

Part 2, Chosen But Free

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This passage clearly states that certain individuals are called according to God's purpose and are objects of God's foreknowledge and predestination. It goes on to affirm that those thus designated *will* achieve the destiny divinely intended. And God is orchestrating everything to work together toward that end.

God has a purpose, and He has sovereignly chosen some for that purpose. By implication, others have not been chosen. Those He chose, He foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those thus chosen will ultimately fulfill God's divinely decreed destiny. It will happen exactly as proposed by God. To that end, the chosen ones can safely assume that whatever occurs in their lives—*whatever happens*—is part of God's divine plan and serves His divine purpose. Nothing lies outside His control, not even those who reject Him. Everything serves His divine purpose and contributes to His plan to bring the believer to perfection.

Free Will

How can one be chosen sovereignly by God and still decide to accept Christ as a matter of free will? That's a good question. I will reference a book by Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*. Geisler does an excellent job of explaining this subject.

As we continue our study, we will explore three perspectives. First, we will refer to one viewpoint as "extreme Calvinism," which is also known as "hyper-Calvinism." It's worth mentioning that John Calvin himself was not considered an extreme Calvinist. An extreme Calvinist asserts that God

foreknows *only* because He has firstly predestined it. In other words, nothing can be foreknown as certain unless God first establishes it as certain through predestination.

The second view is that of the Armenians. Armenianism refers to the theology of the followers of Jacobus (James) Armenius (1560-1609), a Dutch Reformed theologian. The Armenian perspective asserts that God predestinates *only* what He foreknows. Armenians argue that foreknowledge of the elect is rooted in God's understanding in eternity past of what individuals will choose to do in the future. Notable Armenians include John Wesley, Charles Wesley, John William Fletcher, and Richard Watson, the Methodists, Pentecostals, Holiness Movement, and the Charismatic Movement.

The third view is what Geisler refers to as "Moderate Calvinism" or "Middle Knowledge Calvinism." This view is held by theologians like Louis Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and other significant dispensationalists. Moderate Calvinism occupies a position between Extreme Calvinism and Arminianism.

This should not be interpreted as "fence-sitting" because Moderate Calvinism is distinct enough from the two extremes to possess its own clear and identifiable theology. We will later examine the three in greater detail, but first, we need to establish some fundamental Scriptural truths.

Who is in charge?

- God is in charge and is said to be the **first cause** of all things
- God came before all things
- God created all things
- God upholds all things
- God is above all things
- God knows all things
- God can do all things
- God accomplishes all things
- God rules over all things
- God is in control of all things
- GOD IS IN CHARGE!

If God is in control of everything, then why should we be blamed for anything? God's sovereignty does not eliminate our responsibility! Extreme Calvinism, however, claims that free choice is merely acting on our desires, *but* no one ever desires to do anything unless God gives them that desire. If this were true, then God would be responsible for *all* human actions. If this were true, then the Bible would state that God gave Judas the desire to betray Christ, but it does not. It says, "The devil had already prompted Judas..." (John 13:2)

It also does not address the issue of claiming that God *only provides* good desires and not evil ones. Neither Lucifer nor Adam possessed a sin nature initially, yet they chose to sin. So then, who compelled the devil to act? Who prompted Lucifer to sin? If free choice means acting on one's desires, and all desires originate from God, then it would imply that God made Lucifer sin. However, it's contradictory to assert that God could ever oppose Himself. Hebrews 6:18 states that God cannot sin. Habakkuk indicates that God cannot tolerate wrongdoing. James affirms that God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. Therefore, the extreme Calvinist position must be rejected as contradictory.

Some less-than-extreme Calvinists argue that God only instills good desires and not evil ones. But why would God grant the desire to do good to some individuals and not to everyone? This perspective fails to clarify where Lucifer's desire to sin originated. If it didn't come from God, then it must have originated from within himself. In that scenario, the initial act of evil was self-caused (caused by himself), which aligns precisely with the concept of human free will that extreme Calvinists reject.

Who made the devil? The Bible asserts that God made only good creatures. Genesis states that on each day of creation, God declared, "It is good." On the final day, He proclaimed, "It is very good." Ecclesiastes 7:29 observes that God "made mankind upright." In 1 Timothy 4:4, we are explicitly told, "Every creature of God is good." Only perfect creatures come from the hands of a perfect God. The Bible indicates that God did not make the devil, nor did He make the devil act. Instead, God created a good angel named Lucifer, who became the devil through his own free choice to sin.

God granted His good creatures a wonderful gift called free will. In Genesis 2:16, God told Adam, "You are free." Mankind instinctively recognizes freedom as valuable. Only those who usurp or abuse power deny it, yet even they pursue it for themselves. Have you ever seen protesters carrying signs that say, "Down with freedom" or "Back to bondage"? In conclusion, free choice is undeniably good.

Free choice is the origin of evil. With the power of moral free choice comes the ability to choose the good God designed for us or to reject it. The latter is referred to as "evil." Thus, the true origin of evil is the misuse of free will. If humans are to have the free choice to choose God or reject Him and all He represents, then God must also permit the consequences of negative volition, which means allowing evil. Although He has the power to do so, God cannot eliminate evil without infringing upon the good gift of free choice.

God is not responsible for evil; humanity is. We have been granted a license to drive a car. Those who irresponsibly abuse that right by driving recklessly, resulting in the injury or death of others, are accountable, not the government that granted the license. The government provided us with permission to drive and taught us how to drive safely through license tests, signs, and stoplights. It is the driver's responsibility to operate the vehicle safely.

And so it is with God and free will. God granted us a freedom known as "free will" along with guidance on how to exercise that freedom. The responsibility to use it properly rests solely with us. Ecclesiastes 7:29 states, "God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." While the existence of freedom is positive, some expressions of freedom can be harmful. God is the source of the former; we are the source of the latter.

Who made me do it? Contrary to what extreme Calvinists claim, God did not make you do it. The biblical answer to that question is **I did**. The self is the source of evil. Evil existed only as an abstract concept until God created free moral agents who could bring evil into reality by misusing their free moral agency. Evil originates from the *good power* of free will that God granted to mankind and angels.

Extreme Calvinists have an issue with this. They argue that every event has a cause—even our actions. This is true—every event does have a cause, but not every cause has its own cause. If every cause had a cause, then God could not be the first uncaused cause that He is. Therefore, if the creature, through the good power of free choice, is the first cause of evil, then no cause of this evil should be sought other than the person who caused it.

The extreme Calvinist's objection mistakenly assumes that an evil action must be caused by another person or thing, or else it is not caused at all. Every event is either caused or uncaused; there are no logical alternatives. Neither extreme nor moderate Calvinists nor even Armenians believe that evil actions lack a cause. That would represent libertarian freedom—spontaneous decisions made outside of reason or logic. This would violate the fundamental principle of reason: Every effect has a cause. Furthermore, if evil actions lack a cause, then no one can be held accountable, but the Bible clearly states that we are accountable. We must conclude, then, that our actions are indeed caused.

The great “philosopher” Pogo (a comic strip character, if you don’t remember him) once said, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” The extreme Calvinist view that actions cannot be self-caused should be rejected. Self-caused actions are not impossible. God did not cause Lucifer to sin. His act of rebellion was self-caused; otherwise, how could God hold Lucifer accountable for his actions?

There is a conflict between God's sovereignty and man’s free will. We know both exist because the Bible repeatedly speaks of God’s sovereignty from beginning to end. At the same time, man is held accountable from Genesis to Revelation. It would be unjust for God to hold man accountable for his actions if they were not initiated by his own free will. Clearly, these two great truths are in tension. One of the major subjects of the Bible is reconciling them.

The question is, why do we make decisions? Are there external influences that sway us? Doesn’t our background, training, and environment affect what we do? Yes, they do, but they don’t compel us to act that way.

You might have been born in a ghetto, but that doesn't mean you have to become a criminal. You may have grown up in an abusive home, but that doesn't make you an abuser. There is a difference between inherited physical traits like brown eyes or blond hair, which we can't control, and inherited spiritual tendencies, such as lust or the sin nature, which we should control. We don't choose our eye color, but we do choose whether to follow the spiritual impulses we may have inherited. Morally speaking, "irresistible urges" are simply urges that go unresisted. People have died from lack of water, but no one has ever died from a lack of sex, alcohol, or drugs.

There is a difference between moral and non-moral choices. Our preferences for color are non-moral and largely shaped by genetics, while the choice to reject someone based on color is a moral issue. Those who claim that all actions have a reason and that reason determines our behavior do not differentiate between purpose and cause. Cause refers to what produces the act, whereas purpose explains why we act. Are you confused?

Example: You find a bag containing \$20,000 in cash. What do you do? The cause is the bag of money will drive some action. The purpose is what happens next, specifically, what you decide to do with the bag of cash. You've stumbled upon a windfall. What will you do with it? Can you finally take that long-dreamed vacation? Pay your bills? Or should you turn it in to the authorities? Moral actions stem from our free choices.

The extreme Calvinist argument asserts that what is inherently good cannot will to do evil, and what is inherently evil cannot will to do good. We may be born with a tendency to sin, but that does not make it a *necessity* to sin. It is inevitable that we will sin, but it is not inevitable that we must sin. Although we are depraved by nature and inclined toward sin, each sin is freely chosen. We must distinguish desire from decision. Free individuals may desire to sin, but they need not choose to sin.

Paul expresses this well in Romans 7:15: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do; and what I hate, I do."

Personal experience shows that we sometimes act against our deepest desires. This extreme Calvinistic perspective represents a form of determinism—our moral actions are influenced by others rather than our own will. If evil cannot will for good and good cannot will for evil, then why do Christians still choose to sin despite their new nature? Clearly, the unsaved can and often do lead what society views as moral lives. Morality is a choice.

The difference between the saved and the unsaved is that believers possess the power of the Holy Spirit to make moral choices. In contrast, the unsaved must rely on the carrot-and-stick system of God's divine institutions, which include free will, marriage, family, government, and any norms and standards that they may have acquired, guided by their conscience.

For heaven's sake, whose fault is it? The unpleasant truth is even though we have inherited sin natures, we have no one to blame but ourselves. "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

Both Calvinists and Arminians agree that God holds us accountable for our actions. However, sound reason asserts that responsibility does not exist where there is no ability to respond. If we cannot respond with our free will, how can we be held accountable? For any evil we commit, we could have acted differently by *choosing not* to do it. That is undeniable. It is a self-caused action, not caused by another, but stemming from one's own choices. It is an action that could have been avoided.

Ought implies can. If we, as free moral agents, ought to do or refrain from doing something, it implies that we have the power to fulfill what is expected. Good reason suggests that if God demands it, then we can accomplish it. Moral obligation implies moral freedom. The phrase "ought implies can" does not suggest that we can do so by our own strength, as this would be contrary to Scripture. In John 15:5, Jesus says, "Without me, you can do nothing." And in Philippians 4:13, Paul assures us "We can do all things through Christ."

Thus, "ought implies can" only in the sense that we can do so through the grace of God. However, the unsaved are left to operate under the fear of retribution and the divine institutions.

Another indication of self-determination is that both Scripture and common moral wisdom tell us that praise and blame hold no real significance unless those who receive praise or blame have the freedom to choose differently.

Both fatalists and determinists have unsuccessfully attempted to deny human freedom. However, determinists believe that all non-determinists should change their minds and become determinists. The profound irony is that this suggests they have a choice and are free to change their minds. Thus, determinism is false because it contradicts its own claim.

The Bible confirms that human beings possess free will. The power of free choice is part of humanity's creation in God's image. Adam and Eve were instructed to multiply and to avoid eating from that one tree, implying they had a choice. Ought implies can. The requirement to obey these commandments suggests that they had the ability to do so. Even after Adam fell and became a sinner by nature, he was not so corrupted that he could not hear God's voice or respond freely. The LORD called to the man, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard you in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." God's image in Adam was tarnished but not eliminated. The "Image of God," which encompasses free will, remains in human beings after the fall.

The fallen descendants of Adam possess free will. Depraved human beings have the power of free choice. The Bible states that fallen man is ignorant, depraved, and a slave to sin; however, these conditions involve a free choice. Peter speaks of depraved ignorance as being willingly ignorant (2 Peter 3:5). Paul asserts that the unsaved have clearly seen and understood the truth, yet they deliberately suppress it (Romans 1:18-19). Consequently, they are without excuse. Even our enslavement to sin is a matter of free choice.

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of

sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Ephesians 2:2 states that those under Satan's power are there due to their own free act of disobedience. Each verse reinforces that man is a free agent with the ability to choose his own path of action.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

The extreme Calvinist holds that faith is a gift offered to only a select few. They believe faith is a special gift from God, and without it, salvation is impossible.

This is their doctrine of the total depravity of man. They hold the view that man is so depraved that he cannot make the right decision regarding his salvation. In other words, a dead person cannot believe; he must first be made alive. Regeneration is necessary *before* he can choose to follow Christ. That right decision is enabled by the Holy Spirit through the gift of faith. They cite Ephesians 2:8-9 to support their argument. They firmly believe this passage confirms that the faith by which we are saved is a gift from God. However, even John Calvin remarked that this text does not imply that faith itself is a gift from God but rather that salvation is a gift from God.

The Greek makes this very clear. "That" in verse 8 is *touto*, which is in the neuter form, not *toute*, which would be feminine. The extreme Calvinist claims that "that" refers back to "faith" before it, asserting that God gives the sinner the faith necessary for regeneration. The issue is that "faith" is *pistis* and is feminine, meaning the pronoun does not agree with the proposed noun. Additionally, "grace," *charis*, is also feminine, so "that" cannot refer to it either. It can only refer to salvation as the gift of God. Paul could have easily used the feminine gender *toute* instead of the gender-neutral *touto* to clarify his intention to focus on faith as the gift rather than on being "saved by grace through faith." However, he did not do that. We can only assume Paul conveyed exactly what he meant to convey. Anyone

can be saved as long as they demonstrate faith, and God does not need to supply the faith.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

“Whoever believes in him...”

God’s sovereignty or man’s free will: is it one or the other? The extreme Calvinist rejects free will, but the Bible states that both sovereignty *and* free will coexist. Human beings, even in their fallen state, possess the freedom to choose.

The Bible affirms the dual truths of sovereignty and responsibility. Scripture proclaims God's complete sovereignty over all things, but it also teaches that we are accountable for our actions. *Ought implies can*.

The Cross was both predetermined *and* freely chosen. Acts 2:23 states that Jesus' death was determined "by God's purpose and foreknowledge.” Yet in John 10:17-18, Jesus says, "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

Acts 2:23 “...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

There, in Peter’s sermon, we have God's foreknowledge along with His “definite plan” (predestination).

1 Peter 2:8 “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Here, we see predestination and free will presented in the same passage concerning the same action!

Salvation is both ordained and persuaded into it.

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.

Acts 14:1 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

Though their coming to Christ was preordained, these converts were persuaded. God preordained the means—persuasion—and the end—eternal life. The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and individual responsibility on the part of man. Extreme Calvinism argues that predetermination is separate from foreknowledge. What God predetermines necessarily becomes foreknowledge. This perspective denies free will. The notion of *irresistible grace* contradicts free choice. There are no shotgun weddings in heaven.

C.S. Lewis put it this way, "The irresistible and indisputable are the two weapons which by nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will ... would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo."

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.' All those in hell choose to be there. Without self-determination, there could be no hell.

Armenianism states that God's predetermination is based on foreknowledge. God knows in advance the choices that people will make and predetermines them accordingly. It isn't man's will that drives God, but rather His own definitive purpose and will. If they were correct, then salvation would not be by grace but rather by a human decision.

The idea of God's thoughts being chronological or sequential is highly problematic. God is a simple being; that is, He is indivisible and not

dependent on anything in the universe for what He is. Whatever He has, He is. His attributes are identical to His nature. God's knowledge is not sequential; rather, it embraces everything in a single spiritual co-intuition. His thoughts are not sequential but simultaneous.

If He were not simple, He would think in terms of temporal succession. If temporal, He would be spatial. If limited to time and space, He could think no faster than the speed of light. Thus, He could not know the entire universe in a single moment, not to mention an infallible knowledge of the future.

Moderate Calvinism

Moderate Calvinism, however, asserts that God's predetermination *is in harmony* with His foreknowledge. God's election is neither based on His foreknowledge of man's free choices nor conducted independently of it. There is no chronological precedence of foreknowledge over predetermination. God is a simple being in which both foreknowledge and predetermination coexist as one. Whatever God knows, He determines; whatever He determines, He knows. His thoughts are eternally coordinated and unified. What God foreknows cannot rely on what He forechose, and what He forechose cannot depend on what He foreknew. Both acts are simultaneous, eternal, and coordinated acts of God.

God's predestination and human free will are mysteries, not contradictions. They go beyond reason but do not contradict it. God decided that moral, free agents would act freely. He did not dictate that they would be forced to perform free acts. In short, we are chosen yet free.

We often perceive our decisions and the influences that shaped them within a narrow timeframe, usually focusing on the present or perhaps our own lifetime. However, the reality of who we are extends far beyond that limited perspective. Many of the providential influences in our lives that have shaped us into who we are at any given moment are far more intricate, often reaching back much further than we typically consider, and frequently remain entirely unknown to us. We may reflect on a decision we made and think we understand the reasons behind it, but in truth, we might not fully grasp all the motivations that led us to that choice. This process involves a blend of extremely complex providential events and decisions

made by ourselves and others that have unfolded over many generations, ultimately shaping our present and the choices we may be called upon to make today.

If we could access the “computer of divine decree” in heaven, we would find that our identities and decisions can be traced back not only to our immediate ancestors but all the way to Adam. We are products of our own choices and are held accountable for them, yet we are also shaped by the decisions of others who have influenced us, as well as those who preceded us in human history. Moreover, we cannot overlook God’s providential actions that are meant to guide our choices.

That in no way excuses us from responsibility; regardless of the influence, the decision we make today is still ours to own. God’s providential work in our lives, which guides us to the place He has intended for us, is far more complex as it encompasses all of human history and the entire world.

Consider this as you ponder the vastness of His omniscience and omnipotence in providentially overseeing your life and all the “all things” connected to it.

Free Will Key Points

Omniscience of God — the knowledge of everything: everything past, everything present, everything future, and it includes the merely possible as well as the actual. It is not the acquiring of knowledge but the possession of knowledge.

Middle Knowledge refers to what is merely possible or the counterfactuals. God's knowledge of you is so intimate and detailed that He can predict with absolute certainty what your actions will be when faced with any circumstance that may arise in your path. This demonstrates a profound understanding of your soul and how you respond to the “all things” in your life. With His deep insight into you and human nature, God can orchestrate infinitely complex circumstances and events to influence individual free will decisions, ensuring that He achieves His intended objectives *exactly* as He has planned.

God's Foreknowledge — A more limited aspect of His omniscience that refers solely to what is absolutely certain to occur. It deals exclusively with the actual and excludes the merely possible. God's foreknowledge does not make anything certain; rather, it considers only that which *is* certain. In God's mind, they are simultaneous; one does not precede the other; what is foreknown is foreordained, and what is foreordained is foreknown.

Divine Decree — God makes what is foreknown certain through divine decree. God's divine decree establishes the entire sequence of events, from the smallest detail to the largest. What is foreordained is decreed to happen exactly as foreordained.

Foreordination — Takes what is foreknown and predetermined and establishes it as certain. Thus, it is part of the divine decree. It pertains to the saved, the unsaved, and the “all things.” Foreordination encompasses everything that will happen in a person's life, regardless of whether they are a believer or an unbeliever. It takes God's foreknowledge and ensures that it occurs as foreknown.

Predestination refers to the aspect of foreordination specifically related to a believer's salvation, sanctification, and ultimate glorification. Scripture does not suggest that the unbeliever is predestined to a state of being lost. In fact, it states that *all* are lost, but some are predestined to election.

The Called – Those who are called (the elect) were foreknown and predestined from eternity past to respond positively to the call. Those who are called are justified and will ultimately be glorified.

God does not coerce humanity; that would violate free will. God can only persuade. With His middle knowledge of all *possible* situations and His intimate understanding of each person and their potential reactions to the “all things,” He manages these “all things” through His providential actions to influence individual decisions (persuade). The called *will* respond positively, exactly as God predestined. The lost’s decision to reject the grace offering of salvation is their choice, and God will not violate their free will.

Evil is an undesirable byproduct of free choice; however, the positive aspect of free choice cannot exist without the possibility of choosing evil. For God to disallow evil in this world would mean He would have to eliminate free will.

Free Will—an attribute bestowed upon humanity by God because He desires a *meaningful* relationship with His creation. Without free will, any worship or faithful service offered to God would have to be coerced by Him, reducing humanity to mere automatons—robots that mindlessly follow God’s orders. Any love directed toward God would be devoid of meaning and hold no value for Him.