages attesting to the fact that the Holy Spirit is the only agent involved in regeneration. In Titus 3:5, it is written that God saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in Ephesians 2:8, it is stated that we have been saved by grace through faith, which is not our own doing but a gift of God. Monergism is a central belief of the Reformed tradition and is often associated with the theology of John Calvin.

Monergism, the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in regeneration, is affirmed by a multitude of Scriptures:

John 6:63 - "It is the Spirit who quickens; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

John 6:65 - "And he said, 'This is why I told you that **no one** can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'"

John 6:37 - "**All** that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

Acts 16:14 - "One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

John 3:8 - "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Deuteronomy 29:4 - "But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear."

Deuteronomy 30:6 - "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

Jeremiah 31:33-34 - "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Ezekiel 36:26 - "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

These Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is the one who gives life and opens the heart to the gospel, without which no one can come to Christ. It is the Spirit who works in the hearts of men, blowing where He wills, regenerating and quickening them to new life in Christ. It is not by the will or works of man, but by the grace of God alone, that one is saved. It is God who acts upon the hearts and spirits of His people to bring about repentance, faith, and new life. This work of regeneration is entirely a monergistic work of God, not dependent on human will or cooperation.

41. Doesn't the Bible Teach that We're Born Again through Faith?

Although it is a very common conception in contemporary Evangelicalism that we're "born again" through faith, the bible actually teaches the very opposite: that we have faith by being born again. Being "born again," or being given a new, spiritual life, is a concept that comes from the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, where God promises to give new, living hearts of flesh to those who were stone dead, with the result that they would then believe in him, obey him, delight in his laws (Ezek. 36:26-27). Then, in the New Testament, Jesus expands on this theme: in John 3:1-21, he tells Nicodemus that he cannot "see" the Kingdom of God, that is, he will have no understanding of spiritual things, unless he is first "born again". This is why John had said earlier that everyone who "received" Jesus, that is, embraced him in faith, had not been born of their own will or efforts, but of God (John 1:11-13). In other words, when God gives us a new birth, then we immediately respond by believing and embracing Christ. Regeneration (the new birth) logically and causally precedes faith, which is the instrumental cause of justification, or being declared righteous in God's sight.

The scriptures to confirm this doctrine are legion: some additional passages which teach that God sovereignly creates in his elect a new, "born again" heart which believes in him, and that he alone gives the faith and repentance of those who believe are Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33; 32:40; Ezek. 11:19-20; 37:3-6, 11-14; Mat. 16:15-17; Luk. 10:21; John 3:27; 5:21; 6:37-40, 45; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 16:14; 18:27; 1 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 2:1-10; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 2:29). But one of the simplest, clearest passages that teaches this truth is 1 John 5:1. There, the apostle does not say that "everyone who is born again has believed," but rather quite the opposite: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God". In other words, if you believe in Christ, it is because you have been born again.

Last of all lets take a closer look in John chapter 6 where Jesus declares that regeneration precedes faith in a syllogism.

But what is a syllogism? A syllogism is a logical formula consisting of two premises and a conclusion, which follows of necessity from them. It is a combination of two judgments that necessitate a third judgment infallibly. A simple example of a syllogism is: If all humans are sinners, and all Greeks are humans, then all Greeks are sinners.

Lets begin by setting down some context. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever COMES TO ME shall not hunger, and whoever BELIEVES In me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe" John 6:35, 36. (emphasis mine). Here, we see that Jesus uses the phrases "comes to him" and "believes in him" as synonyms. He reiterates this point in John 6:37 & 65 when he says, "No one can COME TO ME unless the Father who sent me grants it." Likewise in verse 37 Jesus says, "all the Father gives me will COME TO ME.

Furthermore, the Greek word used for "gives" in John 6:37 is "δίδωμι" (didomi), which shares the same root as the word "granted" in John 6:65, which is "δέδωκεν" (dedoken). This connection between the two verses further express the idea that Jesus is talking about the same subject and emphasizes the role of God in the process of salvation.

By combining two related concepts expressed in John 6:37 and John 6:65, Jesus explicitly teaches that a person's ability to come to him is not based on their own will or effort, but entirely on the work of God. Specifically, Jesus states that no one can believe in him unless God grants it, and all those to whom God grants it will believe. Jesus thus establishes the essential role of grace in salvation, ensuring that no one thinks anything apart from it is what saves them.

From these declarations, a syllogism can be derived to prove monergistic regeneration:

Premise 1: No one (universal negative) can come to Jesus unless it is granted (δέδωκεν) by the Father. (John 6:65)

Premise 2: All (universal positive) that the Father gives (δίδωμι) to Jesus will come to Him. (John 6:37)

Conclusion: Therefore, all people without exception that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him (believe in Him/come to faith in Him), and only them. Lastly, Jesus directly relates these texts to the Spirit's work of regeneration. In verse 63, just before the verses we are discussing, Jesus says, "The Spirit gives life [quickens]; the flesh counts for nothing." This statement highlights the essential role of the Holy Spirit in regenerating a person's heart and enabling them to believe in Jesus. It emphasizes that salvation is entirely the work of God, and human effort or merit plays no part in it. Therefore, the passages in John 6 support the doctrine of monergistic regeneration, which shows that a person's ability to come to Jesus is dependent solely on the grace and work of God. By recognizing this truth, individuals can come to a place of humility and dependence on God.

42. Is Being Born Again the Same Thing as Being Saved?

According to the Bible, being "born again" and being "saved" are distinct yet related concepts. Being "born again" refers to the initial work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the heart of the sinner, granting new life and a new nature. This spiritual rebirth is necessary for a person to believe and have faith in Christ. As Jesus said in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

In contemporary Evangelicalism, it is common to use the terms “saved” and “born again” as catch-all phrases for becoming a Christian. However, the Bible presents a much more nuanced understanding of man's transition from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of his Son. Being “saved” is depicted as a past event, an ongoing reality, and a future deliverance that we eagerly anticipate. We were saved from our sin and guilt in the past (e.g. Luk. 7:50; Eph. 2:5, 8), we are being saved from this present evil world and the remaining corruption in our hearts in the present (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:18), and we will be saved from God's wrath on the Day of Judgment and brought into his eternal New Jerusalem (e.g. Rom. 5:9).

On the other hand, the teaching on being “born again” is much more specific, and the Bible consistently places this event at the beginning of the Christian life, before conversion, justification, and other spiritual transformations (see question 41 above). When the terms “saved” and “born again” are used imprecisely, it is easy to fall into misunderstandings, such as the belief that we are “born again” through faith. However, the Bible teaches that we are “born again” to faith, meaning that God's regenerating grace produces in our hearts the willingness to believe in him and be saved.

43. What does “Ordo Salutis” Mean, and Why is it Important?

The term “ordo salutis” in the Reformed tradition refers to the specific order of events and realities in the process of salvation that occurs in an individual's life. This Latin term can be translated as “the order of salvation”. The concept of “ordo salutis” is of great importance because the doctrine of salvation is so rich and nuanced, involving many different realities. To fully grasp the depth of salvation, all the elements must be defined carefully. As believers

gain a greater understanding of the order of events, they will grow in sanctification and holiness and mature in their faith and conduct.

The “ordo salutis” is sometimes temporal or chronological, such as when an individual is justified before being glorified in the eternal state. At other times, it is logical or causal, such as when faith is exercised after being regenerated, but regeneration is the cause of faith. The “ordo salutis” is vital because it allows believers to understand the fullness of salvation and the many precious blessings God's Word has to offer.

A simple “ordo salutis” begins with God's unconditional love and election of individuals in eternity past. Next, an outward call comes when God brings the message of the gospel through the reading or hearing of the word. Then, an inward call through the prompting of the Holy Spirit leads to regeneration, which brings individuals to life. As a result of regeneration, conversion occurs, which includes faith in Christ and repentance from sin and self-righteousness. Through faith, an individual is justified, and God legally declares them righteous by imputing Jesus' perfect righteousness to their account. At this point, God adopts individuals as his children, making them brothers and sisters of Christ, and unites them with Christ so that they are in him. Throughout their lifetime, God sanctifies believers, making them holy and changing them into his likeness. During this time, God preserves them, causing them to persevere in the faith, so that they do not fall away. At death, they enter an intermediate state in the presence of the Lord but without their physical bodies. Finally, in glorification, their bodies will be resurrected and transformed, so they no longer decay, and they will inherit the new heavens and new earth, where they will live in the presence of their Immanuel forever.

44. Is God Sovereign Over Every Single Event that Takes Place on Earth?

To many Christians the idea of God's absolute sovereignty over every event that takes place, no matter how minute, seems laughable. The conception of God as a dignified old gentleman, who only concerns himself with the "big" matters, and would not get his hands dirty in minor affairs, or else as a cosmic "watchmaker," who wound up the universe and lets it keep on ticking, is common. Others would say that, while God is somehow "sovereign" over everything, he does not actively exercise that sovereignty in directing the actions of men, for to do so would violate the principle of free will, and make people mere robots. But instead of dwelling on these philosophical ideas and objections, we ought instead to examine the scriptures, and see what they have to say on the subject.

Fortunately, the scriptures are very clear on this matter. The bible depicts God as the only and absolute King of the universe, who rules over all, and does everything he pleases (Exo 15:18; 1Ch 29:11-12; 2Ch 20:6; Psa 22:28). And not only is he sovereign in some abstract way, in that he retains the right to govern all events actively according to his will, but chooses not to do so; but he actually and actively ordains and brings to pass everything that takes place on the earth (Deu 32:39; 1Sa 2:6-8; Job 9:12; 12:6-10; Psa 33:11; 115:3; 135:6; Isa 14:24; Isa 45:7; Act 15:17-18; Eph 1:11). From the smallest matters of "chance," such as the casting of a lot into the lap (Pro 16:33), to the greatest events of the earth's mighty kingdoms (e.g. Isa 45:1-4), God is bringing all things to pass according to his will. He governs and superintends "coincidental" happenings (1Ki 22:20, 34, 37), the wicked actions of men (Gen 45:5; 50:20; Exo 4:21; Jdg 14:1-4; Psa 76:10; Pro 16:4; 21:1; Isa 44:28; Amo 3:6; Act 2:22-23; 4:27-28), the good deeds of men (Joh 15:16; Eph 2:10; Phi 2:12-13), the actions of both evil spirits and good angels (1Sa 16:14-16; 1Ki 22:19-23; 1Ch 21:1/2Sa 24:1; Psa 103:20-21; 104:4), the habits of animals (Num 22:28; 1Ki 17:4; Psa 29:9; Jer 8:7; Eze 32:4; Dan 6:22), and the operations of all creation (Gen 8:22; Psa 104:5-10, 13-14, 19-20; Mar 4:39).

The bible is clear that God is in no way culpable for evil (Jam 1:13), and that humans are all morally responsible for their actions (Ezek 18:4); so we must not let our understanding of God's sovereignty tempt us to minimize these truths; however, the bible is equally clear on the matter of God's active governance in and through all the actions of men, and we must not deny this either. If we err in one direction or the other, we must set our errant thought aright by looking to the cross, where God accomplished his intention for the ages, which he had planned before the world began; but he did so through the most morally reprehensible and culpable actions ever done, in the betrayal of Judas, the false witnessing of the Jews, the cruelty of the Romans, etc. (see Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

45. How Can God be Sovereign and Man Still be Free?

Man is responsible because he makes voluntary choices, but because he is captive to sin, his will is not free, but in bondage. The Bible also teaches that God ordains all things (Eph 1:11) and yet holds man accountable for his actions (Ezek 18:20, Matt 12:37, John 9:41). Theologians use the term "compatibilism" to describe how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility coincide. Compatibilism does not negate determinism; rather, it means that God's predetermination is compatible with voluntary choice. Though our choices are not coerced, we never choose against God's sovereign decree (Eph 1:11). According to compatibilism, human choices are voluntary, but the circumstances and desires that lead to those choices are divinely determined. For example, God ordained the crucifixion of His Son, but the men who carried it out did so voluntarily:

Acts 2:23 says, "This man [Jesus], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a

cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

Acts 4:27-28 says, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

Note that this act of evil by men is not free from God's decree, but it is voluntary, and these men are thus responsible for the act, according to these Texts. Or when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, Joseph later recounted that what his brothers intended for evil, God intended for good (Gen 50:20). God determines and ordains that these events will take place (that Joseph will be sold into slavery), yet the brothers voluntarily make the evil choice that brings it to pass, which means the sin is imputed to Joseph's brothers for the wicked act, and God remains blameless. In both of these cases, it could be said that God ordains sin, sinlessly. Nothing occurs apart from His sovereign good pleasure.

Again, fallen man is in bondage to a corruption of nature and that is why the biblical writers considered him not free (see Rom 6). Jesus Himself affirms that the one who sins is a "slave to sin" and only the Son can set him free.

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'" (John 8: 34-36)

Note that even Jesus speaks of a kind of freedom here. He is not speaking of freedom from God but freedom from the bondage to sin, which is the kind of freedom those have who are in Christ. In this sense God is the most free Person since He is holy, set apart from sin ... yet He cannot make choices contrary to His essence, i.e. He cannot be unholy. According to Jesus' definition of freedom in John 8:31-36,

it can be concluded that the natural man's will is in bondage to sin and therefore does not possess a free will.

One of the best statements on the nature of man's will is one I found from John Calvin:

"...we allow that man has choice and that it is self-determined, so that if he does anything evil, it should be imputed to him and to his own voluntary choosing. We do away with coercion and force, because this contradicts the nature of the will and cannot coexist with it. We deny that choice is free, because through man's innate wickedness it is of necessity driven to what is evil and cannot seek anything but evil. And from this it is possible to deduce what a great difference there is between necessity and coercion. For we do not say that man is dragged unwillingly into sinning, but that because his will is corrupt he is held captive under the yoke of sin and therefore of necessity will in an evil way. For where there is bondage, there is necessity. But it makes a great difference whether the bondage is voluntary or coerced. We locate the necessity to sin precisely in corruption of the will, from which follows that it is self-determined.

- John Calvin from *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, pg. 69-70

46. What Does the Term “Compatibilism” Mean, and is it Biblical?

Compatibilism is a term used to describe the harmony between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for his actions. The belief, also known as soft determinism, asserts that God's meticulous providence over all events does not contradict man's voluntary choice, as long as these choices are in accordance with his natural desires, which are wholly corrupt after the fall. Compatibilism is not only a biblical

teaching, but also the only solution to the so-called "free will problem" that Scripture allows. The Bible affirms that God does not contradict himself, that he ordains everything that comes to pass, and that man is fully responsible for his wicked actions and will suffer eternal punishment unless given the free grace of God in Christ.

To hold these two truths in harmony is essential to a biblically faithful understanding of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Any contradiction would lead to God being a liar or the author of confusion. The fact that we may not fully comprehend the way these truths co-exist is of secondary importance. What matters is that we take God at his word and accept that these two teachings are compatible. As such, compatibilism is not only a biblical concept, but also a deeply pastoral one, as it affirms the coherence and reliability of God's Word and the hope of redemption for those who put their faith in Christ.

In addition to what has been said, it is worth noting that compatibilism has significant theological implications, particularly in the area of soteriology. It affirms the biblical teaching that salvation is entirely of God's grace, and that it is only by his sovereign choice and action that sinners are brought to repentance and faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 6:44). At the same time, compatibilism affirms the biblical teaching that sinners are responsible for their rejection of the gospel and will be held accountable for their unbelief (Mark 16:16; John 3:18-19; Romans 10:16).

Furthermore, compatibilism has practical implications for the Christian life. It encourages believers to take personal responsibility for their actions, knowing that they will give an account to God for how they have lived (2 Corinthians 5:10). At the same time, it provides comfort and assurance to believers, knowing that all things are under God's sovereign control and that nothing can separate them from his love (Romans 8:38-39).

Compatibilism is a biblical teaching that affirms the harmony between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for his actions. It has significant implications for theology and the Christian life and provides comfort and assurance to believers in the midst of life's challenges and uncertainties.

Some additional scriptures that support compatibilism include:

- Proverbs 16:9 - "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."
- Acts 13:48 - "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."
- Philippians 2:12-13 - "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."
- Ephesians 1:11 - "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

In conclusion, the Bible teaches that human beings have the ability to make choices without external coercion, but their choices are limited by their sinful nature and desires. True freedom comes only through the work of Christ, who sets human beings free from the bondage of sin. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the sovereignty of God in all things, including human salvation, and affirms that God's grace is not dependent on human will but on God's free and sovereign choice.

47. Does the Bible Teach that Man has Free Will?

The question of whether the Bible teaches that man has free will is a complex and controversial issue that has been debated throughout the history of Christian theology. To understand the concept of free will, it is necessary to define the term carefully. The term "free will" may refer to the ability of a person to make choices without external coercion, or it may refer to the ability to choose any option, even those that are not consistent with our desires or nature.

If we consider free will as the ability to make choices without external coercion, then it is evident that the Bible affirms this concept. God holds human beings accountable for their actions and their choices, indicating that they have the power to make real choices. However, if we consider free will as the ability to choose any option, then the Bible teaches otherwise. The Scriptures affirm that human beings are bound by their sinful nature and desires, and that their wills are limited by their natures.

According to the Reformed tradition, human beings are fallen and, as such, are in bondage to sin. The Apostle Paul wrote that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This fallen state affects every aspect of human nature, including the will. Paul also 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). This passage indicates that the human will is not free but is bound to the sinful nature, which makes it hostile to God.

The Bible teaches that only by the grace of God can human beings be saved and set free from the bondage of sin. In John 8:34-36, Jesus states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." This passage implies that human beings are slaves to sin

and that true freedom comes only through the work of Christ in setting them free.

Reformed theology emphasizes the sovereignty of God in all things, including human salvation. God's grace is not dependent on human will, but rather on God's free and sovereign choice. This view does not deny the human responsibility for choices made, but rather asserts that God is the ultimate cause of all things, including human salvation.

"But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but **to those whom God has called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." - 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

From a Reformed perspective, the idea of libertarian freedom, which posits that man is completely free to make choices apart from any constraints, is incompatible with the biblical doctrine of the total depravity of man. The Bible teaches that man is in bondage to sin, unable to please God or choose Him on his own (Romans 3:9-12; 8:5-8). This bondage of the will is a result of the fall, as Adam's sin brought death and corruption into the world (Romans 5:12-21).

In contrast to libertarian freedom, the Reformed view of compatibilism maintains that God's sovereign will and human responsibility are compatible. God ordains all things that come to pass, including man's choices, but man still acts freely according to his desires and motives (Ephesians 1:11). This view of freedom emphasizes the fact that man's choices are not coerced, but rather are voluntary, yet they never occur outside of God's sovereign plan and will.

The bondage of the will is also affirmed in the doctrine of election. The Bible teaches that God chooses who will be saved and who will not, not based on any merit or action of the individual, but solely on His grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 9:11-13). This

doctrine affirms the total sovereignty of God in salvation and the utter helplessness of man apart from God's gracious intervention.

Ultimately, the bondage of the will highlights the need for the saving work of Christ. Only through His death and resurrection can we be freed from our bondage to sin and made alive in Him (Ephesians 2:1-10). It is only through faith in Christ that we can be truly free, no longer slaves to sin but rather servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-23).

In summary, the Reformed perspective affirms the biblical teaching of the bondage of the will as a result of the fall and the need for God's sovereign grace to free us from that bondage. It emphasizes the compatibility of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, and highlights the need for union with Christ as the means of true freedom from sin.

48. What is Calvinism?

The term "Calvinism" refers to the theological teachings of John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Geneva reformer, and is often used to describe the absolute sovereignty of God and his predetermination of all that takes place on earth, particularly as it relates to the salvation of man. While Calvin's magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, outlines the principles of the Christian faith in great detail, it is his emphasis on God's sovereignty that is usually what is meant by "Calvinism" or "Calvinistic theology."

In popular usage, "Calvinism" often specifically refers to the Canons of Dort, a document produced by a synod held in 1618-1619 that upheld Calvin's teaching on soteriology against the opposition of the Remonstrance. The Canons of Dort respond to the five points of the Remonstrance with the five points of Calvinism, commonly

remembered by the acronym "TULIP": Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. These points are considered the "Doctrines of Grace" and are a central part of many modern Reformed churches and denominations.

Scripture supports the foundational beliefs of Calvinism. Total Depravity is evidenced in passages such as Romans 3:10-18 and Ephesians 2:1-3, which speak of man's sinful state and inability to please God. Unconditional Election is supported by verses such as Ephesians 1:4-5, which speaks of God's choice of believers before the foundation of the world. Limited Atonement is taught in passages such as John 10:11, which speaks of Christ laying down his life for his sheep, and 1 John 2:2, which speaks of Christ being the propitiation for the sins of believers. Irresistible Grace is supported by verses such as John 6:44, which speaks of God drawing believers to himself, and Acts 13:48, which speaks of those who were appointed to eternal life believing. Finally, Perseverance of the Saints is taught in passages such as John 10:27-29, which speaks of believers being held secure by Christ, and Philippians 1:6, which speaks of God's work in believers being brought to completion.

In summary, Calvinism emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God and his predetermination of all that takes place on earth, particularly in the salvation of man. The Canons of Dort outline the five points of Calvinism, or the "Doctrines of Grace," which are a central part of many modern Reformed churches and denominations. These points are supported by numerous scriptural passages, which speak to man's sinful state, God's choice of believers, Christ's atonement for believers, God's drawing of believers to himself, and the security of believers in Christ.

49. What do the terms "Pelagianism," "Semi-Pelagianism," and "Arminianism" mean, and how do they relate to each other?

Theological debates surrounding the nature of salvation have been ongoing for centuries and have resulted in a diversity of perspectives among Christian traditions. Four major viewpoints in this regard are Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Augustinianism. While all four perspectives share a few similarities, they differ significantly in their understanding of the role of human will and the nature of divine grace in the process of salvation. In this essay, we will examine these similarities and differences, exploring the key features of each perspective and the ways in which they have shaped theological discourse and practice throughout Christian history.

Pelagianism

Pelagianism is a theological doctrine that emphasizes the role of free will in the salvation of individuals. According to Pelagianism, human beings are born in a state of moral neutrality, and they possess the ability to choose either good or evil without any predetermined influence. Pelagius, a British monk, is the founder of Pelagianism, and he believed that humanity's capacity for moral choice was central to the Christian faith. Pelagianism gained popularity in the 5th century, especially in Northern Africa and Rome, but it was later condemned as heretical by the Catholic Church.

Pelagianism's fundamental tenet is that humans are capable of achieving salvation through their own efforts, without the need for divine intervention. Pelagianism denies the doctrine of original sin, which holds that humans are inherently sinful because of the fall of Adam and Eve. Instead, Pelagianism maintains that humans are morally neutral at birth and capable of living a life of perfect

righteousness. Pelagians believe that humans can achieve salvation through obedience to the divine law and through the practice of good works.

However, Pelagianism has been widely criticized by various Christian theologians, who argue that it denies the fundamental Christian doctrine of salvation by grace. The belief that humans can earn their way into heaven is seen as a form of legalism that detracts from the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Augustine, a renowned theologian, was one of the most prominent critics of Pelagianism. Augustine argued that human beings are completely dependent on God's grace for their salvation, and that human effort alone cannot earn them eternal life.

Pelagianism holds the following beliefs about Original Sin, Free Will, Salvation, Predestination, and Redemption:

1. **Original Sin:** Pelagianism denies the concept of Original Sin, which is the belief that all humans inherit a sinful nature from Adam and Eve's fall. Pelagians believe that humans are born sinless and are capable of living a sinless life.
2. **Free Will:** Pelagianism emphasizes the role of human free will in salvation. Pelagians believe that humans have the ability to choose to do good or evil and that this choice is not influenced by the Fall. They believe that humans can choose to live a sinless life and can earn their salvation through their own efforts.
3. **Salvation:** Pelagians believe that salvation is achieved through human effort and obedience to God's commands. They reject the concept of grace as an unmerited gift from God and believe that salvation is earned through a person's own merit. Pelagians believe that humans can achieve perfection in this life and can merit eternal life through their own works.
4. **Predestination and Redemption:** Pelagianism denies the concepts of predestination and redemption as traditionally

understood in Christian theology. Pelagians do not believe in the idea that God chooses certain individuals for salvation and that Christ's death on the cross was necessary for the redemption of humanity. They believe that salvation is achieved through human effort alone and that Christ's death was simply an example of how humans should live.

Semi-Pelagianism

Semi-Pelagianism is a theological position that emerged as a response to Pelagianism. This view was a compromise between Pelagianism and Augustinianism, trying to avoid the extremes of both. Semi-Pelagianism recognizes that human beings are in need of grace to achieve salvation, but it also asserts that people have the ability to make the first move towards God without grace.

Unlike Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism acknowledges that humans are born with a sinful nature that affects every aspect of their being, including their will. However, it asserts that humans still have the power to choose God and turn towards Him. According to semi-Pelagianism, God's grace is necessary for salvation, but human beings take the initiative to seek and respond to that grace. Semi-Pelagianism sees God's grace as something that helps and cooperates with human effort in salvation.

Semi-Pelagianism was condemned as heresy by the Council of Orange in 529, which affirmed the Augustinian view that human beings are born with a sinful nature that completely disables their ability to respond to God's grace without His prior action. However, the ideas of semi-Pelagianism continue to influence some Christian traditions, especially those that emphasize free will and human responsibility in the salvation process.

Semi-Pelagianism is a modified form of Pelagianism that emerged in the fifth century as an attempt to respond to the criticisms of Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagians believe that while human beings are

corrupted by sin, they are not completely depraved and are still able to seek after God on their own initiative. However, they believe that humans require God's help to achieve salvation.

Semi-Pelagianism holds the following beliefs about Original Sin, Free Will, Salvation, Predestination, and Redemption:

1. **Original Sin:** Semi-Pelagians affirm that all human beings inherit a corrupted nature from Adam, but this corruption is not total. Instead, they argue that human beings retain a degree of moral responsibility and are capable of initiating the process of salvation.
2. **Free Will:** Semi-Pelagians hold that human beings have free will and can respond to God's offer of salvation. However, they assert that God's grace is necessary for salvation, but this grace is not irresistible. Therefore, they believe that a person can resist God's grace and choose to reject salvation.
3. **Salvation:** Semi-Pelagianism holds that salvation is a cooperative work between God and humanity, with both parties contributing to the process. Semi-Pelagians assert that the beginning of salvation is initiated by an individual's free will and desire to turn to God. In this view, God's grace is not irresistible, and a person can reject it. Semi-Pelagians maintain that it is possible for a person to take the first step toward God on their own without the aid of grace, but they need God's help to complete the process of salvation.
4. **Predestination and Redemption:** Semi-Pelagians believe that predestination is based on God's foreknowledge of a person's response to the gospel message, rather than on an unconditional election. They also believe that Christ's atonement made salvation possible for all human beings, but it is up to individuals to choose to accept or reject this offer of salvation.

Arminianism

Arminianism is a theological view that developed after John Calvin's work in Geneva. It is characterized by the belief that salvation is available to everyone, and that God's election of individuals is based on foreknowledge. Arminians believe in Total Depravity, which means that all humans inherit corruption as a result of Adam's fall, but they also believe that God has extended grace to all people to reverse this corruption to some extent. This grace enables humans to choose to follow God, and it is necessary for salvation.

Arminians are often accused of being Semi-Pelagians, which is not entirely accurate. Both views believe that humans have an unfallen faculty that allows them to choose to follow Christ, but they differ in the cause of this faculty. Arminians believe that this faculty remains intact because God has restored it in all humans, and the act of will is a response to God's grace. Semi-Pelagians, on the other hand, believe that the corruption of Adam's nature was not complete, and the human person must choose to follow God apart from any specific extension of grace on God's part. This is what many Reformed teachers are referring to when they compare Arminians and Semi-Pelagians to each other.

Arminianism teaches that man's response to God's grace is necessary throughout the entire process of salvation, which cannot be initiated or completed without it. This means that although man does not initiate the process of salvation, it cannot be completed without man's contribution. Additionally, Arminians believe that God elects based on his foreknowledge of which humans will respond to the Gospel, and then determines to grant those humans special grace in order to bring about that response. Thus, although God's grace is necessary for salvation, it is based on the individual's choice to respond to it.

Arminianism holds the following beliefs about Original Sin, Free Will, Salvation, Predestination, and Redemption:

1. **Original Sin:** Arminianism affirms the doctrine of original sin, which teaches that all humanity is born with a sinful nature inherited from Adam.
2. **Free Will:** Arminians believe that human beings possess libertarian free will, which means that they have the ability to choose freely between good and evil because God's prevenient grace has set them free from their sinful nature and set them upon a "sky-hook" of neutrality so they can choose for themselves whether or not to follow Christ. This is in contrast to the Calvinist view that teaches the necessity of regeneration (a change of nature) before one believes (John 6:63-65, 37, 44, Ezek 36:26, Deut 30:6)
3. **Salvation:** Arminians believe that salvation is available to all people through faith in Jesus Christ. They reject the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement, which teaches that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was only for the elect. Arminians also believe that it is possible for a person to lose their salvation through apostasy or unbelief.
4. **Predestination and Redemption:** Arminians believe that God has predestined certain individuals to salvation based on his foreknowledge of their faith. They also affirm the doctrine of unlimited atonement, which teaches that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was sufficient for the salvation of all people, but only effective for those who believe.

Augustinianism/Calvinism

The system of salvation called Augustinianism, also known as Calvinism, is a theological position that emphasizes the sovereignty of God in salvation due the total depravity of human nature. Not meaning that man is as evil as he can be but that sin has infected and corrupted every aspect of our being. Augustinians believe that human beings are incapable of saving themselves, and that salvation

is a work of God's grace from beginning to end. This view is in contrast to Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, which hold that humans have the ability to initiate salvation and/or cooperate with God's grace.

Augustinians affirm the concept of unconditional election, which means that God chooses to save some people without regard to any merit or worthiness on their part (because man has none). This election is based solely on God's merciful sovereign will and purpose, not on any foreseen faith or good works of the elect.

Another key doctrine of Augustinianism is effectual grace, which means that when God calls someone to salvation, that person will infallibly come to Christ (John 6:37). This view is in contrast to Arminianism, which teaches that humans can resist God's grace and, many Arminians believe they can even lose their salvation if they fall away from faith.

Overall, Augustinianism emphasizes Christ's person, His work, God's sovereignty in salvation and the radical depravity of human nature. It affirms that salvation is a work of God's grace from beginning to end, and that human beings are incapable of saving themselves. Augustinianism's emphasis on unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace distinguish it from other theological positions, such as Arminianism, Pelagianism, and Semi-Pelagianism.

Here are the key beliefs of Calvinism regarding Original Sin, Free Will, Salvation, Predestination, and Redemption:

1. **Original Sin:** Calvinism teaches the doctrine of total depravity, which asserts that humanity is born into a state of sin as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This means that all aspects of human nature, including our thoughts, desires, and actions, have been corrupted by sin and are in need of redemption, and humans are unable (because they are

unwilling), to save themselves. They love darkness, hate the light and will not come into the light (John 3:19-20) and think the gospel is foolish (1 Cor 2:17), apart from the quickening of the Holy Spirit (John 6:63).

2. Free Will: Calvinism teaches that humans do have free agency, but it is constrained by the effects of original sin. People have a will and make voluntary choices. They are free to choose what they desire, but since their desires are enslaved to sin and corruption, they are unable to choose God on their own.
3. Salvation: Calvinism teaches that salvation is entirely the work of God's grace, and is not dependent on any merit or works of the individual. God the Father chooses to save individuals according to His own purposes, the Son redeems them and the Holy Spirit unites them savingly to Christ, not because of anything they have done or any good within them. Additionally, at the time of regeneration, that salvation is secured through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
4. Predestination and Redemption: Calvinism teaches that God predestines certain individuals for salvation, and that this is based solely on His sovereign good pleasure. This works in harmony with Christ's atonement, in which asserts that Christ's death on the cross was carried out and intended only for the same persons the Father predestined to be saved.

Here's a table comparing Pelagianism and Augustinianism on four key doctrines:

Doctrine	Augustinianism	Pelagianism
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Doctrine

Augustinianism

Pelagianism

Original Sin

By the sin of Adam, sin and all other punishments of Adam's transgression injured Adam's sin came into only himself, not his the world. Human descendants. All individuals nature has been are born in the same moral physically and morally condition as Adam was corrupted, and every created and there is no person is born with a original sin. corrupt nature that can only sin.

Free Will

By Adam's transgression, the freedom of the human will has been entirely Man's will is free, and lost. In his current everyone has the ability to state, man's best will and do good or evil. It works are polluted depends on the individual's with evil. Man cannot choice. do any good without grace, and everything not of faith is sin.

Doctrine

Augustinianism

Pelagianism

Grace

If man wills and does good, it is entirely the work of grace. It is an inward, secret, and wonderful operation of God upon man. Man needs cooperating grace for every good act, and grace is irresistible. God acts according to his own free will, and man has no merit at all.

Although man has the capacity of willing and doing good without God's special aid, God revealed the law, and the instruction and example of Christ aid him. Even the supernatural operations of grace are imparted to him, but grace is given only to those who deserve it by the faithful employment of their own powers. Man can resist it.

Predestination and Redemption

God made an unconditional decree to save the elect and gave them the means for salvation. The rest of humanity falls into merited ruin, and Christ died for the elect only.

God's decree of election and reprobation is founded on prescience. Those whom God foresaw would keep his commands are predestined to salvation, while the others are predestined to damnation. Christ's redemption is general, and those who actually sin need his atoning death. All may be led to higher perfection and virtue by his instruction and example.

Here is a table that distinguishes Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism on the four doctrines:

Doctrine

Semi-Pelagianism

Arminianism

Original Sin

Humans are born with a corrupted nature but retain the freedom to choose between good and evil.

Humans are born with a corrupted nature but retain the freedom to choose between good and evil.

Free Will

Humans have the ability to **initiate** faith and good works through their own free will, but require divine grace to persevere in faith and good works.

Humans have the ability to respond to the gospel through their own free will, but **require divine grace** to choose and persevere in faith and good works.

Salvation

Salvation is a cooperative effort between humans and God, initiated by human free will and aided by divine grace.

Salvation is a cooperative effort between humans and God, initiated by God's prevenient grace and aided by human free will.

Doctrine

Semi-Pelagianism Arminianism

Predestination/Redemption	God elects those who he knows will choose him and sends Jesus to die for all people, but only those who choose to believe are saved. However, this election is conditional to on foreseen faith, and God's grace can be resisted.
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It's worth noting that there can be some overlap between Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism, and the boundaries between the two can sometimes be fuzzy. However, in general, Arminianism tends to emphasize God's prevenient grace as the necessary condition for human salvation, while Semi-Pelagianism emphasizes the primacy of human free will in initiating the salvation process.

50. What Does the Term “Prevenient Grace” Mean, and is it Biblical?

"Prevenient Grace" is a term used in the Remonstrance, a seventeenth-century document formulated by Jacobus Arminius and others to protest the Calvinistic soteriology of the Reformers. The term itself simply means "grace that comes before." However, the Remonstrance framed it in terms of the grace of God given to all mankind without exception, enabling all people to respond to God's invitation and believe in the gospel. Whether someone believes in the gospel is conditioned upon whether they choose to improve upon the

grace that has been given to all indiscriminately. Preventive grace is not irresistible for the elect; it is merely persuasive and enabling, and may be freely accepted or rejected by its subjects' arbitrary choice. This doctrine of resistible, indiscriminate preventive grace for all people is held today in many Arminian/Wesleyan theologies and denominations throughout Christianity.

However, the doctrine of preventive grace, as explained in Arminian theology, finds no support from scripture. The regenerating grace of God must come before faith, and so in that sense, it is preventive. This biblical preventive grace goes far beyond the Arminian conception. When God grants his quickening grace to unbelievers, it does not merely give them the option to be alive; it makes them alive (Eph. 2:1-5; Ezek. 37:3-6, 11-14; John 1:11-13, 3:3-8; 5:21; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet, 1:3; 1 John 5:1). It does not merely grant them the ability to come; it irresistibly draws them all without exception (John 6:37-40, 45; Psalm 65:4 Rom. 9:15). It does not merely make them able to choose good if they improve upon it; it causes them to walk in God's statutes (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Jer. 31:33; 32:40). The Bible teaches that there are only two classes of people: those whom the Father has chosen and given to the Son, all of whom without exception will come to him (John 6:37-40, 45); and those whom the Father has not given to the Son, who are not of his sheep and therefore cannot believe (John 6:65; 10:26; 12:37-41). There is no room for a third class of people who have been given God's drawing grace but who do not improve upon it. Furthermore, the doctrine of preventive grace is specifically argued against by the apostle in 1 Cor. 4:7, which asks rhetorically, "Who made you to differ?" Preventive grace says that we make ourselves different from our unsaved neighbors by choosing to improve upon the grace that God gave to us all without exception; hence, it is in manifest contradiction to this passage.

51. What Does the Term “Total Depravity” Mean, and is it Biblical?

Total depravity is a term used in Reformed theology to describe the biblical doctrine that every aspect of humanity is affected by sin. It is not a denial that human beings have a certain goodness or that they can do good things in this world, but rather it asserts that every thought, word, and deed of fallen humanity is tainted by sin, something that has been woven into the very fabric of fallen human nature. This means that human beings are unable to do anything that is completely acceptable in the sight of a holy God.

The doctrine of total depravity emphasizes two aspects of sin's effect on humanity. The first aspect is that no act of man is ultimately good or perfectly acceptable to God. This is because every human act is touched by sin and so falls short of God's glory. The second aspect is that man is so corrupted by sin that he is utterly unable to contribute anything to his regeneration, even the simplest act of seeking God, believing in him, or coming to him.

The idea of total depravity can be illustrated by the term "tincture." A tincture is a coloring agent that taints everything it touches. In the same way, sin taints everything in human nature, and no part of humanity is untouched by its effects. This means that humans are unable to contribute to their own salvation in any way, and they are completely dependent on God's grace to be saved.

The biblical support for total depravity is abundant. Scripture teaches that man cannot do anything good, cannot please God, and is utterly bound to sin and the devil. Even man's best acts are considered filthy rags before God. The Bible also teaches that man cannot seek God, come to him, or believe in him unless God Himself draws and regenerates him. The apostle Paul declares that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10) and that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

In conclusion, total depravity is a biblical doctrine that describes the complete corruption of human nature as a result of sin. It asserts that every aspect of humanity is affected by sin and that humans are completely dependent on God's grace for salvation. The doctrine emphasizes the need for a Savior who can cleanse us from sin and make us acceptable to a holy God.

Romans 3:10-12: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."

Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

1 Corinthians 2:14: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Romans 8:7: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."

52. Even Though a Depraved Person Cannot Do Good Works, He Can Still Believe, Can't He?

The question of whether a depraved person can believe in God and have faith is one that has been debated throughout the history of the Christian church. Arminians have argued that, despite the fact that man is depraved and unable to do good works, he still retains, with

prevenient grace (but not regeneration), the ability to respond to God's offer of salvation and come to him in faith. However, this idea is not supported by Scripture.

The Bible teaches that man is so corrupted by sin that he cannot even believe in God or the words of Jesus without the sovereign grace of God (John 6:65; 8:43-45; 10:26; 12:37-41). The idea that man has a "free" will to believe in the gospel undermines the power and grace of God, which is the only means by which we are saved. In fact, the Bible indicates that even faith and repentance are gifts from God (John 3:27; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:1; Acts 5:3; 11:18; 16:14; 18:27; Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

The apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Who makes you to differ? or what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). This underscores the fact that even the ability to believe in God is a gift from him, not something that we can generate on our own. Our salvation is utterly dependent on God's power and grace, and to suggest that we can believe in him apart from that grace is to undermine the very foundation of the gospel.

In short, while some may argue that a depraved person can still believe in God and have faith, the biblical evidence suggests otherwise. Man is so corrupted by sin that he cannot even believe in God without the sovereign grace of God, and even faith and repentance are gifts from him. Our salvation is a testament to God's power and grace, and to suggest otherwise is to diminish his glory and undermine the very essence of the gospel.

53. What Does the Term “Unconditional Election” Mean, and is it Biblical?

Unconditional election is a term used to describe God's sovereign choice of individuals for salvation without regard to any merit or foreseen faith in them. This doctrine emphasizes that God's choice is solely based on his own will and purpose, not on any human effort or ability. The idea of unconditional election was developed in response to the Arminian view that God's election of individuals to salvation was conditioned upon the faith which he foresaw that they would come to in time.

The Synod of Dort, convened in 1618-1619, affirmed the doctrine of unconditional election as part of its response to the Remonstrance. This document, composed by Jacobus Arminius and others, challenged the Reformed view of predestination, arguing that God's choice of individuals for salvation was based on his foreknowledge of their faith. The Synod of Dort rejected this view, stating that election is "not based on foreseen faith, but is unconditional and based solely on the good pleasure of God's will."

The biblical basis for unconditional election can be found in numerous passages of Scripture. For example, Ephesians 1:4-5 teaches that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Similarly, Romans 9:11-13 declares that God chose Jacob over Esau before they were born, not based on their works, but according to his own purpose and grace.

Critics of the doctrine of unconditional election argue that it portrays God as arbitrary and unjust, choosing some for salvation and condemning others without regard to their actions or choices. However, defenders of the doctrine argue that it is not arbitrary, as God's choice is always based on his own righteous character and purpose. Moreover, they point out that the doctrine of unconditional election is closely tied to the broader biblical teaching on salvation, including the doctrines of total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

In summary, the doctrine of unconditional election affirms that God's choice of individuals for salvation is based solely on his own will and purpose, not on any human merit or foreseen faith. While some may find this doctrine challenging, it is deeply rooted in Scripture and reflects the sovereign grace and mercy of God towards his chosen people.

54. Doesn't the Bible Teach that God Chooses Those Whose Faith He Foresees?

The foreknowledge of God has been a topic of controversy throughout history. This is due to the fact that many people are ignorant of the meaning and Scriptural scope of the term. Therefore, it is easy for preachers and teachers to deceive their audience with false interpretations of this subject. The only safeguard against this is to be established in the faith through prayerful, diligent study of the Word of God.

When the subject of divine foreordination is expounded, some argue that election is based on the foreknowledge of God of future events. This interpretation means that God foresaw certain individuals who would be more pliable than others and respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit, and therefore predestinated them to salvation. However, this interpretation contradicts the truth of total depravity, the independency of God, and the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners.

Before defining the term "foreknowledge," it is essential to understand how words are used in Scripture. Many people assume they already know the meaning of a term used in Scripture and are too dilatory to test their assumptions with a concordance. This failure to apply the Holy Spirit's usage of an expression is responsible for much confusion and error.

Foreknowledge is often interpreted to mean "to know beforehand," but it is crucial to find out how the word is used in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. Therefore, the significance of a certain word used in Scripture must be carefully examined by comparing every occurrence of it and studying each separate context.

The term "foreknowledge" is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. "Those He foreknew" (Rom. 8:29) not "those events He foreknew". The individuals under consideration are the subject of the verb "foreknew," and they remain the subject without any additional qualification or characterization. The notion that presumes the anticipation of faith or the anticipation of individuals as believers must add a description that the apostle does not supply. The inquiry must be made as to whether the term "foreknew" possesses an inherent meaning that precludes the need to import extraneous ideas that are not validated within the text. If it does have such a meaning, which is supported by examples in the scripture, then it's not necessary to bring in extra ideas. This idea is plausible, as there's enough evidence to support the interpretation that the phrase "whom he foreknew" is understandable and appropriate without further explanation.

When the term "foreknew" is used in connection with God, it usually signifies to regard a person with favor, affection of covenant love. God's foreknowledge of a person is not based on any merit or goodness in the person but is solely the result of God's sovereign choice. The usage of the word "foreknew" perhaps necessitates further examination. It is clear from its Scriptural usage that "know" carries the connotation of distinguishing affection and purpose, which comes to be interchangeable with love. This is apparent in the Old Testament, where "know" frequently represents "love," as seen in Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8, 13; 10:15; 23:5; 1 Kings 10:9; 2 Chronicles 9:8; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 11:1; 14:4; and Malachi 1:2. Therefore, "foreknowing" means to know with a distinct regard and love from

before the creation of the world (cf. Ephesians 1:4), with no further qualification needed for the persons.

Furthermore, Ephesians 1:5 supports this interpretation. It is evident that the theme of the two passages is identical. When Paul states, "In love having predestinated us unto adoption," he implies that predestination arises from love and is dependent upon it. Romans 8:29 expresses the same connection when foreknowledge is interpreted according to the principles of Scripture and the context of the passage. Additionally, it emphasizes that this love and predestination extend to the conformity of the elect to the image of God's Son. These two verses do not duplicate each other's ideas. Instead, love highlights the electing grace, and predestination focuses on the high destiny to which those selected by electing love are appointed. This order of thought is similar to Ephesians 1:4, which declares that election in Christ is for the purpose of being holy and blameless. Electing love always has a goal commensurate in magnitude with the love that motivates it and is never fruitless.

The concept of foreknowledge is often used in connection with God's election of individuals for salvation. God, according to His sovereign good pleasure, singled out certain individuals to be recipients of His distinguishing favors. Therefore, He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith. False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the cause of His election to salvation. However, God's election is the cause, and our believing in Christ is the effect.

God's foreknowledge, therefore, is not a mere intellectual apprehension of future events. It is an act of the divine will, whereby God regards a person with favor and grants that person the gift of faith. God's foreknowledge is not conditioned upon any foreseen faith or good works on the part of the individual. Rather, it is solely the result of God's sovereign choice.

So then, if God does not choose us according to his foreseeing in us faith or any good thing, does the bible say why he does choose those

whom he chooses? Yes, in fact, the bible is clear that God chooses whom he chooses entirely according to his own good pleasure (Eph. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:9), for the display of his glory (Isa. 43:6-7; Rom. 9:22-24; Eph. 2:4-7), because of his unmerited love (Deut. 7:6-8; 2 Thes. 2:13), and so that no flesh may boast before him, as if a person had some cause within himself for his election unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:27-31).

In conclusion, the meaning and Scriptural scope of the term "foreknowledge" is often misunderstood. It is important to understand that foreknowledge is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions but always refers to persons. When the term is used in connection with God, it signifies to regard a person with favor, one He sets his covenant love and affection on. God's foreknowledge is not based on any merit or goodness in the person, but is solely the result of God's sovereign choice. Therefore, God's foreknowledge is not a mere intellectual apprehension of future events, but an act of the divine will, whereby God regards a person with favor and grants that person the gift of faith. It is important for preachers and teachers to be established in the faith through prayerful, diligent study of the Word of God, so as not to deceive their audience with false interpretations of this subject.

55. Doesn't the Doctrine of Unconditional Election

Make God an Arbitrary Tyrant?

To claim that God is arbitrary in choosing some to salvation would be to assert that there is a reason in the universe that is greater than God Himself. This is a problematic claim because it goes against the idea of God's sovereignty and His ultimate authority. The Hebrew

God of the Bible is unlike the Greek gods who must yield to some greater truth. God is the ultimate Truth, and therefore, if He determines something, it is by definition not arbitrary. There is no better reason for anything than the fact that God determines it. We should find no comfort in a theology that promotes a god who must yield to something greater than himself.

Moreover, it is important to understand that God does not treat anyone unjustly. Some may receive justice, and others may receive mercy, but no one gets injustice. All men are sinners deserving of wrath, and God is under no obligation to save anyone. That He chooses to save some out of the mass of ill-deserving sinners is better than any deserve. God does not look into the world and see some deserving persons and others undeserving; otherwise, it would not be grace, but based on some goodness He saw in them.

In other words, God's election of individuals to salvation is not based on any merit or worthiness in them, but solely on His good pleasure and purpose. This means that God's choice to save some and not others is not arbitrary, but rather a display of His divine sovereignty and grace. It is through God's sovereign choice that He demonstrates His love for humanity, even though they are unworthy of it.

Therefore, to accuse God of being arbitrary in His election of some to salvation is to misunderstand the nature of God and His character. It is important to remember that God is not limited by human understanding, and we must trust in His wisdom and goodness, even when we do not fully comprehend His ways. In short, God is not arbitrary in choosing some to salvation because His election is based on His sovereignty, grace, and perfect wisdom.

As He develops his argument in Romans 9, Paul responds to the question of a hypothetical objector, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means" (Rom. 9:14). As we can see, Paul refutes this claim and insists that God is not arbitrary or unjust, even though He elects some to mercy and hardens others as He sees

fit, without taking into account any good will or exertion that He sees in anyone: "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." (Romans 9:15-16). God hardened Pharaoh according to His purpose of displaying His glory in all the earth, and He chooses to have mercy on whomever He will, to display the glory of His grace (Rom. 9:17; cf. Rom. 9:22-24). In conclusion, "Therefore, He has mercy on whom He will and He hardens whom He will" (Rom. 9:18).

Christ's parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) teaches that just because God chooses to have mercy upon some individuals does not make Him unjust or arbitrary for giving others their just deserts. God extends His free, undeserved mercy and grace in salvation, and He may do with it as He wills. Although we may not comprehend the deep and mysterious ways of God (Rom. 11:33-36), it would be foolish to claim that God is arbitrary and unjust in His election. One would do well to respond like Job and say, "Behold, I am of little worth; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand upon my mouth" (Job 40:4).

We would challenge you to wrestle with the following verses. Paul encountered this very same argument against election in Romans 9:18-23; that it would make God unjust and arbitrary:

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19 **You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"**

20 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?

21 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?

22 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?

23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

Paul would not ask this hypothetical question unless he believed that the ultimate determination of one's salvation is in the hands of God alone. Paul emphasizes that God has the sovereign right to do with us whatever He wants.

Furthermore, since we know the character of our omnibenevolent God, we must not think that God had no internal reasons or causes for saving some and not others. Heppe's Reformed Dogmatics asserts that "the divine purpose always conspires with His wisdom and does nothing without reason or rashly." Although these reasons and causes have not been revealed to us, it is clear that God decrees nothing except justly and wisely according to His good pleasure founded on His gracious love towards us. Just because we do not know His internal reason for choosing some to faith and not others is not reason enough to reject it. In the absence of relevant data, there are no legitimate grounds for doubting the goodness of God. To doubt that God can choose us based solely on His good pleasure is to doubt the goodness of God.

Those who believe in "foreseen faith" are essentially saying that they cannot trust God in making this choice and prefer it to be left up to the fallen individual, as if he would make a better choice than God. This would also make God's love towards us conditional and based on some inherent good will, talent, wisdom, or strength found in the individual, rather than in God Himself. However, the Bible repeatedly affirms that God's love towards us is unconditional and that our salvation depends solely on His gracious choice. Therefore, to reject the doctrine of unconditional election is to reject the goodness and sovereignty of God.

56. Doesn't the Doctrine of Unconditional Election Take Away Human Responsibility?

The question of whether the doctrine of unconditional election negates human responsibility is one that has been raised by many. In Romans 9, Paul is unequivocal in his declaration of the sovereign choice of God in election, emphasizing that salvation is not dependent on human will or exertion, but solely on God's mercy and grace. However, Paul anticipates an objection to this doctrine: if salvation is determined by God alone, then how can he hold anyone responsible? Essentially, this objection questions the fairness of God's election, asking how God can hold individuals accountable for their actions if their ultimate fate is predetermined.

Paul's response is straightforward: who are we to question God's right to choose as he pleases? He compares the relationship between God and his creation to that of a potter and the clay. The potter has the authority to make different vessels out of the same lump of clay, some for honorable use and some for dishonorable use. Similarly, God has the right to use his creation in whatever way he sees fit, whether it be for the display of his wrath or his mercy. In other words, God's sovereignty and human responsibility are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary.

To illustrate the folly of this objection, let us consider a scenario: a foolish prodigal borrows millions of dollars from a bank, squanders the money in riotous living, and is unable to repay his debt. The bank hauls him to court, and another man who had done the same thing before had his debt entirely paid off by a goodhearted philanthropist. However, the philanthropist chooses not to help the foolish prodigal. The prodigal argues that he is not responsible to pay back the loan since the philanthropist freely paid off the other prodigal's debt but chose not to pay off his. However, this argument is fallacious as the

prodigal is still responsible for his own actions, and the philanthropist has the right to choose whom he helps. How much more are we responsible for our sin debt to our Creator and Lawgiver, whether he chooses us for mercy or not?

Or imagine a group of prisoners awaiting their sentences in a court of law. The judge looks at each of their cases and, for reasons known only to him, decides to show mercy to some and sentence others to the maximum penalty. One of the prisoners who received the maximum penalty objects, saying, "How can you hold me responsible for my actions when you chose to show mercy to others who have done the same things as me?" The judge responds by pointing out that each prisoner is responsible for their own actions, regardless of what others have done or what mercy the judge chooses to show. In the same way, God's choice to show mercy to some and not others does not take away human responsibility for their actions.

"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?
Or do you begrudge my generosity" (Matthew 20:15)

The Reformed tradition affirms that God's election does not negate human responsibility. In fact, the doctrine of election emphasizes the depth of human sinfulness and God's grace. All humans are sinners deserving of God's wrath. God is under no obligation to save anyone; that he saves some out of the mass of ill-deserving sinners is better than anyone deserves. God's election is not arbitrary; rather, it is grounded in his character and purposes. He does not choose based on any merit or deservingness on the part of the individual. God's election is an act of grace, and we are responsible for our response to this grace.

In conclusion, the objection that the doctrine of unconditional election negates human responsibility is fallacious. God's sovereignty and human responsibility are complementary, not mutually exclusive. The Reformed tradition affirms that God's election is not

arbitrary, but is grounded in his character and purposes. As Paul declares, who are we to question God's right to choose as he pleases?

57. Doesn't the doctrine of unconditional election/effectual grace make people into robots?

Some Christians, often with good intentions, claim that our affirmation of the biblical doctrine of effectual grace would turn human beings into robots or automatons. They argue that the love of God necessitates free will, which they refer to as libertarian freedom.

At the outset, it is essential to understand that this objection is moral, not exegetical. Those who make such claims base their considerations and theological future on shaky ground. Therefore, we must rely solely on what Scripture says to reach our conclusions. Drawing our highest presuppositions from an unauthoritative source, such as unaided human reason, is not a viable alternative.

But suppose we take their moral argument at face value. In that case, does it mean that effectual grace cannot be loving because it makes people into automatons? Let's consider 3 real-life examples.

1) Imagine a toddler willfully disobeys their parent by running into oncoming traffic. Which parent is more loving: the one who risks their life to save the child, regardless of the child's will at the time, or the one who remains on the curb and waits for the child to give them permission to act?

We can see that in this instance love does not require consideration of someone's will. In such a case, love demonstrates itself by getting the job done, which, in this case, is saving the child's life. The second parent's love could be

deemed as conditional because they require permission before acting, making their response appear unloving in comparison to the first parent who acts without hesitation out of love for the child's safety. Or-

2) Consider a patient who needs life-saving surgery but is unconscious and cannot give their consent to the procedure. The surgeon knows that without the surgery, the patient will die, and so they make the decision to operate, even though the patient has not given their explicit consent.

In this scenario, the surgeon's actions demonstrate their love and concern for the patient's well-being. They do not wait for the patient to regain consciousness and choose to undergo the surgery before acting. Instead, they make the decision based on their medical expertise and the patient's need for intervention. Or-

3) When we are born, we are given the gift of life, along with all the faculties and senses necessary to experience it fully. We did not choose to be born, nor did we have any say in the physical attributes or abilities we were given at birth. Yet, we do not consider ourselves to be mere robots or automatons because of this.

Similarly, God's grace and love for us extend beyond physical birth to include our spiritual birth. Just as we did not have a choice in our physical birth, we also cannot choose our spiritual birth. Instead, it is a merciful gift given to us by God through the work of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to be born again and become children of God. In this way, God's grace is a demonstration of His love for us, not an indication that we are mere automatons or puppets.

At this point in the conversation, the response is usually a deflection. People ask, "why doesn't God save everyone then?" This question is a

subtle shift from the original argument, which was about whether effectual grace makes us automatons. Although it is a good question, it is not relevant to the current discussion. We have demonstrated that genuine love does not necessarily require both parties to choose freely at the time, and hence the charge of "automatons" is fallacious. In this instance, the lack of choice is the only option that demonstrates true love.

58. Doesn't the Doctrine of Unconditional Election Hinder Evangelism and Missions?

The doctrine of unconditional election has been accused of hindering evangelism and missions, but this objection is fundamentally flawed. Firstly, Christ has commanded all believers to proclaim the gospel to all nations, and as servants of Christ, they must obey Him regardless of their understanding of His ways (Matthew 28:18-20). Moreover, the scriptures explicitly state that God calls out His elect from all nations through the proclamation of His word (Romans 10:13-17), and He is sovereign over both the end (the salvation of the elect) and the means to that end (the preaching of the word). Should we not just repeat what John Ryland supposedly said to the zealous (and Calvinistic!) missionary William Carey: "Sit down, young man; when God wants to convert the heathen, he'll do it without your help and mine."?

Furthermore, the doctrine of unconditional election is actually a necessary foundation for evangelism and missions. The natural condition of humanity is that no one is capable of obeying the gospel, believing in Christ, understanding the things of the Spirit, or seeking God (John 3:3, 27; 6:44, 65; 8:43-45; 10:26; 12:37-41; 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 3:10-11). Therefore, the doctrine of God's

sovereign election, which overcomes these impossible barriers, is a necessary foundation for missions. When Paul was discouraged by opposition in Corinth, God comforted him by reminding him that He had already chosen many people in that city (Acts 18:9-10). In other words, the truth that with men salvation is impossible would be a hindrance to evangelism were it not for the truth of God's unconditional election, which does the impossible (Matthew 19:26).

Moreover, the doctrine of unconditional election motivates and sustains evangelism and missions. Believers know that God has already chosen those who will be saved, but they do not know who they are. Therefore, they proclaim the gospel to all people indiscriminately, knowing that God will use their proclamation to bring His elect to faith. This knowledge also sustains them in the face of opposition and persecution, knowing that God is sovereign over all things, and that their labors will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

In conclusion, the objection that the doctrine of unconditional election hinders evangelism and missions is without merit. Believers are commanded to proclaim the gospel to all nations, and God uses their proclamation to call out His elect. Furthermore, the doctrine of unconditional election is a necessary foundation for missions, as it overcomes the natural condition of humanity, which is incapable of obeying the gospel. Finally, the doctrine of unconditional election motivates and sustains evangelism and missions, as believers know that God is sovereign over all things, and that their labors will not be in vain.

59. What is “Double Predestination,” and Does the Bible Teach It?

The term "double predestination" refers to the belief that God predestines some to eternal salvation and others to eternal

punishment, also known as "reprobation." Those who are not elected are called the "reprobate." The doctrine of reprobation is logically true if the following premises are established: 1) God sovereignly chooses some for salvation, 2) God does not choose all for salvation, and 3) there is no possibility of obtaining salvation apart from God's sovereign election. Therefore, if God has chosen to save some infallibly and has cut off any other means of salvation for all others, then He has effectively made a choice concerning every person who has lived.

Critics of the doctrine of double predestination often misunderstand it, assuming that the way in which God brings the elect to salvation must be identical to the way in which he brings the reprobate to damnation. However, this assumption is flawed. Salvation begins with the sovereign, monergistic work of God in regeneration, for which all credit is due to Him. Some suppose that if double predestination is true, then God must also be responsible for the beginnings of damnation in the reprobate by producing sin in their hearts, leading to eternal judgment. However, this understanding of double predestination makes God the author of sin, which is utterly unbiblical.

However, even though the idea that God is responsible for producing sin unto condemnation is unbiblical, we must also reject the denial of double predestination altogether. God is not the author of sin, but he does harden sinful men for his righteous purposes of judgment. The Bible makes it clear that just as God chooses some for mercy and salvation, he chooses others for judicial hardening and reprobation. For example, when God loved Jacob, he also hated Esau at the same time, even before their birth (Rom. 9:10-13). Likewise, when he chose to save Israel from Egypt, he also chose to raise up Pharaoh in hardened rebellion, for the glory of his wrath (Rom. 9:17-18). In fact, God chooses from the same lump of human clay some to make into vessels of honor and some to make into vessels of dishonor, in order to show by the one class the glory of his mercy and by the other class the glory of his judgment and wrath (Rom. 9:21-23). The Apostle

Paul is not the only one who speaks clearly on this issue. Peter also speaks of those who receive Christ as the precious Cornerstone of salvation, and those who stumble against him to their eternal destruction. He makes it clear that those who are reprobate were "predestined" to disobey the word and so to perish (1 Pet. 2:6-8).

Therefore, the idea of double predestination is not the same as God monergistically producing sin. Rather, it is the biblical teaching that God has sovereignly chosen some to salvation and others to judgment. This doctrine is essential to understanding the glory of God in both his mercy and wrath. It does not mean that we should be complacent in evangelism and missions, but rather it should spur us on to share the gospel with urgency, knowing that God will save his elect through the preaching of his word. It should also humble us, knowing that our salvation is entirely a work of God's grace, and that we have no grounds for boasting.

The great reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries deal wisely and biblically with this question, on the one and affirming the doctrine of double predestination, but on the other hand guarding against the error of charging God with culpability for sin. A good example comes from the Westminster Confession of Faith:

“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His Sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and

wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.” (Chap. III — Art. VI and VII)

60. What Do the Terms “Supralapsarianism,” and “Infralapsarianism” Mean, and Does the Bible Teach One or the Other?

The terms "supralapsarianism" and "infralapsarianism" (sometimes referred to as "sublapsarianism") pertain to the logical sequence of God's eternal decrees of salvation. Essentially, the question at hand is whether God's decree to save a particular group of people came before (supra) or after (infra) his decree to allow the fall (laps). Infralapsarians contend that, in order to avoid charging God with injustice or sin, it is necessary for God's election of people to salvation to be made from a pool of individuals who are already sinners; therefore, the decree to permit the fall must precede the decree to elect individuals to salvation. Otherwise, if God ordained the destruction of individuals who had not yet fallen, the accusation could be made against God that he was responsible for their sin and rebellion, which his eternal plan demanded of them. However, supralapsarians contend that God's eternal plan to redeem some individuals and not others from the beginning, even though it required sin and the fall, does not make God logically culpable. Additionally, this view aligns more accurately with the biblical evidence of God's prerogative to use evil to accomplish his prior designs. God's ultimate purpose for creation and redemptive history is the triumph of Christ through both the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his people. This plan logically necessitates the existence of sin and God's triumph over that sin through righteous judgment and sovereign mercy. If God's ultimate purpose in history is to display his glory in the person and work of Christ, and if the

manifold glory of Christ includes righteous wrath against sin, then God's eternal purpose of redemption required the fall and was not just a response to it.

The basic schema of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism may be displayed as follows:

Infralapsarianism

1. the decree to create the world and (all) men
2. the decree that (all) men would fall
3. the election of some fallen men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others)
4. the decree to redeem the elect by the cross work of Christ
5. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to the elect

Supralapsarianism (historical)

1. the election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others)
2. the decree to create the world and both kinds of men
3. the decree that all men would fall
4. the decree to redeem the elect, who are now sinners, by the cross work of Christ
5. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to these elect sinners

The traditional lapsarian lists have been criticized by recent theologians who argue that neither accurately portrays how reasonable creatures pursue their goals. They propose a modified supralapsarianism in which God first determines His ultimate goal: the glory of the Lamb in sovereign mercy and righteous judgment. This goal necessitates the existence of sinners, which in turn requires a fall. To have a fall, there must be a world created in righteousness. Therefore, the logical order of God's decrees is modified supralapsarianism rather than infralapsarianism or traditional supralapsarianism.

Supralapsarianism (modified)

1. the election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind in order to make known the riches of God's gracious mercy to the elect)
2. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to the elect sinners
3. the decree to redeem the elect sinners by the cross work of Christ
4. the decree that men should fall
5. the decree to create the world and men

In any discussion of the lapsarian debate, it should be emphasized that all the views have one thing in common: God decreed all the events of his eternal redemption from before the creation of the world. Perhaps the last scheme is the most defensible logically, but no position should be embraced so heartily as to be made binding upon men's consciences. The scriptures do not address the topic clearly enough for such a firm adherence. A story from the life of Martin Luther could be instructive here: when a curious theologian asked him what God was doing before he created the world, Luther quipped, "He was busy creating hell for foolish theologians who pry into such questions." The response is a little tongue-in-cheek, of course, but there may be some wisdom in it, especially when addressing the lapsarian question.

[All of the above lists are taken from Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), pp. 479-489.]

61. What Does the Term "Limited Atonement" Mean, and Does the Bible

Teach it?

The term “limited atonement” is used in the Reformed tradition to describe the belief that Christ's atonement was fully effective to accomplish its design of redemption for all those for whom it was intended; but I prefer the phrase “particular redemption” because it centers in on the redemptive benefits of the atonement and who they are intended for. This doctrine is often associated with the other four points of Calvinism, which are commonly summarized by the acronym TULIP.

One passage that is often cited in support of limited atonement is John 17:1-2, 9, 19 where Jesus, in his High Priestly prayer just before going to the cross, prays to the Father, “I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.” Here, Jesus clearly distinguishes between those for whom he is praying and the world at large. He prays specifically for those whom the Father has given him, indicating that his atoning work is intended for them alone.

In verse 19, Jesus continues his prayer, saying, “And for their sake I **consecrate myself**, that **they** also may be **sanctified in truth**.” This statement is significant because it shows that Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross was not simply an expression of his love for humanity in general, but rather a specific act of self-consecration for the sake of those whom the Father had given him.

Moreover, in verse 24, Jesus establishes that he is speaking not only of the immediate disciples, but of others who the Father has given him who hear their word. This demonstrates that Jesus’ atonement was intended for a specific group of people who hear the gospel beyond the small circle of the disciples, namely, those whom the Father has given him out of the world.

The doctrine of limited atonement does not mean that the value or sufficiency of Christ's atoning work is limited in any way. Rather, it

asserts that the redemptive intention of Christ's death was limited to the elect, those whom the Father has given him. This is consistent with the Reformed understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation and the biblical teaching that God has chosen a specific people for himself.

While this doctrine is often controversial and misunderstood, it is important to remember that it is also a logical and necessary implication of other biblical teachings, such as God's sovereignty in salvation and the specific nature of Christ's work on the cross. As with any doctrine, it is ultimately subject to the authority of Scripture and should be held with humility and a desire to submit to God's revealed truth.

The support for the Calvinistic understanding of limited atonement in Scripture is extensive and diverse. The Bible teaches that God has always intended to redeem a specific people while not redeeming others, as evidenced in 1 Chronicles 17:20-21, Matthew 22:14, 1 Peter 2:8-9, and Ezekiel 36. Throughout the Bible, Jesus is depicted as interceding and offering Himself specifically for the people chosen and given to Him by the Father, as in Isaiah 53:10-11, Matthew 1:21, John 6:35-40, 10:3-4, 11, 14-15, 17, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5:25, John 17:1-2, 6-12, 20-21, 24-26, and Romans 8:34. In His high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus answers the question of who He died for as "the ones whom He represented."

Moreover, the Bible teaches that Christ's death fully accomplished justification, redemption, cleansing, propitiation, and resurrection to new life. In other words, the death of Jesus secured these things, not merely made them possible. Additionally, the death of Jesus provided the faith necessary to receive the eternal blessings of the covenant. Jesus died to establish the New Covenant, which promised faith, repentance, and knowledge of God. As a result, Christ's death provided faith, repentance, and knowledge of God as the fulfillment of a unilateral promise. The internal call and the atonement are coextensive, but the external call and the atonement are not. While

the command to repent and believe is extended to all, the internal grace to comply is not. Those who do not believe do so because they comply with the decree to reprobate from their own natures.

Therefore, the death of Jesus had a specific purpose intended for some but not for others. His death effectively purchased faith, but not all have faith. Thus, His death had an effective intention limited to certain persons. This concept is also demonstrated in other passages, such as Deuteronomy 30:6, Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27, John 3:27, Philippians 1:29, 2 Peter 1:1, Acts 16:14, 18:27, Ephesians 2:8-10, Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25-26, and 1 Corinthians 4:7.

A survey of all these biblical teachings makes it clear that the death of Jesus had a redemptive intent limited to the elect and was fully sufficient to provide them with all things necessary for their eternal salvation, including faith and repentance. Although the cross may have purchased certain blessings for the non-elect, such as temporal forbearance, common grace, and a free gospel offer, the redemptive blessings were intended only for the elect and were powerful enough to be fully accomplished in all of their intended subjects.

Therefore, Christians affirm that they are joined to Christ by the sovereign and merciful work of God Himself, and all redemptive benefits come to them only because of their union with Christ. All these spiritual blessings flow from Christ, including regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification, and these benefits cannot be separated from the Benefactor (Eph 1:3).

What does union with Christ have to with limited atonement?

Everything. Because if **regeneration itself** is a **redemptive benefit** given only to the elect, then Christ died in a way for the elect (redemptively, to procure the benefit of regeneration), that he did not for the non-elect. Faith presupposes the existence of spiritual life in the same way that heat presupposes the existence of fire. The

redemptive benefit of regeneration gives rise to faith. There is an economy of the Trinity behind each step of salvation. In this the Trinity works harmoniously. The Father elects a particular people in Christ, the Son redeems them and the Holy Spirit regenerates and unites them to Christ.

Think about this: Unconditional election is in Christ (Eph 1:3,4). Perseverance is IN CHRIST (1 Thess 5:23, 34) and Irresistible grace is IN CHRIST (John 6:63-65; John 17). In other words, the Trinity works in harmony in saving His people. The intent the Father has for electing His people is the same the Son has in redeeming them and the Spirit has in regenerating them. To reject limited atonement, by definition therefore, is to believe that the intention of the Persons of the Trinity are at odds with one another. It also makes the doctrines of grace into an abstraction for if irresistible grace (a benefit given to the elect only) does not come from the work of Christ, then where does the grace come from? If you believe it does it does come from Christ then you just embraced limited atonement. The REDEMPTIVE INTENT of God in the atonement is what is at issue in this debate. This means God not only justifies the elect for Christ's sake when people come to faith, but also raises them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. This raising from spiritual death (Eph 2:5) is also a redemptive benefit of being joined to Christ - and benefit which Christ died to procure for His people. This means the REDEMPTIVE benefits of the atonement are particular, that is, given only to the elect. That is why we oftentimes (perhaps more properly) call this the doctrine of "particular redemption" rather than limited atonement. While there may very well have been some non-redemptive benefits for the non-elect but this doctrine is only interested in to whom God grants the redemptive benefits. Taking the "L" out of the TULIP is therefore like taking "Solus Christus" out of the Five Solas. It effectually removes all the redemptive benefits of the doctrines of grace from the work of Christ.

62. What About the Passages that Speak of Christ's Work Being for the Whole World?

Proponents of what is (misleadingly) called "unlimited atonement" are quick to point out the many passages that speak of Christ's death as being for "all the world," and other similar phrases. The bible is, in fact, clear that Christ's death was intended to save "all" in a variety of contexts: it was intended to save "all" who believe (John 3:16); it was intended to save people **from** "all" kindreds, tribes, tongues, and nations (Rev. 5:9); it was intended to save persons from "all" classes, rich or poor, slave or free, king or peasant, man or woman, Jew or Greek (Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 2:1-6). Thus, his death is spoken of in a variety of places as being intended for "all," or "the world". For example, John 1:29; Tit 2:11-14 [in the context of "all men" is the delimiting concept of a peculiar people, zealous of good works]; Heb 2:9-10 [notice that the many sons whom Christ brings to glory gives a contextual delimiter to the term "every"]; 2Pe 3:9 [note that this desire is explicitly limited to "us" (Peter was writing to fellow-believers) in the context]; 1Jo 2:2 [propitiation means "appeasement of wrath"; either Jesus appeases God's wrath against all, and therefore hell (which is the place where God's wrath resides) is non-existent; or the "whole world" means something different than "every individual who ever lived". See John 11:51-52 for a clear verbal parallel that gives strong support of the Johannine emphasis on Christ's death being, not just for ethnic Jews, but for people across the whole world].

In sum, yes, the bible often speaks of Christ's death as being for the whole world; and that is because of the paradigm-shattering reality that, when Christ came to redeem a people, he intended to redeem that people from every nation under heaven, quite out of keeping with the expectations of the majority of the Jewish people.

As a final note, it is instructive to look at other ways in which the terms "world," "all," etc., are used throughout the New Testament. The word "all" is often used to indicate all of a set, or even many representatives of a set (Mat 10:22; 1Co 6:12; 15:22; Mat 2:3; Joh 4:29; Act 10:39; 17:21; 21:28; 26:4); or, to indicate all "classes" or "nations," not all individuals (Mat 5:11; Act 2:17; 10:12). The word "world" is often used in the sense of "many," or "all of a set" (Luk 2:1-2; Joh 6:33; 12:19; Act 19:27; Rom 1:8).

63. What About the Passages that Speak of God's Desire for All to be Saved?

Unconditional election is a central doctrine of Calvinism, which is one of the five points of the TULIP acronym. The Synod of Dort affirmed and articulated this doctrine in 1618-1619 in response to the teachings of the Arminians, who rejected the idea of unconditional election and instead taught a conditional election based on foreseen faith. The Synod of Dort held that God's choice of individuals for salvation is based solely on God's sovereign and gracious will, and not on any foreseen merit or choice on their part. This doctrine has been the subject of much debate and criticism, particularly in light of the passages in the Bible that speak of God's desire for all to be saved. However, there are different ways in which these passages can be understood, and there is plenty of biblical support for the position when read in context.

God's Preceptive Will

One way in which God's desire for all to be saved can be seen is through the use of God's preceptive will, as revealed in the imperatives and indicatives in certain passages. For example, in Ezekiel 18:23, God declares, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn

from his way and live?" Similarly, in verses 30-32, God urges the people of Israel to repent and turn from their sins, saying that He has no pleasure in the death of anyone. These passages speak of God's preceptive will, which is the expression of His desire for all people to obey His commands and live righteous lives.

While these passages may seem to contradict the idea of unconditional election at first glance, they can be understood in light of the distinction between God's preceptive will and His will of decree. God desires all people to obey His commands and live righteous lives, but this does not mean that they will. A command to do something does not carry with it the power to do so. Also, a command to obey does not mean God has decreed to save all people he issues the command to. Rather, God's sovereign will determines who will be saved, and His preceptive will serves as a call to all people to turn from their sins and seek righteousness.

In addition to God's precepts, another way in which passages speak of God's desire for all to be saved is through the expression of God's will of disposition. This refers to God's attitude or disposition towards something, which defines what is pleasing to Him. One example of this is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, where Paul writes, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality." Here, the will of God is expressed as His desire for the believers' holiness and purity. It is important to note that God's will of disposition does not necessarily correspond to His sovereign will of decree. While God may desire something to happen in one sense, He may also decree that it does not happen in another sense.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that God's will of disposition does not necessarily correspond to His sovereign will of decree. While God may desire something to happen in one sense, He may also decree that it does not happen in another sense. This is seen in passages such as Matthew 23:37, where Jesus laments over Jerusalem, saying, "How often would I have gathered your children

together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Here, Jesus expresses His desire to gather the people of Jerusalem, but also acknowledges their refusal to come to Him. It is also seen in God's predetermining the crucifixion of his own Son.

In the Context of Some Passages "All" Clearly Means All Kinds or Types

Another way these passages are expressed in scripture is to simply look at the context of the passages. In some passages God's desire for all to be saved refers to His desire for all kinds of people to be saved, rather than every single individual without exception. Such is the case with 1 Timothy 2:3-4 which states that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But on context the passage says:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Why should we pray for "all people" as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:1-4? The context suggests that it is because God desires all kinds or types of people to be saved, including those in high positions such as kings and rulers. This would include not only Jews but Gentiles as well, regardless of their social standing or ethnicity.

This understanding of "all people" as referring to all types or kinds of people is consistent with other passages in the Bible. For example, in Revelation 5:9, the heavenly anthem praises the Lamb for ransoming people for God "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (emphasis added). This suggests that God desires to save people from every ethnic group and nation, not just a select few.

It is also important to note that the concept of "all" in the Bible is often qualified by the context. For example, in Romans 5:18, Paul writes that "one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (emphasis added). However, in the following verses, it becomes clear that "all men" here does not mean every single individual without exception, but rather all who are "in Adam" and all who are "in Christ" (Romans 5:12-21). In other words, the context shows that "all men" refers to all humanity considered as a whole, not every single individual.

In conclusion, while there are passages that speak of God's desire for all to be saved, a careful study of the context and the use of the word "all" in the Bible suggests that this desire does not necessarily mean that God wants to save every single individual without exception. Instead, God desires to save all types and kinds of people, and the doctrine of unconditional election does not necessarily conflict with this understanding of God's desire for salvation. While God's will of disposition may express His desire for all to come to repentance, it must also be understood in light of the broader context. Ultimately, it is important to trust in the sovereignty of God and His perfect plan for salvation, even if it may be difficult to fully understand or reconcile with human reasoning.

64. What Does the Term "Irresistible Grace" Mean?

The term "irresistible grace" is a common theological phrase referring to the Calvinistic teaching that God has sovereignly determined to have grace upon certain persons, and he will unstopably have his way in being gracious to them, and in finally saving them. In other words, God's grace, in the case of the elect, does not stop with a mere offer of mercy; it is greater yet, and irresistibly draws his people to himself. It commands repentance and

then grants that very repentance commanded. It calls sinners to himself and then gives them the spiritual life and heart of faith necessary to respond to that call. In other words, God's grace freely and necessarily supplies everything, including the will to believe, that is necessary for the salvation of all the elect.

What the doctrine of irresistible grace does not teach is that God's grace or the work of the Holy Spirit can never be resisted. The non-elect not only might, but always do resist the Holy Spirit and the grace of God freely offered in the Gospel (e.g. Acts 7:51; John 12:37-40); and even the elect may resist it for a time. However, God will continue to work and draw his elect; and in his own time, he will eventually overcome all resistance, and bring them to himself certainly and unstoppably.

There are many scriptural passages that teach the doctrine of irresistible grace, in its correctly understood sense that God will certainly overcome the natural opposition of the elect and draw them to himself. In Deuteronomy 30:6, for instance, God promises not just to give his people an opportunity for salvation, but to give them circumcised hearts that will obey his laws; and then in Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40 he confirms and expands upon this promise, assuring his people that he will give them new hearts of faith, causing them to trust and believe in him and preventing them from turning away from himself. Not only does his grace present them with a free offer of salvation, it also provides them with the new heart that delights in the gospel and freely embraces that offer.

In John 3:8, Jesus teaches the doctrine of irresistible grace by saying that, just as the wind blows wherever it wishes, so the Holy Spirit gives life to whomever he desires. In John 5:21, he teaches that the Son has the authority to give life to whomever he will. And in John 6:37-45, he teaches that all (without exception!) whom the Father gives to the Son and draws to him will infallibly come to Christ and be raised up on the last day. So in the gospel of John, all three

persons of the Trinity are portrayed as providing irresistible and certain grace to the elect, which will unstoppably give life and salvation to those whom the Father has chosen and given to the Son. Many more scriptures could be provided, but perhaps the clearest teaching of the doctrine of irresistible grace comes from Romans 9:15-24, where God declares unilaterally, "I will (not might!) have mercy on whomever I will have mercy".

65. Does Irresistible Grace Mean that Human Response is Forced and Artificial?

The common objection to the doctrine of irresistible grace, that it makes human response forced and artificial, as if they were robots and not real people making real choices, misunderstands what irresistible grace actually means. It certainly does not mean that God will bring people to Christ against their wills, kicking and screaming. "Irresistibility," in other words, does not imply coercion. On the contrary, it means that God will not merely save his people apart from or in opposition to their wills, but he will give them the very will to come. He will give them new hearts of faith that delight in coming to him and walking in his ways. When Christ called to Lazarus from his grave, he irresistibly arose and came forth – but it was not as if the still-dead corpse were miraculously moving like a robot, nor yet as if he desperately wanted to stay in his grave, but Jesus dragged him out anyway. No, he was given new life, and the living will he received delighted to come forth from his stinking grave and embrace the Master (John 11:43-44). In the same way, when God irresistibly draws us to Christ, he does not make us come mechanically, even though our hearts are still spiritually dead, nor does he force us to come unwillingly. He gives us new, living hearts of faith that delight in coming to him, that could not do anything

else, in fact, because our recreated wills naturally delight in him and want nothing else but to belong to him (for scriptural support, see the previous question, “What does the term 'irresistible grace' mean, and does the bible teach it?”).

To insist that if God's grace is irresistible, then our response must therefore be coerced and artificial, is to diminish God's power. Why is it that you have a will at all, so that you might volitionally choose anything? Is it not because God created you as a volitional creature and not a robot? God created your will in the first place, a will that is able to choose the things it desires; so can he not create a new heart and will that still chooses what it desires, but that naturally desires what is good and right? To say that our response is forced or constrained, just because God gives us the desire to come to Christ freely and joyfully, is to minimize his power both as Creator and Redeemer.

66. What Does the Term “Perseverance of the Saints” Mean, and Does the Bible Teach It?

The term "perseverance of the saints" means that every true "saint," or in other words, all who have actually been "sanctified by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10), will certainly persevere in faith until the end, and so be finally saved. The term does not mean that true Christians will never have seasons of doubt, nor ever fall into sin, but rather that God will always cause their faith to triumph at the last, and will never allow them to remain in gross sin indefinitely, but will continue the work that he first began in them, bringing it to perfection in the Day of Jesus Christ (see Philippians 1:6). Neither does the term mean that no one who makes a profession of faith will finally fall away: on the contrary,

there are many false professions, and there are different kinds of false faiths that flourish for awhile but then wither away (e.g. Matthew 7:21-23; 13:1-23); but all who have been granted true faith, which God alone can give (e.g. Joh 3:27; Phi 1:29; 2Pe 1:1; Act 16:14; 18:27; Eph 2:8-10; Act 5:31; 11:18; 2Ti 2:25-26; 1Co 4:7), will continue in the faith until they reach their blessed end in heaven.

The scriptures clearly teach certain truths which, when conflated, definitely confirm the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The bible teaches that, what God begins (especially concerning his work of grace in the hearts of the saints), he will certainly finish (Psa 138:8; Ecc 3:14; Isa 46:4; Jer 32:40; Rom 11:29; Phi 1:6; 2Ti 4:18); that of all whom he has called and brought to Christ, none will be lost (Joh 6:39-40; 10:27-29; Rom 8:28-31, 35-39; Heb 7:25; 10:14); and that, while his preservation of the saints is not irrespective of their continuance in faith and holiness (1Co 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Heb 3:14; 6:4-6; 10:26-27; 12:14; Rev 21:7-8; 22:14-15), yet he himself is the one who sanctifies them, and causes them to persevere in true faith and godliness (Joh 15:16; 1Co 1:30-31; 6:11; 12:3; 15:10; Gal 3:1-6; Eph 2:10; Phi 2:12-13; 1Th 5:23-24; Heb 13:20-21; 1Jo 2:29; Jud 1:24-25).

A denial of the final perseverance of all true saints is a very serious error for a couple of reasons; first, it logically demands that we must continue by the works of the flesh what God has begun by his gift of the Spirit – a serious error Paul addresses in Galatians 3:1-6. If God saved us by his grace alone, which was given to us in Christ Jesus, then how can we say it is up to us to continue in the faith, or that his grace alone, which was sufficient to give us faith and the Spirit at the first, is not sufficient to keep us in the faith and preserve us by his Spirit? In other words, any position which denies that Christ will persevere Christians to the end is implicitly denying that Jesus' work on the cross is sufficient to save to the uttermost ... That we must somehow maintain our own just standing before God. No small error. And second, if the Holy Spirit does not preserve all whom the Father has elected and brought to Christ, then the persons of the

Trinity are working in contradiction to each other, which is an impossibility given the precious unity of the Godhead.

67. Is Perseverance of the Saints the Same thing as Eternal Security?

It is common to hear the term "eternal security" used basically as a synonym for "the perseverance of the saints". The former term emphasizes that all who are in Christ, that is, all the elect, who have truly been regenerated, are secure in their position forever – they will never finally fall away. The latter term, on the other hand, emphasizes the manner in which God will infallibly preserve his own – by causing their faith to persevere through every trial, until they finally apprehend the prize of the upward calling, for which they have already been apprehended by Christ (see Philippians 3:12-14). If this is all that is meant by the term "eternal security," then it is certainly a biblical doctrine, very similar to the term "perseverance," and complementing it.

However, the term "eternal security" is often used in a very different and unbiblical way, by Christians who adhere to a synergistic doctrine of regeneration (that is, the doctrine that man from his own nature produces faith in the gospel, and then God regenerates him in consequence of this faith – a doctrine opposed to the scriptures [see question #40, "What does monergism mean," above]). To many of these Christians, faith is something that we ourselves contributed to our salvation by our free will, and so it is up to us whether or not we will continue to believe, as well. According to this doctrine, then, "eternal security" basically means that a person who has come to faith in Christ may fall away from that faith and turn aside to a lifestyle of willing sin, and yet he will be saved anyway, because he had faith at one time, and so he is eternally secure, no matter what his subsequent life may look like. This false doctrine, based upon a

flawed understanding of "free will" (see Question #47, "Does the bible teach that man has free will," above), contradicts many scripture passages which teach that the saints must persevere in the faith to be saved (e.g. 1Co 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Heb 3:14; 6:4-6; 10:26-27; 12:14; Rev 21:7-8; 22:14-15), but that the God who first gave them faith will cause them to persevere. Hence, in common usage, the term "eternal security" can sometimes refer to a doctrine diametrically opposed to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

68. What is Meant by the Expression “Once Saved, Always Saved”?

The expression “once saved, always saved” (OSAS) can simply mean that all who have been called out by the gospel of Christ, granted true faith, and saved from his wrath and the condemnation they had been under, will never more be in peril of eternal damnation, but will be saved by God's sovereign and immutable grace for all eternity. If this is all that is intended by the expression, then it is complementary to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance, which teaches that all true saints will persevere in the faith, by God's keeping power, until they finally reach their blessed end in heaven.

Antinomianism

Unfortunately, the phrase “once saved, always saved” is sometimes used to promote a false sense of security, suggesting that a person who has made a profession of faith can continue to live a life of unrepentant sin and still be saved. This view is inconsistent with the teachings of Scripture, which make it clear that those who have truly been born again will persevere in faith and good works until the end. See the two questions above for a fuller treatment of this theme.

Antinomianism is a heretical view that denies the necessity of good works in the Christian life. Antinomians believe that Christians are freed from the moral law, and that obedience to God's commands is an unnecessary fruit of salvation. This belief often leads to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of perseverance and the idea that once a person has been saved, he can never lose his salvation, regardless of how he lives his life.

Antinomians hold to the belief that a person need not persevere in faith to be saved. This belief is at odds with the doctrine of perseverance, which teaches that true believers will continue in faith and obedience to God until the end. According to this doctrine, those who do not persevere in faith and good works show that they were never truly saved to begin with.

Antinomians also hold the belief that true believers can lose their faith. While it is true that believers can struggle with doubts and unbelief, the Bible teaches that those who have been genuinely saved by God's grace will persevere in faith and obedience to the end. This perseverance is evidence of their salvation, and those who do not persevere show that they were never truly saved.

The most dangerous aspect of Antinomianism is the belief that those who lose their faith are still saved simply because they once professed belief, or raised their hand. This belief is contrary to the biblical teaching that true believers will persevere in faith and obedience to the end. Those who do not persevere are not true believers and will not be saved.

In summary, Antinomianism is a dangerous heresy that denies the necessity of good works in the Christian life. This belief leads to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of perseverance and the idea that once a person has been saved, he can never lose his salvation. The Bible teaches that true believers will persevere in faith and good works until the end, and those who do not persevere were never truly saved to begin with.

The Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints

The doctrine of perseverance of the saints teaches, rather, that those who are truly saved will persevere to the end, not because of their own strength, but because of the sovereign and preserving grace of God. Believers are kept secure in their salvation by the power of God, who is able to keep them from falling away and present them blameless before the throne of grace.

The Reformed doctrine of perseverance teaches both the requirement of believers to persevere until the end and God's preservation of His people. On the one hand, believers are called to persevere in faith and godliness, as seen in Colossians 1:21-23, 1 John 1:5-10; 3:3-6, Hebrews 10:26-31, and Hebrews 12:1. These passages emphasize the need for believers to continue in their faith, to strive for holiness, and to avoid falling away into sin and unbelief.

On the other hand, the doctrine of perseverance also affirms that God will preserve His people and cause them to persevere until the end. This is seen in passages such as John 6:38-40, John 10:28-29, Romans 8:28-39, Philippians 1:4-6, Philippians 2:12-13, and 1 John 2:19. These passages emphasize that God has chosen and called His people, and that He will sustain and keep them in their faith until the end, regardless of any challenges or obstacles they may face.

It is important to note that the doctrine of perseverance does not teach that believers will never struggle with sin or doubt, nor does it teach that they will never experience times of spiritual dryness or difficulty. Rather, it affirms that true believers will ultimately persevere in their faith and that God will sustain them through any trials or challenges they may face. This doctrine encourages believers to strive for holiness and to trust in God's faithful preservation, knowing that He will never let them go and that He will ultimately bring them to their blessed end in heaven.

Arminians, Antinomians and Calvinists Contrasted

Many Arminians hold the belief that salvation can be lost by sinning it away, which begs the question as to whether Christ's atoning sacrifice is sufficient. Does it only provide for initial salvation and not preservation also?

Antinomians, who adhere to the doctrine of cheap grace, hold that salvation cannot be lost. However, this belief leads them to ignore the importance of believers living a life of godliness.

The Calvinists hold a different view, based on the belief that union with Christ produces both the desire to persevere until the end and God's preserving grace. In other words, they hold that the preservation of the saints is both a divine promise and a human responsibility.

The biblical doctrine of preservation teaches that the salvation of the elect is based on God's sovereign and gracious will, and not on any merit or works of their own. They also believe that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect, giving them a new desire to live a life of godliness and obedience to God's commands. This desire to live a holy life is seen as evidence of true conversion and a sign that God is working in the heart of the believer.

At the same time, Calvinists also believe that believers have a responsibility to persevere in the faith and to live a life of obedience to God's commands. They believe that believers are called to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, not in order to earn salvation, but as evidence of their faith and love for God. They also believe that God's preserving grace will enable believers to persevere to the end, and that nothing can separate them from the love of God.

In short, the Calvinist view of perseverance combines both divine sovereignty and human responsibility taking into account all the Scriptural evidence. The believer's desire to live a life of godliness is evidence of God's work in their heart, while their responsibility to persevere to the end is evidence of their faith and love for God.

Ultimately, the preservation of the saints is seen as a work of God's grace, which ensures that the elect will persevere to the end and be saved.

Here are some more biblical references that support the Calvinist view of perseverance and preservation of the saints:

- Romans 8:28-39: This passage speaks of God's sovereign work in the lives of believers, assuring them that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ.
- Philippians 1:4-6: Paul expresses confidence that God, who began a good work in the Philippians, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 2:12-13: This passage speaks of the believer's responsibility to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, while acknowledging that it is ultimately God who works in them to will and to act according to his good purpose.
- John 6:38-40: Jesus speaks of God's will that all who look to the Son and believe in him shall have eternal life, and that he will raise them up at the last day.
- John 10:28-29: Jesus speaks of his sheep, who hear his voice and follow him, and how no one can snatch them out of his hand or the Father's hand.
- Colossians 1:21-23: Paul speaks of the need for believers to continue in the faith, being reconciled to God through Christ, and being presented holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.
- 1 John 1:5-10; 3:3-6: John speaks of the importance of believers walking in the light and confessing their sins, and the relationship between sin and the knowledge of Christ. He also

speaks of the relationship between righteousness and being born of God.

- Hebrews 10:26-31: The author of Hebrews warns against deliberate sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, saying that it brings fearful judgment and punishment.
- Hebrews 12:1: The author of Hebrews speaks of the need for believers to run with perseverance the race marked out for them, fixing their eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of their faith.

These are just a few examples of the many biblical references that support the Calvinist view of perseverance and preservation of the saints.

69. Is the Doctrine of Perseverance Opposed to the Doctrine of Salvation by Grace Alone?

The doctrine of perseverance of the saints in Reformed theology affirms that those whom God has graciously called to salvation, He will preserve them in their faith and sanctification until the end. However, this doctrine is sometimes opposed to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, arguing that it implies a need for good works as a requirement for salvation.

This objection fails to understand the nature of good works as the fruit and proof of genuine faith, rather than as a cause of salvation. True faith in Christ naturally leads to a life of obedience and godliness, as evidenced by the works produced by the Holy Spirit in

the believer's life. A faith that produces no good works is, therefore, a false and dead faith that cannot justify anyone.

The Reformed view of perseverance teaches that believers are justified by grace alone, but it is the same grace that grants them the desire and ability to live a life of obedience to God's commands. Being set free from the bondage of sin is an essential part of the package of salvation, as both the guilt and power of sin are dealt with by God's grace. In other words, true faith in Christ is never alone but produces the fruit of holiness and sanctification.

The biblical references to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints make it clear that God promises to justify, sanctify, and glorify all those who believe in Him. Therefore, if a person claims to have faith and justification but demonstrates no sanctification, it is evident that his faith is not genuine, and he is not justified. Works are not a condition for salvation, but rather the evidence of true salvation, produced by the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

In summary, the Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints is not opposed to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. The same grace that justifies also sanctifies and produces good works in the believer's life. A true and living faith in Christ is never alone but is always accompanied by the fruit of holiness and obedience to God's commands.

How the Lord Uses Discipline to Preserve His Saints

"But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world." - 1 Corinthians 11:31-32

In 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, Paul urges believers to judge themselves truly, which means to examine their own hearts and actions and confess their sins. By doing so, they can avoid being judged and disciplined by the Lord.

However, if believers fail to judge themselves and persist in unrepentant sin, the Lord will judge and discipline them. This discipline is not a sign of God's wrath or abandonment, but rather evidence of His love and commitment to the believer's spiritual growth.

The passage emphasizes that God is committed to His people and will not allow them to wander too far off. He uses discipline as a means to bring them back to Himself and to prevent them from being condemned along with the world.

Therefore, as believers, we are called to stand in the light and mirror of God's word, and when He shows us our sin and failings, we confess our sin, and He promises to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. By doing so, we can avoid the discipline of the Lord and grow in holiness. If we fail to do so, we can trust that God will discipline us in love and commitment to our spiritual growth.

Note: the distinction between the final judgment and the temporal discipline of the Lord. This passage is not referring to the final judgment where believers will be saved by grace through faith in Christ. Instead, it speaks of a temporary judgment and discipline that God administers to His children in this life to correct their behavior and bring them back to Himself.

The discipline of the Lord is a form of correction that is intended to help believers grow in holiness and avoid the consequences of being overcome by sin. The passage emphasizes that God's discipline is evidence of His love and commitment to the believer's spiritual growth. He is not a distant or uncaring God who leaves His children to wander aimlessly. Instead, He is intimately involved in their lives and is committed to their growth and well-being.

What Role Does Perseverance and Good Works Play in our Salvation, if Any?

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace, not based on any merit or works of our own. The believer's standing before God is solely dependent on the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to the believer by faith alone. Therefore, there is nothing we can do to either attain or maintain our just standing before God. Through a deep study of the Scriptures, the Reformers rejected the notion that salvation is a process achieved through a combination of faith and works. They maintained that salvation is an entirely free gift of God's grace received by faith alone.

It is important to stress that the sustainability of salvation is not based on how one lives after being saved. Good works cannot add anything to the finished work of Christ on the cross. However, our preservation is one of the benefits of salvation given to the elect. Christ's finished work includes (among other things) both the application of our justification and our preservation in Christ. God will never let us go, and Christ is interceding for us that our faith will not fail. So there is nothing we can do to lose our salvation. However, the salvation we have in Christ also includes the gift of a new heart that loves God. Our perseverance is a fruit of our union with Christ, not the root.

The new heart that believers receive as a gift of salvation is what enables them to love and obey God. The fruit of this new heart is a changed life characterized by good works and a desire to live for God's glory. However, these works are not the cause of salvation or a means of maintaining it. They are the result of salvation and fruit of the Spirit's work in the believer's life.

In summary, the Bible declares that salvation is a gift of God's grace, received by faith alone. And one of salvations' benefits is the preservation of the saints. Our standing before God is based solely on the righteousness of Christ, and we cannot do anything to earn or keep it. Our salvation is secured by the finished work of Christ on the cross, and our perseverance is a fruit of our union with Him. We are saved not by works, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ

alone, which leads to a life characterized by perseverance and good works.

--- 1 Peter 1:3-5: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

--- Jude 1:24-25: "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

70. What is “Easy-Believism”?

The term “easy-believism” is a usually derogatory label, used to characterize the faulty understanding of the nature of saving faith adhered to by much of contemporary Evangelicalism, most notably (and extremely) by such Dispensational authors as Charles Ryrie and Zane Hodges. The term was popularized in an ongoing debate between Hodges, to whose theology the label “easy-believism” was affixed, and John MacArthur, to whom the term “lordship salvation” came to be applied.

Essentially, the teaching of “easy-believism” (which proponents prefer to call “free grace,” or some similar term), asserts that the faith which saves is mere intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel, accompanied by an appeal to Christ for salvation (at the end of his life, Hodges embraced the even more extreme position that

salvation requires only an appeal to Christ, even by one who does not believe the most basic truths of the gospel, such as his death, burial, and resurrection [which he clearly taught, for example, in “The Hydra's Other Head: Theological Legalism,” printed in the Grace In Focus Newsletter]). According to proponents of the “free grace” movement (i.e. “easy-believism”), it is not required of the one appealing for salvation that he be willing to submit to the Lordship of Christ. In fact, at least according to some proponents, the person appealing for salvation may at the same time be willfully refusing to obey the commands of Christ; but because he has intellectual faith, he will still be saved, in spite of his ongoing rebellion.

“Easy-believism” is usually connected with Dispensationalism, which serves as a foundational theological support for it. According to classic Dispensationalism, the gospel which Jesus proclaimed on earth was a gospel for the ethnic Jews alone, promising them earthly rewards in the Jewish millennium for their works of submitting to and following Christ; and this “gospel of the Kingdom” is categorically different from the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone which Paul later proclaimed. In this way, all of Jesus' teachings that, if anyone is not willing to leave father and mother and take up his cross and follow him, he cannot be his disciple, do not apply to the gospel of grace, but only to the gospel of the Kingdom. But contrary to this flawed method of interpretation, there is only one gospel in the New Testament, which Jesus proclaimed on earth, and which his apostles likewise proclaimed throughout the whole world after his ascension. And this gospel declares that all who repent (that is turn from sin and rebellion to Christ the Lord) and call upon the Name of Christ in true faith will be saved. Even in Paul's writings, moreover, it is clear that anyone who perverts the gospel of grace alone, and uses it to continue presumptuously in sin, is bringing just damnation upon himself (Romans 3:8).

In much of Evangelicalism, the flippant sort of “once saved, always saved” mentality, which denies that true grace will always prove itself

in faith and works, is closely related to an “easy-believism” mindset, which suggests that intellectual belief alone, which does not go on to pursue a life of true holiness, is the kind of faith that saves (see questions 66-68 above). When the gospel is understood biblically, it becomes clear that both faith and obedience assume the prior existence of spiritual life. As J.I. Packer wisely commented, "sinners cannot obey the gospel, any more than the *law*, without renewal of heart." Understanding this as foundational biblical truth, we know that salvation not only saves us from the guilt of sin but from its power.

71. What are Patristics, and Why Should We Study Them?

Patristics, is a branch of theological study of the most prominent writings of the pastors and theologians of the Church from the end of the Apostolic period until the beginning of the Medieval period. The time span of the Patristic period is generally considered to be about AD 100 (after the death of John, the last living apostle) until about AD 604 (when Gregory the Great died after serving in the the bishopric of Rome, in a life of ministry that tended to lock into place the basic elements of the Medieval Church, including the consolidation of ecclesiastical power in the church of Rome, and the ascendancy of the Roman bishop, who would come to be called the “pope”).

The Patristics are usually divided into the “Ante-Nicene Fathers,” that is, those who lived and wrote before the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, and the “Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,” that is, those who lived and wrote during and after the time of the Nicene Council. Another common classification is the Greek Fathers, who generally lived in the East and wrote in Greek, and the Latin Fathers, who lived in the West and wrote in Latin. Some of the earliest influential

Fathers include Clement of Rome (a contemporary of the apostles), Polycarp (a disciple of John), Justin Martyr (early second century), and Irenaeus (late second century). Some of the most influential Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers include Theodoret, Jerome, Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose. The two most outstanding (or influential) of them all, though, are doubtless the Latin father Augustine of Hippo (AD 354 – 430) and the Greek father John Chrysostom (AD 347 – 407). The canons of the seven ecumenical councils are also important reading for the Patristic period.

There are several reasons that it is important to study the Patristics: first, their theological and scriptural insights are very valuable in their own right. The Patristics lived much closer to the days of the apostles than we do, and they were forced to crystallize the apostolic teaching in response to the influx of various heresies and errors. Their formulation of trinitarian and christological doctrine was eminently biblical and foundational for true Christianity, and their homilies, apologetical and homiletical writings, and so on, contain innumerable valuable insights. Second, studying the Patristics gives us a much clearer understanding of the history of the Church, and acquaints us with how the ragamuffin band of apostles and the outnumbered and persecuted churches they started grew up into the Christianity that we recognize today. This acquaintance with Church history gives us a sense of continuity with the beginnings of Christ's gospel accomplishment, and firmly tethers us to the community of saints worldwide and throughout the ages. Third, it is important to know what the Patristics say simply because, virtually every branch of professing Christendom respects them and wants to employ their writings in support of their own teachings. Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and most of Protestant Christianity all claim some degree of continuity with the Church Fathers. Defending those claims of continuity by an appeal to the actual writings of the Patristics is, therefore, a very valuable apologetic strategy. One very successful example of this kind of apologetic was Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, where he expertly quotes the Scripture

together with the early church fathers to refute the Roman Catholic view of grace and free will.

72. What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a complex philosophical and cultural movement that arose as a reaction to the boundless optimism of the modern worldview. Modernism, with its roots in the thought of influential figures such as Immanuel Kant and Augustus Comte, placed great faith in the ability of human reason to discover a vast body of certain and indisputable knowledge through the scientific method. This led to a belief that humans could exercise an ever greater control over the material world and increase the happiness and prosperity of people everywhere.

Postmodernism, by contrast, is deeply skeptical of the possibility of any certain knowledge whatsoever. It is suspicious of power structures and the misuse of knowledge to cement authority in the hands of the strong, whether in governmental, religious, or other realms of influence. Postmodernism emerged particularly in the aftermath of the World Wars, which had a profound impact on Western culture and thought.

Postmodernism's impact has been felt most deeply in the field of hermeneutics, the science of interpreting written texts. Postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have put forward a new theory of hermeneutics known as "deconstructionism" or "post-structuralism." According to this view, all texts, when examined at multiple levels, deconstruct into different and often violently opposed meanings. Texts are incapable of asserting univocal truth, and are actually used only to oppress and wield authority.

The influence of postmodernism has been particularly significant in certain movements within the Protestant Church. This has led to new approaches to biblical interpretation that reject traditional notions of objective truth in favor of a subjective, reader-focused hermeneutic. The impact of postmodernism on the Church has been the subject of intense debate within theological circles. Some have hailed it as a welcome corrective to modernism's excesses, while others have criticized it as a dangerous relativism that undermines the authority of Scripture and the gospel message.

What major Christian movements or denominations have been more influenced by postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a broad and multifaceted philosophical movement that has influenced various aspects of contemporary culture, including some Christian movements and denominations. However, it is important to note that postmodernism's influence on Christianity is a contentious issue, and not all Christians agree on its implications.

That being said, some Christian movements and denominations have been more influenced by postmodernism than others. For example, some emerging churches, such as the Emergent Church, have explicitly embraced postmodernism as a way to rethink and reformulate Christianity for the contemporary world. These churches emphasize a relational, experiential, and non-dogmatic approach to faith and reject the traditional emphasis on propositional truth and institutional authority.

Progressive Christianity is a broader movement that encompasses a range of theological and political positions within Christianity. It is characterized by a commitment to re-examining traditional Christian beliefs and practices in light of contemporary understandings of science, ethics, and social justice. Progressive Christians often emphasize inclusivity, social justice, and environmentalism, and they

may reject traditional doctrines such as biblical inerrancy, substitutionary atonement, and eternal conscious torment.

With regard to postmodernism, many Progressive Christians challenges the concept of objective truth and absolute certainty, and Progressive Christianity tends to adopt a more fluid, open-ended approach to religious beliefs and practices. This often includes a willingness to re-examine traditional Christian doctrines and to embrace what they think of as a more inclusive, diverse perspectives. In many cases, Progressive Christianity may reject aspects of traditional Christian theology and instead draw from a variety of philosophical and spiritual traditions. This approach can be seen as a response to the postmodern critique of grand narratives and metanarratives, which challenges the idea that any one perspective or worldview is objectively true or universally applicable.

In general, progressive Christianity tends to place more of an emphasis on social justice issues and political activism than it does theology. This emphasis on politics is often seen as a natural extension of the movement's commitment to inclusivity and equality. Progressive Christians may support causes such as LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, environmentalism, and immigration reform. However, it is important to note that not all progressive Christians prioritize politics to the same degree, and there is a diversity of views within the movement.

Likewise, some mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church USA, have also been influenced by postmodernism in their theological and ethical perspectives. These denominations have emphasized a more "inclusive, open, and dialogical approach" to theology and social issues, such as gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and environmentalism.

On the other hand, most conservative and evangelical Christians have rejected postmodernism as a threat to the authority of

Scripture, the uniqueness of Christ, and the objectivity of truth. These Christians have emphasized a more traditional, doctrinal, and evangelistic approach to faith and have criticized postmodernism for its relativism, subjectivism, and nihilism.

In summary, postmodernism's influence on Christianity is complex and contested, and different Christian movements and denominations have responded to it in different ways.

73. What Are the “New Perspective(s)” on Paul?

The “New Perspective on Paul” is a relatively recent paradigm shift in understanding what the Apostle Paul meant in his teaching on justification. According to the New Perspective, justification does not address the question of how a sinful individual may be pronounced righteous before a holy God; it actually answers the question of who may be considered a member of the covenant community. According to this perspective, Paul's criticism of the Judaizers had nothing to do with their legalism, or basing their hopes of being accepted by God upon a moral lifestyle; on the contrary, the Jewish religion that Paul was confronting was a grace-based religion. Paul was actually condemning their ethno-centrism, in saying that a person had to accept Jewish customs such as circumcision in order to be counted a part of the family of God. Present justification is only the recognition of someone as a part of God's family; and there will likewise be a future justification, based upon the whole life lived, which will determine whether or not God accepts someone into future, eternal bliss.

In this new understanding, several major theological terms receive a drastic redefinition. One of the most notable is “works of the law”. According to the New Perspective, these are not works done to earn

favor or acceptance with God, but rather, cultural “badges” of Jewish ethnicity. The Jews themselves believed that their nation would be saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*); but they believed that they had to display the “works of the law,” that is, circumcision, dietary regulations, etc., not as meritorious deeds, but to show themselves a part of this people that would be saved by God's grace. The “righteousness of God” is another theological term that receives a thorough reworking, so that, against the historic Reformed understanding, it never means an alien righteousness, outside of us (*extra nos*), that is imputed to the believer by faith; rather, it means God's faithfulness to vindicate his promises, and other similar things. Imputation itself, as a theological doctrine, is likewise strictly denied: righteousness is simply not a substance that can be passed from the Judge to the defendant; and therefore, all the classic texts supporting the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer, such as 2 Cor. 5:21, are made to teach something different altogether.

There are essentially three big names associated with the promulgation of the “New Perspective” on Paul; E. P. Sanders and James Dunn were two of the first pioneers of the movement; but the most well known and widely read is certainly N. T. Wright, who has done more than anyone else to popularize it.

Inasmuch as the New Perspective demands a radically different understanding of themes central to the entire bible, an adherence to its basic point of view is something that touches upon not the periphery, but the very heart of the gospel. The New Perspective denies the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and teaches instead a future justification upon the basis of the believer's whole life lived; therefore, if the New Perspective is wrong, and if Paul's teaching on justification does indeed address the question of how an individual can be declared righteous before a holy God, then the New Perspective dogma is precisely what falls under his condemnation in such epistles as that to the Galatians. In other words, the disagreement is a life-and-death controversy; if by “works of the Law,” Paul really meant the good things we do to merit acceptance

with God; and if by “justified,” he really meant “declared legally righteous before God”; then the doctrine of a future justification based, not upon the “fiction” of an imputed righteousness, but upon a whole life lived (i.e. the good, moral things we do) is exactly what falls under Paul's anathema in Galatians. And in that very letter to the Galatians, it seems clear that his term, “the works of the Law,” means much more than just a badge of cultural identity: in 3:10-14, for example, he defines the term as a flawless fulfillment of everything commanded by the Law, the failure to perform which results in a curse, which can only be satisfied by the substitutionary curse-bearing of Christ and the righteousness which comes by faith, apart from these works of the Law (inclusive not just of “ethnic badges,” but of every commandment written).

Similarly, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul explicitly disavows every moral accomplishment he had attained, in order to rest in the righteousness of Christ which comes by faith. He did not trust in “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). At the very minimum, what this means is that, if Paul really is referring to a righteousness from God that is imputed by faith, then anyone denying this truth, and refusing to hope in an imputed righteousness for justification, but choosing rather to base his hopes on a “whole life lived,” is of the same sort as the “dogs” and “evildoers” he condemns above (verse 2).

N.T. Wright believes “we have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism,” (Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 32). In light of this, we can see that one of the fundamental premises of the New Perspective is that Phariseism was actually a religion of grace. We agree that as far as the creeds go, the religion of the Jews as a whole was a gracious one, something Reformed Theology has always affirmed. The covenant God made with Abraham is a gracious covenant and not merit-based. So the Jews were saved by grace alone in Christ alone, like all of us. But just as many Christians today may

have a correct doctrinal statement, it is human nature to self-justify and we believe there is an abundance of historical evidence to show that the first century Pharisees had slipped into a form of legalism. Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector and his repeated condemnation of their hypocritical religion alone should confirm this to be true.

74. Fallacy: God Would Not Command Us

To Do What We are Unable to Do.

Although I hear this all the time, fact is, nothing can be deduced about abilities from a command.

Passages such as "Choose life...", "If you are willing" and "whosoever ..." etc. assert nothing indicatively. What we ought to do does not necessarily imply what we can do.

The premise is unscriptural because God gave the Law for two reasons: to expose sin and to increase it so that man would have no excuse for declaring his own righteousness. This is because, in the context, he does no righteousness. Martin Luther said to Erasmus, "when you are finished with all your commands and exhortations from the Old Testament, I'll write Ro.3:20 over the top of it all."

"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:19-20).

Why use commands and exhortations from the Old Testament to show free will when they were given to prove man's sinfulness? They exist to show what we cannot do rather than what we can do. God

gave commands to man that he cannot do. Therefore, commandments and exhortations do not prove free will. Nowhere in scripture is there any hint that God gives commands to natural men to prove they are morally willing and able to perform them.

The consequences of Adam's disobedience on his descendants include spiritual impotence in several areas. Man is unable to understand God (Psalm 50:21; Job 11:7-8; Rom 3:11), to see spiritual things (John 3:3), to know his own heart (Jer 17:9), to direct his own steps in the path of life (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12), to free himself from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10), to receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:17), to hear, understand, or receive the words of God (John 8:47; 1 Corinthians 2:14), to give himself birth into God's family (John 1:13; Romans 9:15-16), to produce repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 6:64-65; 2 Thessalonians 3:2; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25), to come to Christ (John 10:26; John 6:44), and to please God (Romans 8:5, 8-9).

Overall, the effects of the fall on humanity are devastating, rendering humanity utterly incapable of coming to God on their own. Only through the gracious work of God can people be saved, as they are unable to do anything to earn or merit salvation. This highlights the importance of recognizing our own spiritual impotence and relying solely on God's mercy and grace for salvation.

75. What is Monergistic Regeneration.

While we have covered some of this in question 41, the doctrine of monergistic regeneration asserts that God alone gives ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to understand (Deut 29:4, 30:6). In other words, God is the exclusive and singular source of illumination and comprehension of His Word, endowing us with a renewed heart that possesses the moral impetus to believe.. Only He has the power to

resurrect us from spiritual death, circumcise our hearts, and unplug our ears (Ezek 36:26-27), granting us a new sense that allows us to behold His beauty and unsurpassed excellency. As Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus, we are naturally inclined to love darkness and hate the light, and without divine intervention, we will not come into the light (John 3:8, 19, 20). This hardened resistance is rooted in our affections, and only God's grace can change, overcome, and disarm our rebellious disposition. The natural man, without the quickening work of the Holy Spirit, will not come to Christ, as he is at enmity with God and cannot understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14; Rom 8:7). Simply reading or hearing the word of God will not elicit saving faith (1 Thess 1:4, 5) unless the Spirit first "germinates" (so to speak) the seed of the word in the heart, which then infallibly gives rise to our faith and union with Christ. Lydia's story in Acts 16:14 exemplifies this point, as "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Similarly, God must give His people spiritual life and understanding to open their hearts and turn to Christ in faith.

In order to understand the concept of faith, one must recognize that it is beyond the power of unregenerated human nature. Thus, it is solely God who can grant the spiritual ears and eyes necessary to recognize the beauty of Christ as presented in the gospel. God alone can disarm the sinner's hostility, transforming their heart from one of stone to one of flesh. The issue of conversion does not stem from any fault in the Word or God or His Law but instead from man's prideful heart. The humility required to submit to the gospel, a task beyond man's natural capacity, is inspired not by the individual's will but by God's mercy (John 1:13; Rom 9:16). No one can believe the gospel unless it is granted by God (John 6:63, 65), and the Spirit must provide all believers with spiritual life and understanding in order to open their hearts and allow them to respond to Christ in faith.

76. Does God Demand Perfection?

The story of the rich young ruler is one that many people are familiar with. In this story, Jesus tells the man that if he obeys the commandments, he will have eternal life. However, this story was not intended to demonstrate the man's obedience. Instead, it was meant to expose his inability to obey perfectly. The rich young ruler mistakenly believed that he had kept the commandments since his youth. Jesus, knowing his heart and where he would stumble, instructed him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow him. Jesus was telling him that repentance from covetousness and faith in Christ were what he still lacked. However, the man, unable to part from his love of riches, walked away saddened. Jesus then tells his disciples that it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The disciples, recognizing the impossible standard Jesus presented, asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus responded that "what is impossible with man [repentance and faith], is possible with God." The rich young man's desire for wealth and his sin of covetousness outweighed his desire for Christ, and his nature was incapable of rising above his desires.

The Bible is filled with examples of man's inability to reach God's perfect standards. It is a common misconception that man in his natural state seeks after God. Men may seek a god, but not the true God as revealed in scripture. Without the new birth, no one can come into the light of the true God without suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

The Bible teaches, without a doubt, that we act and choose based on our greatest desire, which stems from our nature. As Jesus noted above, it is impossible to do otherwise. Furthermore, the physical death of Adam and his descendants (Gen 2:17) has resulted in other issues with man's unregenerate nature, including his inability to comprehend God, see spiritual things, understand his own heart, direct his own path, free himself from the curse of the Law, receive

the Holy Spirit, understand or receive God's word, give birth into God's family, produce repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, come to Christ, and please God. These consequences of Adam's disobedience on his descendants are referred to by theologians as the total depravity of man. Without a change of disposition, the love of God and His law cannot be the natural man's deepest motive and principle.

In conclusion, the perfect standard set by God is a reminder of our own imperfection, and how much we need the salvation that only Jesus can provide. We cannot achieve this on our own, for our natural desires and actions are based on our nature, which is fallen and unable to please God. But, thanks be to God, He has made a way by grace through faith in Jesus.

77. Does God Elect Us Based on Foreseen Faith?

The foreknowledge of God has been a topic of controversy throughout history. This is due to the fact that many people are ignorant of the meaning and Scriptural scope of the term. Therefore, it is easy for preachers and teachers to deceive their audience with false interpretations of this subject. The only safeguard against this is to be established in the faith through prayerful, diligent study of the Word of God.

When the subject of divine foreordination is expounded, some argue that election is based on the foreknowledge of God of future events. This interpretation means that God foresaw certain individuals who would be more pliable than others and respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit, and therefore predestinated them to salvation. However, this interpretation contradicts the truth of total depravity,

the independency of God, and the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners.

Before defining the term "foreknowledge," it is essential to understand how words are used in Scripture. Many people assume they already know the meaning of a term used in Scripture and are too dilatory to test their assumptions with a concordance. This failure to apply the Holy Spirit's usage of an expression is responsible for much confusion and error.

Foreknowledge is often interpreted to mean "to know beforehand," but it is crucial to find out how the word is used in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. Therefore, the significance of a certain word used in Scripture must be carefully examined by comparing every occurrence of it and studying each separate context.

The term "foreknowledge" is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. "Those He foreknew" (Rom. 8:29) not "those events He foreknew". The individuals under consideration are the subject of the verb "foreknew," and they remain the subject without any additional qualification or characterization. The notion that presumes the anticipation of faith or the anticipation of individuals as believers must add a description that the apostle does not supply. The inquiry must be made as to whether the term "foreknew" possesses an inherent meaning that precludes the need to import extraneous ideas that are not validated within the text. If it does have such a meaning, which is supported by examples in the scripture, then it's not necessary to bring in extra ideas. This idea is plausible, as there's enough evidence to support the interpretation that the phrase "whom he foreknew" is understandable and appropriate without further explanation.

When the term "foreknew" is used in connection with God, it usually signifies to regard a person with favor, affection of covenant love.

God's foreknowledge of a person is not based on any merit or goodness in the person but is solely the result of God's sovereign choice. The usage of the word "foreknew" perhaps necessitates further examination. It is clear from its Scriptural usage that "know" carries the connotation of distinguishing affection and purpose, which comes to be interchangeable with love. This is apparent in the Old Testament, where "know" frequently represents "love," as seen in Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8, 13; 10:15; 23:5; 1 Kings 10:9; 2 Chronicles 9:8; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 11:1; 14:4; and Malachi 1:2. Therefore, "foreknowing" means to know with a distinct regard and love from before the creation of the world (cf. Ephesians 1:4), with no further qualification needed for the persons.

Furthermore, Ephesians 1:5 supports this interpretation. It is evident that the theme of the two passages is identical. When Paul states, "In love having predestinated us unto adoption," he implies that predestination arises from love and is dependent upon it. Romans 8:29 expresses the same connection when foreknowledge is interpreted according to the principles of Scripture and the context of the passage. Additionally, it emphasizes that this love and predestination extend to the conformity of the elect to the image of God's Son. These two verses do not duplicate each other's ideas. Instead, love highlights the electing grace, and predestination focuses on the high destiny to which those selected by electing love are appointed. This order of thought is similar to Ephesians 1:4, which declares that election in Christ is for the purpose of being holy and blameless. Electing love always has a goal commensurate in magnitude with the love that motivates it and is never fruitless.

The concept of foreknowledge is often used in connection with God's election of individuals for salvation. God, according to His sovereign good pleasure, singled out certain individuals to be recipients of His distinguishing favors. Therefore, He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith. False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the cause of His election to salvation. However, God's election is the cause, and our believing in Christ is the effect.

God's foreknowledge, therefore, is not a mere intellectual apprehension of future events. It is an act of the divine will, whereby God regards a person with favor and grants that person the gift of faith. God's foreknowledge is not conditioned upon any foreseen faith or good works on the part of the individual. Rather, it is solely the result of God's sovereign choice.

In conclusion, the meaning and Scriptural scope of the term "foreknowledge" is often misunderstood. It is important to understand that foreknowledge is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions but always refers to persons. When the term is used in connection with God, it signifies to regard a person with favor, one He sets his covenant love and affection on. God's foreknowledge is not based on any merit or goodness in the person, but is solely the result of God's sovereign choice. Therefore, God's foreknowledge is not a mere intellectual apprehension of future events, but an act of the divine will, whereby God regards a person with favor and grants that person the gift of faith. It is important for preachers and teachers to be established in the faith through prayerful, diligent study of the Word of God, so as not to deceive their audience with false interpretations of this subject.

78. How Does the Doctrine of Divine Providence Relate to the Problem of Evil and Suffering in the World?

The problem of evil and suffering in the world is a complex issue that has challenged thinkers and theologians for centuries. At the heart of this problem is the question of how a loving and all-powerful God can allow such pain and suffering to exist in the world. The doctrine of divine providence, which affirms God's sovereign control over all

things, is often invoked as an answer to this problem. But how does this doctrine relate to the reality of evil and suffering?

One biblical passage that addresses this issue is found in Luke 13:4-5, where Jesus responds to a question about a tragic event that occurred in Jerusalem. A tower had fallen and killed eighteen people, and people were wondering if these individuals were more sinful than others. Jesus responds by saying, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

In this passage, Jesus negates several assumptions that people often make when confronted with suffering. First, he says that suffering is not proportional to sinfulness. In other words, just because someone experiences tragedy or hardship, it does not mean that they are more guilty than others. Second, Jesus says that tragedy is not always a sign of God's judgment for a particular sin. It is easy to assume that when something bad happens, God must be punishing someone because they were particularly bad. But Jesus reminds us that this is not always the case. Third, bad things can happen to anyone, not just so-called "bad people" since we all fall under that description. Finally, Jesus reminds us that we do not have the right to make judgments about others, but we should use it as an opportunity of self-reflection.

So, what does this mean for the doctrine of divine providence? The Reformed tradition affirms that God is sovereign over all things, including evil and suffering. This does not mean that God is the author of evil or that He delights in causing pain and suffering. Rather, it means that God is able to bring good out of evil and to use even the most tragic events for His purposes.

One way to understand this is to consider the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and he spent years in prison before eventually rising to a position of power

in Egypt. When he was reunited with his brothers, he said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). In other words, God used the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers to bring about a greater good.

This does not mean that we should be indifferent to evil and suffering in the world. Rather, it means that we can trust in God's goodness and His ability to bring good out of even the most difficult situations. It also means that we should respond to suffering with compassion and love, seeking to alleviate the pain and bring comfort to those who are hurting.

In conclusion, the doctrine of divine providence provides a framework for understanding how God can be sovereign over all things, including evil and suffering. While we may never fully understand why God allows certain things to happen, we can trust in His goodness and His ability to bring good out of even the most tragic circumstances. As followers of Christ, we are called to respond to suffering with love and compassion, seeking to be agents of healing and hope in a broken world.

79. How may I, an ill-deserving sinner, draw near to God in whom there is no sin, and look upon His face in peace?

As a sinner, drawing near to God who is perfectly holy and without sin may seem impossible. And it is, if we trust in our own righteousness. In our own (de)merit, we can no more approach God than we can approach the sun without being burned. However, the Scriptures teach that through faith in Jesus Christ, sinners can be made right with God and have access to Him. This faith is a gift from

God, and it is through this faith that sinners are justified and reconciled to God.

Justification is the act of God declaring sinners to be righteous because of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This means that even though sinners are still sinners, they are considered righteous in God's sight because of Christ's perfect obedience and sacrificial death on their behalf. This is why Christians often say that they are saved by grace through faith.

Reconciliation is the act of God restoring the broken relationship between sinners and Himself. Through Christ's death and resurrection, sinners are reconciled to God and given access to Him. The rebel is made a son and given a seat at his table. This means that sinners can draw near to God in prayer and worship, knowing that they have been forgiven and fully accepted by Him.

So, to draw near to God and look upon His face in peace, one must have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior from the guilt and power of sin. This faith is a gift from God, and it is through this faith that sinners are justified and reconciled to God. It is by Christ that sinners can approach God with confidence, knowing that they are forgiven and accepted.

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