

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#32—Theology Proper—Part XI¹
Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom
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For studies in theology proper, if you have the book, you should read Bruce Ware's *Their God Is Too Small*. The next topic will be prayer and the sovereignty of God. Valuable reading is Arthur Pink's "God's Sovereignty and Prayer," which can be found at <http://www.sovereign-grace.com/pink/chapter09.htm>, along with Curt Daniel's "Prayer and the Sovereignty of God," available at <http://members.aol.com/rbiblech/MiscDoctrine/PrayerTheSovOfGod.htm>. Relevant for today's study are pgs. 343-381 in Reymond, which I strongly encourage you to read and re-read. Also of great value for this study is all of R. C. Sproul's *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*.

In the previous two studies—the topics were God's decree and God's providence—we dealt with the question of God's control over his creation. We have actually been dealing with it throughout our study of theology proper, especially as we have used the heretical views of Open Theism as a foil² to help us grasp biblical teaching. We saw that one of the most important questions concerning theology and everyday life is "How and how much does God control his creation?" This is significant for theology because at issue is the very relation of God to everything that exists outside of him, as well as the very nature of God. We have seen, for example, that the Open Theist has a heretical view of God that matches his view of God's control (and man's freedom and power relative to God's): God does not know what is going to happen and depends on the actions of "free" human beings to bring about his goals.

The question of control is also of great practical significance, because every human being faces the issue of why things happen—things that are pleasant as well as things that hurt. We often wonder about God's purposes: Does God care what happens to us? Does God favor some people? Why doesn't salvation come to everyone? Why do sinful people seem to prosper? Why do righteous people suffer? How can God be good and still allow or perhaps even *send* evil? (This is the exact question the prophet asks in Hab. 1:13.) Is God really loving? Is the Bible deceiving us when it says that God is good? Is God unfair sometimes? We have underscored that the Bible addresses all these questions in some way.

In Study #30 we dealt with the decree of God, defining it this way: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass. We presented Eph. 1:11 as the key verse for understanding God's decree, emphasizing that God's plan concerns everything, is actualized by God himself and matches the counsel of his will or desire:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

In Study #31 we presented the providence of God and gave this definition: Providence is God's care for and upholding of his creation. Providence is God's relation to what he has created, which, since it could not create itself, cannot sustain itself. All actions of all living and inanimate objects in the universe are included

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² A foil is anything that serves by contrast of color or quality to adorn or set off another thing to advantage. Open Theism helps us to see the value of scriptural information.

in the providence of God. All of what we have seen concerning God's decree and his providence will be important as we turn to today's topic: the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom.

The problem of human freedom

Libertarian free will

The question of the relation of divine sovereignty and human freedom is one of the most difficult in theology and philosophy. There are two basic views of human freedom: libertarian free will and determinism. Here is a description of libertarian free will from Theopedia that we saw in a previous study³.

Libertarian free will means that our choices are free from the determination or constraints of human nature and free from any predetermination by God. All "free will theists" hold that libertarian freedom is essential for moral responsibility, for if our choice is determined or caused by anything, including our own desires, they reason, it cannot properly be called a free choice. Libertarian freedom is, therefore, the freedom to act contrary to one's nature, predisposition and greatest desires. Responsibility, in this view, always means that one could have done otherwise.

Free will is affected by human nature but man retains ability to choose contrary to his nature and desires. Man has the moral ability to turn to God in Christ and believe of his own "free will," apart from specific (special) divine enablement. Indeed, according to Open Theism, God is anxiously waiting to see what each person will do, for he cannot know ahead of time what the choice might be. Or, according to Arminianism, God chooses to save those whom he foresees will believe of their own free will.

Some speak in terms of chance: at decision points the outcome cannot be forced or decided ahead of time. In other words, there is no sufficient cause for the outcome. What happens is unpredictable.⁴ Only if this is true are human beings actually free.

For the proponent of libertarian free will, the most important issue is responsibility (while we used the word freedom in the title of this study, we could have just as easily used 'responsibility'). In order to be held to account for our actions, human beings must be entirely free of outside coercion. If a person never comes to Christ in his lifetime, the failure to do so is entirely due to his free choice. If God in some way kept him from coming to Christ, then God would be unjust in condemning him to eternal punishment. (It is very important to remember that the apostle Paul address this very point in Rom. 9. We will come to this later.) Similarly, if a person does come to Christ, he does so on the basis of an entirely free choice. If he didn't act in freedom at salvation, then God would be forcing his will and salvation would not be meaningful. Open theism adds something to the free-will position, arguing that for human existence to be meaningful we must have the full ability to make decisions without interference from God.

We can state this in another way. If God has determined (foreordained, predestined) what happens, then human beings are not entirely free. If they are not entirely free, then any sinful choices are forced on them by God. If so, then they are not responsible for their actions, and God is the author of sin. But if human beings are truly free to choose without coercion, they can be charged with sin and God need not be viewed as being unfair or the author of sin. God permits sin, including the sin of rejection Christ. Notice that human freedom and divine permission are essential to this system.

³ Available at http://www.theopedia.com/Libertarian_freedom.

⁴ See, for example, John Byl, "Free Will and Responsibility," at http://www.the-highway.com/freewill_Byl.html.

Determinism

Determinism holds that our actions are not free and are determined in advance by either our own makeup and history or by something outside ourselves. Naturalistic determinists hold that what we do is determined by biological factors. Determinism in theology is the view that God determines what human beings do in advance. Here is part of the Wikipedia entry on Determinism⁵:

Theological determinism is the thesis that there is a God who determines all that humans will do, either by knowing their actions in advance, via some form of omniscience or by decreeing their actions in advance. The problem of free will, in this context, is the problem of how our actions can be free, if there is a being who has determined them for us ahead of time.

Compatibilism and incompatibilism

In previous studies we introduced the terms compatibilism and incompatibilism. These are used in discussions of the relation between God's sovereignty and human freedom. Here are some descriptions of the terms:

Compatibilism holds that we can act in freedom and yet there may be another reason why we acted as we did. It holds that God's sovereignty is compatible with human freedom. Put in other terms, it holds that determinism and free will are compatible.⁶

The incompatibilist says that the [sic] free will is "incompatible" with determinism. The Libertarian is an incompatibilist who consequently rejects any determinism associated with the sovereignty of God. Hence, Libertarian Free Will is necessarily associated with both Open Theism, which maintains that God does not foreknow or predetermine the free choices of man, and Arminianism, which admits that God in his omniscience foresees man's free choices and reacts accordingly. Libertarian freedom is the general view of liberal Protestantism and a growing number of evangelicals.⁷

Compatibilism is a theological term that deals with the topics of free will and predestination. It seeks to show that God's exhaustive sovereignty is compatible with human freedom, or in other words, it claims that determinism and free will are compatible. Rather than limit the exercise of God's sovereignty in order to preserve man's freedom, compatibilists say that there must be a different way to define what freedom really means.⁸

Given only what we have said so far, there are only two possible positions and we are at an impasse:

1. The libertarian free will position is correct and there are valid limits on divine sovereignty.
2. The libertarian free will position is not correct and human freedom and divine responsibility are somehow compatible.

The traditional Arminian position is that of #1: under the assumption that human freedom must be maintained, they state that God may influence human actions, but never fully controls them. The Open Theist takes this farther, modifying the traditional view of God's attributes and stating that God does not know the future. If God doesn't know the future, he can't control it, so he isn't sovereign over human actions. Thus, human freedom can be preserved and God cannot be charged with anyone's sin, particularly their failure to

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://www.theopedia.com/Compatibilism>

come to Christ, since he genuinely cannot control their actions. In other words, God gets off the hook. The Open Theist actually eliminates the possibility of divine sovereignty.

There are three possible ways to get beyond this impasse: 1) modify, restate or correct the statement of free will, 2) modify, restate or correct the statement of divine sovereignty or 3) modify, restate or correct both.

Picking up on the last sentence in the last quote, we will turn now to show a different and better definition of human freedom. I will devote the remainder of this study to the third approach to the impasse—correcting the statement of free will and restating what God’s sovereignty is. I will also show that there is not really an impasse, since the formulation of the position of libertarian free will is contrary to the reality of life according to Scripture. In other words, the libertarian free will position is fatally flawed when viewed through the lens of Scripture.

The biblical picture of human freedom

What we believe about sin, particularly original sin, is determinative for our understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Are human beings really free to make decisions without outside influence? The Bible’s answer is no, and the reason is the bondage of sin that stems from the fall. Reymond has a great paragraph on this, which he writes in his evaluation of Pinnock’s concept of free will⁹:

There are problems in his [Pinnock’s] claim that men have free wills (understood as the ability or power to choose any one of numerous incompatible courses of actions). There simply is no such thing as a will which is detached from and totally independent of the person making the choice—suspended, so to speak in midair and enjoying some “extra-personal vantage point” from which to determine itself. The will is the “mind choosing” (Edwards). Men choose the things they do because of the complex, finite persons that they are. They cannot will to walk on water or to flap their arms and fly. Their choices in such matters are determined by the total complexion of who they are. And the Bible informs us that men are not only finite but are *now* also sinners, who by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ’s word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:17). By nature *cannot* discern truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44, 45, 65). In order to do any of these things they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra*. So there simply is not such thing as a free will which can always choose the right.

It is easy to illustrate from everyday life that we are not entirely free in our decisions. Suppose that I set out for a store in my truck. I am immediately limited in my actions by the controls on the truck, so I cannot turn the wheel more than a certain distance or put my foot through the roof. I feel a compulsion to drive on the right side of the road, as the state requires. Because of values my mother and father taught me, I do not aim my truck at pedestrians. I am not free to drive through other vehicles in order to avoid traffic. If I try this, I will immediately be brought to a stop and I absolutely cannot do it any more. The same kinds of limitations on absolute freedom—complete chance outcomes—exist everywhere in life.

R. C. Sproul points out that Augustine saw one of the critical consequences of original sin as the loss of freedom¹⁰:

⁹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 353-54.

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 56.

Something disastrous happened to the human will as a result of the fall. In creation man had a positive inclination toward the good and a love for God. Through it was possible for man to sin, there was no moral necessity that he sin. As a result of the fall, man entered into bondage to evil. The fallen will became a source of evil rather than a source for good.

Sproul continues concerning Augustine¹¹:

Augustine clearly affirms that man before and after the fall possesses free will. The ability to choose, or the faculty of the will, remains in man even after the fall.

But how can one be free and at the same time be in bondage? Sproul says that¹²

[Augustine makes a] crucial distinction between *free will (liberum arbitrium)* and *liberty (libertas)*. In our use of language we normally consider the terms *liberty* and *freedom* to be virtually synonymous. For Augustine that was not the case. When he speaks of free will, he means the ability to choose without external constraint.

The sinner sins because he chooses to sin, not because he is forced to sin. Without grace the fallen creature lacks the ability to choose righteousness. He is in bondage to his own sinful impulses. To escape this bondage the sinner must be liberated by the grace of God. For Augustine the sinner is both free and in bondage at the same time, but not in the same sense. He is free to act according to his own desires, but his desires are only evil. In an ironic sense he is a slave to his own evil passions, a slave to his own corrupted will. This corruption greatly affects the will, but it does not destroy it as a faculty of choosing.

In other words, human beings have free will, but not liberty. They are free to choose, but instead of choosing in the realm of liberty, they can only choose within the realm of bondage to sin.

John Calvin echoes Augustine's position:

Since the Spirit of God declares that every imagination of man's heart from infancy is evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21); that there is none righteous, none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God (Ps. 14:3); but that all are useless, corrupt, void of the fear of God, full of fraud, bitterness, and all kinds of iniquity, and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10); since he proclaims that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and does not even leave us the power of thinking a good thought (Rom. 8:6; 2 Cor. 3:5), we maintain with Augustine, that man, by making a bad use of free will, lost both himself and it. Again, that the will being overcome by the corruption into which it fell, nature has not liberty. Again, that no will is free which is subject to lusts which conquer and enchain it.¹³

This has a crucial bearing on how people are saved. In order to be saved, a person must first have his heart changed so that he is capable of pleasing God. His will must be changed from the freedom to choose within the realm of evil to the freedom to choose righteousness. Hence we have such scriptures as Jn. 6:44:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him

¹¹ Sproul, 62.

¹² Ibid, 68.

¹³ John Calvin, *Articles Agreed upon by the Faculty of Sacred Theology of Paris, in Reference to Matters of Faith at Present Controverted; with the Antidote*, ed. And trans. Henry Beveridge (1844), in John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:75.

The biblical picture of human beings is that they have freedom, but without a new nature—the result of regeneration—will never and can never choose to do the will of God, and that includes obeying the gospel message. The picture that the libertarian free will advocate paints of human nature does not square with the Bible. Instead of having free will that enables us to choose for God—something that supposedly absolves God of responsibility for sin—we are only free to choose within our bondage to sin.

The biblical picture of God's sovereignty

The following scriptures (many of which we saw in connection with God's decree) should be sufficient to convince us that God does what he wants with his creation:

Gen. 45:5-8: ⁵And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. ⁷But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

Gen 50:20: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. . . .

Job. 12:10-23: ¹⁰In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food? ¹²Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? ¹³“To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his. ¹⁴What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released. ¹⁵If he holds back the waters, there is drought; if he lets them loose, they devastate the land. ¹⁶To him belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his. ¹⁷He leads counselors away stripped and makes fools of judges. ¹⁸He takes off the shackles put on by kings and ties a loincloth around their waist. ¹⁹He leads priests away stripped and overthrows men long established. ²⁰He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders. ²¹He pours contempt on nobles and disarms the mighty. ²²He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light. ²³He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them.

Prov. 16:4: The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

Prov. 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Prov. 19:21: Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Prov. 45:7: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Ps. 33:11: But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Isa. 40:13-14 ¹³Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

Isa. 46:8-11: ⁸Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. ⁹Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰I

make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

Mt. 16:21: From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Lk. 18:31-33: ³¹ Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. ³³ On the third day he will rise again.”

Eph. 1:11: In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

Acts 13:29: When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Acts 17:26: From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Phil. 2:12-13: Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

2 Tim. 2:25: ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

1 Pet. 2:8: and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

Rev. 17:17: For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled.

Divine sovereignty and human guilt

We have seen that at the heart of the libertarian free will position as espoused by some Christians is the attempt to vindicate God, absolving him of the charge of being arbitrary and unfairly condemning people when he sovereignly blesses some and not others. Their solution is that God gets off the hook if human beings make their choice against God with complete freedom. It is very important to understand that the Bible unequivocally addresses and answers this problem in Rom. 9:

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” ¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. ¹⁹ One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me

like this?” “²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? ²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

This passage teaches that God does not bless people on the basis of what they do. Instead, he blesses on the basis of his completely free choice. It was expected that Esau would receive the blessing, but God chose to bless Jacob, entirely apart from anything Jacob or Esau did (“before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad”). He hardened Pharaoh and blessed Moses. An objector says to Paul that if Paul’s understanding of these things is true, then God cannot be fair and still hold anyone responsible for his sin (v. 19). Notice that this is exactly the problem the Arminian and the more extreme Open Theist try to solve. If they can see man as truly free, then the person who isn’t saved has only himself to blame: God let him choose that path. But Paul’s view says God is sovereign in choosing to bless or harden. So the objector concludes that God is unfair in Paul’s system. The questioner in Paul’s day says Paul must be wrong, and the Arminian and Open Theist say essentially the same thing today. But Romans 9 is devastating to the libertarian free will position.

Will we accept Paul’s words—written by the leading of the Holy Spirit—at face value? Will you? This is Paul’s statement of compatibilism, written against the backdrop of the same truth as we saw Augustine explain: human beings do not have the freedom to choose the things of God. We always choose against God apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Notice Paul’s answer: to question the sovereignty of God in saving one person and hardening another is to talk back to God and forget that he is the potter and we are the clay.

God’s absolution from the charge of guilt for human sin

Recall that the advocate of libertarian free will holds that if God is sovereign and there is no genuine human free will, God must be the author of sin. There are several things that we must say about this:

- 1) God has ordained whatever comes to pass, yet the Bible says that he is not the source of sin (1 Jn. 1:5—“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”)
- 2) God never tempts anyone to sin (Jas. 1:13).
- 3) Guilt for evil that occurs in God’s plan is always attributable to human beings and evil angels. We need to realize that theological compatibilism is taught in such portions of Scripture as Acts 2:23: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” God’s decree included the Cross and so the sin surrounding it; human beings sinned in crucifying Jesus; God holds human beings accountable for what they did. Here we see divine control and human freedom and accountability side by side. The Bible does not tell us how these three can coexist. It only says that they do. Notice also Acts 4:27-28:

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

Could Herod, Pilate and those that crucified Jesus have done any differently? A biblical understanding of the decree and sovereignty of God says no. Is God chargeable with sin? No, they are. The reason that they are guilty for their sin is that God has created a universe in which he holds them accountable.

The necessity of divine sovereignty for salvation

If we take the Scriptures at face value we have to conclude that human beings contribute nothing to their salvation. We cannot do good works that God might accept (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-18, 23). We do not generate faith: it is a gift from God (Phil. 1:29). We do not seek God (Rom. 3:10). We do not subject ourselves to the will of God (Rom. 8:7). We are dead in sin, unable to please God (Eph. 2:1). If human beings are to be saved, it can only happen if God overcomes our unwillingness by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The following scriptures describe this:

Acts 13:48: and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Acts 16:14: The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Eph. 2:8-10: ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It is significant that in terms of exegesis the word 'this' in v. 8 is most naturally taken to refer to all of the first part of the verse—grace, salvation and faith. All three of these come from God. As Reymond says in concluding his critique of Pinnock¹⁴:

From beginning to end the Scriptures teach that men, when they come to God savingly, come because God effectually calls them to himself: "Blessed is the man whom you choose and cause to approach unto you, that he may dwell in your courts" (Ps. 65:4). Men do not come, as Pinnock would teach, because *they* will to do so; they come because *God* wills that they should will to do so.

The vindication of the glory of God under this view of divine sovereignty and human freedom

We need to remind ourselves of Paul's words in Rom. 9:

²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? ²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

The Bible says here that if God unconditionally elects/chooses some for salvation He will be glorified. He has the right to do this because he created us. If he chooses some for eternal condemnation, he will be glorified. He has the right to do this because he created us. There is no presentation in the Bible of a libertarian free will picture that brings glory to God if some people choose him on their own, because no one will ever do that.

Can God be glorified through a decree—a comprehensive eternal plan—that includes sin? Yes. Here is Reymond's explanation¹⁵:

The ultimate end which God decreed he regarded as great enough and glorious enough that it justified to himself both the divine plan itself and the ordained incidental evil arising along the foreordained path to his plan's great and glorious end.

¹⁴ Reymond, 380.

¹⁵ Ibid, 377.

Reymond says¹⁶ that if Adam had not failed the test in the Garden, he would have been confirmed in holiness, unable to sin in the future. We would consequently look to Adam as our savior from sin. Then Jesus Christ could never receive that glory. God's eternal decree, however, included sin, so that God through Jesus Christ would receive the appropriate and greatest glory. Similarly, God raised up Pharaoh—who sinned in hardening his heart after God first announced that he himself (God) would harden Pharaoh's heart. According to Rom. 9:17, this brings glory to God:

¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

According to Rom. 9:22-24, hardening the hearts of the non-elect and so condemning them to eternal loss brings glory to God because at the same time he saves some:

²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

God's plan is to glorify himself through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, saving sinners without any help from them. When we acknowledge with the Bible that we are completely sinful, then we can say that it is a good thing that God saves sovereignly, because otherwise no one would be saved. This is exactly Paul's point in Rom. 9:29:

²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

¹⁶ Ibid, 377.

Study questions

1. What are some popular concepts of free will that we hear today?
2. Why do we feel as if we are acting in freedom although the Bible says otherwise?
3. Be able to describe the position of libertarian free will.
4. What scriptures do you feel are the most devastating for libertarian free will?

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiration* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning "standard"; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation

30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.
39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.