

Grace Alone and the Myth of Saving Free Will

Thesis
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Preface

This work was written with a specific purpose: to guide believers into a deeper understanding of God's sovereign grace as revealed in Scripture, especially through the writings of the Apostle Paul. Unlike a book that tells a single story from beginning to end, this thesis is designed as a **guide**. Each chapter deals with a different aspect of Christian life, leadership, and theology related to the question of free will and God's electing grace.

You do not need to read it all at once or in order. Each chapter can be studied on its own, reflected upon, and discussed in small groups or one-on-one discipleship. My hope is that this makes the work both **accessible** and **practical**, serving as a resource you can return to again and again as questions arise in your walk with Christ.

The arguments and conclusions here come from careful study of Scripture and the long history of the church's wrestling with these truths. While I have used tools to assist with clarity and structure, the convictions are my own, shaped by years of preaching, teaching, and seeking God's wisdom in His Word.

As you read, I encourage you to keep your Bible open. Test what is written here against the Word of God, wrestle with the questions honestly, and allow the Spirit to lead you into truth. If this thesis strengthens your assurance in Christ, humbles you under God's sovereign hand, and deepens your joy in His undeserved grace, then its purpose has been fulfilled.

To God alone be the glory.

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Bibliography

Primary sources (Scripture, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Arminius, Synod of Dort) and secondary sources (commentaries and theological works) presented in Chicago style.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The doctrine of election has long stood at the center of theological debate, representing both a source of profound assurance for believers and a stumbling block for those who prefer to preserve a measure of human autonomy in salvation. While the language of “free will” has increasingly permeated modern Christian discourse, particularly in evangelical and revivalist traditions, the apostle Paul’s writings present a strikingly different picture. For Paul, salvation is not the cooperative achievement of God and man but rather the sovereign act of God’s will, rooted in His eternal purpose and accomplished through Christ. This conviction reverberates throughout his epistles, where grace is exalted, boasting is excluded, and the glory of salvation belongs to God alone.

The rise of free will theology in Christian history, though often couched in biblical language, reflects a departure from this Pauline emphasis. The church has wrestled with questions of grace, responsibility, and divine sovereignty since its earliest days, from Augustine’s battle against Pelagius to the Synod of Dort’s rejection of Arminianism. At each point, the central concern has

been the same: does salvation ultimately depend on God's sovereign choice, or on man's decision to believe?

This thesis argues that Paul's theology leaves no room for the latter. Free will as a decisive factor in salvation represents a distortion of Scripture, one that undermines assurance, opens the door to errors such as the belief that grace can be lost, and subtly shifts the glory of salvation from God to man. By contrast, the Reformed position, grounded in Paul's writings, provides a consistent, coherent, and deeply pastoral theology of grace.

The chapters that follow will trace both the biblical and historical development of this debate. Chapter 2 will examine the biblical foundations of election in Paul's writings. Chapter 3 will consider the force of Paul's language concerning God's sovereign grace. Chapter 4 will explore the historical development of the doctrine, particularly in the writings of Augustine, Pelagius, and their successors. Subsequent chapters will address human inability, faith as God's gift, predestination and the golden chain of Romans 8, the corporate and individual dimensions of election, and the Synod of Dort's defense of sovereign grace. The thesis will conclude with pastoral implications, showing that the doctrine of election is not merely a theological abstraction but the bedrock of Christian assurance and joy.

In short, this study contends that the Reformed doctrine of election is not only faithful to Paul but necessary for the church's health today. It preserves the glory of God in salvation, humbles man's pride, and produces confidence in the believer who knows that his or her salvation rests not on a fragile human choice but on the eternal, unchanging will of God.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The doctrine of free will and divine grace has been one of the most enduring debates in the history of Christian theology. From the early church through the Reformation to contemporary scholarship, the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility has been the subject of intense discussion. This chapter surveys the major voices in that debate, demonstrating how the question has evolved and why it remains central to systematic theology today.

2.1 Historical Voices

The earliest church fathers left room for human choice, though not always with precision. Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) and Irenaeus (c. 130–200) spoke of free will in the context of human responsibility, stressing that obedience to God could not be coerced. Yet their emphasis lacked the later clarity regarding the depth of human depravity.

By contrast, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) forcefully articulated the necessity of grace against Pelagius (c. 354–418). Pelagius taught that man retained the natural ability to obey God without divine aid, effectively rendering grace optional. In response, Augustine argued that man’s will is bound by sin and that grace is essential at every stage of salvation. The Council of Carthage (418) condemned Pelagianism, affirming the doctrine that apart from grace no one can even begin to turn toward God.¹ Augustine’s insights laid the foundation for the later Reformed tradition.

2.2 Reformation and Post-Reformation Debates

The Reformation era reignited the debate with intensity. Martin Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) responded to Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had defended a moderate form of free will. Luther insisted that man’s will is enslaved to sin and utterly unable to choose God apart from sovereign grace.²

John Calvin (1509–1564) expanded these insights in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, teaching unconditional election, effectual calling, and the perseverance of the saints. Calvin emphasized that salvation depends wholly upon God’s eternal decree, leaving no room for boasting.

In the late sixteenth century, Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and his followers (the “Remonstrants”) challenged this understanding, proposing that election was conditional on foreseen faith. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) convened in response, rejecting the Remonstrants and formulating the Canons of Dort, which clarified what later became known as the “Five Points of Calvinism.”³ This marked a decisive point in the history of the doctrine, firmly establishing the Reformed position over against synergism.

2.3 Modern Arminian Scholarship

The Arminian tradition continued through John Wesley (1703–1791), who popularized the doctrine of *prevenient grace*—a universal grace that restores the ability of every person to choose or reject God. Wesley’s theology aimed to preserve both God’s grace and genuine human freedom.

In contemporary scholarship, Arminian voices such as Roger Olson and Ben Witherington III argue that God’s love requires real human freedom. They often contend that election in Scripture is primarily corporate rather than individual, and that God’s saving will extends equally to all.⁴ For Arminian scholars, the rejection of free will undermines God’s character as loving and just.

2.4 Modern Reformed Scholarship

Reformed theologians, however, continue to defend monergism—the belief that God alone accomplishes salvation. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), in *Freedom of the Will*, argued that human freedom is compatible with divine sovereignty, since the will is always bound by the heart’s strongest inclination. John Murray, R. C. Sproul, John Piper, and Michael Horton represent modern defenders of this tradition, all stressing that salvation is wholly of God. Sproul famously wrote, “The cardinal point of Reformed theology is that regeneration precedes faith.”⁵

These scholars maintain that grace is not merely enabling but effectual, ensuring the salvation of those whom God has chosen. Romans 3:27–28 remains a central text: “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded... For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (ESV).

2.5 The Debate Today: Fairness vs. Sovereignty

At the heart of the ongoing debate is the question of fairness. Arminians emphasize human responsibility, arguing that unconditional election appears arbitrary and undermines God’s justice. Reformed theology emphasizes God’s sovereignty, maintaining that salvation is a gift of mercy, not a debt owed to man.

Paul himself directly addresses this concern in Romans 9:14–16:

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! 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.” (Rom. 9:14–16, ESV)

Here Paul affirms that God’s freedom in showing mercy is the very essence of divine justice. Far from being arbitrary, it highlights God’s holiness, mercy, and sovereign lordship. This Pauline emphasis provides the firmest foundation for the Reformed critique of synergism and ensures that all glory for salvation belongs to God alone.

Selected Bibliography

- Augustine. *On Nature and Grace*.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
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- Synod of Dort. *Canons of Dort* (1619).
- Wesley, John. *Sermons on Several Occasions*.
- Witherington, Ben. *Grace in Galatia*.

¹ Council of Carthage, Canon 2 (418 A.D.).

² Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1957).

³ Synod of Dort, *Canons of Dort* (1619).

⁴ Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 183–85.

⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986), 72.

Chapter 3: Paul’s Exegesis of Grace and the Will

Introduction

No New Testament writer speaks more clearly about salvation, grace, and the human will than the Apostle Paul. Writing to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul consistently emphasizes that salvation is **entirely of God**—from its eternal planning to its historical accomplishment and personal application. Where many theologians attempt to leave room for human free will in salvation, Paul’s words shut the door firmly. This chapter examines Paul’s strongest passages on the subject, demonstrating that he leaves no room for interpretation: salvation is by God’s sovereign choice and grace alone.

3.1 Romans 3:9–28 — No One Seeks God

Romans 3:9–12 (ESV):

“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

‘None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good, not even one.’”

Paul begins his climactic indictment of humanity in Romans 3 with universal language: *none, no one, all*. His argument leaves no exceptions. Not only are people sinful in action (“no one does good”), they are corrupt in inclination: “no one seeks for God.”

If **no one seeks for God**, then the idea that man, in his natural will, can initiate faith collapses. Arminian theology must distort this passage, often suggesting that God’s “prevenient grace” restores enough ability so that man may freely choose Him. Yet Paul says nothing of such an enabling grace here. The text instead underscores radical inability: humanity in its fallen state neither understands nor seeks God.

Romans 3:21–22 (ESV):

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

The shift from judgment to hope makes clear that righteousness is not earned or chosen by human will but *manifested apart from the law*. The saving righteousness comes *through faith*, but even this faith is not self-generated. Elsewhere Paul teaches that faith is “not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (**Ephesians 2:8–9**).

Thus, Romans 3 establishes that free will cannot produce saving faith. Man’s problem is not merely lack of opportunity but lack of desire. Without divine intervention, he will not seek God at all.

3.2 Romans 8:28–30 — The Golden Chain of Redemption

Romans 8:29–30 (ESV):

“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. 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 “golden chain” contains no missing links. Each action is God’s initiative, and the subjects are entirely passive. The verb *proginōskō* (“foreknew”) does not mean God foresaw human faith, but rather that He foreloved and sovereignly chose His people. John Stott explains: “It is not foresight of faith but foreordination of people.”¹

The verbs move seamlessly from eternity past (*predestined*) to eternity future (*glorified*). Human free will is conspicuously absent. Arminians often argue that God “predestined” on the basis of foreseen faith, but this imposes foreign meaning onto the Greek. If Paul intended that sense, he could have used other terms such as *proeiden* (“foresaw”). Instead, the chain demonstrates unbreakable divine action.

This passage offers assurance: the same God who predestined also glorified. Salvation does not rest on the shaky ground of man’s will but the solid rock of God’s eternal purpose.

3.3 Romans 9:6–24 — God’s Sovereign Election

Romans 9:15–16 (ESV):

“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.”

Here Paul confronts the most direct question: why are some saved and not others? His answer is unflinching: it does not depend on human will (*thelēma*) or exertion (*trechontos*, “running/effort”), but entirely on God’s mercy.

Arminian interpreters often soften this by appealing to “corporate election” (God chooses groups, not individuals). Yet the examples Paul gives—Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau, Pharaoh hardened—are clearly individuals. Paul even anticipates human objections: “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’” (**Romans 9:19**). Such a question makes no sense if Paul were teaching conditional election based on free will. Only unconditional, sovereign election provokes that objection.

Paul’s response appeals to God’s rights as Creator: “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (**Romans 9:20**). This confronts human pride head-on. To accept election is to bow before God’s sovereignty. To reject it is often to cling to the illusion of human autonomy.

3.4 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 — God Chose the Weak

1 Corinthians 1:27–29 (ESV):

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

Paul emphasizes God’s choice three times: *God chose... God chose... God chose*. Salvation is explicitly designed so that “no human being might boast.” If free will were decisive, boasting

would remain. The only way to remove all ground for human pride is to ascribe salvation entirely to God's will.

Here again, Arminian attempts to preserve human autonomy distort the text. The grammar is simple and emphatic: God is the subject, His people are the object, and His purpose is humility. As Calvin comments, "We must ascribe the whole of our salvation to His mercy, that we may not claim even the smallest particle to ourselves."²

3.5 Ephesians 1:3–14 — Chosen Before the Foundation of the World

Ephesians 1:4–5 (ESV):

"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."

Paul begins his letter with a hymn of praise centered on God's electing grace. Believers were chosen "before the foundation of the world"—long before they could exercise free will. The basis is not man's faith but God's love and "the purpose of his will."

The Greek *eklogē* (choice) and *proorisas* (predestined) highlight God's initiative. Human action is absent. Paul piles phrase upon phrase: "according to the purpose of his will" (v.5), "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (v.11).

If free will determined salvation, these verses would be redundant. Instead, Paul is making explicit that salvation is rooted in God's eternal decree, not man's decision.

3.6 Philippians 2:12–13 — Work Out Because God Works In

Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV):

"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."

At first glance, verse 12 seems to support human free will: "work out your own salvation." But Paul's next statement grounds that imperative: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work." Even the believer's willing (*thelēn*) is produced by God.

This destroys any notion that free will is autonomous. Human responsibility is real—we must work out our salvation—but it rests entirely on God's prior working. As Augustine summarized: "Command what you will, and give what you command."³

3.7 Pastoral Implications

Paul's teaching is not abstract theology; it has deep pastoral consequences.

1. **Assurance** — If salvation depends on God's eternal choice and unbreakable chain, the believer can rest secure. Doubt and fear vanish when we see that "those whom he justified he also glorified" (**Romans 8:30**).
2. **Humility** — God chose what is weak, not what is strong. Election removes boasting and kills pride.
3. **Joy** — Grace, when rightly understood, produces gratitude. Believers can rejoice that they were loved before the foundation of the world.
4. **Holiness** — Election is unto holiness (**Ephesians 1:4**). Far from promoting sin, it compels obedience born of love.
5. **Worship** — Understanding salvation as God's sovereign work leads naturally to doxology: "To the praise of his glorious grace" (**Ephesians 1:6**).

In contrast, belief in autonomous free will undermines each of these. Assurance is lost (for one may fall away), humility is compromised (for man played the decisive role), joy is fleeting (for salvation rests on fragile will), holiness is misdirected (for it becomes self-effort), and worship is muted (for glory is shared with man).

Therefore, Paul's consistent teaching makes one thing clear: free will as a means of salvation is not merely a minor error but a distortion of the gospel. Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end.

Notes

1. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 249.
2. John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 77.
3. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 31.

Chapter 4: The Historical Rise of Free Will Theology

Introduction

While Paul’s writings leave no ambiguity about the primacy of divine sovereignty in salvation, the history of the church demonstrates that this clarity has been repeatedly challenged. From the earliest centuries, theologians wrestled with the relationship between human responsibility and divine grace. The battle lines became most visible in the debates between Augustine and Pelagius, resurfaced in the medieval scholastics, and erupted again during the Reformation. Each controversy reveals a recurring pattern: when the church elevates human freedom over divine sovereignty, the result is doctrinal distortion, loss of assurance, and reliance on man rather than God. This chapter traces that history, showing how “free will” theology entered mainstream Christian thought and why the Reformed position provides the most faithful continuity with Paul.

4.1 Augustine and Pelagius

At the beginning of the fifth century, a British monk named **Pelagius** began teaching in Rome that human beings possess the inherent ability to obey God’s law apart from divine grace. Pelagius argued that if God commands something, then man must necessarily have the natural power to perform it. To Pelagius, sin was not an enslaving corruption but merely a matter of bad habits and poor choices.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430), in sharp contrast, insisted that man’s will was bound by sin and utterly incapable of choosing God apart from grace. Drawing heavily from Paul, Augustine argued:

Romans 9:16 (ESV): “*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*”

For Augustine, this verse encapsulated the entire dispute. If salvation depended on man’s unaided will, the gospel would collapse into moralism. Augustine declared in *On Nature and Grace*:

“It is not by free will, but by God’s grace, that a man is made righteous; and it is not through nature, but through the Spirit, that he is born again.”

The Pelagian controversy culminated in the **Council of Carthage (418 A.D.)**, which condemned Pelagius’ teaching as heresy. The Council affirmed the necessity of prevenient grace — that grace must come before any human response. This decision shaped the trajectory of Western theology for centuries, though the tension between grace and free will would resurface in subtler forms.

4.2 Semi-Pelagianism and Medieval Development

Though Pelagianism was officially condemned, its spirit persisted. Many were unwilling to accept Augustine's full emphasis on divine sovereignty, so a compromise emerged: **Semi-Pelagianism**. This position taught that man, though weakened by sin, still retained the ability to make the first move toward God. Grace was necessary, but it was seen as a cooperative aid to human effort rather than the decisive cause of salvation.

The **Council of Orange (529 A.D.)** sought to settle the debate. The council reaffirmed that grace was necessary for every aspect of salvation, but it did not go as far as Augustine in denying any role for the human will. In effect, it left the door cracked open for synergism (man cooperating with God in salvation). That small opening would later widen into medieval scholastic theology.

During the Middle Ages, theologians such as **Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)** attempted to reconcile divine grace with human freedom through Aristotelian philosophy. Aquinas' famous axiom, "*Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it*", suggested that man's natural faculties, though damaged, were not entirely ruined by the fall. Grace elevated and completed human capacity rather than replacing it. While Aquinas sought to honor grace, his framework allowed later thinkers to emphasize human participation in salvation more than Scripture warranted.

Paul's words again stand in direct contradiction to this trajectory:

Ephesians 2:1 (ESV): "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.*"

A corpse does not cooperate in its resurrection. To reduce grace to a mere assistance is to minimize Paul's language of death-to-life transformation. The medieval church, however, had largely lost sight of this, preparing the ground for the abuses and errors that the Reformation would later confront.

4.3 The Reformation Recovery of Grace

By the sixteenth century, the medieval church had built an elaborate system of sacramental works, indulgences, and penances. Salvation was presented as a cooperative venture between God and man, mediated through the institutional church. Into this world stepped the Reformers, who returned to Paul's writings and reasserted the supremacy of divine grace.

Martin Luther (1483–1546), an Augustinian monk, found in Paul's letters the liberating message of justification by faith alone. His 1525 treatise, *The Bondage of the Will*, written in response to Erasmus' defense of free will, was one of his most forceful works. Luther insisted that free will was not merely weak but bound and captive to sin:

“If anyone ascribes salvation to the will, even the least bit, he knows nothing of grace and has not understood Jesus Christ aright.”

Luther anchored his argument in Paul’s teaching:

Romans 7:18 (ESV): “*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*”

This verse dismantled the humanistic optimism of Erasmus. Luther argued that man’s will is not free but enslaved, and therefore salvation must be entirely God’s work.

John Calvin (1509–1564) expanded this teaching systematically in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin’s doctrine of **total depravity** and **unconditional election** was nothing more than Paul’s theology applied consistently. On 1 Corinthians 1, Calvin wrote:

“For our salvation is founded on God’s eternal election; for it was not because we were better than others that we were chosen, but in order that we might be instruments for showing forth the glory of God’s grace.”

The Reformation was, in essence, a recovery of Paul’s gospel: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Any appeal to human free will was seen as a return to Rome’s synergism and a betrayal of the apostolic witness.

4.4 Arminius and the Remonstrants

The Reformation’s recovery of grace did not go unchallenged. By the late sixteenth century, within the Dutch Reformed Church itself, a new teaching arose through the influence of **Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)**. Originally trained in Calvinist theology, Arminius began to question the doctrine of unconditional election, arguing instead that election was conditioned upon God’s foreknowledge of who would believe.

After Arminius’ death, his followers (known as the **Remonstrants**) drafted the **Five Articles of the Remonstrance (1610)**, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **Conditional Election** — God chooses individuals based on foreseen faith.
2. **Unlimited Atonement** — Christ died for all, though only believers benefit.
3. **Resistible Grace** — God’s grace can be rejected by human free will.
4. **Partial Depravity** — Sin has weakened but not destroyed human freedom.
5. **Uncertain Perseverance** — Believers may fall away from salvation.

At first glance, these articles seemed to preserve human responsibility. In reality, they shifted the ground of salvation from God's sovereign will to man's autonomous decision. This placed assurance on fragile ground: if man's free will could secure salvation, it could also forfeit it.

Paul's writings stand in stark contrast to these claims. To the Ephesians, he declared:

Ephesians 1:11 (ESV): *“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.”*

Arminian theology requires a narrowing of Paul's strong language. The apostle does not speak of God working “some things” according to man's response but of *all things* according to His will. Arminius and his followers, in elevating free will, introduced into Protestantism the same synergistic tendencies that Augustine had resisted over a thousand years earlier.

4.5 The Synod of Dort (1618–1619)

The spread of Arminian teaching caused deep division within the Dutch Reformed Church. In response, a national synod was convened at the city of **Dordrecht** in 1618–1619, known as the **Synod of Dort**. Delegates from across Europe gathered to evaluate the claims of the Remonstrants in light of Scripture.

After months of careful debate, the Synod decisively rejected the Five Articles of the Remonstrance as contrary to the gospel. In their place, the Synod produced the **Canons of Dort**, which articulated what later became summarized as the “Five Points of Calvinism”:

- 1. Total Depravity** — Man is wholly incapable of saving himself.
- 2. Unconditional Election** — God's choice of the elect is not based on foreseen faith but solely on His mercy.
- 3. Limited Atonement** (or Particular Redemption) — Christ died specifically and effectively for His elect.
- 4. Irresistible Grace** — God's saving grace cannot be thwarted by man's will.
- 5. Perseverance of the Saints** — Those truly saved will persevere to the end by God's power.

The Synod of Dort was not inventing new doctrine but recovering Paul's theology against distortion. Its declarations echo Paul's words:

Romans 8:30 (ESV): *“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 “golden chain” contains no weak links, no dependency on human will. The Canons of Dort stood as a monumental defense of the sovereignty of God in salvation, preserving the Reformed heritage and providing assurance to believers that salvation rests not in their grip on God but in God’s grip on them.

4.6 Modern Evangelicalism and Free Will

Although the Synod of Dort condemned Arminianism, its influence did not disappear. In the centuries that followed, Arminian theology resurfaced and spread widely, especially through movements that emphasized revivalism and human decision.

John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of Methodism, embraced many Arminian convictions, particularly the idea of **prevenient grace** — a grace that restores enough free will to every person so they may choose or reject salvation. This doctrine preserved the concept of universal human responsibility, but it also blurred the sharp edge of Paul’s teaching on spiritual deadness.

In the nineteenth century, American revivalist **Charles Finney (1792–1875)** radicalized this trend. Finney rejected the doctrine of original sin altogether, claiming that man could, by sheer choice, obey God’s commands and bring about revival. He redefined conversion as a matter of proper persuasion rather than sovereign grace. His “new measures” — the anxious bench, altar calls, and pressuring techniques — shifted the focus of salvation from God’s electing grace to man’s immediate decision.

This trajectory has profoundly shaped modern evangelicalism. Today, phrases such as “*accept Jesus into your heart*”, “*make a decision for Christ*”, or “*God did His part, now you must do yours*” are commonplace. The idea of an “age of accountability,” absent from Scripture, further reflects the assumption that salvation depends on a human choice once a person reaches a certain maturity.

Yet Paul never grounds salvation in such decisionistic language. Instead, he insists:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): “*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*”

The modern emphasis on free will offers no such certainty. If salvation depends on human decision, it can be lost by indecision. If it begins by man’s will, it can end by man’s will. By contrast, the Reformed emphasis — in harmony with Paul — roots assurance in God’s unchanging grace.

4.7 Pastoral Implications

The history of “free will” theology demonstrates that when human choice is elevated above divine sovereignty, the church inevitably drifts into uncertainty and error. Pelagius denied the

corruption of sin; the medieval scholastics reduced grace to a helper; Erasmus and Arminius revived synergism; Finney and modern revivalism turned salvation into a human transaction. In every age, the temptation has been the same: to make salvation rest, even in part, upon man's will.

But Paul's gospel leaves no room for such confidence in the flesh. His testimony is unwavering:

1 Corinthians 1:30–31 (ESV): *“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”*

Pastorally, this truth is both humbling and liberating. It humbles us because it strips away pride — we contribute nothing to our salvation but the sin that made it necessary. It liberates us because assurance no longer rests on the frailty of our wills but on the steadfast mercy of God. To accept election is to confess that salvation is a miracle of grace, not a partnership with man.

This is why many resist the doctrine of election: it confronts them with the death of self-rule. It forces the surrender of the illusion that man can control his eternal destiny. To embrace Paul's teaching is to acknowledge the depth of sin and the radical nature of grace. Yet for those who bow before God's sovereign choice, the result is joy, stability, and unshakable hope.

The Reformed tradition, faithful to Paul, offers the church not only a clearer theology but a surer foundation for life and faith. In a world where human will is frail, fickle, and fallen, only God's will can anchor the soul.

Chapter 5: The Consequences of Free Will Theology

Introduction

Ideas are not harmless. What the church teaches about the nature of salvation inevitably shapes how Christians live, worship, and relate to God. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he rebuked them sharply for allowing even the smallest distortion of the gospel, declaring:

Galatians 1:6–7 (ESV): *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”*

The doctrine of free will as a decisive cause in salvation may seem minor to some, but Paul would not have seen it that way. A gospel that rests on man's will rather than God's grace is no gospel at all. This chapter explores the theological and pastoral consequences of grounding salvation in free will, contrasting them with the joy, confidence, and stability found in God's sovereign election.

5.1 The Fragility of Salvation Under Free Will

At the heart of free will theology lies a dangerous premise: if man has the decisive power to enter into salvation, he also has the power to exit it. The human will becomes both the gate and the guard of eternal life. Such a framework inevitably produces instability, for the very faculty on which salvation depends—the fallen will—is described in Scripture as weak, fickle, and unreliable.

Paul paints this sobering picture in Romans:

Romans 7:18 (ESV): *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”*

If this is true, then grounding salvation in free will is building on sand. It places eternal security in the hands of a will that Paul himself calls powerless. No wonder so many under Arminian or decision-based teaching struggle with assurance. Their faith feels fragile because it rests on their own fragile resolve.

By contrast, Paul anchors the believer's confidence in God's unchanging purpose:

Romans 8:29–30 (ESV): *“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. 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 “golden chain” leaves no room for collapse. What God begins, God completes. Free will theology may promise autonomy, but it can never deliver assurance. Reformed theology, faithful to Paul, gives both humility and unshakable security: salvation depends not on the fragility of man's decision but on the constancy of God's grace.

5.2 The Error of “Falling from Grace”

One of the most troubling consequences of free will theology is the teaching that true believers may “fall from grace” and lose their salvation. This doctrine flows naturally from the assumption that salvation depends on man's decision. If the decisive cause of entering into Christ is the will of man, then it follows that man's will can also cast him out.

Arminius himself left this question somewhat open-ended, but his followers, especially later Methodists and Holiness preachers, pressed it with alarming clarity: believers must continually choose to remain in Christ, or they risk forfeiting eternal life. In this view, assurance is never final—it must be re-secured daily by human effort.

Paul, however, presents salvation not as a precarious partnership but as an unbreakable work of God. To the Romans, he declared with sweeping confidence:

Romans 8:38–39 (ESV): *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

If salvation can be lost through a faltering will, then Paul’s statement is false. Something *in creation*—namely, man’s free will—would indeed separate us from Christ. But Paul leaves no such exception. Not even the most powerful forces in existence, let alone the fragile human will, can sever the bond established by God’s grace.

Jesus Himself reinforced this certainty:

John 10:27–28 (ESV): *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

Here the ground of security is not the sheep’s grip on the Shepherd but the Shepherd’s grip on the sheep. To suggest otherwise is to distort the gospel into a treadmill of anxiety, where believers live in constant fear of losing what only God can give.

Thus, the doctrine of “falling from grace” is not only pastorally devastating but biblically indefensible. It replaces Paul’s note of triumphant assurance with a note of fearful uncertainty, undermining the very comfort the gospel is meant to provide.

5.3 The “Age of Accountability” and Its Inconsistencies

Another consequence of free will theology is the invention of the so-called “**age of accountability.**” This concept, common in many evangelical circles, teaches that children are not held responsible for their sins until they reach a certain age when they are capable of making a conscious decision for Christ. At that point, salvation supposedly hinges on their exercise of free will.

The problem is that Scripture never teaches such an idea. The “age of accountability” is a theological patch, created to cover the holes in a system that requires free will for salvation. If salvation depends on the individual’s conscious decision, then what of infants or young children who die? To avoid the horrific implication that they are lost, many churches invented an unbiblical loophole: God excuses them until they are old enough to choose Him.

But Paul’s teaching renders this unnecessary. He declares that **all** are under sin from birth:

Romans 5:12 (ESV): *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”*

The universality of sin includes infants; death proves it. If sin and its penalty extend to all, then so must grace. The comfort for grieving parents does not come from a man-made doctrine of accountability but from the sovereign mercy of God, who is able to save apart from human will.

David, after the death of his infant son, confessed this hope:

2 Samuel 12:23 (ESV): *“But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”*

David’s confidence did not rest on an imagined age of accountability but on God’s covenantal mercy. Similarly, Paul’s doctrine of election provides greater comfort than any man-made system could offer: God saves His people from every stage of life, not because they chose Him, but because He chose them.

The “age of accountability” highlights the inevitable inconsistencies of free will theology. In attempting to protect God’s character, it creates doctrines with no biblical grounding. By contrast, the Reformed position rests on the sure foundation of God’s Word, offering both clarity and comfort where human inventions falter.

5.4 Assurance and Joy in the Reformed Position

If free will theology produces fear, uncertainty, and doctrinal inventions, Reformed theology produces the opposite: assurance, joy, and stability. Grounding salvation in God’s sovereign grace rather than man’s choice provides believers with a foundation that cannot be shaken.

Paul’s letter to the Romans offers the fullest picture of this assurance. Having unfolded the doctrines of sin, justification, and election, he arrives at a resounding conclusion:

Romans 5:1–2 (ESV): *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

Notice the certainty: *we have peace, we stand, we rejoice*. There is no suggestion of instability or conditional security. For Paul, justification is a past act of God’s grace that produces a present confidence and a future hope.

This assurance flows directly from the truth that salvation is God’s work from beginning to end. As Paul told the Philippians:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): “*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*”

The believer’s joy rests not in the strength of his faith but in the faithfulness of the One who called him. Free will theology, by contrast, undermines assurance because it shifts the focus from God’s faithfulness to man’s decision. This creates anxiety: *Have I believed enough? Am I holding on tightly enough? What if I fall away?*

The Reformed position liberates the conscience by redirecting faith away from self and toward Christ alone. As John Calvin wrote:

“Our salvation is not in ourselves, but in Christ. We must not look at ourselves, but at Him alone. For it is He who has been given to us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption.” (Institutes, 3.24.5)

This Christ-centered assurance produces joy and fuels worship. When believers recognize that salvation is entirely of grace, boasting is silenced and gratitude abounds. The fruit of election is not pride but praise, not passivity but perseverance.

In this way, the Reformed doctrine of salvation does not merely resolve theological disputes—it builds a strong, joyful, and enduring Christian life.

5.5 Theological and Pastoral Implications

The debate over free will versus divine sovereignty is not an abstract quarrel for theologians alone; it strikes at the heart of Christian life and ministry. The theology we embrace inevitably shapes how we preach, how we worship, and how we comfort the people of God.

Theological Implications.

Free will theology distorts the gospel by shifting the decisive cause of salvation from God’s grace to man’s will. This alters the very nature of the good news, turning it from a declaration of what God has accomplished into an appeal for what man must decide. It also weakens the doctrine of assurance, since what man initiates, man can undo. By contrast, the Reformed position preserves the purity of Paul’s gospel, grounding salvation in the eternal will of God. This produces a coherent and consistent theology that harmonizes with the whole counsel of Scripture.

Pastoral Implications.

The consequences are equally significant in the life of the church. Preaching that emphasizes man’s free will inevitably pressures hearers to “make a decision,” often producing shallow conversions and false assurance. By contrast, preaching grounded in election magnifies God’s glory and calls sinners to humble dependence on His mercy. Pastoral care is also strengthened: believers struggling with doubt can be pointed not to the strength of their faith but to the

faithfulness of their God. Parents grieving the loss of a child need not rely on the invention of an “age of accountability,” but can rest in the mercy of a sovereign God who saves apart from human will.

Most importantly, Reformed theology produces **worship**. When salvation is rightly understood as God’s work from beginning to end, the believer responds with humility, gratitude, and awe. Paul himself models this in the great doxology following his discussion of election:

Romans 11:33 (ESV): “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*”

Here is the pastoral heart of the doctrine: election humbles man, exalts God, and assures the church that the gospel is not fragile but unbreakable. To embrace free will is to embrace uncertainty; to embrace election is to embrace the joy of knowing that *salvation belongs to the Lord*.

Chapter 6: The Assurance of Salvation in Reformed Theology

Introduction

Having traced the rise of free will theology and its consequences, we now turn to the positive construction of assurance as found in Paul’s writings and carried forward in the Reformed tradition. If Chapter 5 revealed the instability of salvation grounded in man’s will, this chapter will show the confidence, joy, and freedom that flow from salvation grounded in God’s sovereign grace.

The question of assurance is not a side issue but central to the Christian life. Believers who lack assurance are left with a fragile faith, anxious worship, and uncertain obedience. But believers who rest in God’s sovereign work stand firm, worship freely, and endure trials with hope. Paul’s theology offers nothing less than this foundation of assurance.

6.1 Paul’s Emphasis on Assurance

Paul consistently anchors the believer's confidence in God's initiative and faithfulness rather than in human resolve. Nowhere is this clearer than in his great summary of salvation in Romans 8:

Romans 8:29–30 (ESV): *“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. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

Here Paul describes what theologians have long called the “golden chain” of salvation. Each link is forged by God Himself: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. None are left dangling, and none depend on man's fragile will. The result is absolute assurance: those whom God begins to save, He unfailingly brings to glory.

This theme runs throughout Paul's letters. To the Philippians, he writes:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

Paul does not say that God merely offers the possibility of salvation or that He begins the work only for man to complete it. Rather, the God who begins is the God who finishes.

Similarly, in Ephesians Paul ties assurance directly to God's eternal plan:

Ephesians 1:13–14 (ESV): *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*

The Spirit's seal is not a temporary stamp awaiting man's confirmation but a divine pledge that guarantees the believer's inheritance. For Paul, assurance is not wishful thinking but the natural fruit of understanding God's sovereign grace.

6.2 The Joy of Grace Alone

Assurance in Paul's writings is not only a matter of security but also the wellspring of Christian joy. When salvation is understood as the free and sovereign gift of God, boasting is silenced and worship flourishes. By contrast, free will theology robs God of His glory and the believer of his joy, for it shifts the focus from God's grace to man's choice.

Paul emphasizes again and again that salvation is wholly a work of God. In Romans 3 he declares:

Romans 3:27–28 (ESV): *“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”*

If salvation were in any way dependent on human will, then boasting could not be excluded. Man would retain at least some ground to glory in his own decision, his own wisdom, or his own perseverance. But Paul makes it clear: justification is *apart from works of the law*—and by extension, apart from any effort or resolve of man.

This is why Paul insists that salvation must be of grace alone. As he tells the Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV): *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

The joy of the gospel is that man contributes nothing to his salvation. Faith itself is a gift, granted by God so that no one may boast. This strips away human pride but fills the believer with gratitude, humility, and joy.

The Reformed tradition has rightly emphasized that the doctrine of election is not a cold abstraction but a fountain of comfort and worship. As John Calvin put it:

“We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the pure fountain of God’s free mercy, until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.” (Institutes, 3.21.1)

Far from producing despair, the knowledge of election magnifies grace. It assures believers that their salvation does not rest in their shaky will but in God’s eternal love. This leads, inevitably, to joy. Paul himself erupts into praise at the end of his discussion of election:

Romans 11:36 (ESV): *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

Here lies the joy of grace alone: salvation begins with God, continues through God, and ends in God. To rest in this truth is to find not only security but also the deepest possible gladness.

6.3 Perseverance of the Saints

The doctrine of the **perseverance of the saints** flows naturally from Paul’s theology of grace. If God is the one who elects, calls, justifies, and glorifies, then it follows that He will also preserve His people to the end. Perseverance is not the result of human willpower but the outworking of God’s unfailing promise.

Paul makes this clear in Romans 8, where he climaxes his teaching on salvation with a series of rhetorical questions that drive home the certainty of the believer’s security:

Romans 8:31–34 (ESV): “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*”

The logic is unshakable: if God has already given His Son, He will certainly not fail to give everything else required for the believer’s salvation. No charge can stand against those whom God justifies, and no condemnation remains for those for whom Christ intercedes.

Paul concludes with words that eliminate all possibility of apostasy:

Romans 8:38–39 (ESV): “*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

If human free will could sever us from Christ, then Paul’s words would be false. But Paul leaves no room for such an exception: *nothing in all creation*—including man’s will—can separate God’s elect from His love.

Similarly, Paul assures the Thessalonians that perseverance is not left to their own efforts but rests in God’s faithfulness:

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (ESV): “*Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*”

The Reformed doctrine of perseverance is therefore not a doctrine of human stubbornness but of divine faithfulness. Believers persevere because God preserves. This is why the Westminster Confession rightly affirms: “*They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved*” (WCF 17.1).

The pastoral significance of this truth cannot be overstated. Where free will theology leaves believers anxious and uncertain, the doctrine of perseverance enables them to rest securely in God’s promise and to endure trials with hope. It is not their grip on God but God’s grip on them that guarantees their final salvation.

6.4 Pastoral Application of Assurance

The doctrine of assurance is not meant to remain in the realm of abstract theology; it has profound implications for the everyday life of the believer and the ministry of the church. Paul’s teaching on the sovereignty of God in salvation was written not merely for theological debate but for the strengthening of faith, the encouragement of saints, and the comfort of troubled consciences.

1. Comfort for the Doubting Believer.

Many Christians struggle with doubt: *Am I truly saved? Have I done enough? Could I lose my salvation?* Free will theology exacerbates these fears, since it makes salvation hinge on the frailty of human decision. But Paul directs believers away from themselves and toward Christ. His assurance is not “look harder within” but “look steadfastly to Him.” As he reminds Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:12 (ESV): *“But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”*

Paul’s confidence rests not in the strength of his faith but in the power of Christ to guard him until the end.

2. Strength for the Suffering Christian.

Trials often cause believers to question whether God has abandoned them. Yet Paul insists that suffering itself is woven into God’s saving plan. Earlier in Romans 8, he writes:

Romans 8:16–17 (ESV): *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”*

Suffering is not a sign of rejection but of sonship. The assurance of election enables believers to face trials not with despair but with hope, knowing that glory lies beyond the cross.

3. Confidence in Preaching and Evangelism.

The pastor who believes salvation rests on free will must resort to pressure tactics—emotional appeals, manipulation, or endless invitations. But the pastor who trusts in God’s sovereign election can preach the gospel with boldness and honesty, leaving the results in God’s hands. As Paul proclaimed in Corinth:

Acts 18:9–10 (ESV): *“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’”*

Paul’s courage came not from human receptivity but from God’s sovereign choice: there were already “many” whom God had elected. The task of the preacher is not to produce converts but to proclaim the gospel, trusting God to draw His people.

4. Hope in Death.

Finally, assurance shapes how believers face death. Because salvation rests in God’s unchanging purpose, the believer can echo Paul’s words with confidence:

2 Timothy 4:7–8 (ESV): *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”*

Here is the ultimate pastoral comfort: those in Christ need not fear death, for their inheritance is guaranteed.

6.5 Doxology: The End of Theology is Worship

Theology is never an end in itself. Its goal is not to satisfy intellectual curiosity but to lead the church into deeper awe of God. For Paul, no doctrine more naturally leads to worship than the assurance of salvation grounded in God's sovereign grace.

After expounding the mystery of election and God's sovereign plan of redemption in Romans 9–11, Paul does not end with further analysis or speculation but with doxology:

Romans 11:33–36 (ESV):

*“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

‘For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?’

‘Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?’

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

This doxology captures the essence of assurance in Reformed theology. The believer's confidence is not in himself but in the God whose wisdom and power are beyond comprehension. Salvation is “from him,” rooted in His eternal purpose; it is “through him,” accomplished by His sovereign grace; and it is “to him,” directed toward His eternal glory.

In this way, the doctrine of election and perseverance does not produce pride but humility, not fear but confidence, not despair but joy. It silences boasting and magnifies grace. It turns theology into worship.

For the believer, assurance means freedom from fear, strength in trials, confidence in preaching, and hope in death. But ultimately, assurance means this: that the glory of salvation belongs wholly to God. And in this truth, the church finds its song, echoing Paul's doxology—*to Him be glory forever. Amen.*

Chapter 7: The Pastoral and Practical Implications of Free Will vs. Election

7.1 The Burden of Free Will Preaching

The contrast between free will theology and the Reformed doctrine of election is not merely a matter of abstract debate—it is a matter of pastoral practice and spiritual health. Nowhere is this more evident than in the pulpit.

When salvation is believed to rest on human decision, preaching inevitably carries a heavy burden. The preacher feels compelled to persuade, pressure, and even manipulate hearers into making a decision for Christ. Sermons often conclude with emotional appeals, extended altar calls, or urgent pleas that imply the eternal destiny of the congregation depends upon their immediate response. The preacher must not only proclaim the gospel but also generate the desired outcome.

This burden is not only unscriptural but crushing. It distorts the role of the preacher, who is called to sow the seed faithfully (2 Tim. 4:2) rather than to force the harvest. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 3:6–7 (ESV): *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”*

Paul did not see himself as a spiritual salesman, anxiously closing the deal. He planted the gospel seed; others watered it. But God alone gave life. This conviction freed Paul from the crushing anxiety that characterizes much of free will preaching today.

By contrast, Reformed preaching liberates the pastor. Knowing that God has chosen His people from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), the preacher can proclaim Christ boldly, clearly, and faithfully, trusting the Spirit to draw the elect. The weight of salvation does not rest on the eloquence of the preacher or the will of the hearer but on the sovereign power of God.

This is why Paul, though deeply burdened for the lost (Rom. 9:2–3), never reduced the gospel to a sales pitch. Instead, he preached Christ crucified and trusted in “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

7.2 Parenting, Assurance, and the “Age of Accountability”

Another area where free will theology bears significant pastoral consequences is in the realm of parenting and the salvation of children. Many evangelical households have been shaped by the teaching of an “age of accountability”—the idea that children are innocent until a certain age, at which point they become responsible to make a free will decision for Christ. While often

intended to comfort parents, this doctrine is not found in Scripture and creates more confusion than assurance.

The “age of accountability” assumes that sin is not imputed until one is old enough to exercise choice. Yet Paul explicitly teaches the opposite. In Romans 5, he grounds original sin not in individual choices but in Adam’s representative act:

Romans 5:12 (ESV): *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”*

Even infants, who have no ability to choose or reject, suffer death because they are born under Adam’s headship. This is why David could confess of himself:

Psalms 51:5 (ESV): *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

Every child is born a sinner—not at the mythical “age of accountability,” but from the very beginning. To deny this is to undermine the biblical doctrine of original sin.

This distortion has profound pastoral effects. Parents are often left wringing their hands, wondering if their child has “reached the age” or if they have made a sufficient profession of faith to be secure. The focus shifts from God’s sovereign grace to the child’s fragile will. The result is anxiety, false assurance, or both.

By contrast, the Reformed view offers true comfort. Parents are called to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), to bring them under the Word, and to pray fervently for God’s saving grace. Salvation is never guaranteed by biology, baptism, or upbringing—but neither is it left to the uncertain timing of a child’s will. It rests in the eternal decree of God.

This provides real assurance for parents who grieve the loss of infants or who fear for their children’s salvation. The hope is not that their child was “too young to be accountable,” but that the God who is rich in mercy has chosen to save a people for Himself and is mighty to save the children of believers. The covenant promises of God give greater comfort than any invented doctrine of accountability.

7.3 Evangelism and Missions: Confidence in God’s Sovereignty

One of the most frequent objections to the doctrine of election is that it undermines evangelism and missions. If God has already chosen His people, some argue, why preach at all? Yet this objection misunderstands both Scripture and Paul’s ministry. Far from discouraging evangelism, election provided Paul with confidence and urgency in his mission.

When Paul faced opposition in Corinth, the Lord Himself reassured him in a vision:

Acts 18:9–10 (ESV): *“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’”*

Notice the logic. Paul was to keep preaching *because* God had already chosen people in Corinth. The doctrine of election did not render preaching unnecessary; it made it fruitful. Paul could be bold because he knew that God’s word would not return void (Isa. 55:11) but would accomplish its purpose in gathering the elect.

This perspective runs throughout Paul’s letters. He endured beatings, shipwrecks, and imprisonment not because he was uncertain of the outcome, but because he was confident in God’s sovereign plan. He writes to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:10 (ESV): *“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”*

Paul’s endurance flowed from his conviction that God had a chosen people who would certainly be saved. His role was simply to proclaim the gospel as the appointed means by which God brings His elect to faith.

In contrast, free will theology burdens evangelism with uncertainty. If everything depends on the hearer’s choice, then evangelism becomes a matter of strategies, techniques, and persuasion. Success or failure rests on the preacher’s ability and the sinner’s willingness. The inevitable result is either pride in apparent success or despair in apparent failure.

But the Reformed view produces both humility and boldness. Humility, because the preacher knows he cannot save a single soul. Boldness, because he knows God certainly will. Election turns evangelism from a desperate gamble into a confident proclamation of the King’s victory. The results belong to the Lord.

7.4 Worship and the Glory of God

At the heart of the debate between free will and election lies the question of glory. Who ultimately receives the credit for salvation—man or God?

Free will theology, even if unintentionally, shifts the spotlight toward man. Salvation becomes the result of man’s wise choice, his decision to “accept Christ,” or his ability to persevere in faith. God provides the opportunity, but man must complete the process. The subtle implication is that some will be in heaven because they were more receptive, more spiritual, or more willing than others. This undermines Paul’s clear declaration:

1 Corinthians 1:28–31 (ESV): *“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from*

God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

Paul strips man of every ground for boasting. If anyone could claim that his free will decision was the decisive factor in salvation, then boasting would be possible. But Paul will not allow it. "Because of him you are in Christ Jesus" (v. 30). The entire saving work—from election to redemption to sanctification—is God's doing.

This truth radically reshapes worship. A free will gospel produces worship centered on human response: songs about "I decided," "I surrendered," "I chose." But a gospel of sovereign grace produces worship that magnifies God alone: songs of praise for His mercy, His power, and His glory. Worship shifts from a celebration of human decision to a doxology of divine grace.

Paul himself models this transition. After eleven chapters of deep theology in Romans, he does not end with a call for man to act but with a hymn of praise to God's sovereignty:

Romans 11:36 (ESV): *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."*

This is the inevitable end of true theology: worship. The doctrine of election magnifies the grace of God and secures the joy of the believer. Free will theology cannot sustain such worship, for it reserves a sliver of glory for man. Reformed theology, by contrast, bows low before the throne and exalts the God who saves completely.

7.5 Pastoral Implications for Discipleship

The doctrine one believes about salvation inevitably shapes the way discipleship is practiced. Free will theology produces instability, while the doctrine of election and perseverance nurtures deep-rooted confidence and growth.

1. Stability in Trials

A disciple who believes salvation depends on his will is easily shaken when hardships arise. He may ask, *"Did I truly choose Christ? Did I believe sincerely enough? Could I fall away if my will falters?"* Such questions corrode faith and can leave a believer paralyzed by fear. By contrast, Paul assures believers that trials are not signs of God's abandonment but part of His sovereign plan:

Romans 8:28–30 (ESV): *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 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. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."*

Discipleship flourishes when rooted in this certainty: God will complete what He began.

2. Joy in Salvation

When salvation is viewed as a fragile possession that can be lost through negligence or poor choices, joy is fleeting. But when salvation is understood as an unmerited gift of sovereign grace, joy becomes abiding. The believer is free to rejoice in God's mercy without fear of losing it tomorrow. This joy strengthens obedience, for it flows not from insecurity but from gratitude.

3. Boldness in Witness

Disciples of free will theology often hesitate to share the gospel, fearing they may say the wrong words or fail to convince. But a Reformed disciple knows that the power lies not in persuasion but in the gospel itself. As Paul declared:

Romans 1:16 (ESV): *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

The gospel is powerful not because of man's choice but because it is the means by which God calls His elect. This frees disciples to share Christ with confidence.

4. Perseverance in Growth

Finally, discipleship requires perseverance. Free will theology often leaves Christians disheartened, believing that repeated failures reveal a weak will or a defective faith. But Reformed theology anchors perseverance in God's promise:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

Disciples persevere not because their will is strong, but because God's will is unbreakable.

In these ways, the Reformed understanding of salvation builds disciples who are stable in trials, joyful in salvation, bold in witness, and persevering in growth. Such discipleship reflects the solid foundation laid by Paul and magnifies the grace of God.

7.6 Conclusion: A Church Grounded in Grace

The debate over free will and election is not an abstract theological quarrel; it shapes the life of the church in profound ways. Free will theology produces anxiety in the pulpit, confusion in parenting, uncertainty in evangelism, man-centered worship, and fragile discipleship. Though often well-intentioned, it leaves both leaders and members carrying burdens that Scripture never places upon them.

Reformed theology, by contrast, grounds the church in the unshakable grace of God. Preachers proclaim Christ with confidence, knowing that God gives the growth. Parents rest not in a man-made doctrine of “accountability” but in the mercy of a covenant-keeping God. Evangelists speak boldly because God has His people in every place. Worshipers sing not of their decision but of His glory. Disciples grow not because their will is strong, but because His will cannot fail.

At the center of this confidence is Paul's unwavering proclamation that salvation is of the Lord. Election confronts human pride, strips away every illusion of control, and forces man to bow before the God who saves by grace alone. This is not an easy doctrine to accept, for it requires us to let go of autonomy and acknowledge our utter dependence on God. Yet in surrendering this false freedom, the church receives true freedom: the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The pastoral implications are therefore clear. A church built on free will will always be restless, fragile, and man-centered. A church built on grace will be stable, joyful, and God-centered. To embrace election is to embrace both assurance and mission, worship and discipleship, humility and hope.

As Paul himself declared:

Ephesians 1:11–12 (ESV): *“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, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”*

Here lies the ultimate aim: the praise of God's glory. To reject free will is not to diminish man but to magnify God. And in that magnifying, the church finds its rest, its mission, and its joy.

Chapter 8: Wrestling with Election — Objections and God's Sovereignty

8.1 The Common Objections to Election

The doctrine of election has always stirred controversy. While Scripture presents it as a source of assurance, worship, and joy, many recoil from it instinctively. The reason is simple: election confronts deeply ingrained assumptions about fairness, responsibility, and human autonomy. From Paul's day until now, objections arise whenever God's sovereignty is proclaimed without compromise.

1. “Election makes God unjust.”

This objection echoes the very question Paul anticipates in Romans 9:14:

Romans 9:14 (ESV): *“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!”*

To human ears, the idea that God chooses some and not others sounds unfair. The assumption is that God owes every sinner an equal opportunity. Yet Paul rejects this line of reasoning entirely.

God is never obligated to show mercy; if mercy were owed, it would no longer be mercy. Justice is getting what we deserve—eternal condemnation. Grace is receiving what we do not deserve—salvation. Paul insists there is no injustice in God, for “he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18).

2. “Election removes human responsibility.”

If God has decreed salvation, some argue, then man’s choices no longer matter. Yet Paul never allows election to negate responsibility. Throughout his letters, he calls sinners to repent, believe, and obey. He does so because God’s sovereign plan includes not only the ends (salvation) but also the means (faith and repentance). As Paul told the Philippians:

Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV): “*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.*”

Responsibility and sovereignty are not enemies but partners. The believer works precisely because God is working in him.

3. “Election makes evangelism unnecessary.”

This objection misunderstands election entirely. As Paul’s example in Acts 18:10 demonstrates, election is the very reason evangelism is necessary and fruitful. If no one were chosen, no one would respond. But because God has His people, the proclamation of the gospel is guaranteed success. Paul endured all things “for the sake of the elect” (2 Tim. 2:10), not despite election but because of it.

4. “Election portrays God as unloving.”

This objection strikes at the heart of modern sentimentality. Many assume that love requires absolute equality of outcome. Yet Paul reminds us that God’s love is revealed in Christ dying for sinners who deserved nothing but wrath (Rom. 5:8). Election does not diminish God’s love; it magnifies it. That He would set His affection freely on anyone is astonishing. Election means that His love is not conditioned on human worthiness but flows entirely from His sovereign grace.

These objections are serious and pastoral. They must be addressed, not ignored. But Paul himself shows that the objections are not new—they arose in his day as well. And his response is not to soften the doctrine but to proclaim it even more clearly.

8.2 Paul’s Direct Response in Romans 9

No passage in the New Testament speaks more directly to the objections against election than Romans 9. Here Paul anticipates every protest the human heart can raise and answers with divine authority.

1. God’s Freedom to Show Mercy

Paul begins by citing God’s words to Moses:

Romans 9:15 (ESV): *“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’”*

Mercy, by definition, is never owed. The very moment it becomes a right, it ceases to be mercy. God declares His freedom to bestow compassion according to His sovereign will. As John Calvin observes, *“If God is bound to show mercy, then it is no longer mercy but debt.”* Paul’s point is unmistakable: salvation depends not on man’s willing or running, but on God’s mercy (Rom. 9:16).

2. The Example of Pharaoh

Paul then presents Pharaoh as an example of divine hardening:

Romans 9:17–18 (ESV): *“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”*

God’s dealings with Pharaoh reveal His absolute sovereignty over rulers and nations. Pharaoh’s rebellion did not frustrate God’s plan; it fulfilled it. As Augustine explained, God did not create evil in Pharaoh’s heart but sovereignly withdrew His restraining grace, leaving Pharaoh to the hardness he desired. This demonstrates that God’s glory is revealed not only in salvation but also in judgment.

3. The Potter and the Clay

Anticipating the objection of unfairness, Paul invokes the analogy of the potter and clay:

Romans 9:20–21 (ESV): *“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”*

Here Paul cuts to the heart of the matter: man is not in the position to sit in judgment over God. As Creator, God possesses the right to do what He wills with His creation. Human notions of fairness cannot be imposed upon divine sovereignty. As John Murray notes, *“The very essence of sin is man’s refusal to accept his creaturely dependence upon God.”* Paul calls us to abandon that rebellion and submit to God’s authority.

4. The Purpose of Election

Paul concludes that God’s ultimate purpose in election is the display of His glory:

Romans 9:22–23 (ESV): *“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.”*

Election is not arbitrary; it is doxological. God magnifies both His justice and His mercy in His sovereign dealings with humanity. This perspective shifts the focus from man-centered fairness to God-centered glory.

In Romans 9, Paul leaves no room for compromise. His strong language silences objections by pointing us not inward, to human choice, but upward, to divine sovereignty. The question is not whether man finds God's ways agreeable but whether man will bow before the Potter who holds all rights over the clay.

8.3 Election and Human Responsibility

One of the greatest tensions in theology is the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Critics often insist that if God unconditionally elects, then man cannot be truly responsible for his response to the gospel. Yet Paul affirms both truths without hesitation: God sovereignly elects, and man is accountable to believe.

1. Paul's Paradoxical Balance

Paul presents election and responsibility side by side, never attempting to dissolve the tension. In Romans 9, he proclaims God's absolute sovereignty in election. But in Romans 10, he calls all people everywhere to believe:

Romans 10:9–10 (ESV): *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”*

Paul sees no contradiction between unconditional election and the genuine offer of the gospel. God ordains both the ends (salvation) and the means (faith and confession).

2. Faith and Repentance as Gifts

While Paul commands sinners to believe, he also teaches that faith itself is a gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV): *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Faith is not the contribution of man's free will but the gracious work of the Spirit in the heart. Repentance, too, is granted by God (2 Tim. 2:25). Thus, human responsibility remains real, but it operates entirely within the framework of God's sovereign grace.

3. Responsibility Grounded in God's Sovereignty

Far from undermining responsibility, election actually secures it. Because God has chosen His people, the preaching of the gospel is not in vain. Paul endured suffering “for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:10). His confidence in evangelism came not from man's free will but from God's sovereign purpose.

4. The Mystery of Compatibilism

The relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility is often described as “compatibilism”: both truths are fully compatible, even if their harmony transcends human logic. As Charles Spurgeon once remarked, *“I never reconcile friends.”* Paul does not reconcile these truths because they are not enemies; they are partners in God's redemptive plan.

In the end, Paul affirms that man is commanded to repent and believe, and those who reject the gospel are justly condemned. At the same time, those who believe do so only because God first chose, called, and enabled them. Election does not nullify responsibility—it establishes it within the sovereign plan of God.

8.4 The Nature of God’s Justice and Mercy

A central objection to election is rooted in human ideas of fairness. Many insist that if God saves some and not others, He must be unjust. Yet Paul, along with the broader testimony of Scripture, shows that the problem lies not in God’s character but in man’s misunderstanding of justice and mercy.

1. Justice Defined Biblically

Justice means giving each his due. For sinners, what is due is judgment. Paul declares unequivocally:

Romans 6:23 (ESV): *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Death is the wage we earn; life is the gift we do not deserve. When God condemns, He acts with perfect justice. When He saves, He acts with sovereign mercy. Never does He commit injustice.

2. Mercy Cannot Be Demanded

Mercy is never owed. The very essence of mercy is that it is freely given. To demand that God give mercy equally to all is to turn mercy into entitlement, stripping it of its meaning. As Paul insists in Romans 9:16, salvation “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” If all are sinners, then none deserve mercy; that some receive it only magnifies the freeness of grace.

3. The Revelation of God’s Glory

Election displays both aspects of God’s character—justice and mercy. Paul teaches that God endures “vessels of wrath” in order “to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22–23). This dual display reveals the full scope of God’s nature. His justice is not diminished by His mercy, and His mercy does not cancel His justice. Both shine together, magnifying His glory.

4. Correcting the Human Notion of “Fairness”

The objection that election is unfair reveals a deeper issue: fallen man seeks to sit in judgment over God. But as Paul sharply rebukes in Romans 9:20, *“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”* The question is not whether God fits our concept of fairness, but whether we will submit to His revealed will. As R.C. Sproul once wrote, *“The issue is not why God chooses some and not others, but why He chose any at all.”*

5. The Cross as the Meeting Point of Justice and Mercy

The ultimate demonstration that God is both just and merciful is the cross of Christ. Paul states:

Romans 3:25–26 (ESV): “[God] put forward [Christ] as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Here, justice and mercy converge perfectly. God punishes sin fully in Christ, and He grants mercy fully to those united to Christ. Election flows from this reality: the cross secures salvation for the elect in a way that glorifies both God’s justice and His mercy.

Thus, the doctrine of election does not impugn God’s character but exalts it. Human objections arise not from Scripture but from sinful assumptions. Paul leads us to see that the real marvel is not that God does not save all, but that He saves any.

8.5 The Pastoral Call to Humility and Trust

The doctrine of election is not given to the church as an abstract puzzle but as a call to humility, worship, and trust. Paul does not soften election to make it more palatable; instead, he applies it pastorally, reminding believers that God’s sovereignty should lead not to pride or despair, but to faith and awe.

1. Election Confronts Human Pride

At its core, free will theology appeals to man’s desire for autonomy and self-determination. Election dismantles this illusion. Paul reminds the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:27–29 (ESV): “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

Election leaves no room for boasting. Salvation is entirely of grace, ensuring that God alone receives the glory.

2. Election Calls for Rest in God’s Wisdom

The reality of God’s sovereign choice invites trust in His wisdom. We do not see the end from the beginning, but He does. Paul concludes his extended meditation on election in Romans 9–11 not with a neat philosophical resolution but with a doxology:

Romans 11:33 (ESV): “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

Paul models humility before mystery. Election reminds the church that our place is not to judge God’s decisions but to rest in His perfect wisdom.

3. Election Produces Assurance, Not Anxiety

Where free will theology leaves believers questioning whether they have done enough, election assures them that their salvation rests entirely on God’s eternal purpose. Paul writes:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

The believer’s confidence is not in his fragile will but in God’s unstoppable grace. This transforms election from a doctrine of dread into a doctrine of comfort.

4. Election Motivates Worship and Gratitude

Rather than stirring fatalism, election fuels worship. Those chosen by grace know that they deserve nothing, yet have received everything. This recognition produces joy and gratitude, not apathy. As Jonathan Edwards declared, *“The doctrine of God’s sovereignty has very often appeared an exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet doctrine to me.”*

In this way, election functions pastorally: it humbles the proud, steadies the anxious, comforts the suffering, and magnifies the glory of God in the hearts of His people. Far from undermining the Christian life, it grounds it in grace from beginning to end.

8.6 Conclusion: Bowing Before Mystery, Standing in Assurance

The objections to election are as old as Paul’s epistles. They rise not from Scripture but from the human heart’s struggle with God’s absolute sovereignty. Election confronts us with truths our pride resists: that we are not autonomous, that salvation is not within our control, and that God alone determines the destiny of souls. Yet this very confrontation is what makes the doctrine so vital.

Paul does not shrink back from these realities. He does not soften election to accommodate human sensitivities. Instead, he proclaims it boldly, grounding it in God’s freedom, justice, and mercy. He silences objections by reminding us of our place as creatures before the Creator, clay in the hands of the Potter.

At the same time, Paul applies the doctrine pastorally. Election humbles the proud, comforts the anxious, and fills the believer with assurance and joy. It shifts our confidence from the shifting sands of human will to the unshakable foundation of divine grace. The believer’s salvation rests not on his fleeting decisions but on God’s eternal decree, secured in Christ before the foundation of the world.

To embrace election, then, is to bow before the mystery of God’s wisdom and to stand firm in the assurance of His grace. It is to confess with Paul:

Romans 11:36 (ESV): *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

Thus, what begins as a doctrine that offends human pride ends as a fountain of praise. Election is not a stumbling block for faith but the bedrock of assurance. In it, we see that salvation is truly of the Lord—from beginning to end.

Chapter 9: The Historical Struggle Over Free Will and Election

9.1 The Early Church Fathers and the Seeds of the Debate

The earliest centuries of the church reveal both clarity and tension on the matter of grace and free will. While the apostles had left no ambiguity—salvation is “not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:9, ESV)—the church quickly faced pressures to explain how divine sovereignty related to human responsibility.

1. Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch

Clement, writing at the end of the first century, grounded salvation firmly in God’s initiative. He exhorted believers to humility, reminding them that “we are not justified by ourselves... but through faith, by which Almighty God has justified all men from the beginning” (*1 Clement* 32). Ignatius, likewise, spoke of believers as chosen and preserved by God’s will, not their own power. These early voices echoed Paul’s insistence that salvation is grounded in divine grace.

2. Justin Martyr and Origen

As Christianity interacted with Greek philosophy, some Fathers, such as Justin Martyr, spoke of man’s capacity to respond to God, at times using language that suggested an elevated role for human choice. Origen, in particular, stressed the soul’s freedom in a way that later critics judged as dangerously synergistic. Though not denying grace, his framework left room for human cooperation as a decisive factor, softening the sharp Pauline edge.

3. Seeds of the Debate

Thus, even before Augustine, the church contained voices emphasizing divine sovereignty and voices tilting toward human ability. These seeds would later bloom into full theological controversy. The real watershed came with Pelagius, whose teachings forced the church to define once for all whether salvation was truly of God alone or a cooperative endeavor between man and God.

9.2 Augustine’s Defense of Sovereign Grace

The decisive moment in the early church’s struggle over free will came with the controversy between **Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.)** and **Pelagius (c. 354–418 A.D.)**. This debate not only sharpened the church’s understanding of grace but also set the trajectory for all later discussions on election and free will.

1. Pelagius and the Denial of Original Sin

Pelagius, a British monk, was deeply troubled by what he perceived as moral laxity among Christians. He argued that God's commands would be meaningless unless man had the full natural ability to obey them. Thus, he denied the doctrine of original sin, insisting that every human being is born morally neutral, with the same capacity for obedience as Adam before the fall. For Pelagius, salvation was essentially the product of human willpower aided by Christ's example.

This teaching, however, stood in direct contradiction to Paul's assertion:

Romans 5:12 (ESV): *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

Paul roots the universality of sin in Adam's fall, making clear that mankind's plight is inherited, not merely imitated.

2. Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin

Augustine rose to defend the apostolic faith. He taught that Adam's sin corrupted all humanity, leaving every man spiritually dead and incapable of turning to God apart from divine grace. In his words, the human will is not free but "in bondage" to sin. This is precisely Paul's description in Ephesians 2:1:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins."

Dead men do not cooperate with God; they must be resurrected by His sovereign power.

3. Grace as Sovereign and Irresistible

For Augustine, grace is not merely assistance given to those who take the first step. It is the decisive cause of salvation. God's grace awakens the sinner, grants faith, and secures perseverance. As he famously wrote, "Give what You command, and command what You will," expressing that only God's enabling grace allows obedience.

Augustine grounded this view in Paul's testimony:

Philippians 2:13 (ESV): *"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

The will itself, Augustine argued, is shaped and moved by God's sovereign action.

4. Predestination as a Safeguard of Grace

To protect grace from being diluted by human effort, Augustine advanced the doctrine of predestination: God has eternally chosen those whom He will save, not on the basis of foreseen faith or merit, but solely according to His purpose. Augustine cited Paul:

Romans 8:29–30 (ESV): *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."*

For Augustine, this “golden chain” demonstrated that salvation is God’s work from beginning to end.

5. The Church’s Verdict

The Councils of Carthage (418) and Ephesus (431) sided with Augustine, condemning Pelagianism as heresy. While later centuries would introduce nuances, the Augustinian victory established a foundation: salvation is wholly of God’s grace, not man’s will.

9.3 Medieval Drift Toward Synergism

Although Augustine’s defense of sovereign grace won the day against Pelagius, his teachings were not always consistently upheld in the centuries that followed. The medieval period witnessed a gradual drift toward *synergism*—the belief that salvation involves a cooperative effort between divine grace and human will. This shift was subtle but significant, preparing the ground for later controversies.

1. Semi-Pelagianism

In southern Gaul during the fifth and sixth centuries, certain theologians (notably John Cassian) resisted both Pelagius and Augustine. They admitted the necessity of grace but insisted that the first step toward God could still be made by man’s free will. Grace, in this view, assisted the willing heart but did not create that willingness.

Paul’s words directly contradict this notion:

Romans 3:11 (ESV): *“No one understands; no one seeks for God.”*

If no one seeks God on his own, then even the first movement toward faith must be the work of God.

The **Council of Orange (529)** attempted to mediate, affirming the necessity of prevenient grace while stopping short of endorsing full Augustinian predestination. This compromise allowed semi-Pelagian tendencies to persist under the surface.

2. Scholasticism and Human Cooperation

In the Middle Ages, theologians like Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas wrestled with harmonizing grace and free will. While Aquinas upheld much of Augustine’s doctrine, he also described grace as enabling man to cooperate freely in salvation. This cooperation language, though not Pelagian, reintroduced ambiguity that Paul’s writings do not allow.

Aquinas wrote of grace “perfecting nature,” suggesting that man’s natural will is not utterly corrupt but elevated by grace to respond. Yet Paul insists that apart from grace, the will is enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:16–17).

3. The Rise of Merit Theology

By the later Middle Ages, the drift toward synergism culminated in a system of merit. The

church taught that while grace initiates salvation, man contributes by cooperating through works, sacraments, and penance. This blurred the distinction between God's gift and man's effort, leading to the common belief that justification was a process of becoming righteous through cooperation with grace.

This was precisely what Paul opposed when he wrote:

Galatians 2:16 (ESV): *“Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”*

4. A Loss of Assurance

As a result of this drift, assurance of salvation virtually disappeared from medieval piety. If salvation hinged on man's cooperation with grace, then no one could be certain of final perseverance. This insecurity set the stage for the Reformation, when Martin Luther and others recovered the Pauline-Augustinian conviction that salvation rests on God's sovereign grace alone.

9.4 The Reformation Recovery

The medieval drift toward synergism eventually provoked a thunderous response: the Protestant Reformation. At its core, the Reformation was a recovery of Pauline and Augustinian theology—salvation by grace alone through faith alone, apart from works of the law. Nowhere was this recovery clearer than in the Reformers' rejection of free will as a saving power.

1. Martin Luther and the Bondage of the Will

In 1524, Erasmus of Rotterdam published *On Free Will (De libero arbitrio)*, arguing for human cooperation with divine grace. Luther replied a year later with what he considered his most important work, *The Bondage of the Will (De servo arbitrio)*. In it, Luther insisted that Erasmus had struck at the heart of the gospel by exalting human ability.

Luther wrote: *“If any man ascribes salvation, even the very least, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace and has not learned Jesus Christ aright.”* For Luther, man's will was in bondage to sin, incapable of choosing God, echoing Paul's declaration:

Romans 8:7–8 (ESV): *“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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

Luther restored the Pauline clarity: man is not sick but dead in sin, and salvation is wholly of God's sovereign initiative.

2. John Calvin and the Institutes of the Christian Religion

Calvin further systematized the Reformation's recovery of grace. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (first published 1536, expanded in later editions), Calvin gave prominence to God's

sovereign election. He argued that predestination safeguards the gospel by attributing salvation entirely to God's grace:

“We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by His eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was His pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was His pleasure to doom to destruction.”

Calvin's language reflected Paul's unyielding logic in passages such as Ephesians 1:4–5:

“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.”

3. Reformed Confessions

The Reformers codified their teaching in confessions and catechisms, which consistently affirmed election and denied free will as a saving power. The **Belgic Confession (1561)** states: *“We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin... God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just: merciful, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel, of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works.”*

4. Assurance Restored

Unlike the medieval system, which left believers uncertain, the Reformation proclaimed assurance as the fruit of sovereign grace. If salvation depends on God's eternal decree, then believers can rest secure in Christ's finished work. As Paul declared:

Romans 8:30 (ESV): *“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

The Reformers saw this as an unbreakable chain of salvation, incapable of being severed by human failure.

9.5 The Arminian Challenge and the Synod of Dort

Despite the Reformation's recovery of Paul's doctrine of sovereign grace, challenges soon arose from within Protestantism itself. The most significant came through the teaching of **Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)** and his followers, whose views reopened the debate between divine sovereignty and human free will.

1. The Rise of Arminius

Originally trained in the Reformed tradition, Arminius came to reject certain Calvinist doctrines. While he affirmed the seriousness of sin, he proposed that God grants “prevenient grace” to all people, enabling them to respond freely to the gospel. Election, he argued, was based on God's foreknowledge of who would believe, not His sovereign decree.

This view represented a decisive shift from Paul's teaching. Paul insisted:

Romans 9:16 (ESV): “*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*”

For Arminius, salvation ultimately did depend on human will, though aided by grace.

2. The Remonstrance of 1610

After Arminius’s death, his followers drafted the **Remonstrance of 1610**, summarizing their five points:

1. Conditional election based on foreseen faith.
2. Universal atonement (Christ died for all, but only believers benefit).
3. Human inability, but with prevenient grace enabling faith.
4. Resistible grace (God’s call can be rejected).
5. Uncertainty of perseverance (believers may fall from grace).

Each point echoed aspects of Pelagius and Semi-Pelagianism, softening or overturning the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation.

3. The Synod of Dort (1618–1619)

In response, the Reformed churches convened the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands. Delegates from across Europe examined the Remonstrant teachings and issued a firm rejection. The **Canons of Dort** articulated five counterpoints—later remembered as the “Five Points of Calvinism” (TULIP):

- **Total Depravity** (man is utterly unable to turn to God).
- **Unconditional Election** (God’s choice is not based on foreseen faith).
- **Limited Atonement** (Christ died effectively for the elect).
- **Irresistible Grace** (the Spirit’s call cannot be resisted by the elect).
- **Perseverance of the Saints** (the elect will be preserved to the end).

The Synod declared the Arminian views not merely erroneous but a distortion of the gospel, undermining assurance and exalting man’s will over God’s grace.

4. Paul’s Theology Vindicated

The Synod’s decisions reflected the sharp Pauline emphasis already noted in Romans and Ephesians. As Paul declared in 2 Timothy 1:9:

“[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”

For Paul, as for Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, salvation is grounded in God's eternal purpose, not man's choice.

5. Assurance Protected

By condemning the Remonstrants, Dort preserved the believer's assurance. If salvation depended on human free will, perseverance could never be certain. But if it rests on God's sovereign decree, then nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39).

9.6 Implications for Today's Church

The long history of the church's struggle over free will and election is not a matter of dusty theology; it continues to shape Christian faith and practice today. Many evangelical churches, while rejecting Pelagius in name, nevertheless embrace views closer to Arminius than to Paul.

1. The Mainstreaming of Free Will Theology

In much of modern preaching, salvation is presented as God offering grace and man deciding whether to accept it. Phrases like "God has done His part, now you must do yours" dominate popular evangelism. While intended to make the gospel simple, such language risks shifting the focus from God's sovereign action to man's decisive choice.

This rhetoric mirrors the very distortions refuted at the Synod of Dort. The result is often a Christianity marked by:

- **Uncertainty of perseverance** ("I may lose my salvation").
- **Age of accountability theories**, which assume children are born innocent until choosing sin.
- **Man-centered worship**, where God's glory is diminished because man's will is magnified.

2. Why Free Will Appeals to the Human Heart

The persistence of free will theology reveals something deeper: man's desire for autonomy. The doctrine of election confronts us with uncomfortable truths—our inability, our dependence, and God's absolute sovereignty. To accept election is to renounce control and confess that even our faith is a gift (Eph. 2:8–9).

This confrontation is precisely why many resist election: it humbles human pride and forces us to acknowledge God as the sole author of salvation.

3. The Reformed Foundation of Assurance and Joy

By contrast, the Reformed view—rooted in Paul's writings and defended across the centuries—offers solid assurance. Because salvation depends on God's eternal decree and Christ's finished work, the believer can rest in the promise:

John 10:28–29 (ESV): *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*

This assurance produces humility and joy. We cannot boast in our choice; we can only boast in God’s grace.

4. A Call to the Church Today

The church must continue to recover and proclaim Paul’s gospel in its undiluted form. To compromise with free will theology is to return to the errors that plagued the church from Pelagius to the Remonstrants. To stand firm in the doctrines of grace is to uphold the glory of God and the comfort of His people.

Conclusion of Chapter 9

From the early church to Augustine, from the medieval drift to the Reformation, from the Arminian controversy to today, the struggle over free will has remained at the heart of Christian theology. Scripture, and especially Paul’s writings, consistently testify that salvation is of the Lord, not of man. History shows that whenever this truth is compromised, assurance and God’s glory suffer. But when it is upheld, the church flourishes in confidence, humility, and joy.

Chapter 10: Pastoral and Practical Implications of Paul’s Theology of Election

10.1 From Doctrine to Life

The Reformed understanding of election is not meant to be an abstract puzzle for scholars. Paul never presented it that way. Instead, he consistently used the doctrine to **comfort believers**, **humble the proud**, and **inspire holiness**. In this sense, election is not only a theological truth but a pastoral necessity.

As Paul wrote:

Romans 15:4 (ESV): *“For 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.”*

Doctrines like election are written for our encouragement, not our speculation.

10.2 Assurance of Salvation

One of the greatest pastoral benefits of election is assurance. Because salvation rests in God’s sovereign purpose, the believer’s confidence does not rise or fall with personal performance. Paul makes this explicit:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV): *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

The Arminian position, by contrast, leaves believers anxious. If salvation depends on free will, then assurance is always provisional. But Paul’s doctrine teaches that God’s electing grace guarantees perseverance. This assurance is not a license to sin but a foundation for joyful obedience.

10.3 Humility Before God

Election destroys human pride. Paul presses this point in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29:

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

Pastorally, this truth calls the church to humility. No one can claim credit for his salvation. All glory belongs to God. This humility should foster unity, for if we all stand only by grace, then divisions based on pride or superiority are inexcusable.

10.4 Holiness as the Fruit of Election

Paul always linked election with holiness. In Ephesians 1:4 he writes:

“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

Election is not a bare decree but a call to transformation. Believers are not only chosen for heaven but also for holiness now. The pastoral implication is clear: election motivates sanctification. The chosen are to live as chosen, displaying God’s glory in their lives.

10.5 Comfort in Suffering

Election provides profound comfort in suffering. Paul assures believers in Romans 8:28–30 that all things—even trials—work together for the good of those who are called according to God’s purpose.

For a suffering Christian, this means that pain is not random. It is woven into the eternal plan of God, who both elects and preserves His people. Far from discouraging faith, election strengthens endurance.

10.6 The Challenge of Evangelism

One of the most common objections to the doctrine of election is that it supposedly undermines evangelism. If God has already chosen who will be saved, why preach the gospel at all? Yet Paul himself—who wrote so extensively about predestination—was also the most tireless missionary in the early church.

1. Election Ensures Evangelism's Success

Paul did not see election as a barrier but as the very reason evangelism is fruitful. In Acts 18:9–10, the Lord encouraged him in Corinth:

“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”

Paul could preach with boldness because he knew God had already chosen people in Corinth who would respond. Evangelism was not gambling on human free will but harvesting those whom God had appointed.

2. The Means and the End

Election does not remove the need for preaching; it guarantees it. God ordains both the end (the salvation of the elect) and the means (the preaching of the gospel). As Paul declared:

Romans 10:14–15 (ESV): *“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”*

The elect cannot believe unless the gospel is preached. Far from discouraging missions, election demands it.

3. Evangelistic Confidence

Pastorally, this doctrine removes the crushing burden many Christians feel—that success in evangelism depends on their eloquence or persuasion. Instead, the outcome rests in God's hands. Our task is faithfulness in proclaiming; God ensures the fruit.

This perspective not only gives freedom from fear of failure but also fuels perseverance. As Paul wrote:

2 Timothy 2:10 (ESV): *“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”*

Paul’s missionary endurance was grounded in election. He could face rejection, persecution, and hardship because he knew God had His people to save.

10.7 The Struggle of Accepting Election

While the doctrine of election is clearly taught in Paul’s writings, many believers struggle to accept it. This struggle is not merely intellectual but deeply spiritual, for election confronts the human heart with truths it naturally resists.

1. The Confrontation with Human Pride

Election dismantles the idea that man contributes to his salvation. To embrace it means acknowledging that even our faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8–9). This leaves no room for boasting. Paul writes:

Romans 3:27 (ESV): *“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.”*

For many, this exclusion of human achievement feels threatening. It strips away the illusion of control and demands complete dependence on divine grace.

2. The Loss of Autonomy

Modern culture prizes independence and self-determination. Free will theology resonates with this cultural mindset, offering the comfort of choice. Election, by contrast, reminds us that we are not sovereign over our destiny. To accept election is to confess: *“I am not my own; I belong to God.”*

This is liberating, but only once pride is surrendered.

3. The Mystery of God’s Will

Paul himself acknowledged the tension election creates. After expounding God’s sovereign choice in Romans 9, he concludes with doxology:

Romans 11:33 (ESV): *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”*

For some, the inability to fully understand is a stumbling block. Yet Paul presents this mystery as a reason to worship, not a reason to doubt.

4. What Must Be Surrendered

To embrace election, believers must let go of:

- The pride of thinking they chose God.

- The illusion of control over their salvation.
- The demand to fully comprehend divine mysteries.

Instead, they are called to rest in God’s revealed Word, trusting that His sovereign grace is both just and good.

5. The Pastoral Task

Pastors must be patient with those struggling to accept election. Often, resistance comes not from malice but from fear or misunderstanding. Teaching must be both firm in truth and gentle in tone, leading people to see that election magnifies grace and secures assurance.

10.8 Pastoral Implications and Conclusion

The doctrine of election, as taught by Paul and faithfully upheld in the Reformed tradition, is not a cold theological abstraction. It is a living truth with profound pastoral implications for the believer and the church.

1. Assurance and Joy

Because salvation rests on God’s eternal choice rather than man’s fleeting decision, believers can enjoy unshakable assurance. Paul proclaims:

Romans 8:38–39 (ESV): *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

This assurance frees believers from fear and fills them with joy.

2. Humility and Unity

Election humbles the church by removing grounds for boasting. All stand equally as recipients of grace, chosen not because of worthiness but in spite of unworthiness. This humility should breed unity in the body, erasing prideful divisions.

3. Motivation for Evangelism

Far from stifling missions, election empowers them. Knowing that God has chosen people from every tribe and nation gives confidence that evangelism will not be in vain. The church can boldly proclaim the gospel, trusting God to draw His elect to Christ.

4. Worship of God’s Glory

Ultimately, election magnifies God’s glory. It declares that salvation is “from him and through him and to him” (Rom. 11:36). Worship becomes deeper and more God-centered when believers see that everything—from calling to glorification—is of grace.

5. Pastoral Sensitivity

Finally, pastors and teachers must remember that the doctrine of election, though clear in

Scripture, can be difficult for many to accept. It should be taught with patience, framed not as a theological weapon but as a pastoral balm. Election is meant to heal the anxious, humble the proud, and comfort the suffering.

Conclusion of Chapter 10

Paul's teaching on election is not a theological puzzle to solve but a pastoral truth to embrace. It secures assurance, nurtures humility, fuels evangelism, and deepens worship. Where free will theology leaves believers uncertain, anxious, and man-centered, Paul's gospel of sovereign grace gives stability, confidence, and God-centered joy.

The pastoral task today is clear: to present election not as a harsh decree but as the very heartbeat of grace, the fountain of assurance, and the anchor of hope. When received in faith, this doctrine transforms not only theology but the entire Christian life.

Chapter 11: Conclusion – The Glory of God in the Doctrine of Election

11.1 The Unity of Paul's Witness

From Romans to Ephesians, Galatians to Titus, Paul speaks with one voice: salvation is of God alone. Election, predestination, and grace are not peripheral themes but central threads woven through his gospel. Paul leaves no space for human boasting or for free will as a decisive cause of salvation. His language is consistently strong, absolute, and uncompromising:

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV): *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

This testimony is not one text among many but a chorus across Paul's letters. His gospel is relentlessly God-centered.

11.2 The Historical Struggle

The history of the church demonstrates how difficult it has been to hold fast to this truth. From Pelagius to the Remonstrants, human pride continually sought to reintroduce man's will into salvation. Each time, the church was forced to clarify: salvation is either by grace alone or it is not grace at all.

The Synod of Dort (1618–19) was not an innovation but a reaffirmation of Paul's gospel against distortion. By rejecting the Remonstrant Articles and affirming the Canons of Dort, the church declared anew that man contributes nothing to his salvation.

11.3 The Distortion of Free Will Theology

Free will, as commonly taught, is not neutral—it distorts the gospel. It diminishes God’s glory, unsettles the believer’s assurance, and leaves the church vulnerable to errors such as:

- the idea of losing salvation,
- age of accountability schemes,
- man-centered worship,
- and the erosion of joy in God’s grace.

These are not minor side effects but direct consequences of shifting the decisive cause of salvation from God to man.

11.4 The Fruit of Reformed Theology

By contrast, Reformed theology, grounded in Paul’s writings, provides a solid foundation:

- **Assurance** that God will complete His saving work.
- **Humility** that excludes all boasting.
- **Joy** in receiving undeserved grace.
- **Confidence** in evangelism, knowing God’s elect will respond.
- **Comfort** in suffering, trusting God’s sovereign plan.

Election is thus not a barrier to faith but its anchor.

11.5 The Glory of God as the Final Goal

Ultimately, the doctrine of election confronts us with the deepest reality: salvation is not about man’s freedom but about God’s glory. As Paul exclaims:

Romans 11:36 (ESV): *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

To accept election is to embrace the truth that God is God—that He alone saves, sustains, and glorifies His people for His name’s sake.

11.6 Final Pastoral Word

Why do people resist election? Because it humbles human pride, strips away autonomy, and forces us to rest in God alone. But when embraced, it produces freedom, security, and joy. The

church today must recover Paul's gospel of sovereign grace, not as a matter of theological curiosity but as the very lifeblood of Christian assurance and worship.

The glory of God is most clearly displayed when man confesses: "*Salvation belongs to the Lord*" (Ps. 3:8).

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