

Notes on some theological subjects related to
CALVINISM & ARMINIANISM¹

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. By this term we refer to "...*the supreme rulership of God.*"² Isaiah 46:9-11 illustrates what we mean when talk about God being sovereign over all: "*Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.*"

"*Your God is altogether too human,*' wrote Luther to the famous Renaissance humanist scholar Erasmus. I feel certain the great Dutch scholar was greatly offended at such an accusation, but history and a casual investigation of Scripture reveal the accusation to be true. In our day, J.B. Phillips has hurled the same accusation at mankind in the title of his book, '*Your God Is Too Small.*' With this thought in mind, I want to ask the question: *Who rules the world in which you live—the world you read about on the front page of our newspaper? How big is your God? ...*

"**The sovereignty of God is not a popular subject. It never has been and never will be.** Since the beginning of creation, the creature has sought to usurp the place of the Creator. This was seen in Lucifer, the angel of light who tried to become like God and take upon himself the prerogatives of God. For this reason, he was cast out of heaven and a great multitude of angels with him. It was this same sin that brought the whole human race into its present disgraceful and depraved condition. Man wanted to usurp the authority of God and be the god of his own life...the God of modern man [is] a very little, limited God. '*Either God is not good or He is not powerful,*' said one unbeliever, '*otherwise the world could not be in the mess it's in.*' ...May I suggest an alternative? The reason for the mess the world is in is not because God is not good, or not able. The problem is man. He is not good or able."³

D. James Kennedy has written that this is not necessarily a popular doctrine, as evidenced by the following:

(1) Satan chaffed against this idea and tried to take over the creator's position. cf. Ezek. 28:13-17 & Isa. 14:12-15

(2) Man has also opposed this truth and has sought to take over the creator's position. cf. Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-5

Some people believe that God can only do what man permits. I do not believe that this is correct or Scriptural. A natural question that arises then is "*Where is man's free will?*" A separate section will deal with this question in somewhat more depth, but I might say right here that I believe that:

***Man is free to do what he PLEASES, but,
Man is not free to do what he OUGHT***⁴

¹ These notes originally existed in mimeograph form & were written and compiled while I served as youth pastor at Bible Baptist Church, N. Madison, Ohio. The various sections were completed from 18-28 July, 1978. I consulted a variety of sources at the time, but many of the statements, ideas & much of the format for the first four sections was taken from and based on material I found in D. James Kennedy's "*Truths That Transform*" (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, NJ, 1974). I began retyping these notes into our computer in Goroka, Papua New Guinea in May of 2003, in response to a request from one of our sons. Unfortunately it took me a lot longer to do that than I had planned. In retyping them I was tempted to rewrite and rework them. But since my views in this area of theology had remained essentially unchanged over the intervening 35 years, I decided to leave them as they were originally written. The only exception to that has been the addition of several direct quotes from Kennedy's book, the correcting of some typographical & grammatical errors in the originals, & an occasional slight quotes & the rewording of a few things, in an effort to make it a bit more readable. -Mike Edwards, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, West Indies, May, 2008. Bolding, underlining & anything appearing in brackets has been added by me.-mwe (rev. July 2016, Madison, Ohio)

² Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1971 ed., p. 1041.

³ Kennedy, *Truths That Transform*, pp. 15-16

⁴ Since he is bound by sin.

“Some believe that God submits and man permits; that God can do only that which man allows Him. How ludicrous to think that Almighty God, who by His very Word caused the galaxies of the universe to leap into being, should be governed by His creation—like some mighty mouse who lifts his finger to the Almighty Infinite God and says, ‘*Thus far and no further shalt Thou go.*’ Blasphemy! And unfortunately many Christians cry with the humanists, ‘*I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul.*’”⁵

“Many people see the world as a driverless chariot, horses running wild, reins flapping in the wind, about to plummet off the edge of the road into the abyss. The Scripture presents a God who has the reins of this world firmly in His hands, who is in absolute control of all things, who is working out His perfect plan for the world. The Scripture says, ‘...My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure...yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, and I will also do it’ (Isa. 46:9-11).”⁶

In returning to our subject of God’s sovereignty, I would now call your attention to several areas in which we see God’s sovereignty demonstrated:

A. GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IN GENERAL EVENTS.

1. According to God, there is no such thing as luck or fate. –Prov. 16:33
2. Even lightning doesn’t strike by chance, but is under His control. –Job 36:32 (NASV)

B. GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IN BIBLICAL HISTORY.

1. Rulers of countries are under God’s control. –Prov. 21:1
2. Cyrus, a heathen king, was controlled by God to do God’s will, all the while believing he was making free choices. –Isa. 44:28-45:8
3. An arrow that was just shot up into the air at “random” was directed by God into the joints of Ahab’s armor to kill him because God had said he would die! –I Kings 22:28, 34.
4. A people (The Egyptians) who had hated and put into slavery the Jews, were caused to have a complete change of heart and nature so that they were kind to them. –Ex. 11:7
5. The Egyptians not only had a change of nature toward the Jews, they had a complete change of mind and all of them decided to give all their wealth to these people, who only weeks before had been their lowly slaves. –Ex. 12:35-36.
6. Three times per year, according to God’s commands, every male in Israel went up to Jerusalem for certain feast days. Yet God so controlled their enemies who lived nearby, that those enemies had no desire to attack the villages of the Jews, or take their wives or children or lands during those times! –Ex. 34:23-24.
7. The things which Joseph’s brothers thought they were doing of their own free will were nonetheless under the control of God, in order to preserve the Jews as a nation. –Gen. 50:20

⁵ Kennedy, p. 17

⁶ Kennedy, p. 17

8. God's Sovereignty is seen in His choosing of Abram out of Ur, while the rest were left in heathenism and darkness. –Gen. 12
9. We are told that God chose Israel-excluding all other nations. –Dt. 7:7
10. We are told that God chose Jacob over Esau for blessings, even though neither had done anything good or bad yet (i.e. it wasn't based on their behavior). –Rom. 9:11-13
11. We are told that even the wrath of man praises God. –Ps. 76:10

C. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN HIS DEALINGS WITH MEN.

1. A man (Peter) is told what he will do, and then does it though vowing he wouldn't, and all the while he felt he was making free choices! –Mk. 14:30
2. We are told that God controls the free acts of men. –Phil. 2:13
3. Jesus illustrated God's sovereign choice (notice the end result!). –Lk. 4:25-27
4. Elijah was sent to only one widow. –Lk. 4:25-26 cf. I Kings 17:1; 18:1
5. Conversion depends on God, not on man's permission. –Acts 9:1-7. Some people believe God can't convert a soul unless that soul gives Him permission. I wish they would ask the Apostle Paul, that great hater and despiser of Christ and His Church, who, while on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, was suddenly cast to the ground by God and converted. The Bible also says that God opened the heart of Lydia and caused her to attend unto the things that were spoken by Paul."⁷ (see #6 below)
6. We are told that "*the LORD opened Lydia's heart*" so that she could be saved. –Acts 16:14
7. We are told that God chooses whom He will for blessing. –Rom. 9:16, 18
8. We are told that *NO man comes to the Father, except the Father draw him.* –Jn. 6:37, 44

God is sovereign in our birth. He didn't ask us where we wanted to be born! As Kennedy remarks: "*Consider the matter of your own physical birth. What did you have to do with it? This is a perfect example of the absolute sovereignty of God; you were not consulted in the matter! No one said, 'Do you want to be sir or madam? Would you like to have black hair, blond, or perhaps no hair at all? Would you like your eyes to be brown or blue? Would you like to have white or black skin, or would red or yellow suit you better? And where would you like to live, in Fort Lauderdale, Hong Kong or maybe in Zaire?' Nothing of the sort! You were not consulted at all. The sovereign Lord God of heaven and earth brought you into existence without so much as a how-do-you-feel-about-it!*"⁸

⁷ Kennedy, p. 19

⁸ Kennedy, p. 49

“Charles Spurgeon said that [mankind] would have a God who enters into His workroom and creates the universe and a God who enters into the almonry to bestow His alms. They would have a God who upholds the pillars of the earth, but when God would enter into His throne chair, then the world would gnash its teeth and shake its head and fist against God. But [believers] know that the only God there is, is the God who is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth; the God who will do all of His pleasure and whose purposes shall come to pass.”⁹

A key point in regard to God’s sovereignty: While I believe strongly in God’s sovereignty, **that in NO WAY lessens my responsibility to witness and evangelize-the reason being that God has ordained the MEANS as well as the ENDS in salvation [Rom. 10:14].** Believers are the means God has designed to reach others with the everlasting gospel. To do nothing to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ is a serious misunderstanding of such doctrines as the sovereignty of God, and is properly known as hyper-Calvinism.

II. FREE WILL vs. TOTAL INABILITY. At the beginning of this section some preliminary comments are necessary:

“First of all, to ask if man has a free will is to put the question in an improper form. It’s more accurate to talk about a free agent or free soul, because the will of man never acts independently from the rest of his faculties. Man’s will isn’t some sort of internal gyroscope moving and turning any way it pleases. Rather it is an integral part of the human being—the human soul. What is the soul of man? **Man’s soul consists of intellect** [mind], **emotions** [heart], **and volition** [will], or more simply, his **mind, heart, and will.** Therefore, when man decides or wills an action, it comes first from his mind. Then because he has some knowledge, he gets a feeling—human affections and appetites come into play. These two then act on any give issue and tell the will what to do. The will, *without exception*, does what the mind and heart tell it to do. Man’s will, therefore, never acts contrarily to his mind and heart.”¹⁰

“The second problem with the question, ‘Does man have free will?’ is one of semantics. What exactly do we mean by free will? Do we mean: Does he have the ability to choose whatever he **wants** to do? The answer is: **Yes, he does!** This is an inalienable contribution of God to the human soul—that man always and only does what he pleases. Man is a self-motivating agent. He can originate action and choose whatever he pleases on any given occasion...

“Dr. John Gerstner writes that it is impossible to force the will of man. To have a forced free will would be contrary to the meaning of the word. He illustrates this by saying that if he could place a book in your hands, point a gun to your temple, and say, ‘*You will read this book or I’ll splatter your brains all over the wall!*’ **that would still not force your will** because you would then come to the place of making a decision. Your mind would feed certain facts to your consciousness, emotions, and affections as to how much you love or didn’t love life. Quite likely you would come to the decision to read the book!

“...Under other circumstances, with things more significant than merely reading a book, there have been Christians who have come to other conclusions. In effect, Nero said to millions of Christians: ‘*You will renounce Jesus Christ and blaspheme His name or you will wish someone would blow out your brains. You will be peeled, boiled, fed to lions, and put in sacks with snakes and vipers.*’ Faced with such a choice, hundreds of thousands of Christians made a decision! Their minds fed them certain facts about this life and eternity and most thought it was better to lose this life and gain eternity, than to gain a few more years on earth and lose eternal life. Their affections went out to Jesus Christ whom they loved more than life itself.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 21

¹⁰ *ibid*, pp. 23-24

Their decision was: *'Bring on the lions!'* But that was their choice! It wasn't forced! Without exception, man does whatever he pleases in light of the facts and feelings involved...

"I said that man is free in every case to do whatever he *pleases*. But it doesn't necessarily follow that man is free to do what he *ought* to do! Now, what ought man to do? Man ought to love God, repent of his sins, by faith embrace Jesus Christ. Man ought to love the commandments of God, desire a holy life, love purity, holiness, and righteousness. Man ought to strive for all these things. But the Bible makes it clear that every man is not free to do what he ought to do...

"The Bible tells us that God made man—Adam and Eve—and gave them the power of contrary choice. He also gave them the ability to do that which was good, to do what they ought to. And they ought to have obeyed God and kept the commandments He gave them! Notice: They had the ability to do good as well as evil. **This was man in a state of *innocency*, his first state**, and without the experience of evil until he made that first fatal choice...

"The Bible describes man's second state as being in *sin*. Because Adam sinned, he plunged the whole human race into sin and death in sin, which means all of us are born with his fallen nature. After first shattering and marring the image of God, Adam then brought forth creatures in his own fallen image. Some people believe man is born in the same condition as was Adam. This is not true. Adam was born in *innocency*; thereafter all men were born in *sin*...

"The Bible describes man in sin as *the natural man*, with a natural desire to sin. *This doesn't mean he goes around robbing banks!* **This means that whatever he does is sin.** The Bible says that the plowing of the wicked is sin [Prov. 21:4]. When he goes out and works at a job, it is sin. When he eats his dinner, it is sin because he's getting strength to continue his rebellion against God. In his natural state of sin, man's heart, emotions, mind, motives, ends, goals, everything is contrary to God...

"The things which the natural man does may be good in themselves. He may give a million dollars to charity, but does it for the wrong reasons and wrong motives—perhaps to get a deduction on his income tax or get the praise of men. Jesus said, *'Ye seek the praise of men rather than the praise of God.'* (John 12:43) Man often has a false idea that in some way he's going to buy himself some real estate in heaven. The Bible says: *'They that are in the flesh cannot please God'* (Rom. 8:8). Therefore it is impossible for the natural man to do good things without first knowing Christ, without first being born anew of the Spirit, redeemed."¹¹

Man has the ability to choose freely to do whatever he *wants*. But man does not have the ability to choose freely to do what he *ought*.

Perhaps an illustration will help: **A man cuts off his arms so he can't work. Now he says that the government should pay him because he can't work. He is confusing being *unable* and being *responsible*.** Yes he is *unable* to work, but he is *responsible* for being unable i.e. it's his own fault.

In like manner, man ought to love God, repent from sin, love God's commandments, desire to be holy, love purity and righteousness, etc. But man doesn't! He is *unable* to do good. But that doesn't destroy his *responsibility* since it is his own fault (i.e. Man is born a sinner and lives as one. He's a sinner by nature and by choice).

By contrast, Adam and Eve had the power to do what they *ought*. We call their condition "*innocency*" (see above). But unfortunately they chose to do evil. We all were "*in*" Adam, and so fell with him. And it's no

¹¹ Kennedy, pp. 24-25

use to say, “Well, if I had been there things would have been different.” We were there in Adam. Adam was “*the best of the bunch*,” if you will pardon the expression.

Since that time, all men and women born into this world are fallen, and thus do not possess the ability to choose good in and of themselves. “The Bible...says that the natural man is *at enmity against God* [Rom. 8:7]; that he is *not subject to the law of God*, neither indeed can he be. The Bible says that man is *dead in his sins*; he loves unrighteousness rather than righteousness; he is *bound* to his sin. The question now is: **Does the natural man have the freedom to choose to do good, to choose Jesus Christ, to come to God? The answer is unequivocally: No!** Many Protestants talk about the natural man as if he had the power to simply cease being unrighteous and ungodly and start being a godly man! This was a Romanist teaching and not that of Luther or the other Reformers. One of Luther’s greatest books was ‘*The Bondage of the Will*.’ It was Erasmus, the rationalist, who wrote on the freedom of the will. Luther said that man was bound in sin and controlled by his own passions and desires and could not cease from these to do good.”¹²

Consider the following sample of Bible verses which describe natural man and his condition:

- a) “*Ye will not come...*” – John 5:40.
- b) “*If the Son shall make you free...*” which implies that we are bound – John 8:36
- c) We are described in the Bible as being “*dead in trespasses and sins...*” Dead men do not respond. They do not speak. They do not do *anything*! Why? Because they’re *dead*! – Eph. 2:1-5, 12
- d) Man is described here as “*dead...needing life*” – John 5:21-25
- e) Man is seen and described as *naturally sinful* in practice – Genesis 6:5
- f) Man here is described as “*blind*” and “*dumb*” – Mark 4:11-ff
- g) “*Bound...*” – II Timothy 2:25
- h) We are told that the natural man possesses *a mind darkened to the gospel* – I Corinthians 1:18
- i) The pleasure seeker is described as “*dead while she liveth...*” – I Timothy 5:6
- j) We are told that the wicked are “*estranged from the womb*” – Psalm 58:3
- k) Paul says, “*In my flesh dwelleth no good thing*” – Romans 7:18
- l) Jeremiah asks a rhetorical question: “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard his spots, so can those accustomed to doing evil, change and do good.*” – Jeremiah 13:23
- m) All mankind is said to be “*dead in sin...*” – Romans 5:12
- n) Job asks, “*Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!*” – Job 14:4 (NASV)
- o) Scripture teaches that man in his natural state does *not* receive the things of God, to him they are foolishness. – I Corinthians 2:14
- p) Man’s heart is described as “*deceitful*” and “*desperately wicked...*” – Jeremiah 17:9
- q) We are told that “*none do good...*” – Psalm 53:3
- r) Jesus gives a list of some of the sins that come from the natural heart. It’s not a pretty picture. – Matthew 15:19

¹² *ibid*, pp. 26-27

- s) David says that we are “*conceived in sin*” and “*shaped in iniquity*” – Psalm 51:5
- t) Proverbs says that even “*the plowing of the wicked is sin*” (because as an unsaved man plows, he used his gains to continue his rebellion against the most high God). – Proverbs 21:4
- u) Those “*in the flesh cannot please God*” – Romans 8:8
- v) Paul says the natural man “*is at enmity (war) with God*” – Romans 8:7
- w) We are told that “*men love darkness...*” (they do not naturally love light) – John 3:19
- x) We are told that to commit sin shows that you are its servant. Thus all are servants of sin, not righteousness. – John 8:34
- y) “*None seek after God...*” – Romans 3:10, 11; Psalm 14:2, 3
- z) Jesus said that “*the truth shall make you free*” i.e. we are not free but bound, prior to coming to Christ. – John 8:32
- aa) Believers are told they “*were the servants of sin...*” – Romans 6:17, 20-21

So what can we conclude from verses such as those above? That the natural man does not have the power to cease being unrighteous and ungodly, apart from God’s grace.

Kennedy says: “*Put a bottle and a Bible in front of an alcoholic. He’s free to do whatever he wants; the trouble is, we know what he always wants! Invite a dope addict to a heroin party or a prayer meeting; he’s free to do whatever he wants, but the problem is what he wants! Give a box of chocolates to a glutton; he’s free to eat them or not—but is he really free? No! He’s controlled by his appetite. He’s bound and therefore the servant of his own emotions, affections, desires, and passions. Let me point out that **he could choose to eliminate any one of those sins, but he could not choose to make himself holy.** Because even if he got rid of his alcohol, dope, or gluttony, he would still be an unholy sinner, incapable of choosing Jesus Christ. Why is he in this condition? His mind and heart are darkened by sin. They deceive him. **He is at enmity with God...What is needed is not reformation, but regeneration by God.**”¹³*

The four states of man’s condition, as portrayed in Scripture:

- 1) **The state of Innocency** – able to do good or bad.
- 2) **The state of Sin** – able to do bad alone.
- 3) **The state of Grace** – able to do both good and bad.
- 4) **The state of Glory** – sealed to do only good.

An important point regarding the subject of “*Freewill vs. Total Inability*”:

Just because I believe man is bound in sin does not mean I don’t earnestly reason, woo, and appeal to men when I witness to them. The Old Testament prophets reasoned with people, and I should too! For instance, the prophet Ezekiel pleaded with the people of his day, asking “*Why will ye die?*” (Ezek. 18:31). He was reasoning with the people with great passion and conviction. We too should reason with the unsaved, beseech them to repent, and appeal to them to “*look and live*” (Isa. 45:22) i.e. trust Christ as Lord & Savior. All the while we realize that unless God does a work of grace in their hearts, they will never come to Him. **Keep a scriptural balance in this area. *This biblical truth should in no way make you careless, unconcerned and cold in your presentation of the gospel to the lost.*** We should share the gospel and appeal to men with a genuine, Holy Spirit inspired fervor and urgency, praying and trusting God for results that only *He* can give!

¹³ Kennedy, *ibid.*

*“Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature’s night.
 Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray;
 I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”*

-Charles Wesley

III. GENERAL & EFFECTUAL CALLS.

A. GOD EXTENDS TO ALL A “GENERAL” INVITATION TO COME TO HIM i.e. a “general call”

- His general pleasure is to save! – Ezekiel 33:11
- “All day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” – Romans 10:21
- “...ye will not come to me that ye might have life.” – John 5:40
- God warns us to make our “calling and election sure...” – II Peter 1:10
- Jesus said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will never cast out.” – John 6:37. Some say, “I don’t know if I’m one of the elect or called.” Ask them if they desire to come to Christ for salvation. If they do, then they should flee to Him, for He’ll not turn them away. The very fact that they desire to come to Christ is evidence that God has begun a work in their heart. Without that, they wouldn’t even desire to come.
- “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...” – Isaiah 55:1. Note though, that this offer is for the thirsty. However the natural man does not thirst for God.
- “And ye shall seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart.” – Jeremiah 29:13. Again though, unless God does a work in our heart, we won’t naturally seek after God (cf. Rom. 3:10-11, etc.).

B. GOD EXTENDS TO SOME AN “EFFECTUAL” CALL. “Effectual means that which effectuates whatever it attempts to do. It is that which works, is successful, and succeeds in doing that which the author intends. This is what God means when He says: ‘(And) my word...shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.’ What purpose shall it accomplish? Shall it accomplish the purpose of the people that hear it? No, it shall accomplish the purpose for which God sent it. It is effectual to do His work.”¹⁴

- “**Whom** He called, them He also justified...” – Romans 8:30.
- “Many are called, but few are chosen.” – Matthew 22:14.
- “All that the Father giveth me **shall** come to me...” – John 6:37.
- “He shall see His seed...and shall be satisfied.” – Isaiah 53:10, 11.
- None can come to Christ “**except the Father...draw him...**” – John 6:44.
- Paul attributes the work of salvation to God alone: “**But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace to reveal His Son in me...**” – Galatians 1:15-16.

¹⁴ Kennedy, p. 44

- Peter says believers are “**a chosen generation** ...that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” – I Peter 2:9.
- “God...**who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus...**” – I Peter 5:10.
- Paul says God chose us to salvation: “...**God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto He called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” – II Thessalonians 2:13-14.
- Throughout the Gospels we find the Lord Jesus speaking parables that some understood and others didn't. The Lord's explanation to His disciples about the fairness of this was, “*it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*” – Matthew 13:11.

C. ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON “EFFECTUAL CALLING”:

1. The **AGENT** of effectual calling: **The Holy Spirit.**
2. The **INSTRUMENT** of effectual calling: **The Word of God.**
3. The **OBJECTS** of effectual calling: **Unregenerate sinners.**¹⁵

The question naturally comes up: Why do some endorse and others reject this call from God? The *Arminian* says the difference is found in man. The *Calvinist* says the difference is to be found in God! cf. **I Corinthians 4:7**: “*Who maketh thee to differ from another?*” If the difference is in us, then we can boast that we received the gospel because we had a softer, more receptive heart than others. cf. **II Corinthians 10:17**: “*But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*”

TWO MAIN PROBLEMS WITH THE ARMINIAN VIEW:

1) It misunderstands the nature of man. (see the previous section “*Free Will vs. Total Inability*” and passages such as John 8:36; Job 14:4; etc.). “The first problem with the Arminian view is that man is not free to do what he ought. Let me make this clear: **Man is always free to do what he wants; that's why he's responsible for everything he does. But he doesn't have the power to do what he ought.** He ought to love God with all his heart, strength, mind and soul, but he cannot change his character any more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots (Jer. 13:23). He is bound in his sins and, until Christ breaks the shackles and sets the prisoner free, he will remain forever bound in his own sin.”¹⁶

2) It misunderstands the nature of God. God says in Psalm 50:21 “*You thought that I was altogether like you.*” That was their big mistake. “The second problem with the Arminian viewpoint is the problem of God. They say that God offers all men the choice of eternal life; therefore, it's up to man to decide whether he chooses it or not. God, they say, is trying desperately to save everybody in the world, but it's up to man to determine whether or not he's going to let Him. They picture God as saying: ‘*It is My will that everybody in the world should be saved. But, alas, in the end I must say not My will but thine be done. For thou, O man, art the sovereign lord of this world, not I!*’ **This is the humanist viewpoint and he likes it because it elevates his own will...**

“Some people suppose, because God says He ‘*would that all men should be saved*’ and ‘*is not willing that any should perish*’, [that] He's actively trying to save everybody in the world... If God were actively trying to do something and was prevented from doing it, then He is not God. It is also false from the multiple statements of Scripture which state God is absolutely sovereign over all things, including the spirit, will, and heart of man. The Bible says ‘*He doeth all of His pleasure among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth; He stretcheth forth His hand and there is none that can say unto Him, ‘What doeth thou?’ or turn His hand back*’ [Dan. 4:35]. As Romans 9:19 says: ‘*For who hath resisted his will?*’ The

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 45

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 47

answer to that is nobody—no one has ever resisted the will of God. The Bible says that He will perform all of His purpose and that not one purpose of His will be restrained...God could be equally just and merciful if He never saved anyone. **Spurgeon said that the amazing thing is not that everybody is not saved, but that anybody is saved...**¹⁷ [cf. Eph. 1:9, etc.]

- **It makes for a helpless God.** Is God going to say, “*Since I willed all to be saved and wasn’t willing that any should perish, I guess it’s not My will, but thine be done*”
- **If God willed that all should be saved, they would be.** End of story. Full stop! After all, Scripture says, “*Who can resist His will?*” (cf. Ephesians 1:9; Romans 9:19; etc.).

An important observation: Once again, in this subject area as with the previous ones, **a scriptural balance is to be sought.** Just because I believe that only some individuals will come to Christ, **it does not mean that I slack up, or carelessly and unenthusiastically present the gospel to the people that I witness to and come in contact with.** *On the contrary,* I plead with them to come to Christ. I can use a verse like Revelation 22:17 which says “*whosoever will may come*” and implore every person I meet, to take Christ up on His offer of salvation and flee to Him. All the while I know that unless God is doing a work in that individual’s heart, they will never come. But since I don’t know who will come and who won’t, I can and should extend the gospel invitation equally sincerely to every person that I meet, leaving the results with God.

One final thought: “*Would you like to know if you are one of God’s elect? Come to Christ and you will know you are because you never would have come otherwise. ‘Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ...It is not the lost sheep that finds the Shepherd.*”¹⁸

IV. PREDESTINATION & ELECTION.

Whenever this subject is discussed, there tends to be some “*hot*” debate. Since that is so, I would like to establish one important point at the very outset: **This doctrine, properly understood, will not deaden evangelistic zeal at all.** Most of the greatest soul-winners the world has ever known throughout church history have been Calvinists in their theology (e.g. C.H. Spurgeon, George Whitfield, George Mueller, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox, Martin Luther, William Carey, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Asahel Nettleton, etc., etc.)

A key text: Romans 8:29-30. This verse clearly teaches that God saves whom He predestinates (elects, chooses).

A person’s view of man’s natural unregenerate condition will determine his view on election. The biblical description of man makes clear that man is basically bad (see the earlier section on *free will vs. total inability*, as well as verses like Jer. 17:9; Ps. 53:3; Mt. 15:19; Eph. 2:1; etc.). Even Arminians acknowledge that man is a sinner. However while they believe man is certainly sinful and sick, they think he still has the ability of his own self, to respond to God, even though the Bible describes the unsaved man as “*dead in trespasses and sins*”(Eph. 2:1, 5). The crux of the matter revolves around the question of how bad off is the natural man? Scripture teaches that man (due to sin), is totally unable to do come to God, do righteous acts or seek after God. So then, if anyone is ever to be saved, someone else outside of himself is going to have to step into the picture and help him. That, the Calvinist says, God does, waking some to their lost condition through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Logically speaking, if man’s condition is as bad as Scripture seems to describe it (see earlier material), then someone outside of himself must do the

¹⁷ Kennedy, pp. 47-48

¹⁸ Kennedy, p. 50

work of redemption. That does not mean that man has no part to play. The Bible is clear that every unsaved man needs to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. The point is, man is never going to want to do that unless God first initiates the work and wakes man up, spiritually speaking, to realize his lost condition and desire to come to Christ.

Man, especially unregenerate man, hates this doctrine. The reason is because man wants to feel that he is the captain of his fate and the master of his soul (cf. Satan in Isaiah 14 and Adam & Eve in Genesis 2 & 3).

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES:

There is an elect group:

- “*for the elect’s sake...*” – Matthew 24:22.
- “*if possible...he would deceive the very elect...*” – Matthew 24:24.
- “*He will gather His elect from the four corners of the earth...*” – Matthew 24:31.
- “*Who shall bring anything to the charge of God’s elect?*” – Romans 8:33-34.
- “*I endure all things for the elect’s sake...*” – 2 Timothy 2:10.
- “*...according to the faith of God’s elect...*” – Titus 1:1.
- “*knowing, beloved, your election...*” I Thessalonians 1:4.

A natural question: “*How do I know if I’m one of the elect?*” **Answer:** Flee to Christ for salvation. You couldn’t, and you wouldn’t even want to, if you weren’t elect!

Some key verses:

- “*...He predestinated us...*” – Ephesians 1:5, 11.
- “*...He predestined us...*” – Romans 8:29-30.
- Many of the teachings that Christ gave, upon which the understanding of them hinged a man’s salvation, weren’t understood by many. But notice Christ’s explanation for why things were “*hid from the wise and revealed unto babes...because it seemed good in God’s sight.*” – Matthew 11:25-26.
- The Bible says that believers’ names “*were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.*” cf. Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8 (see below), etc.

Whenever we hear predestination attacked, it is usually with the statement, “***I cannot believe God would predestine people to Hell!***” But that assumes that man is neutral to begin with, which he isn’t. Man is sinful and if left to himself will end up in hell, ***not*** because God sentenced him to go there, but because he ***deserves*** to go there, because he’s a sinner. “*The Bible never says someone is predestined to Hell. The word is only used of heaven, grace, and glory.*”¹⁹

Some significant passages relating to God’s choosing certain ones:

- “***Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should bring forth fruit...***” – John 15:15, 16.
- “***Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling...***” – II Timothy 2:1-10
- “***...and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.***” – Acts 13:48.

¹⁹ D. James Kennedy, “*Truths that Transform,*” p. 39

- “God’s sovereign choice in national blessing is illustrated in Romans 9.
- The Bible says certain ones have a kingdom “*prepared from the foundation of the world.*” – Matthew 25:34.
- **God chose** those who believed – II Thessalonians 2:13.
- “*unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.*” – Rev. 1:5. Notice the “*us*”
- “*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (Antichrist) whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” – Rev. 13:8 (Unfortunately this translation from the KJV is unclear. Ryrie comments: “Antichrist’s rule will extend to all except believers whose names have been written in *the book of life*. The phrase *from the foundation of the world* relates to the writing of the names, not to the crucifixion (cf. 17:8).” Note the much clearer NASV reading: “*And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose names has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.*”
- “*and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world...*” – Rev. 17:8.

We see God sovereignly electing only one nation out of the whole world to be His people (see below).

All the others were neglected. Yet, how often do we hear protests that that was unfair of God?

- “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth...*” – Amos 3:2.
- “*He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.*” – Psalm 147:20.
- “*...the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth...*” – Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

“**[The doctrine of predestination] gives great security and courage to those who believe it...those that live and move in God and know that He sovereignly controls every atom of this universe, these people are filled with good courage and confidence. Predestination extinguishes fear and it is interesting to note that those who held to it were afraid of no one. It brings men low before God but it lifts Him high, and makes them strong before kings. Thus Mary Queen of Scots could say that she feared the face of John Knox more than ten thousand ships.**”²⁰ At Knox’s death, the one giving the eulogy famously said, “*Here lies a man that neither feared nor flattered any flesh.*” Where did he get his fearlessness? From an unshakeable belief in God’s sovereignty and His predestinating will.

An important observation: A proper understanding of this doctrine will lead not to a feeling of pride over being a child of God, but rather to a humility and gratefulness for having been chosen, though utterly undeserving! Anyone who says that because they believe in election they thus see no need to go out and evangelize, completely misunderstands this truth. While it is true that God has elected certain ones to salvation, **we must bear in mind the fact that God has ordained the means as well as the ends in salvation, and we are the means** (through witnessing) by which those who *are* to be saved, *will* be saved! cf. Romans 10:14-17.

²⁰ Kennedy, p. 40