

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#81-83—Soteriology—I-III¹
The Plan of God and Predestination
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Particularly helpful for this study are:

- Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, available at www.ccel.org.ccek.boettner/predest.html.
- Robert Reymond, “A Consistent Supralapsarian Perspective on Election” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic).

The following texts will prove particularly helpful for the next several studies:

- Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” available at http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1985/1487_What_We_Believe_About_the_Five_Points_of_Calvinism/
- Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2006).
- John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007).
- *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006).
- R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997).
- David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas and S. Lance Quinn (*The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended and Documented* (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2004).

You will see me quote a number of times from Boettner in this study. While I have consulted many articles and books in preparing this and related studies, find that I have great appreciation for the comprehensiveness and warm spirit of Boettner’s study. So I make no apology for referring to him often. I encourage you to download the book and read it a lot!

Our dog Chester is probably pretty intelligent as dogs go. But he has a very obvious characteristic: he can only think about one thing at a time: he cannot make a plan. If he sees a bird or rabbit in the yard that he wants to chase, he goes directly for it, regardless of what might be in the way. Many shrubs testify to the fact that he tries to go right through anything between him and his target. He cannot think ahead. He’s just not made that way.

Our eight-month old granddaughter Kaia, on the other hand, is already learning to take steps toward goals. I recently watched her navigate around our house in a walker. She realized that at certain times she had to turn it around and get pointed in the right direction in order to get around obstacles. This is a trait of human beings that she is already showing and developing. God made us in such a way that we identify goals and devise means to get to them. Like God himself, we make plans.

1. The existence of a plan

As we begin this section on the systematic presentation of what the Bible teaches about salvation, it is important that we learn to think in terms of God’s plan—both for salvation and for the universe. As we

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acquire this ability, we will find that pieces of biblical teaching fall into place much more easily than they would if we did not envision goals and purposes.

The organized study of what the bible teaches about salvation is called soteriology, a word that borrows two Greek words—σωτηρία (*sōteria*, ‘salvation,’ with the last vowel left off) and λόγος (*logos*, topic, ‘declaration’). We cannot formulate a soteriology without identifying a plan behind what God is doing.

We should realize that God does not do anything without having a goal or goals and without knowing the means that must exist in order to reach his goals. So, for example, his creation of the universe must have been a step toward some goal. Robert Reymond comments on the necessity of God’s plan:²

It would be an irresponsible if not an irrational God who would create the world and direct its course of events with no prior plan or purpose behind such activity—or who would not direct the world he created at all. The Bible, however, has a great deal to say—much more than one might suppose at first blush—about the divine purpose standing behind and governing this world and the men who inhabit it.

Sometimes when we think of the prophetic aspects of Scripture, what God is doing with Israel and the Church, how in the latter days he will bring human life as we know it to an end and create new heavens and a new earth, etc., we tend to conclude that that’s all there is—a prophetic scheme or outline for history. But the details of prophecy (including both the Old and New Testaments) are only part of a larger plan that is revealed in Scripture. This larger plan includes all that God is doing with his creation. It includes creation itself, the Fall of man, the nation of Israel, the incarnation, the Cross with all its features, the Church Age, the end times and eternal enjoyment of God by the redeemed, along with eternal punishment for the unsaved and many more things.

In Study #30 we looked at God’s plan and used a term that theologians frequently use for it—God’s ‘decree.’ We defined it this way:

The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.

What we call it—decree or plan—isn’t as important as that we understand its features and how the pieces of it fit together. In this study we will go beyond what we saw in Study #30 as we lay the groundwork for our full study of soteriology in coming studies, where we will see the major pieces of the plan with reference to salvation.

Reymond presents Eph. 3:11 as a passage that shows the existence of a plan (although, of course, it does not give all possible details about such a plan).³ Here is the text:

according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reymond makes several key observations about this verse:

- The word translated ‘purpose’ can also refer to a plan.
- The plan/purpose is eternal. Reymond comments:⁴

² Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 462.

³ Ibid, 463-64.

⁴ Ibid, 463.

There was never a moment when God had a blank mind or a time when God's plan with all of its parts was not fully determined. He never "finally made up his mind" about anything. This is just to say that God has *always* had the plan and that within the plan itself there is no chronological factor *per se*. The several parts of the plan must be viewed than as standing in a teleological rather than a chronological relationship to one another.

- The person and work of Jesus Christ are central to the eternal plan.
- Because the plan is centered on Jesus Christ, it is mainly concerned with the matter of salvation. Similarly, Rom. 8:28 speaks of the elect being called according to God's purpose/plan (same word as Paul uses in Eph. 3:11). Christians are predestined "according to the plan [same word again] of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (different word behind 'purpose' at the end of the verse). Romans 9:11-13, where God differentiates between Jacob and Esau with regard to blessing, speaks of the 'according to election purpose' of God (same word again).

We learn similar things from 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

This says that God has a plan that concerns everything. Yes, that's *everything!* That plan is actualized by God himself and it matches the 'counsel' of his will (or 'desire'). Here is the Greek text of this important verse:

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργούντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ

It will help us to see the import of the elements of this verse if we put its features in their logical order:

- God has a will or desire (θελήματος) for the universe.
- God's will has wisdom and purposefulness associated with it ('counsel'; βουλήν).
- God's will is expressed or carried out through a plan (πρόθεσιν; same word found in Eph. 3 and Rom. 8).
- God works out everything (τὰ πάντα) in keeping with (κατὰ) his counsel. This means that nothing at all is left out.

2. Divine sovereignty as the ability to control

We can think of God's sovereignty as the quality in God himself that enables him to do whatever he wants to do. God's sovereignty is not the same thing as his plan. In Study #32 we defined it as God's control over his universe. Here are some of the scriptures we provided in that study. We begin at this point in this study to bring in many references. This is important, because we need to see the mass of biblical teaching on these topics so that we may be persuaded in our hearts and minds of what is true.

Job. 12:10-23: ¹⁰ In 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? ¹² Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? ¹³ "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his. ¹⁴ What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released. ¹⁵ If he holds back the waters, there is drought; if he lets them loose, they devastate the land. ¹⁶ To him

belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his.¹⁷ He leads counselors away stripped and makes fools of judges.¹⁸ He takes off the shackles put on by kings and ties a loincloth around their waist.¹⁹ He leads priests away stripped and overthrows men long established.²⁰ He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders.²¹ He pours contempt on nobles and disarms the mighty.²² He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.²³ He 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. 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. 46:8-11:⁸ Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels.⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.¹⁰ I 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.

3. Predestination as God's control over the plan (i.e. control + plan)

Some theologians look at God's plan and speak of *predestination*. We need to spend some time clarifying this term. I believe that we will see that it is a convenient term to refer to God's sovereignty with respect to his plan, and particularly with respect to salvation.

a. The controversy

There is perhaps no more divisive word among Christians (genuine or nominal) than 'predestination.' Although the concept can be found in the creeds of many denominations and church groups and has been held by such figures as Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, Augustine, Wycliffe, Owen, Whitefield, Hodge, Dabney, Shedd, Warfield, Kuiper, Boettner, Pink and Murray, it is always opposed by those of a Pelagian bent. While in the thinking of many it is associated most closely with the writings of John Calvin, we should be careful to note that where Calvin was correct he was only showing his agreement with the pages of Scripture. He was really only building on what Augustine had taught a millennium earlier, and, in turn, on what Paul and other biblical writers inscribed under the direction of the Holy Spirit. If the doctrine of predestination is equated by some with 'Calvinism,' it should only be done with a healthy asterisk that notes that Calvin did significant work on systematizing biblical evidences. As Boettner says,⁵

The inherent principles of [Calvinism] had been in existence for long ages before Calvin was born. They had indeed been visible as patent factors in the world's history from the time of man's creation. But inasmuch as it was Calvin who first formulated these principles into a more or less

⁵ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1932), 4.

complete system, that system, or creed, if you will, and likewise those principles which are embodied in it, came to bear his name. . . .

Calvin’s active and powerful intellect led him to sound the depths of every subject which he touched. In his investigations about God and the plan of redemption he went very far, penetrating into mysteries concerning which the average man seldom if ever dreams. He brought to light a side of Scripture which had as yet been very much in the shade and stressed those deep truths which in the ages preceding the Reformation had comparatively escaped notice in the Church. He brought to light forgotten doctrines of the apostle Paul, and fastened them in their full and complete sense upon one great branch of the Christian Church.

The ultimate questions with regard to the doctrine of predestination, then, are “Is it true?” and “Does it accurately reflect what is contained in the pages of Holy Scripture?” We will find that in the final analysis the theological category of predestination is simply the outworking in history of the plan of a sovereign and gracious God. If we are comfortable with (hopefully due to biblical conviction) a God who is able to do whatever he wishes with his creation, then we will have little trouble with predestination.

b. Key terms

It is important that we begin with definitions of terms. The *term* predestination as an English word is drawn from the translations of two Greek words that are rendered differently depending on the published translation. The word προορίζω (proorizō) is translated in the following ways in the King James and NIV:

προορίζω	NIV	King James
Acts 4:28	decided beforehand	determined before
Rom. 8:29	predestined	predestinate
Rom. 8:30	predestined	predestinate
1 Cor. 2:7	destined for	ordained before
Eph. 1:5	predestined	predestinated
Eph. 1:11	predestined	predestinated

The term predestination as employed by theologians has been taken from four instances of the use of προορίζω in the King James as seen with shading in the table. A form of this Greek verb without the prefix προ- (‘before,’ ‘beforehand’) is found in Classical Greek texts and frequently refers to drawing boundaries or borders.

Many theologians use ‘foreordain’/‘foreordination’ as a synonym of ‘predestine’/predestination. This word as a theological concept is certainly drawn from the King James translation of προγινώσκω (proginōskō). The following table shows translations of this verb and the related noun πρόγνωσις (prognōsis) that are relevant to this study:

Προγινώσκω/πρόγνωσις	NIV	King James
Acts 2:23	foreknowledge	foreknowledge
Rom. 8:29	foreknew	did foreknow
Rom. 11:2	foreknew	foreknew
1 Pet. 1:2	foreknowledge	foreknowledge
1 Pet. 1:20	chosen	foreordained

While the words used by theologians to speak about this area of study are drawn from particular translations, the actual *concept* of predestination as a theological object is based on the use of these and

other words and many whole texts. For example the word $\tau\acute{\alpha}\sigma\sigma\omega$ (tassō) as found in Acts 13:48 is translated ‘appointed’ in the NIV and ‘ordained’ in the King James.

Here are some key texts (NIV) that use these and similar words to express aspects of the doctrine of predestination:

Acts 4:27-28: 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.

Eph. 1:4b-5: In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

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,

Rom. 8:29-30: ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

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.

Acts 13:48: When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (Please note that the text does not say that all who believed were appointed for eternal life, as the Arminian would.)

Ps. 139:16: your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

c. Defining and describing predestination

The preceding section was designed to show that theologians have drawn from the translations of some words to describe a large doctrine that includes many features that go beyond those particular words. So, for example, we find that Rom. 8:29 and 30 use $\pi\rho\omicron\sigma\upsilon\zeta\omega$ and translate it ‘predestine.’ The reference is to God’s marking out or planning the details of the life of an elect person. But, when the theologian speaks of predestination as a theological concept, he is speaking of something much broader. What is this theological category that is referred to as ‘predestination’ or ‘foreordination’?

Here is the relevant section of the Westminster Confession (III-”Of God’s Eternal Decree”):

I. God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Notice that the first part of the first section speaks broadly of God's ordaining whatever comes to pass. But immediately this section of the Confession begins to speak about God's sovereign work in salvation.

Similarly, Loraine Boettner in his extensive treatment of predestination says:⁶

This doctrine of Predestination represents the purpose of God as absolute and unconditional, independent of the whole finite creation, and as originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. God is seen as the great and mighty King who has appointed the course of nature and who directs the course of history even down to its minutest details. His decree is eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign. It extends not merely to the course of the physical world but to every event in human history from the creation to the judgment, and includes all the activities of saints and angels in heaven and of reprobates and demons in hell. . . . Everything outside of God Himself is included in this all-embracing decree. . . .

So while theologians may speak of predestination as equivalent to the outworking of God's control over the whole universe, it ultimately focuses on God's saving work—particularly his sovereign acts in bringing some human beings to salvation and some to eternal punishment.

Ultimately the presence of what we might call a tension in the doctrine between God's larger control and his interest in human beings is totally appropriate. Both sides have to be present in our theology. God's management of the universe through his plan has as its ultimate goal his bringing to completion his goals for individuals; on the other hand his plan for individuals is one manifestation of his control over the universe. Here is R.C. Sproul, showing the same two sides:⁷

When the Bible speaks of predestination, it speaks of God's sovereign involvement in certain things before they happen. He chooses in advance certain things to take place. For example, he predestined creation. Before God created the world, he decided to do it.

Usually when people think of predestination, they think about whether or not somebody was hit by an automobile on a given day because God had decided ahead of time that that should happen on that day.

Theologically, the principal issue of predestination in the Bible has to do with God selecting people for salvation beforehand. The Bible clearly does teach that somehow God chooses people for salvation before they're even born. Virtually every Christian church believes that, because this concept is so clearly taught in Scripture.

The focus of Scripture is human beings and God's purpose for them. The Bible is the story of the Fall and its reversal. It tells us a lot about God's purpose for both the saved and unsaved, but very little about what will happen to stars, planets trees and mountains. This fits with what we will see in a coming study about the ordering in the steps in God's planning for his creation: the existence of the universe is subordinate to God's purpose for human beings. In other words, God's first interest is in bringing human beings into his presence, with the earth and other portions of the physical universe (and even the spiritual universe) being the vehicle for bringing about the ultimate place of people.

⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷ Available at <http://ccc138.org/etc/prINTER-friendly.asp?ID=426>

We can now provide a definition of predestination as a theological concept:

Predestination is God's outworking of his plan for the universe under his sovereign control. The term is often used particularly of his sovereign purpose for human beings and its outworking.

Predestination is not the same thing as providence, which is God's care for and upholding of his creation, including what we regard as nature, animal life, the affairs of nations, as well as the lives of human beings. God uses what we call his providential acts to move things, people and events toward his desired ends.

We can know nothing about God's purpose for human beings and the rest of his creation apart from Scripture. General revelation tells us that God is sovereign and divine and that we are responsible to him, but it does not tell us about his redemptive purposes. Nor can we understand God's goals from reason or from history or anything else around us. Wisdom concerning predestination can only come through careful study of Scripture. It is not surprising that there should be lack of appreciation and even rejection of predestination and related doctrines in a time such as ours when there is such great weakness of understanding Scripture in the Church.

We should be careful not to claim that we have full understanding of predestination and related works of God. We need to try to explain and state everything that Scripture says. But there are many things that we ultimately cannot understand. And, of course, when we understand a doctrine we must embrace it, believe it and live it out.

To summarize, then, 'predestination' is a term used to speak of God's plan as controlled by his sovereignty. It is used of God's sovereignty over his plan as a whole and also of God's sovereign work in salvation, with all that is involved in that.

4. Some general characteristics of God's plan

While subsequent studies will fill in the details and features of God's plan for the universe, we can state at this point some of the general characteristics of the plan.

a. The plan is unified

There is only one plan, as described in Eph. 1:11. Human beings can only see part of the plan at any one time and can never in this life know the whole plan. In addition we cannot see all the connections between parts of the plan. But in the mind of God there is a unified plan in which all the parts are connected.

b. It is the best possible plan.

It is entirely appropriate to base our evaluation of God's plan on his nature. He is perfect in his person and therefore perfect in all that he does. If he conceives of a plan, it is perfect; there could be no better plan. There could not even be a plan of equivalent value.

c. It is eternal.

Here are some scriptures that demonstrate this.

2 Tim. 1:9: God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have

done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

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

Isa. 37:26: “Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone.

Isa. 46:9, 10: Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I 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.

2 Thess. 2:13: But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mt. 25:34: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

1 Pet. 1:20: He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Jer. 31:3: The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Acts 15:18: “ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ ¹⁸ that have been known for ages.

Ps. 139:15-16: My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

d. It is unchangeable

Jas. 1:17: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Isa. 14:24: The LORD Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

Isa. 47:10-11: ¹⁰ You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’ ¹¹ Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.

Num. 23:19: God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Mal. 3:6: I the LORD do not change.

e. It includes everything.

One verse is sufficient to demonstrate this—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,

f. God's plan is wise

This should be one of the greatest comforts when we wonder about our circumstances. There is wisdom that we cannot see or understand.

Ps. 104:24: How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

We should see what are usually regarded as great 'tragedies'—the tsunami that takes thousands of lives, the death of a loved one "before his time"—as having God's wisdom written all over them.

g. It involves complete control by God.

There is no part of God's plan and its outworking where he does not or cannot control what happens.

Daniel 4:35: All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Jeremiah 32:17: ¹⁷ "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

Ephesians 1:11: 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,

Isaiah 46:9, 10, 11: ⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I 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. ¹¹ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

Job 42:2: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Psalms 115:3: Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Isaiah 55:11: so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Romans 9:20, 21: 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?

h. God's plan is completely free of outside influence.

Isa. 40:13-14 ¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?
¹⁴ Whom 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?

These verses show us that we have no claim on any part of God's decree nor can we think that we might have a better plan. This points us in the direction of trusting confidence in God.

i. God's plan is absolute and unconditional.

Nothing can change it, nor does it need to change. Nothing in the plan depends on something else to enable it to go ahead at any point. God did not provide at the Cross for salvation but then has to see who will respond.

Isa. 46:10: I 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.

j. There are different levels of relationship within the plan.

God's plan includes different levels of relationship with the objects of the decree. So, while the decree includes sin and God orders and controls his plan, he is not the author of sin in the same way that he is the author of good. Human beings and angels bear the consequences for sin, not God. This is exactly why James says what he does about God and sin (Jas. 1:13-17), answering someone who suggests that God tempts us and leads us to sin:

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

k. It includes things that are described as seemingly occurring by chance.

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

Jonah 1:7: Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Acts 1:24-26: Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Job. 36:32: He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark.

1 Ki. 22:27-34 (shading mine): The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son ²⁷ and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'" ²⁸ Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me." Then he

added, “Mark my words, all you people!”²⁹ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead.³⁰ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.³¹ Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, “Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.”³² When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, “Surely this is the king of Israel.” So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat cried out,³³ the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.³⁴ But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, “Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I’ve been wounded.”³⁵ All day long the battle raged, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died.

Job. 5:6: For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.

Mk. 14:30: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

l. It includes human actions described as not yet occurring.

God’s sovereign outworking of his plan includes predicting what will happen and then bringing events to pass. Here are some scriptures that show this. Ultimately, all prophecies demonstrate this feature.

Dan. 2:28: but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

Jn. 6:64: Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

Mt. 20:18-19:¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

m. It includes events that are described as fixed or certain; it assures that particular things will happen.

This is seen most clearly in regard to prophecy, but we can trust that it applies to everything in our lives, too.

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.”

Lk. 24:45-46:⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

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.

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.

Lk. 22:22: The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.”

Jn. 8:20: He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Mt. 24:36: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Gen. 41:32: The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

Hab. 2:3: For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

Lk. 21:24: They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jer. 15:2: And if they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ tell them, ‘This is what the LORD says: “ ‘Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.’

Job 14:5: Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

Jer. 27:7: All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

- n. It includes sinful human acts. Remember, one of the objections to predestination is that it makes God the author of sin.

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.

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

Amos 3:6: When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

Acts 3:18: But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Mt. 21:42: Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

Boettner comments on the inclusion of sin in God's plan:⁸

Even the sinful acts of men are included in this plan. They are foreseen, permitted, and have their exact place. They are controlled and overruled for the divine glory. The crucifixion of Christ, which is admittedly the worst crime in all human history, had, we are expressly told, its exact and necessary place in the plan (Acts 2:23; 4:28).

Here we face one of the most difficult aspects of God's plan—the presence of sin in a plan that God designed and controls. Boettner says further,⁹

No one can rationally deny that God foreordained sin if, as the Scriptures assert, He foreordained the crucifixion of Christ, and these other events to which we have referred. That sinful acts do have their place in the divine plan is repeatedly taught. And if any persons are inclined to take offence at this, let them consider how many times the Scriptures declare the judgments of God to be a "great deep." Hence those who hastily charge that our doctrine makes God the author of sin, bring that charge not only against us, but against God Himself; for our doctrine is the clearly revealed doctrine of the Scriptures.

Here is Boettner on Augustine's view of this:¹⁰

Augustine expressed a similar thought when he said: "Wherefore those mighty works of God, exquisitely perfect, according to every bent of His will, are such that, in a wonderful and ineffable way, that is not done without the will of God which is even done contrary to His will, because it could not be done at all, unless He permitted it to be done; and yet, He does not permit unwillingly, but willingly. Nor, as the God of goodness, would He permit a thing to be done evilly, unless, as the God of omnipotence, He could work good even out of the evil done."¹¹

Ultimately we cannot fully understand how God works in this Here is Boettner again:¹¹

And while it is not ours to explain *how* God in His secret counsel rules and overrules the sinful acts of men, it is ours to know that whatever God does He never deviates from His own perfect justice. In all the manifestations of His character He shows Himself pre-eminently the Holy One. These deep workings of God are mysteries which are to be adored, but not to be inquired into; and were it not for the fact that some persons persist in declaring that the doctrine of Predestination makes God the author of sin, we could let the matter rest here.

Remember that human beings always bear the guilt for sin. Acts 2:22-38 and 4:27-28 clearly teach this (shading mine):

²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 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. . . . ³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." ³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles,

⁸ Boettner, 13.

⁹ Ibid, 140.

¹⁰ Ibid, 137.

¹¹ Ibid, 129.

“Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Acts 4:28:²⁷ 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.

Both passages say that while God controlled what would happen, human beings are still guilty for their sins.

o. God’s plan included the Fall.

This can be easily demonstrated. First Peter 1:20 says that Christ was planned for as a sacrifice for sin before the foundation of the world. Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the blood of the eternal covenant. So, if the plan of salvation has its roots in eternity past, the Fall must also have eternal roots. Otherwise, there would be no point to having the Cross in the plan. Boettner says,¹²

Consistent Arminianism, however, pictures God as an idle, inactive spectator sitting in doubt while Adam fell, and as quite surprised and thwarted by the creature of His hands. In contrast with this, we hold that God fore-planned and fore-saw the fall; that it in no sense came as a surprise to Him; and that after it had occurred He did not feel that He had made a mistake in creating man. Had He wished He could have prevented Satan’s entrance into the garden and could have preserved Adam in a state of holiness as He did the holy angels. The mere fact that God fore-saw the fall is sufficient proof that He did not expect man to glorify Him by continuing in a state of holiness. Yet God in no way compelled man to fall. He simply withheld that undeserved constraining grace with which Adam would infallibly not have fallen, which grace He was under no obligation to bestow. In respect to himself, Adam might have stood had he so chosen; but in respect to God it was certain that he would fall. He acted as freely as if there had been no decree, and yet as infallibly as if there had been no liberty. The Jews, so far as their own free agency was concerned, might have broken Christ’s bones; yet in reality it was not possible for them to have done so, for it was written, “A bone of Him shall not be broken,” Ps. 34:20; John 19:36. God’s decree does not take away man’s liberty; and in the fall Adam freely exercised the natural emotions of his will.

p. God’s plan includes the salvation of sinners and the life of sanctification.

Eph. 2:8-9:⁸ 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.

Phil. 2:12-13:¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—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,

q. Events in the outworking of God’s plan are foreknown because they are planned for.

¹² See Boettner, 132-33

The biblical view of God's plan for the universe sees his controlling acts as determining what he knows. God cannot know the future with any certainty unless he makes sure that it happens in a particular way. If we deny foreordination, then nothing that is future can be certain and God cannot know it: all is random.

Perhaps the most blatant example of the rejection of the sequence foreordination → foreknowledge is the Arminian's assertion that a person is one of the elect because God sees ahead of time that he will believe and then labels him as "elect." If we think about this for a moment, it means that God cannot have any certainty of anyone's act of believing. In addition, coming to Christ is then entirely up to the individual. The logical and theological outcome of this is Open Theism, where God does not determine the future, cannot determine the future (remember, he fails often) and cannot therefore know what is going to happen.

r. God's plan preserves human responsibility.

God's plan is not fatalistic, as some claim. To say that God's plan makes human beings robots is to misunderstand the very nature of God. Boettner explains this:¹³

Although the sovereignty of God is universal and absolute, it is not the sovereignty of blind power. It is coupled with infinite wisdom, holiness and love. And this doctrine, when properly understood, is a most comforting and reassuring one. Who would not prefer to have his affairs in the hands of a God of infinite power, wisdom, holiness and love, rather than to have them left to fate, or chance, or irrevocable natural law, or to short-sighted and perverted self? Those who reject God's sovereignty should consider what alternatives they have left.

One of the most striking examples of this in Scripture is the account of Joseph's revealing of himself to his brothers. While God controlled the events of the brother's mistreatment of Joseph, the ultimate purpose is for a loving God to bring about good and bless Joseph and his family.

In Rom. 9:19 Paul cites a hypothetical objector who questions the fairness of God in response to his hardening of Pharaoh:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

The answer is that as the Potter God can do what he wants with what he has created. This includes the charging of sin to human beings. After all, we are born in sin and bear the guilt of Adam.

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.

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.

s. God's plan and control are not antithetical to human freedom. One criticism of predestination is that it takes away human freedom—something that supposedly we must be left to exercise.

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

¹³ Ibid, 18.

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.

Reymond has a great paragraph on this, which he writes in his evaluation of Pinnock’s concept of free will:¹⁴

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.

See the Appendix for more on this feature of God’s plan.

¹⁴ Reymond, 353-54.

Questions for further study

The plan of God

1. What is soteriology?
2. What do plans do for us in everyday life?
3. What is the relation between God's plan and God's sovereignty?
4. What do we learn from Eph. 3:11 and 1:11?
5. Is God's sovereignty an easy or difficult doctrine to internalize?

Predestination

6. What is predestination? Where does the term come from? What is the difference between the term as found in Scripture and the theological concept? In what ways is 'predestination' used?
7. What do we know about the words that are translated 'predestine,' 'predestinate,' 'predestination' or 'foreordain' in the NT?

General features of the plan of God

8. Suggest ways in which knowing each of the general features of God's plan should affect the Christian life?
9. What do we learn about the following portions of Scripture with respect to God's plan?

Rom. 11:32; 11:11

Ps. 2:4

Job 1

Gen. 50:20

Ex. 4:21; 9:12

II Sam. 16:10, 11

Acts 3:18

1 Pet. 1:20

Appendix

Here is the section on free will from Study #32 for easy reference.

(a) 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 study¹⁵.

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.¹⁶ Only if this is true are human beings actually free.

For the proponent of libertarian free will, the most important issue is 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.) 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 libertarian free will 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.

(b) Determinism

¹⁵ Available at http://www.theopedia.com/Libertarian_freedom.

¹⁶ See, for example, John Byl, “Free Will and Responsibility,” at http://www.the-highway.com/freewill_Byl.html.

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 Determinism¹⁷:

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.

(c) 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.¹⁸

The incompatibilist says that. . . 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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 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.

¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <http://www.theopedia.com/Compatibilism>

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 and take up 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.

(d) 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 will²¹:

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.

R. C. Sproul points out that Augustine saw one of the critical consequences of original sin as the loss of freedom²²:

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 Augustine²³:

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.

²¹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 353-54.

²² R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 56.

²³ Sproul, 62.

But how can one be free and at the same time be in bondage? Sproul says,²⁴

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.²⁵

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.

²⁴ Ibid, 68.

²⁵ 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.

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.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.
51. Efficacious grace: Efficacious grace is the working of God in an individual that cannot be thwarted and that leads that person to faith in Christ. It is also described as effective calling and irresistible grace.
52. Regeneration: Regeneration is the unseen and unfelt work of the Holy Spirit that overcomes depravity and brings spiritual life and the capacity to please God and exercise faith.
53. Spirit baptism is the nonphysical act of the Spirit of God that places a believer in the Body of Christ and makes him a partaker, along with all other believers, of the work and merits of Christ; should be distinguished from filling, sealing, and indwelling; cannot be felt or noticed, and hence must be appropriated by faith; there is no warrant in Scripture for assuming a second act of God for power, a 'baptism,' after salvation.
54. Sealing is a guarantee that the believer will persevere in Christ all the way to entrance into heaven, when God completes his work of purchasing the individual. It begins at the moment of salvation when the Father places the Holy Spirit in the believer for permanent indwelling. It is unseen and unfelt and should result in praise and obedience to the Spirit.
55. Indwelling is the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual who has placed personal trust in Christ as Savior. Described in Jn. 14:17, this is the basis of His other ministries to the believer, such as sealing, anointing and filling and establishes the believer as a part of the spiritual temple that God is building today.
56. The filling of the Spirit is 1) A constant characteristic of a believer's life that consists of regular control by the Spirit that produces Christlikeness through Scripture; 2) A special enablement at particular times for service during the first century.
57. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service.

58. A cessationist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are not present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
59. A continualist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
60. An angel is an individual, personal spirit being originally created by God to assist him in his plan for saving the elect.
61. The cosmos is Satan's organized spiritual system, in rebellion against God.
62. A demon is a fallen angel that is free to assist in carrying out Satan's plan of opposition to God.
63. Biblical anthropology is the study of what the Bible teaches about the nature and purpose of human beings.
64. Hamartiology is the study of sin and its consequences.
65. Sin is anything that is unlike God himself.
66. Personal sin is what occurs when we do something that is unlike what God would do.
67. Inherited sin is the pollution we have from our first parents, the inward bent toward sin. This is sometimes called the sinful nature or the sin nature.
68. Original sin means that all human beings have been affected by the fall.
69. Total depravity describes the extent of the result of our possessing a sinful nature—every part of a person is affected by sin.
70. Total inability means that in his unregenerate state no one is able to do anything that pleases God or seek God or turn to him in response to the Gospel.
71. Pelagianism is a fifth-century error that rejects original sin, total depravity and the bondage of the will to sin.
72. Imputed sin is God's assigning the act of Adam to other human beings. His act is our act in the reckoning of God.
73. Soteriology is the study of what the Bible teaches about salvation.
74. Predestination is God's outworking of his plan for the universe under his sovereign control. The term is often used particularly of his sovereign purpose for human beings and its outworking.