Dissertation

It's All in Your Mind: Mindset and Eternal Destiny

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Contents

Abbreviations

BDAG   Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

BDB   Brown, Francis, ed. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. 1906. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017.

EDNT   *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-1993.

L&N   Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.

TDNT   *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

TDOT   *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation will examine how a Christian's mindset is key to his or her ongoing life as a believer. Much of Christian encouragement focuses on behavioral changes or making a decision for Christ. Christians spend a lot of time learning about the attribute of God's incredible love. They drill down on various facets of faith, including what kinds of actions they can take to help their faith grow stronger. All of these topics are good and important, but how much time does the church spend on the Christian's mindset?[1] It is worth stepping back for a moment and considering how a person's mindset—specifically whether one sets his or her mind on the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit—impacts each of the above items. If someone focuses his or her mind on fleshly things, how likely will that person be to make behavioral changes that are pleasing to God? How likely is it that the person will better understand God's love and justice at a visceral rather than just an intellectual level? How likely is it that the person's faith grows stronger? Conversely, one should consider how the answers to these questions change if one sets his or her mind on the Spirit.

The choice of one's mindset critically affects almost every aspect of a Christian's life. This impact occurs throughout the person's life, because one's mindset must be chosen continuously. One cannot "set it and forget it." Satan constantly lurks around to try to draw the believer away from thinking about spiritual things. One's mindset matters because the focus of one's mind to a large extent determines one's eternal destiny. This dissertation will examine the

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[1] While it is impossible to measure the relative frequency of Christians' exposure to these topics, one proxy is a search in the ATLA Religion Database (performed 2/14/2024) of "sermon" in conjunction with "mindset" (0 occurrences, with the broader "mind" at 30), "love" (915), and "faith" (992). A second proxy is a search for terms on the Christian Book Distributors website on the same date, showing the following occurrences: "mindset" (1,428), "faith" (46,213), and "love" (58,423).

Pauline concept of the "mind of Christ" and demonstrate that sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer.

While a specific doctrinal perspective did not underlie the initial research behind the discussion in this paper (the author spent most of his life in first the Lutheran and then the Baptist tradition), the research led to a perspective quite different from these traditions. The genesis of this paper started with considerable pondering of Paul's struggles in Romans 7, which then led to the solution in Romans 8, and ultimately to a focus on the mindset described in 8:5–8. The analysis of this and related passages then led to the necessities of libertarian free will and the possibility of apostasy to enable the mindset described therein. As a result, the doctrinal perspective taken in this paper ended up somewhere between a Wesleyan Arminian and a Classical Arminian perspective.

In contending for the position that sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer, this dissertation will argue three underlying points. First, it will show that biblical evidence supports a synergistic freely made choice over a monergistic unconditional predestination. Second, it will demonstrate that once made, this choice is mutable, as believers can apostatize, and must therefore persist in making the right choice. Third, it will show that only the mind consistently set on the Spirit can result in a person persisting in saving faith. Therefore, sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer.

The ensuing five chapters will consist of first, a word study on "mind" and "mindset"; second, an overview of the key arguments for libertarianism and for compatibilism; third, an exegetical argument for libertarian free will over compatibilism; fourth, an argument that one can apostatize; and fifth, an argument that the key to perseverance is setting one's mind on the Spirit.

More specifically, Chapter Two will focus on an understanding of the terms "mind" and "mindset" as background for the rest of the paper, by determining the key cognates for the words, and then determining their semantic ranges. From this information, the argument will focus on those Greek words and their usages most relevant to the concepts of the mind of Christ and setting one's mind on either the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit. An overview of the general usage of "mind" in the New Testament will follow, where it will be shown that the usage generally aligns to be either focused on the things of God or on earthly things. This chapter will then continue with an analysis of the terms φρονέω and νοῦς and their cognates relevant to the discussion. The chapter will conclude by analyzing the meanings of these words and how they are used in Paul's writings and elsewhere.

The focus in Chapters Three and Four will be to show that humans have libertarian free will and are not unconditionally predestined. Embracing or rejecting God is truly a freely made choice because one libertarian has free will, and not an artificial "choice" that has been determined in advance. Chapter Three will start with a brief summary of the major views of libertarian versus non-libertarian (including compatibilist) free will and then give an overview of the major issues involved in the debate between these views. These issues include whether or not anything inherent in or specific about people causes or influences God's election. Is there any role at all for humans in their salvation? Is libertarian or non-libertarian free will more closely aligned to what the Bible says? Does libertarian free will put God's ultimate plans outside of his control? Do God's commands in the Bible imply that humans are able to comply with them? Are libertarian choices effectively random?

In considering the debate over these issues, it is helpful to review the various church leaders and scholars who stood on each side of the debate. Those who hold to what will be called

here the non-libertarian position (typically held by Calvinists, and in which human actions are

often viewed as determined by God in advance)[2] were in the minority from the time of the early

church fathers up until the time of the Reformation, with the exception of Augustine later in his

life.[3] What will be called the libertarian position (as held by Arminianism and Molinism, in

which humans have libertarian free will) was otherwise quite strongly supported, with the

following church leaders holding to this view: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Athenagoras of Athens,

Theophilus of Antioch, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Novatian of Rome, Origen,

Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas,

among others.[4] Pelagius famously advocated a position that supported libertarian free will, but

also contained some very extreme views inconsistent with orthodox Christianity. Martin Luther

was the first major theologian since Augustine to advocate a version of the non-libertarian

position, which he proclaimed in *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), written in response to

Erasmus' *On Free Will* (1524). John Calvin, with whom the non-libertarian viewpoint is often

associated, advocated his position in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he wrote and

revised between 1536 and 1559, as did John Edwards in *Freedom of the Will*, which he published

in 1754. James Arminius (1560-1609) took the libertarian position, and John Wesley (1703-

1791) took this side as well.

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[2] Note that Calvinists would more likely describe this position as "humans always choosing their greatest desire," which will be discussed in more depth later in this paper.

[3] Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will,* 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010), 41. Also, Paul Marston and Roger Forster include a 54-page appendix going through this issue in detail with specific citations by the Church Fathers (Paul Marston, and Roger T. Forster, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 289-342). See also Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Ante-Nicene Christianity*, vol. 2, 2nd pr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 543.

[4] Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 189-98.

Turning to more recent scholars, John Feinberg, Norman Geisler, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark Pinnock shared their differing views in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views* in 1986, with Feinberg defending a non-libertarian position, and Geisler, Reichenbach, and Pinnock advocating different variations of the libertarian position. Feinberg again defends his position at various points in his lengthy *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (2001), Geisler does the same in his *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will* (2010), and Pinnock defends his in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (1989). This last book, a seminal book of defenses of different parts of the libertarian position and edited by Pinnock includes chapters by Pinnock, Reichenbach, Fritz Guy, I. Howard Marshall, Jack Cottrell, Richard Rice, John Sanders, and Grant Osborne. Another key book with various defenses of the libertarian position and also edited by Pinnock is *Grace Unlimited* (1999), which contains chapters by Pinnock, Marshall, Osborne, and Jack Cottrell, among others. Marshall defends his position yet again in various places in his own *Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (2004), and Sanders defends his in his book, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (2007). Paul Marston and Roger Forster add their voices to the libertarian side of the debate in *God's Strategy in Human History* (2000), as does Robert Picirilli with *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation—Calvinism and Arminianism* (2002). Other key scholars advocating the libertarian position include Roger Olson in *Against Calvinism* (2011), William Klein in *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (2015), Jerry Walls in *Does God Love Everyone?: The Heart of What is Wrong with Calvinism* (2016), and Brian Abasciano and Steve Lemke (among several others) in *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique* (2022). A seminal work defending the non-libertarian position, *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, published in 2000, includes chapters by various authors, including

Donald Westblade, Thomas Schreiner, John Piper, Bruce Ware, and J. I. Packer. Ware adds to his defense in *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (2004), and Schreiner adds to his in *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (2020). Additional key voices on the non-libertarian side include Thaddeus Williams in *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* (2011), Scott Christensen with *What About Free Will? Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty* (2016), and Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* (2020). Of course, many other scholars take a strong position on either side of this issue, but the preceding summary gives a good view of the more outspoken proponents of each side.

The analysis of the questions raised earlier will initially lean more toward a theological or philosophical investigation, but with biblical backing as appropriate. With this biblically-supported analysis as a backdrop for understanding the major issues, Chapter Four will then turn to look at the relevant passages, performing in-depth exegetical analysis as appropriate. That is, what does the Bible actually say about the various issues just discussed? A close examination of the passages shows that more often than one might think, they do not say what some scholars claim they say.

The passages that seem to support the idea that one has free will to believe in God start as early as Deuteronomy and continue throughout the Bible, with statements from Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Turning to the opposite position, there are two passages in which the Greek word προορίζω (predestined) occurs in reference to believers that some take to support the idea of unconditional predestination. Other passages that have been claimed to support this view include the word ἐκλέγομαι (chose) or καταβολή (foundation). Two of the key passages to explore here are Ephesians 1:4–11 and Romans 8:28–30. A key term in

this second passage, God's "foreknowledge," will be analyzed closely due to its key significance in the debate. Three of the key issues this section will explore with this word include (1) does it mean the same as foreordained (it will be shown that it does not), (2) does God's perfect foreknowledge rule out libertarian free will (it will be demonstrated that it does not), and (3) are the outcomes of contingent or free decisions inherently unknowable, even by God (it will be shown that such things are knowable by God).

Other verses and passages containing ἐκλέγομαι will then be explored. These passages speak of the difference between calling and election, election not being based on works (though exactly what this difference entails will be examined closely, since some scholars oddly seem to include faith as a work), the current remnant, and exhortations given to those who are chosen. Following this exploration, the chapter will examine other verses containing καταβολή, which include the ideas of the kingdom being prepared for believers, being chosen before the foundation of the world, and names that have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. These passages also relate to the next topic of the mutability of one's choice. Just because something was done prior to the foundation of the world does not necessarily mean that it cannot change. God could put people in an initial state and at the same time give them free will to either stay in that state or move out of it. Alternatively, and more likely, he could choose people based on his foreknowledge of their hearts.

The next major issue to be discussed in Chapter Four is that God desires that all people be saved. Several passages that support this claim from both the Old and the New Testaments. Those who believe in the unconditional predestination of a limited number of believers will need to reconcile this point with their position. Further, if one believes that God does *not* desire all

people to be saved, that person will need to explain why God would desire some people to be damned. This dissertation will explore this key issue in relation to the character of God.

Chapter Four will end with a summary showing that man clearly has libertarian free will, but the question addressed in this section is whether that free will extends to choosing to believe in God or whether that choice has been determined by God in advance and man has no bearing whatsoever on God's decision. A key part of reconciling the seemingly contradictory passages entails taking each passage on its own and being clear as to what it says and what it does not say. Logically, a passage could be clear about predestination, be clear about free will, be fairly interpreted either way, or not actually address the issue at all, but only appear to on a surface level. Each of the relevant passages will be placed into one of these four categories first, and then the evidence will be considered in total, which will show that the argument for libertarian free will in choosing to follow God outweighs the argument for a version of predestination completely unrelated to anything pertaining to a person. More specifically, this section will show that the position most consistent with the totality of the related passages is that God, by his omniscience, knows everyone's heart, and thereby knows who will believe in him and who will not, which factors into his election and predestination and allows for and incorporates libertarian free will.

With the issue of free will being addressed, the dissertation will turn to the issue of the security of the believer in Chapter Five, which the following chapter will show to be dependent on one's mindset. Chapter Five holds that believers may apostatize, so they must continue to choose to believe until the end. Said another way, the choice to trust in Jesus Christ as one's Savior remains generally open to people their entire lives, and they have the ability to change their choices over time in either direction. Similar to what was done in the previous chapter,

before turning to an examination of Bible passages, a brief summary of the major views on the issue of the possibility of apostasy versus security of the believer will be discussed. This paper will use the terms "mutable" and "immutable" to describe the position of those who believe that Christians can apostatize and those who believe Christians cannot apostatize, respectively. The mutable position (held by many Arminians) will be addressed first and will discuss some of the key adherents of this position. In addition, it will discuss some of the differences within this position, and give the rationale for mutability overall. After this, the same approach for the immutable position (or the security of the believer, as held by many Calvinists) will be addressed in the same manner as was laid out for the mutable position.

I. Howard Marshall's *Kept by the Power of God* (1969) took an in-depth look into the question of perseverance, but ultimately tried to straddle the issue, admitting that some passages seem clear on the possibility of apostasy, while others seem clear on God keeping believers in the faith. Robert Shank strongly defends the possibility of apostasy in *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (1989). Judith Volf takes the other side of eternal security in *Paul & Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (1990). Scot McKnight sides with Shank in his masterful article, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions" in 1992 that pulls the various warning passages in Hebrews together in such a way to make a compelling case that Christians can apostatize. *Four Views on Eternal Security* (2002) gives two views supporting eternal security (Michael Horton and Norman Geisler) and two supporting the possibility of apostasy (Stephen Ashby and J. Steven Harper). *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (2007) does the same, with Buist Fanning and Randall Gleason supporting the eternal security view, and Gareth Cockerill and Grant Osborne supporting the apostasy view. Shortly thereafter, *Perspectives on Eternal Security: Biblical, Historical, and*

Philosophical Perspectives (2009) gave the perspectives of several different authors that support eternal security. Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, also strongly supports the eternal security of the believer. Finally, as will be shown in Chapter Five, the vast majority of commentaries on the book of Hebrews consulted in this dissertation (thirteen of fourteen) support the possibility of apostasy—a surprisingly one-sided proportion. Similar to the previous list, there are obviously many other scholars in the debate, some of whom will be cited at the appropriate point, but this gives a good overview of several of the key works and voices.

As will be shown, the Bible supports man having the ability to change his choice over time in either direction. Numerous passages suggest that believers can fall from the faith, though some are clearer than others, and all are debated to some extent. Passages to be explored in this area include some direct statements and parables of Jesus, numerous statements and exhortations by Paul, the "warning passages" and other passages in Hebrews, and a passage from the Book of Revelation.

A smaller number of verses suggest that someone who was once one of God's people could fall away and then return. The premier passage on this issue, Romans 11:17–24, will be analyzed closely, but passages from Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Galatians, and James will also be examined.

Related to this, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of perseverance. One may not consciously make a decision to reject God, but may fall away from God by not continuing to make him the priority in one's life. Matthew 10:22 states this issue clearly, in which Jesus said, "The one who endures to the end will be saved."[5] This may be less obvious in John 15:1–6, a

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

passage noted above about falling from the faith, but the key in this instance is that to "abide" means to remain faithful, or persevere. Other passages with this idea that will be investigated span the New Testament, and include passages from the Gospels, Paul's writings, Hebrews, James, 1 John, and Revelation.

On the other hand, the Bible also seems to suggest that a decision for God may be immutable. This appears to be the case especially in the writing of John. However, this section will explore the difference between Jesus protecting believers versus the believers leaving Jesus on their own. Jesus may have declared that he will not let anyone take people from him, but this does not necessarily mean that he will not let his people leave on their own if they so choose. This section will also explore whether those whom God gave to Jesus are those he knows will endure to the end (rather than by giving them to Jesus, they will thereby endure to the end).

Regarding this topic, both Ephesians 1:4–5 and Romans 8:28–30 (discussed previously, but also key passages here as well) will be looked at with this particular issue in mind. First Corinthians 1:8–9 presents a particularly difficult challenge to reconcile with free will, but the solution likely calls for separating what God has committed to do and what God has left for man to do. Other passages to be examined include several from the Gospels, several from Paul's writings, and one each from 1 Peter and 1 John.

In summary, there are multiple passages that show that a believer can fall away from the faith and/or that one must persevere to the end, and also a number of passages that seem to support the eternal security of the believer. As in the previous section, this section will first examine all of these passages on their own, looking specifically at what the passage says and ignoring anything not directly included. It will then categorize these passages relative to how strongly they support one position or the other, or perhaps upon examination do not really

support either position. This analysis will show both that the passages suggesting the possibility of apostasy and/or the need for perseverance are more prevalent, and that the passages suggesting eternal security can more easily be reconciled to a mutable view than the reverse.

The full argument culminates in Chapter Six, which will show that one's mindset determines whether or not one continues to believe until the end. Only a mindset consistently set on the Spirit will result in one's continuing faithfulness. This chapter will start with some key preliminary issues. First, while whether or not one chooses to trust in Christ depends upon one's mindset, it must be emphasized that this possibility exists only due to God's calling. Without this, people would not even have this choice. However, as discussed previously, God does not force the person in either direction, but rather, he calls people to him and convicts them through the Holy Spirit, yet ultimately leaves this decision in their hands. Second, one's choice of mindset consists of only two options, just as their choice regarding Jesus does.

This topic appears much less frequently in the literature than the previous two topics, and much of the information here can be gleaned from commentaries on the relevant verses, but a handful of voices speak directly to mindset in a scholarly fashion, including T. W. Hunt with *The Mind of Christ: The Transforming Power of Thinking His Thoughts* (1995), Ed Marks' article "Setting Our Mind on the Spirit" (2016), and Raymond Laird's *Mindset, Moral Choice and Sin in the Anthropology of John Chrysostom* (2017).

Numerous verses on "mind" or "mindset" will be examined here. The primary passage, Romans 8:3–8, delivers the core message on this topic. One of the most important items to understand in this verse regards who exactly Paul meant by those in the flesh as opposed to those in the Spirit. Most commentators assert that those who set their minds on the things of the flesh are unbelievers, while those who set their minds on the things of the Spirit are believers.

However, a case can be made that believers can be included in both categories (especially Dunn). An important issue related to this is whether one's mindset is the cause or the result of living in the flesh/Spirit. Lloyd-Jones, for example, argues for the latter, whereas this dissertation will argue for the former (though mindset and behavior are mutually reinforcing to an extent, as will be discussed further, below).

Another important verse, Matthew 16:23, sheds light on how best to understand certain aspects of Romans 8:3–8. In this verse, Jesus said to Peter, "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." This verse uses the same word (Φρονέω) as used in Romans 8:6. Just prior to this Jesus told Peter that his answer that Jesus was the Christ was revealed to him by the Father. One must compare the two passages with care, because the passage with Peter obviously happened prior to Christ's death and resurrection, while the Romans passage was written afterward. Yet was Peter really a nonbeliever at this point, or was he a believer who lapsed into earthly thinking?

In Romans 12:2, Paul exhorted his readers to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind." This is enlightening because it focuses not on what Christ does, but on what believers must do—that is, relinquish control and allow Christ and the Holy Spirit to transform their minds. Clearly, this cannot be done without God, but Paul here exhorted believers to actively allow their minds to be renewed. This verse helps address the question of whether one's mindset is the cause or result of living in the flesh/Spirit. Other passages this section will explore again come from across the New Testament, with some from the Gospels, Paul, Hebrews, and 1 John.

One's mindset also closely relates to dying to sin and to other non-spiritual things, which further solidifies the conclusion reached immediately above. While in Romans 8:3–8 Paul gave an *explanation* of the importance of mindset, in Colossians 3:1–11 Paul *exhorted* his readers to

set their minds on the things that are above (v. 2), using the same word, φρονέω, that he used in the Romans passage. They should do this *because* they have died (v. 3), and Paul then further exhorted them to "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (v. 5). Furthermore, while the earlier passage focuses on the result of the choice of mindset one makes—resulting in either spiritual death or spiritual life (Rom. 8:6), the latter passage focuses on the behavior that should follow from the correct mindset—ongoing carnal death, which results in spiritual life (Col. 3:3–5). Romans 6:1–14 sheds further light on Paul's indicative/imperative of having died to sin and needing to continue to die to sin, and how this relates to the importance of one's mindset. Key aspects to explore include what dying to sin actually means, how it relates to the concepts of "realm" and "age," and whether "having died to sin" refers to a single moment in the past (Jewett, Moo) or to an incomplete process (Dunn)—though this difference is somewhat nuanced. Other passages that will be explored on this topic come mostly from Paul.

The final topic of Chapter Six covers how one's mindset solidifies over time, whether focused on the things of the earth or the things above. People whose minds are set on earthly things will eventually become immeasurably sinful. Temptations will naturally arise in the course of life, but believers have an ally in the Holy Spirit encouraging them to quickly refocus on the things above and not dwell on the temptation and allow it to move to the next step. Without this ally, unbelievers have a higher probability of entertaining the thought for longer and progressing to the next step. Over time, unbelievers accept and even embrace temptation more readily, as they harden themselves against God's calling. James 1:14–16 is a classic text that will be explored in connection with this, along with several other passages that will be examined from the Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews.

On the other hand, a person with a mind consistently set on the things above eventually becomes one with God in some sense. A virtuous upward cycle of the right mindset replaces the vicious downward circle of the wrong mindset. The process of transformation and sanctification brings a believer closer and closer to God over time.[6] Several passages will be addressed from both the Gospels and Paul's letters.

Both options generally remain open one's entire life, but due to the solidification of one's mindset, the probability of change becomes less and less likely. The sinful mindset eventually becomes irreparably hardened (and the precise meaning of "hardened" will be examined here). Alternatively, sanctification eventually leads to becoming one with God. God will never give up on drawing people to him, but also not give up on allowing humans to have free will. As a result, while unlikely, a late-stage sinner could still repent and come to the Lord, and perhaps even more unlikely, a late-stage Christian could still lapse and turn away from God. Therefore, both the criticalness of mindset and how it progresses must be understood to gain a solid appreciation of the path to one's eternal destiny.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation, Chapter Seven, will summarize everything that came before, beginning with a reminder of the importance of mindset. It will then give a concise summary of each of the preceding chapters, with enough detail to support the conclusion reached in each step. Finally, it will pull together the entire argument and show how it all fits together to prove the thesis statement.

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[6] While "transformation" and "sanctification" are not synonymous, they are closely related. The *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB)* describes "sanctification" as a "transformative process," and notes that Christians are sanctified "only as they become and remain part of the community of God's people, a people who are corporately and personally being shaped by the Spirit into the image of the crucified Son, and thereby being restored into the image of the holy, life-giving, Triune God" (Andy Johnson, "Sanctify, Sanctification," NIDB 5:96-101). This relates closely to what Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 3:18 about "being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." It may be best to consider transformation as one part of the sanctification process.

Chapter Two: Understanding the Terms Mind and Mindset

There are numerous terms pertinent to the topics in this paper that require a clear understanding. This chapter will focus on terms related to one's mind. While the mind is obviously critical to the thesis on the importance of one's mindset, it also relates directly to the key topics building to the thesis. Having free will clearly relates to one's mind, as does the process of perseverance. The two Greek words most prevalent in the New Testament that impinge upon this topic are νοῦς and φρονέω. After an overview, these terms will be drilled into first, before touching on several lesser-used terms.

The methodology of the research for the words related to "mind" will be to determine the key cognates from *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*, and then determine the semantic range from Louw and Nida (L&N). From this information, this chapter will focus on those Greek words and their usage that are relevant to the concepts of the mind of Christ and setting one's mind on either the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit.

Before turning to an analysis of the key Greek words, this section will first give an overview of the general usage of "mind" in the New Testament. Interestingly, the usage, to a large degree, is binary. After filtering out uses such as to "change one's mind," most of the rest of the uses show the mind either focused on the things of God or on earthly things.

In the English Standard Version, the English word "mind" occurs in seventy-five verses in the New Testament. In twenty-one of these verses, the word does not pertain to the state of a person's mind or else carries a more neutral sense. These verses relate to being out of one's mind or in one's right mind (Mark 3:21; 5:15; Luke 8:35; Acts 12:15; 26:24, 25; 1 Cor. 14:23; 2 Cor. 5:13), changing one's mind (Matt. 21:29, 32; 27:3; Acts 28:6; Heb. 7:21), making up, settling something in, or being convinced in one's mind (Luke 21:14; Rom. 14:5; 2 Cor. 2:1), God being

mindful, searching one's mind, or knowing the Spirit's mind (Rom. 8:27; Heb. 2:6; Rev. 2:23), or a description of a mind that does not explicitly touch on the spiritual (1 Cor. 14:14; Rev. 17:9).

However, the other fifty-four verses relate in some way to a mind that is either connected with the Spirit or connected with the flesh. Two of these verses (Rom. 8:5, 6) deal with both the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit. Of the other thirty-one verses connected with the Spirit, two of them are closely connected with the above two verses, dealing with setting the mind on things above or being mindful of God (Col. 3:2; 1 Pet. 2:19). Other verses connected with the Spirit deal with loving God with one's mind (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27),[7] the mind of the Lord (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16),[8] God's law written on one's mind or the mind's law (Rom. 7:23, 25; Heb. 8:10; 10:16),[9] the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23), being of one mind with other Christians (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 5; 1 Pet. 3:8), praying or instructing others in church (1 Cor. 14:15, 19), being sober-minded (1 Tim. 3:2, 11; 2 Tim. 4:5; Titus 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), minding one's own affairs or having one's sincere mind stirred

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[7] It is interesting to note that while all three of these verses contain the word *mind* (διάνοια), the Old Testament verse they cite (Deut. 6:5) does not, saying only *heart*, *soul*, and *might*. Matthew excludes *might* and adds *mind*, while Mark and Luke keep *might* (or *strength*) and add *mind* as a fourth item. The overall point of the verse does not change, as the intent is that one is to love God with the very fiber of one's being, and in addition, the Hebrew word translated as heart (לֵבָב) means "inner man, mind, will, heart" (*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB), s.v. "לֵבָב"). Additionally, the LXX of Joshua 22:5 may have had an influence on this, where Joshua urges the people to serve God "with all your mind and with all your soul" (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς ὑμῶν). See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 647. Furthermore, διάνοια occurs as a variant to καρδία in the LXX in several places, including Deuteronomy 6:5 (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 911.)

[8] These two verses quote Isaiah 40:13, but instead of following the Hebrew text, which reads, "the Spirit of the Lord," they follow the LXX, which reads "the mind of the Lord," and is almost verbatim with the Romans verse.

[9] The two Hebrews verses quote Jeremiah 31:33, but similar to the Isaiah citation, instead of following the Hebrew, which speaks of *within them* and *heart*, they follow the LXX, which speaks of *mind* and *heart*.

up (1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:1), or having one's mind opened to understand Scripture or being guarded in Christ Jesus (Luke 24:45; Phil. 4:7).

The remaining twenty-one verses are connected with the flesh. Some of these are parallel to those above with the mind set not on the Spirit, but on the things of man, the flesh, or earthly things (Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33; Rom. 8:7; Phil. 3:19) or with being of one mind with those arrayed against God and handing power to the beast (Rev. 17:13, 17). Other verses like this serve as a warning to Christians not to have their minds unsettled, shaken, or even blinded (Acts 15:24; 2 Thess. 2:2). The rest of these verses apply to unbelievers (sometimes including current believers prior to their conversion), when they carried out the desires of their minds, which were enmeshed in fleshly passions (Eph. 2:3). Their minds are described variously as poisoned, debased, blinded, futile, alienated and hostile, sensuous, depraved, corrupted, and defiled (Acts 14:2; Rom. 1:28; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:17; Col. 1:21; 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:15). James highlights the importance of being all in for God, chastising those he calls double-minded (James 1:8; 4:8). For those who continue following the path of sin and unbelief, their minds will be hardened (2 Cor. 3:14).

It is quite telling that of the twenty-one verses that do not directly speak to a mind connected to either the Spirit or the flesh, only two of the verses could be seen as speaking of a neutral mind. All the others do not address the state of one's mind, and even these two verses indirectly relate to spiritual things. The first, 1 Corinthians 14:14, addresses the unfruitfulness of the mind when one prays in a tongue. Clearly, if the mind does not understand the words being said, it cannot be fruitful. Yet just as clearly, this verse has a connection to a spiritual act, pointing out that it is better to have the mind engaged in spiritual activity. The second verse,

Revelation 17:9, says, "This calls for a mind with wisdom."[10] Absent context, this could apply to either spiritual or fleshly wisdom. However, the context here refers to understanding what the beast represents. While in theory, a wise non-Christian could unravel this mystery, in actuality a heavenly angel explained what this meant to one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Almost certainly, the angel calls for spiritual wisdom here. While it may be possible for non-Christians to intellectually understand this mystery, unbelievers simply cannot accept the implications and act appropriately on them without first accepting Christ as their Savior. The New Testament record shows that the mind should not be thought of as something that can be neutral, but rather as something disposed either to the Spirit or to the flesh.

Analysis of νοῦς

Turning now to the Greek, νοῦς will be examined first, as it is the word most commonly translated as "mind." Νοῦς has at least twenty-three words in its cognate group,[11] but just six of these words relate directly to the topics under consideration: νόημα, νοῦς, διανόημα, διάνοια, ἔννοια, and ἐπίνοια. Looking at the semantic domain of each of these words produces only one additional entry: ἐνθύμησις. L&N has four separate semantic domains that include these words, and each will be examined in turn. Before doing so, though, note the progression of the concept of "mind" through these domains: first, the underlying faculty of understanding; second, a way of thinking; third, the content of that thinking; and fourth, the intended result of that thinking.

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[10] Revelation contains another similar verse, but with the word "mind" left out—"This calls for wisdom" (13:18)—that should be treated similarly.

[11] Warren C. Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1998), 75-76.

The first domain is "the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding—'mind.'"[12] This domain includes νοῦς, νόημα, and διάνοια. For νοῦς in this domain, L&N gives Romans 7:25 and 1 Corinthians 14:14 as examples. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) includes both of these verses under its first definition, "the faculty of intellectual perception," with the first reference being under 1.a. ("mind, intellect"), and the second being under 1.b. ("understanding, mind").[13] For νόημα here, both 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Philippians 4:7 are given. BDAG places the first of these verses under its second definition, "the faculty of processing thought, *mind*, *understanding*." The second reference it places under its first definition, "that which one has in mind as product of intellectual process," and specifically under 1.a. ("thought"), but BDAG also notes that some would include it under the second definition instead.[14] Finally, for διάνοια, L&N gives Ephesians 4:18 as an example. BDAG places this verse under its first definition, "the faculty of thinking, comprehending, and reasoning, *understanding*, *intelligence*, *mind*."[15] As can be seen from above, both L&N and BDAG include here the concept of the "faculty" of the mind.

L&N defines the second domain as "a particular manner or way of thinking—'way of thinking, disposition, manner of thought, attitude.'"[16] This domain includes νοῦς, διάνοια, and ἔννοια. Only one example verse is given for each word, which for νοῦς is Colossians 2:18. BDAG places this verse in its second definition, "way of thinking, *mind*, *attitude*," and specifically puts it under 2.a. ("as possessed by every person") as opposed to 2.b. ("specific of

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[12] L&N 26.14.

[13] BDAG, s.v. "νοῦς."

[14] Ibid., s.v. "νόημα."

[15] BDAG, s.v. "διάνοια."

[16] L&N, 30.5.

the Christian attitude or way of thinking").[17] For διάνοια, BDAG places the reference verse,

Colossians 1:21, under its second definition, "mind as a mode of thinking, *disposition*, *thought*,

mind."[18] Finally, for ἔννοια, BDAG includes the given verse, 1 Peter 4:1, under the only

definition it has for the word, "the content of mental processing, *thought*, *knowledge*, *insight*."[19]

Interestingly, here, while the first two BDAG definitions closely resemble what L&N has, the

third seems to fit better under the third domain, discussed immediately below, likely because the

verse in question could be interpreted in a way consistent with either definition.

Third is "the content of thinking and reasoning—'thought, what is thought, opinion.'"[20]

Words included in this domain are ἐνθύμησις, νόημα, διάνοια, and διανόημα. Two different

verses are given as examples for ἐνθύμησις—Matthew 9:4 and Acts 17:29. In BDAG, only one

definition for this word exists, "the process of considering something, *thought*, *reflection*, *idea*,"

so both examples obviously fall under this definition.[21] For νόημα, the only verse given is 2

Corinthians 10:5. BDAG places this under its first definition, "that which one has in mind as

product of intellectual process," and specifically under 1.a. ("thought").[22] For διάνοια, BDAG

places the reference verse, Luke 1:51, under its second definition, "mind as a mode of thinking,

disposition, *thought*, *mind*," the same place where the word was placed in the second domain,

above.[23] The final word, διανόημα, has Luke 11:17 for a reference verse, and BDAG only has

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[17] BDAG, s.v. "νοῦς."

[18] Ibid., s.v. "διάνοια."

[19] Ibid., s.v. "ἔννοια."

[20] L&N, 30.15.

[21] BDAG, s.v. "ἐνθύμησις."

[22] Ibid., s.v. "νόημα."

[23] Ibid., s.v. "διάνοια."

one definition for this word, "product of a thought process, *thought*."[24] Once again, there appears to be somewhat of a disconnect between L&N and BDAG. While on the one hand, all four BDAG definitions contain the word *thought*, only the second and fourth items start with "product," which is similar to "content," but their first item is initially described as a process, and their third as a mode of thinking. These would seem to more naturally fit under L&N's second domain. One should take away from this that there exists more than one way to interpret the texts under consideration, so the exegete should always consider all the possibilities and surrounding context carefully before settling on a particular interpretation.

L&N gives the final domain as "that which is intended or purposed as the result of thinking—'intention, purpose.'"[25] Only two words are represented here, ἔννοια, and ἐπίνοια. For ἔννοια, Hebrews 4:12 is the example given, and, as above, BDAG includes it under the only definition it has for the word, "the content of mental processing, *thought*, *knowledge*, *insight*."[26] Similarly, ἐπίνοια has only one example, Acts 8:22, and only one definition in BDAG, "the result of a thought process, *thought*, *conception*."[27] Yet again, a conflict exists, with the first BDAG definition seeming to fit better into the third L&N domain, while the second BDAG entry is consistent with L&N's fourth domain.

As can be seen from this initial analysis, the definitions in the semantic domains go beyond just "mind," and cover closely related ideas like "thoughts" as well. After completing a similar analysis of φρονέω next, the two analyses will be combined with the earlier analysis of

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[24] BDAG, s.v. "διανόημα."

[25] L&N, 30.66.

[26] BDAG, s.v. "ἔννοια."

[27] Ibid., s.v. "ἐπίνοια."

the English word "mind" to see how all of this fits together in terms of how it relates to the subject of this dissertation.

Analysis of φρονέω

Turning next to φρονέω, the word group associated with it is the next most common group of words translated as "mind," though to a much less frequent extent. Φρονέω has an even larger cognate group than νοῦς, with at least thirty words,[28] but only five of these words relate directly to the topics under consideration: φρήν, φρόνησις, φρόνημα, φρονέω, and φροντίζω. Looking at the semantic domain of each of these words produces two additional entries: σχοπέω and μελετάω. L&N has three different semantic domains that include these words, and like above, each will be examined in turn. Similar to above, it is beneficial to observe the progression of the concepts through these domains: first, the underlying faculty of planning; second, to employ this faculty; and third, to give ongoing consideration to something. Comparing this to the progression of semantic domains for νοῦς, one notices the nuance of νοῦς focuses on understanding and thinking versus that of φρονέω focusing more on planning and the consideration of something.

L&N gives the first domain as "the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, often with the implication of being wise and provident—thoughtful planning, way of thinking, outlook."[29] This domain includes φρήν, φρόνησις, and φρόνημα. For φρήν in this domain, L&N gives 1 Corinthians 14:20 as an example. BDAG includes this under its only definition, "the process of careful consideration, *thinking*, *understanding*."[30] For φρόνησις, BDAG includes the

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[28] Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide*, 119-20.

[29] L&N 26.15.

[30] BDAG, s.v. "φρήν."

biblical reference, Luke 1:17, in its first definition, "the faculty of thoughtful planning, *way of thinking*, *(frame of) mind*."[31] Finally, φρόνημα has the example of Romans 8:6, which is listed under the only definition for this word in BDAG, "the faculty of fixing one's mind on something, *way of thinking*, *mind(-set)*."[32] For this domain, the definitions for the second and third words in BDAG are consistent with L&N as they all discuss a "faculty," while the definition for the first word discusses a process instead.

The second domain is "to employ one's faculty for thoughtful planning, with emphasis upon the underlying disposition or attitude—to have an attitude, to think in a particular manner."[33] The only word listed in this domain, φρονέω, has Philippians 2:5 as its example, and BDAG includes this verse in its third definition, "to develop an attitude based on careful thought, *be minded/disposed*."[34] BDAG and L&N seem generally aligned here.

For the third and final domain in this section, L&N has "to keep on giving serious consideration to something—to ponder, to let one's mind dwell on, to keep thinking about, to fix one's attention on."[35] This domain includes φρονέω, φροντίζω, σχοπέω and μελετάω. Starting with φρονέω, the given verse, Colossians 3:2, is included in BDAG under its second definition, "to give careful consideration to something, *set one's mind on*, *be intent on*," and more specifically under 2.a., which is the general understanding of this definition, as opposed to the more specific options of taking someone's side or acknowledging the importance of something.[36]

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[31] BDAG, s.v. "φρόνησις."

[32] Ibid., s.v. "φρόνημα."

[33] L&N 26.16.

[34] BDAG, s.v. "φρονέω."

[35] L&N 30.20.

[36] BDAG, s.v. "φρονέω."

The second word, φροντίζω, has Titus 3:8 as its example. BDAG's only definition for this word is "to give sustained thought to something, *think of*, *be intent on*, *be careful/concerned about*."[37] The next word, σχοπέω, has 2 Corinthians 4:18 for an example and also has only a single definition in BDAG: "to pay careful attention to, *look (out) for*, *notice*."[38] The final word, μελετάω, has 1 Timothy 4:15 as its example, which BDAG includes under its second definition, "to improve by care or study, *practice*, *cultivate*, *take pains with*."[39] For this domain, the two reference works roughly align, but only the BDAG definition for the second word specifically calls out the idea of this being sustained, though the definition for the fourth word suggests the same idea with practicing and cultivating.

Combining the English View with the Greek Views

Recalling the observation from the opening section of this chapter, the ESV Bible uses the English word "mind" in seventy-five verses in the New Testament. This usage was split into twenty-one instances where the term was used in a neutral sense or not to refer to man's mind, twice where both positive and negative views were included, thirty-one times in a positive or spiritual sense, and twenty-one times in a negative or fleshly sense. Comparing now the Greek words just reviewed with these English usages, in the first category, only four of the twenty-one verses that used "mind" were written with one of these Greek words. Of these four usages two were those that were pointed out as not directly touching on the spiritual, but still indirectly related to spiritual things. One (Romans 8:27) dealt with the mind of the Spirit, rather than that of a human, and the final one (Romans 14:5) dealt with being convinced in one's mind about

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[37] BDAG, s.v. "φροντίζω."

[38] Ibid., s.v. "σχοπέω."

[39] Ibid., s.v. "μελετάω."

why one believes as he or she does regarding the importance of observing certain days. Ultimately, this suggests that other than the first two of these four verses, this first group of twenty-one can be set to the side in analyzing the Greek words related to the mind in the New Testament for the purposes of this study. Both the contexts and the semantic domains are generally unrelated to those of the subject matter.

The other three categories, however, have a much higher representation of the Greek words in the chosen domains. Both of the words in the second category are from these domains, as are twenty-one of thirty-one from the third category and fifteen of twenty-one from the fourth. When looking at the words that do not come from the chosen domains, interestingly, eight of the ten in category three come from either the Pastorals or 1 Peter. Perhaps even more germane to the discussion, six come from the "sober-minded" subcategory (out of seven total in this subcategory). In the fourth domain, all six of the words falling outside of it come from either Acts, James, or Revelation. In terms of subcategories, both words referring to being of one mind are in this group of six, as are both words related to being double-minded. All of this information will be taken into account in the chapter summary.

Analysis of Other Related Terms

A total of eight Greek words underlie the words translated as "mind" in the sixteen verses that were not included in the analysis above: ψυχή, δίψυχος, νηφάλιος, νήφω, γνώμη, ὁμόφρων, πράσσω, and συνείδησις. These will be looked at individually now, after which a few key Hebrew words will be examined.

First, the ESV translates ψυχή as "mind" in three places: Acts 14:2; 15:24; Philippians 1:27. In BDAG, all three of these occurrences fall under definition 2.c.: "seat and center of the

inner human life in its many and varied aspects, *soul*; of feelings and emotions."[40] However, it should be noted that ψυχή occurs in almost one hundred verses in the New Testament, so its translation as "mind" is rare. The first of the three verses under discussion here has to do with the poisoning of the Gentiles' ψυχὰς, which, understandably, is typically translated as "minds." Somewhat similarly, the second verse has to do with the unsettling of the ψυχὰς of the Gentile believers. However, this time, most translations use "souls" as the English word here. The third case deals with one ψυχή striving together, and while most translations use "mind" here, a few use "soul," and some omit a direct translation altogether and simply use something like striving together. Given that ψυχή is only rarely translated as "mind," and that these few cases do not add much to the discussion, expanding the semantic domains to include those that contain ψυχή will likely not add significant value beyond those domains already addressed.

The two occurrences of the next word, δίψυχος, are the only occurrences in the entire New Testament (James 1:8; 4:8). While the ESV translates it in a strict literal fashion as "double-minded," BDAG defines it as "pertaining to be uncertain about the truth of something, *doubting*, *hesitating*."[41] This paper argues that one's mind is either set on the Spirit or on the flesh, so the literal translation of being double-minded would seem to contradict this position. However, as the context in James 1:8 supports, the actual meaning fits better with the BDAG definition. James makes clear that a person who is δίψυχος does not have his mind set on the Spirit, since such a person "must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:8). The natural conclusion is that while people might think they can set their minds in multiple places,

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[40] BDAG, s.v. "ψυχή."

[41] Ibid., s.v. "δίψυχος."

that, in itself, is fleshly thinking, and shows that their minds are set on the flesh.[42] Given this limited usage and clear meaning, this also does not warrant pursuing further.

Similarly, νηφάλιος occurs three times in this review, and these also are its only occurrences in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:2; 3:11; Titus 2:2). Curiously, BDAG has two definitions for the word, and includes all three occurrences under each definition. These definitions are (1) "pertaining to being very moderate in the drinking of an alcoholic beverage, *temperate*, *sober*, and (2) pertaining to being restrained in conduct, *self-controlled*, *level-headed*."[43] This word is translated in the ESV as "sober-minded" each time. It appears that BDAG must be allowing for either definition to be appropriate in each case.

Νήφω, on the other hand, occurs in three of these verses plus a fourth verse that included a different word used for mind and discussed above, and in all four of these cases, the ESV translates it as "sober-minded." It only appears two other times (1 Thess. 5:6, 8), and each time the ESV translates it simply as "sober." BDAG has only one definition: "*be well-balanced, self-controlled*."[44] Both of these words (νηφάλιος and νήφω) have very limited usage and narrow definitions, so are likewise not worth pursuing further.

The fifth word, γνώμη, is twice translated as "mind," both in Revelation 17. BDAG lists its first occurrence, in Revelation 17:13, under its first definition, "that which is purposed or intended, *purpose*, *intention*, *mind*, *mind-set*." Its second, in Revelation 17:17, BDAG lists under

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[42] This conclusion may help explain Paul's struggle in Romans 7:7–25, which is actually bracketed by the solution in Romans 7:4–6 and Romans 8:1–8. He first noted that living in the flesh results in bearing fruit for death (7:5). Later, he connected living in the flesh with setting one's mind on the flesh (8:5) and said that the mind set on the flesh cannot submit to God's law (8:7). The combination of these three verses suggests that Paul continuing to do the evil he does not want to do (7:19) is because his mind was set on the flesh. Such a mindset may deceive one into thinking one is serving the law of God with one's mind, but the resultant actions indicate otherwise. The solution is to instead fully set one's mind on the Spirit.

[43] BDAG, s.v. "νηφάλιος."

[44] Ibid., s.v. "νήφω."

its fourth definition, "a declaration that expresses formal consideration of a matter, declaration, decision, resolution." [45] These are two of a total of nine occurrences of the word in the New Testament. Unlike the previous words in this section, γνώμη would seem to have greater potential to provide some additional insights into the topic, especially given the first definition. The fourth definition, however, has no other verses listed under it, and the first definition only has 1 Corinthians 1:10 in addition to the verse from Revelation. In addition, in both verses, the meaning comes closer to "purpose" than to mindset. Bible versions split the translation of Γνώμη in Revelation 17:13 fairly evenly between "mind" and "purpose," and in 1 Corinthians 1:10 they most often translate it as purpose or judgment, where it occurs alongside the term νοῦς: "be united in the same mind and the same judgment." As such, this narrow usage would not add much value to the overall analysis.

The word ὁμόφρων only occurs this one time in the New Testament, and means "pertaining to being like-minded, *united in spirit*, *harmonious*."[46] As such, this also can be excluded from further analysis. Πράσσω, on the other hand, is only once (1 Thess. 4:11) translated as "mind" in the ESV out of the thirty-seven verses in the New Testament in which it appears. It fits under BDAG definition 1.a., "to bring about or accomplish something through activity, *do*, *accomplish*." Its use in 1 Thessalonians 4:11 is to "mind your own affairs," so this word also can be eliminated from further review.

The final Greek word, συνείδησις, is also only translated once (1 Pet. 2:19) as "mindful" in the ESV out of twenty-nine verses in which it occurs. This occurrence falls under BDAG's first definition, "awareness of information about something, *consciousness*." While the 1 Peter

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[45] BDAG, s.v. "γνώμη."

[46] Ibid., s.v. "ὁμόφρων."

instance comes close to the idea of mindset, the word elsewhere does not, and so will not be considered further. So, none of these additional words added value to the subject matter, leaving just those of the original semantic domains discussed.

Before concluding this chapter, three Hebrew words will be looked at that may shed additional light on this overall topic. The first word, רוּחַ (*rûaḥ*), is usually translated as "spirit." However, in Isaiah 40:13, the LXX translates this as "mind" (νοῦς), though the ESV uses "Spirit." In both Ezekiel 11:5 and 20:32, the ESV translates it as "mind," whereas the LXX uses πνεῦμα in the first verse, and does not contain the word in the second verse. The NIV uses "mind" for all three of these verses as well as for two other instances of רוּחַ. From a lexicon standpoint, most of the definitions for רוּחַ in BDB relate to breath, wind, or spirit, but its fifth definition is "spirit as seat of emotion," and its sixth definition is "seat or organ of mental acts."[47] The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT) goes even further, noting that of the 378 occurrences of רוּחַ in the Old Testament, at least seventeen are "used in the sense of 'mind,' parallel or synonymous with 'heart'" (which will be discussed next).[48]

The other two words, לֵבָב and לֵב (*lēḇāḇ* and *lēḇ*), are typically translated as "heart," but are also translated as "mind" numerous times. In fact, the ESV translation uses the English word "mind" for nine different Hebrew words, but לֵבָב and לֵב are the most common words used, underlying 38 of the 52 total occurrences of a Hebrew word translated as "mind." As above, this is consistent with BDB, which gives the general definition of both words as "inner man, mind, will, heart." The specific sub-definitions are the same across the two words as well, and include "inner man," which encompasses "mind, affections, and will," "specific reference to *mind*,"

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[47] BDB, s.v. "רוח."

[48] Heinz-Josef Fabry, "רוּחַ," TDOT 13:365-402.

"specific reference to *inclinations, resolutions, determinations of the will*," "specific reference to *conscience*," and "specific reference to *moral character*."[49] These five of the ten sub-definitions given are typically thought of with regard to one's mind today. These definitions sit alongside of the "*seat of the appetites*," the "*seat of the emotions and passions*," and the "*seat of courage*,"[50] which more naturally fit with the idea of "heart" today, yet still have a mental component involved. TDOT notes that the two words "appear to be totally synonymous and interchangeable," and occur 853 times in the Old Testament. As with BDB, what takes place within the לֵבָב or לֵב include "intellectual visualization (cognition and memory), thought, understanding, and attention," as well as wisdom.[51] This brief analysis shows that the concepts of heart, mind, and spirit can sometimes be used almost interchangeably.

Chapter Summary

The result of this analysis shows that fourteen Greek words are candidates for being closely related to "mind" as used in the context of this paper. These words, and their number of occurrences in the New Testament are as follows: νόημα (6), νοῦς (22), διανόημα (1), διάνοια (12), ἔννοια (2), ἐπίνοια (1), ἐνθύμησις (4), φρήν (1), φρόνησις (2), φρόνημα (3), φρονέω (21), φροντίζω (1), σκοπέω (6), and μελετάω (2). Chapter Six will dive into the key passages that directly speak to the topics at hand, about one's mindset and having the mind of Christ. However, before concluding this chapter and before summarizing what has been learned, it will be beneficial to first look at those passages containing the above Greek words that do not *directly* relate to the pertinent topics, but that shed some ancillary light on them.

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[49] BDB, s.v. "לֵבָב;" BDB, s.v. "לֵב."

[50] Ibid.

[51] Heinz-Josef Fabry, "לֵב," TDOT 7:399-437.

Three concepts emerge from this analysis. The first regards the usage of the word διανόημα in Luke 11:17, in which it occurs in the context of Jesus *knowing* the thoughts of the people who were trying to test him. This same concept appears in both Matt. 9:24 and 12:25, in which Jesus *knows* people's thoughts, but this time with the word ἐνθύμησις. Second, Paul uses both φρήν (in 1 Cor. 14:20) and φρονέω (in Phil. 3:15) when he encourages believers to be *mature* in their thinking. Third, ἐπίνοια is used in Acts 8:22 when Peter rebukes Simon the Sorcerer for offering to purchase with money the ability to give the Holy Spirit to people. In this instance, ἐπίνοια occurs in conjunction with his *heart* rather than his mind, in the sense of Simon's intention or purpose. However, here heart and mind are closely related, and either could be used in describing what someone intends or purposes to do. In this case, even though the Holy Spirit was involved, Simon's heart or mind was not set on the Spirit, but rather on the flesh in terms of what he could gain from acquiring such power.

Finally, everything learned in this chapter can be pulled together. First, the state of one's mind is rarely described as neutral in the New Testament, but rather is described in a spiritual, positive sense or a fleshly, negative sense. Second, the semantic domains of the relevant words span from the faculty of thinking or planning, to the use of these faculties in thinking or planning, to the ongoing process and results, and only the words in these domains are most relevant to the topics under review. Finally, when reviewing the directly related passages in Chapter Six, one should keep in mind that Jesus knows everyone's thoughts, Christians should aim to be mature in their thinking, and both "heart" and "mind" can similarly be used to refer to the source of the thoughts and intentions of a person.

Chapter Three: Libertarian Versus Compatibilist Free Will—Setting the Stage

The ability for one to freely choose one's mindset depends, of course, on whether or not one truly has libertarian free will. The debate about whether or not humans have free will has gone on for many centuries and continues on today. This chapter will outline the major sides of the debate and then address several specific subsets of the debate, including the implications of different definitions of free will, different understandings of predestination, and the relationship between God's commands and people's ability to obey such commands. This overview will set the stage for the biblical exegetical analysis of the following chapter, giving the reader an understanding of some of the key theological and philosophical issues underlying the main points of the debate.

At a high level, the two primary camps in this debate relate to whether or not any characteristic of people has any bearing on their salvation. Monergism believes that the answer to this question is "no." Salvation depends entirely upon God, and humans do not have free will to either believe or not believe. Synergism, on the other hand, answers, "yes." While salvation is impossible without God's grace, human free will has a role in one's salvation. The monergistic approach is often described as compatibilist or Calvinist, and the synergistic as libertarian or Arminian. Libertarian free will serves as a foundational element in people's ability to choose what to set their minds on.

More specifically, *monergism* has been defined as the position that "the grace of God is the only efficient cause in beginning and effecting conversion."[52] This position was espoused by Martin Luther, who strongly emphasized grace, and further asserted that while salvation was

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[52] C. George Fry, "Monergism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 786-87.

entirely the work of God, refusal to believe was entirely the fault of man.[53] John Calvin, on the

other hand, while he also took a monergistic view, believed that man's will is *necessarily* drawn

to evil.[54]

Synergism, in contrast, sees a cooperation between humans and God in the process of

salvation. While Luther famously described monergism as involving the bondage of the will,

proponents of synergism emphasize the freedom of the will. Notable church leaders who

historically favored this position include Erasmus, James Arminius, and John Wesley.[55]

It may be helpful to consider why monergists consider synergism problematic. Many

monergists believe that synergism has some views akin to Pelagianism, which most Christians

condemn as unorthodox.[56] In particular, they have concerns about the causal aspect of humans in

their own salvation and the praiseworthiness for human behavior, specifically for their role in

salvation.[57] However, both of these concerns seem to be misrepresenting the synergist position.

Regarding the first one, synergists see God as the sole cause. God, if he chose, could save

humans monergistically; humans, if they chose, could never save themselves monergistically.

They simply cannot do it without God. God offers the gift of salvation to humans. The human

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[53] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. James I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1957), 100-102, 204. Luther says, "A man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers . . . and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure and work of Another—God alone." Also, "A man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, . . . but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily." And, "When God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result; yet God, though He does evil by means of evil men, cannot act evilly Himself, for He is good, and cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the impulse and movement of His power. The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these instruments."

[54] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Calvin's Own 'Essentials' Edition*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 70. Calvin said, "If I hold that the will is devoid of freedom and is necessarily drawn to evil, it is surprising that some should find this manner of speaking far-fetched."

[55] C. George Fry, "Synergism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1161-62.

[56] Taylor W. Cyr, and Matthew T. Flummer, "Free Will, Grace, and Anti-Pelagianism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (April 2018): 184.

[57] Ibid., 185.

must simply accept this free gift through faith in Christ. Regarding the second, there is nothing praiseworthy about accepting a free gift.

On the topic of free will, monergists believe that predestination is unconditional,[58] and many in this camp hold that God determines everything in advance. Monergists typically adhere to a position called compatibilist free will. Synergists believe that predestination is conditional on one's faith and hold that humans have libertarian free will.[59] This position exists in the *Five Arminian Articles* (1610 AD), which asserts that God saves "those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith."[60] While other differences exist between the two camps, most of them follow from these two primary positions.

Going a bit deeper on each position, libertarian free will holds that people are able to make any choice that they are logically able to make, though it would exclude the physically impossible—a person could not choose to pick up an automobile and throw it twenty miles away. Many would argue that it would also exclude decisions made under constraint—a person choosing to rob a bank because someone will kill their child if they do not would not be

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[58] Bruce A. Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 211.

[59] This delineation is overly simplistic given that several views lie along the spectrum of these issues, including some that intertwine. For example, Oliver Crisp devotes an entire chapter to something he calls "libertarian Calvinism," which keeps much of the Calvinist view, but advocates for libertarian free will except in the case of one's salvation. (Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 71-96). However, James Anderson and Paul Manata challenge the legitimacy of this view. (James N. Anderson, and Paul Manata, "Determined to Come Most Freely: Some Challenges for Libertarian Calvinism," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 3 (2017): 272–97). Also, Arminians at the extreme end hold a view sometimes called "Open Theism," which many mainline evangelicals reject since it claims that God is not omniscient, as they hold that some things are simply unknowable, even by God.

[60] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 545. Wesley took a simpler approach and modified the *39 Articles of the Church of England* to reflect his own views, in which the idea of prevenient grace is reflected in the article on free will (John Wesley, *25 Articles: The Wesleyan Confession of Faith in Modern English* (North Haven, CT: Pen & Spirit Publishing, 2020), i-ii, 11).

exercising libertarian free will. Without any of these or other types of constraint, however, libertarian free will assumes that a person can make whatever choice they decide. Furthermore, this does not discount that their choices will be influenced by various factors. Someone may choose to eat a cookie rather than broccoli because that person loves cookies and hates broccoli. The person still has the ability to choose to eat the broccoli, even though it is unlikely that he or she will make that choice.

Compatibilist free will, on the other hand, means that people will choose the option that they most desire. John Feinberg, who supports compatibilism, says, "An action is free even if causally determined so long as the causes are nonconstraining."[61] Scott Christensen, another compatibilist supporter claims, "God determines the choices of every person, yet every person freely makes his or her own choices. . . In this model, people are free when they voluntarily choose what they most want to choose as long as their choices are made in an unhindered way."[62] This view, at least in regards to salvation, has its roots in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which asserts that those whom God has predestined are "effectually" drawn to Christ, "yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace."[63] Those who support this position quickly assert that this does not make people automatons or robots. They are not doing what they are programmed to do, but freely choosing what they most want to do. However, it is

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[61] John S. Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 24.

[62] Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will? Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 6.

[63] R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 239.

difficult to see how God determining what they will choose is not effectively programming them.[64]

One of the most commonly used metaphors for God used by proponents of compatibilist free will is that of a novelist.[65] They use this as an analogy for God and humans both being 100% responsible for human behavior.[66] However, the "free will" that the characters purportedly have is at best an illusion. The author determines every single thing that a character does in a novel, which results not in 100% each, but 100% and zero.

Yet compatibilists strongly deny the charge that their position effectively results in fatalism. That is, why should people even make an attempt at being good and doing the right thing if God determines everything in advance? Christensen tries to show by example why compatibilism does not imply fatalism, but his examples fail to convince. First, he gives the example of a soldier who prays for God's protection and says that he would not stand up recklessly in the midst of enemy fire and expect God to protect him if he did that.[67] Christensen, however, overlooks the implications of compatibilism. If God determines everything, then if the soldier did stand up recklessly, it would have been God's plan that the soldier do so. Also, how can God answer a prayer one way or the other based on what someone prays if he has determined everything in advance? It would seem that even the prayer itself would have been determined

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[64] This statement does not deny that God gives humans a nature with certain constraints, but this differs from God determining what one individual will choose versus another within such constraints.

[65] John E. Sanders, "God as Personal," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 169.

[66] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 428; see also Christensen, *Free Will*, 156-57.

[67] Christensen, *Free Will*, 101.

along with the answer before it even happened. Again, why make an attempt if one's actions will occur as planned no matter what? Even the attempt itself would be determined in advance.

Christensen then gives the example of trials and tribulations leading to discouragement and people giving up. He says that people instead should trust in God that God will sustain them.[68] People should indeed trust God, but under his logic, if someone is discouraged, it is because God ordained it, and if someone gives up, it is because God ordained it. A person's decisions do not matter at all, because all has been ordained. He or she has no ability to do otherwise. This statement does not misrepresent his position. Christensen forthrightly states, "God determines the choices of every person."[69] Similarly, Grudem claims, "Before the creation of the world, [God] determined to bring about everything that happens."[70]

Christensen and Grudem both further say that at the same time, people also freely make their own choices, because God makes them want to do what he has already ordained.[71] This "dualism" of choices will be discussed in more detail later on, but for now, the point is about God's role in the process. According to compatibilists, God determines what people do, including what they supposedly "freely" choose. Christensen's examples do not show how choosing one's greatest desire does not result in fatalism if that desire came from God rather than from within the person.

The conclusions from the preceding paragraphs are pretty damaging to the compatibilist position, but what about the libertarian position? Compatibilists often claim that libertarian free

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[68] Christensen, *Free Will*, 101-02.

[69] Ibid., 6.

[70] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 440.

[71] Christensen, *Free Will*, 6; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 441-42.

will cannot be true because it violates God's sovereignty.[72] Yet the facts do not support such a claim for two reasons. First, it would be true if someone imposed this upon God, but that is not the case. God himself decided to create a world with free creatures. Second, sovereigns commonly delegate their authority to others, and doing so does not reduce their sovereignty. Related to this, someone can have complete authority without exercising complete determinism. God has both the power and the authority to determine every single thing that happens, but he also has the power and the authority to choose not to determine every single thing that happens, yet still do so in such a way that his plans are carried out. Delegating some authority to his subjects does not diminish his ultimate authority in any way.

The best leaders delegate decisions so that the people that report to them become good leaders through the experience of making decisions themselves. Jesus gave his disciples authority over unclean spirits (Matt. 10:1). Also, while the word used here (ἐξουσία) can have a connotation of power in conjunction with authority, the parallel passage in Luke says that he gave the disciples "power and authority" (δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσίαν), so it would be redundant if ἐξουσία meant "power" here. By giving this authority to his disciples, is the incarnate God no longer fully sovereign? This verse weakens the compatibilist claim that libertarian free will cannot be true since it impinges on God's sovereignty, because either they are correct that God loses his sovereignty in this case (and so the Bible teaches what they deny) or God does not lose

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[72] Some people advocate for God's *specific* sovereignty, i.e., that his sovereignty is unlimited, and most people in this group advocate for the position that God determines in advance every single thing that people do. However, other people advocate for God's *general* sovereignty, where God has delegated some of his sovereignty to humans, and he allows them to make decisions that may not be completely aligned with his will. People in this group range from those who accept that God intervenes and overrides human free will as necessary to see his will accomplished, to process theologians, who hold that God does not directly intervene, but only works to influence people's choices. (David Basinger and Randall Basinger, "Introduction," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 10-13.) This paper maintains a synergistic view that accepts the position of God's general sovereignty.

any of his sovereignty by delegating some of it (and so God giving free will to man does not necessarily impinge on God's sovereignty).[73]

On a related note, compatibilists object to libertarianism because they fear that with libertarian free will, God loses all control and his plans may not come to fruition.[74] Such a fear misses two key points. First, God is all-powerful and infinitely creative, and can design a way to make his plans come to fruition while at the same time giving humans libertarian free will. Second, God intervenes in human affairs, and so can bring about his plans in this way as well.

Both sides of the debate affirm that God extends his love to everyone, both believers and unbelievers.[75] Arminians see that love extending to respecting human freedom, even if that freedom causes a person to reject the very love that gave the person that freedom and the opportunity to live in eternal bliss.[76] However, the idea of a fully-loving God creates perhaps the most difficult problem for the Calvinist position. What leads to this problem has been posed in a number of different ways, so what follows will address several of them, though the response to each is the same.

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[73] Further support for this position can be gleaned from comparing Jesus' numerous assertions of his authority (Matt. 9:6; 28:18; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24; John 5:27; 10:18; 17:2) with his statement, "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me" (John 8:28). The Father retains all authority, but at the same time gives it to Jesus. This example differs slightly, since Jesus is God, but it shows how one can have authority, but still be subject to a higher authority who does not relinquish his ultimate authority.

[74] Donald J. Westblade, "Divine Election in the Pauline Literature," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 66.

[75] John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 351.

[76] Fritz Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 45.

First, Thomas Schreiner says that God is "wholly just in condemning sinners who have no ability to obey his law."[77] He is completely correct in this, but does not address the bigger point that if one believes the compatibilist view, God brought these people into the world with no ability or desire to obey the law.[78] While God created Adam and Eve with this ability, many Calvinists hold that humankind lost this ability after the Fall. Further, under compatibilism, humans do what they most desire, and since God determines everything, he has determined their desires. Yes, once born and sinful, God is just in condemning them if they freely choose to sin, as is the case with libertarianism. However, as noted earlier in quotes from Christensen and Grudem, under compatibilism, God determined everything—including people's choices—before the world began. Under such a system, how is God just in bringing people into the world this way in the first place? He could have simply not created them. Under Calvinism, God brought people into the world and condemned them to eternal damnation based on nothing that they had the ability to freely choose to do, *but were determined to do in advance by God determining what their greatest desire would be*. How can one reconcile this with God being a God of love? The libertarian position solves this problem, because God does not determine people's choices or their greatest desire, and so people who reject God get what their libertarian free choices deserve.

However, John Piper sees no problem with this, claiming that such a person "is nevertheless accountable."[79] He further makes the puzzling statement that "unconditional election . . . does not nullify sincere offers of salvation to everyone who is lost among all the

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[77] Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 245.

[78] People's inability may be due to their lack of desire, but the key is who determines this desire, or more importantly, the desire to positively respond to the Spirit's promptings—God or the people themselves?

[79] John Piper, "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," *Reformed Journal* 28, no. 11 (November 1978): 13.

peoples of the world."[80] He does not explain, however, how God can *sincerely* offer something to someone at the same time he has made it impossible for the person to accept the offer. Piper's position relates to another key issue in the debate over free will often referred to as "*ought* means *can*." In other words, the natural reading of Scripture is that of God, Jesus, and/or the author addressing their hearers as being able to do what they are commanded or exhorted to do.[81] One finds this especially in John's Gospel, which has been described as "one immense appeal from one end to the other."[82] Given not only the command, but the associated repercussions of disobeying, it makes no sense if one cannot freely obey, as Calvinists hold regarding unbelievers.[83] "Moral obligation implies moral freedom," but it should be pointed out that the ability to utilize one's freedom this way comes only by the grace of God.[84]

The concept of "ought means can" appears to be a strong case in favor of libertarian free will, but Calvinists do not see it this way. They maintain that *ought* does not necessarily imply *can*. Schreiner claims that despite being commanded by God to do various things, unbelievers are morally incapable of doing what God commands, and that they are rightly censured for not believing.[85] He argues that the Bible does not teach that one is able to do what God commands.[86]

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[80] John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 107.

[81] Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 22.

[82] Donald A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 168.

[83] Bruce Reichenbach, "God Limits His Power," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 104.

[84] Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 42-43.

[85] Note that the issue here is not whether the Calvinist view of the nature of man is correct or not, but rather that *if* unbelievers are morally incapable of obeying, then how can one (1) justify commanding someone to do what they are incapable of, and (2) expect readers to understand that people are incapable of doing what God commands?

[86] Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach," 243.

It seems to be an odd defense to rely on the fact that something that would be naturally understood by a typical person (whether Christian or not) is not explicitly taught in Scripture. Why would it be? If something is *other than* what is naturally understood, it would make more sense that this is what would need to be explicitly taught in Scripture.

Bruce Ware agrees with Schreiner that unbelievers are incapable of obeying God's commands. In addition, he seems to have no problem with unbelievers being both commanded to do something that they are unable to do and held accountable for something that is impossible for them to do.[87] This example may be completely aligned to God's sovereignty, but is completely misaligned to God's love. Ware further claims that for believers, the idea that one has libertarian freedom is wrong because that would mean there is no connection between one's character transformation and their obedience. Under libertarianism, he says, "we are able to obey just as well as to disobey," but in reality, "as we *become* more like Christ, we *choose and act* more like Christ."[88]

However, Ware seems to be incorrectly understanding libertarian free will. He makes the mistake of thinking that because one has the power of contrary choice, that one would just as likely choose one thing as another, which is not the case at all. If it were, there would always be a fifty-fifty chance that people would choose something that they dislike versus like. In fact, the libertarian view actually explains the transformation better than the compatibilist view. As Christians become transformed, the probability that they use their free will to choose the wrong thing decreases. This concept will be discussed more fully in the chapter on mindset. Conversely, under compatibilism, God determines what people most desire, so when they sin, God has

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[87] Bruce Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004)*,* 92-93.

[88] Ibid., 94.

determined that their greatest desire is to do that sin. The only transformation happening is what God decreed would happen from the beginning and compelled to happen.

Thaddeus Williams, on the other hand, while agreeing with Schreiner and Ware, makes an attempt to defend his position from Scripture. He points to John 12:36–39, where in this case, Jesus commanded the people to believe (12:36), yet they still did not believe (12:37b), and in fact could not believe (12:39). Further, Jesus "blinded their eyes and hardened their heart" (12:40).[89] This seems to be a strong case, but it loses its strength when one considers what comes before and after verses 39–40. Before this, John said, "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him" (John 12:37). The issue of "hardening" is an important one, and Chapter Six will show that in the Bible, this hardening happens after people have had many chances, and God finally said, "Enough!" (In this particular case, God gave them many chances, as evidenced by the many signs Jesus gave them.) These people had no intention of believing at this point, so he was not leading them to think they had the ability here. Second, just after this, John observed, "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him" (12:42). So, clearly, some in the crowd that Jesus was speaking to *did* have the current moral ability to do what he commanded.

Williams also deserves credit for coming up with a list of five reasons why there is value in commanding the impossible: (1) "Ought" renders the plea of moral ignorance obsolete. (2) "Ought" leads to obedience when coupled with the Spirit. (3) "Ought" highlights the moral achievements of Jesus. (4) "Ought" offers a glimpse into the character of the Ought-Giver. (5) "Ought" reflects a supreme moral reference point.[90] However, what do any of these matter if

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[89] Thaddeus J. Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 69-70.

[90] Ibid., 75-77.

people *cannot* do what is being demanded? So, they are no longer morally ignorant, they realize

Jesus' moral omnipotence, they learn something about the heart of God, and they see themselves

relative to a supreme morality. What value is there in any of this if they remain unable to do what

is commanded, especially to believe? Also, even if these did matter, there clearly must be a more

loving way to get these points across. Imagine if a husband repeatedly told his wife to do

something that she was incapable of doing to show her that she was incapable. Would this really

be the most loving and most effective way to have her realize this? Further, none of Williams'

points answer the charge that Jesus does not mean what he says, if he commands someone to do

the impossible.

Jonathan Edwards argues that the command and obligation to obedience is consistent

with the moral inability to obey, and gives a nine-page argument that Arminianism is

inconsistent with itself because of this assertion (though, interestingly, he never cites Scripture

once). As part of this argument, he observes, "Obedience, in the primary nature of it, is the

submitting and yielding of the Will of one, to the Will of another."[91] However, he seems not to

recognize the implications of his obedience definition for compatibilism. Under compatibilism, it

is impossible to *yield* one's will to God's will, since the English word means to give up control,[92]

and the only word translated as *yield* in this context in the New Testament is εἴκω, which BDAG

describes as "to give way before expression of force or argument."[93] Under compatibilism, the

person never had control since according to Edwards, God determines "all events, of every kind,

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[91] Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 139.

[92] To "yield" in this context is "to give up the control of or responsibility for something, often because you have been forced to" (*Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "yield," accessed March 10, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/yield). Alternatively, it means "to surrender or relinquish to the physical control of another: hand over possession of" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "yield," accessed March 10, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yield).

[93] BDAG, s.v. "εἴκω."

throughout the universe"[94] and a person would not give way under force because he or she would always do their greatest desire. So, according to Edwards' definition of obedience, Christians could not be obedient, since they cannot *yield* to God's will, which actually makes Calvinism inconsistent with itself.

Moving to a new topic, what does the Bible mean when it says that God repented or changed his mind? If God does so, this shows that he does not determine everything in advance, contradicting the compatibilist premise. Close to forty different verses in the Bible indicate that God changes his mind. On the other hand, only two verses indicate that God does not repent (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29).[95] The context and parallelism of the first of these two verses is clearly that God does not lie. The second verse especially helps because in the same broader passage, the exact same Hebrew word (נָחַם) occurs twice (15:11, 35) to say that God regretted what he did, and once (15:29) to say that God does not regret. Given that the Bible does not contradict itself, this close proximity helps show that the verse about God not regretting (or changing his mind) cannot be understood without taking the other two verses into account as well. The context of the overall passage shows that the meaning in 15:29 is that God does not *capriciously* change his mind.[96] The key here is that it was Saul's behavior that prompted God to change his mind. As noted earlier, God intervenes in human affairs and reacts to human behavior, and this passage is a great example of that truth. Such intervention would not be the case in a world in which everything was determined in advance.[97]

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[94] Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 252-53.

[95] Sanders, "God as Personal," 176.

[96] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 115-16.

[97] Some scholars contend that God changing his mind is inconsistent with his immutable characteristics. However, others see God changing his mind in *specific* situations in response to human behavior as necessary for God's core attributes to remain consistent and for his *broad* plans to come to fruition. See Horacio Simian-Yofre, "נחם," TDOT 9:340-55; John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand

Another example of God changing his mind occurs in Exodus 32:14, in which he does so in response to Moses' plea to God to do just that. However, Calvinists adhere to the position that God does not actually change his mind, but the verses that indicate this are just mere anthropomorphisms. Yet how can this be? It is one thing to say that "'the arm of God' is a poetical reference to exerting energy. . . but to what could 'I will change my mind' refer? If it really means 'I will appear to change my mind but really I intended this all along,' then it is a very strange metaphor indeed."[98]

But it is important to look a bit more closely at first predestination and then free will. First, unconditional predestination means that God determines in advance whom he will save, and (whether through an active choice or by default) whom he will not save and thereby will face eternal damnation. By the definition of unconditional, this determination is based on nothing inherent in or specific about the person being saved or damned. Conditional predestination, on the other hand, refers to God deciding in advance whom he will save, based on something inherent in or particular to those being saved, which is typically taken to be the faith that God foreknows the person will have. Remember, both camps agree that no one deserves salvation. God would be perfectly just in damning even those who have faith. The point that those of the conditional camp assert is that what God has predestined is that those who have faith will be saved. The fact that believers are saved through faith has been so drilled in that one can easily

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 16-17; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 250. Further, even a Calvinist like Millard Erickson, who says that "God does not change his mind" allows that "some apparent changes of mind are changes of orientation resulting from humans' move into a different relationship with God," using God's response to the Ninevites' repentance as an example (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 249-50). Just as a father may ground his son for a week due to the son's bad behavior, but then cut the grounding short due to the son showing true remorse and making amends for his actions, so God may begin in one direction and then change direction based on human behavior. The key difference is that God knows in advance that he will make this change, because he is omniscient; i.e., his "changing his mind" is not capricious.

[98] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 117.

forget that this is not a necessary conclusion, but rather an aspect of God's grace that he freely

chooses to grant to those who believe. Some people in the conditional camp hold that God

predestined a group (those who believe) rather than specific individuals. This paper will argue

that God has done both. God has predestined the group that believes, but he also knows

specifically who belongs to that group and has predestined each of them to salvation. Brian

Abasciano also believes that both corporate and individual election take place, but that the key

revolves around which is primary.[99] Furthermore, while jumping ahead a bit, it should be noted

here that this dissertation's position is that God predestined those whom he knows will believe

and persevere in that belief until the end. Finally, both those in the unconditional and conditional

camps agree that those whom God predestined to be saved are the same as the "elect."

One must keep all of this in mind when examining the key Bible passages that those of

each camp hold to support their position. It is all too easy to read one's presuppositions into a

passage. The intent in this paper is to fight this tendency, and reflect the best hermeneutics for

each passage. For example, in which passages does God clearly talk about individuals, in which

does he clearly talk about a group, and in which could it fairly be interpreted either way? More

importantly, which passages make it clear that God absolutely takes nothing into account that is

particular to a person, in which does he absolutely take something into account, and in which

could it be understood either way, or more likely simply not addressed at all?

Second, what are the key issues between compatibilist and libertarian free will? As noted

previously, libertarian free will holds that people can make any choice that they are logically able

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[99] Brian J. Abasciano, "Romans 9 and Calvinism," in *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique,* ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 311.

to make, while compatibilist free will means that people will choose the option that they most desire.

Setting aside for the moment the idea of determinism, though, one of the more difficult concepts to understand is the idea of someone only doing what they most desire. The reason for the difficulty is that on one level—an almost definitional level—it seems to be true, since people generally have a reason why they choose to do something, and it would make sense that they choose what they most desire. Yet on another level, it seems inconsistent with common sense. Sometimes people act against what appears to be their strongest desires, and such action is neither coerced nor arbitrary, but due to a sense of doing what the right thing or some other reason. Might this other reason actually be their greatest desire?

The way to decipher this seeming conundrum is to realize that there are two different things going on, and they need to be separated. There is both the specific action to be taken (or not) and a possible separate higher-level concern. Consider the example of Jesus on the Mount of Olives just prior to his arrest, where he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Regarding the specific event, Jesus' own desire was not to go to the cross, but regarding the higher-level concern, his desire was to do his Father's will. One can see this dichotomy by looking at a potential crucifixion that was not God's will and would not redeem humanity. If that were the case, it clearly would not have been Jesus' desire at all to do it. Like all humans, competing desires confronted Jesus, and the desire to do God's will overrode his desire to avoid crucifixion. So, in the broader sense, his greatest desire was to do his Father's will, but this could be true at the same time that he did not desire to be crucified. The crucifixion was not his desire, but rather was a necessary action for achieving his greatest desire. In *both* compatibilist free will and libertarian free will, when

thought of this way, one chooses their greatest desire. As a result, it shows that the idea of choosing one's "greatest desire" is not really the issue.

The real issue becomes who or what creates what one's greatest desire is. For compatibilists, God does. For libertarians, the people themselves do. In the libertarian view, though, what causes the person to choose one thing over another? The answer to this question, it seems, is what one sets his or her mind on, which a later chapter will discuss in detail. One could then just push the question back further, to what determines what one will set one's mind on, but in this case, the Bible makes it clear that people are exhorted to set their minds on the Spirit rather than the flesh. It becomes a human decision, influenced and enabled by God through the Holy Spirit.

Turning back to the broader question about compatibilism, though, is an action determined by compatibilist free will truly free? Feinberg thinks it is. He says, "Indeterminists usually think no other definition of freedom than their own is possible. That commits the logical error known as begging the question or arguing in a circle."[100] Is this a fair criticism? Interestingly, the term "free will" does not occur in the Bible. The closest term to this, נְדָבָה (nᵉḏāḇâ), is typically translated as "freewill offering." TDOT states that such offerings are those given freely and voluntarily.[101] This is not that helpful, but turning to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "free will" is defined as "the belief that people determine their own behavior freely, and that no causal antecedents can sufficiently account for their actions."[102] This aligns with the

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[100] Feinberg, "God Ordains," 24.

[101] J. Conrad, "נדב," etc., TDOT 9:219-226.

[102] Norman L. Geisler, "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 467-470.

libertarian view that this paper affirms, but given that someone who supports libertarian free will

wrote this definition makes it less than ideal as confirmation for the libertarian position.

However, the LXX may be of some help here, as it most commonly translates נְדָבָה

(nᵉḏāḇâ) as τό ἑκούσιον.[103] TDNT defines ἑκούσιος as "willing," "intentional," "not

compulsory," and in the LXX it is especially used for "cultic acts which are voluntary as distinct

from the required sacrifices."[104] The key here seems to be that this refers to something not

compulsory or required. While from the human standpoint, a compatibilist choice may seem free,

from the broader standpoint, such a choice is, in fact, compulsory or required, since the

defenders of compatibilist free will admit that one's choice is "causally determined" by God. It

would seem that rather than those who hold to libertarian freedom begging the question, that

those who hold to compatibilist free will are redefining what free will means. This position is

reminiscent of the famous phrase that Henry Ford said when he came out with the Model T:

"Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black."[105] When

only one choice is available, whether it is what God determines what one desires or what Henry

Ford makes available, it is not really a free choice or even a choice at all.

The foregoing definition, however, does not mean that those who hold to compatibilism

are wrong in their position, but that they incorrectly hold that compatibilist choices are free

choices. Rather, it may possibly be true that one can do only what God determines that they will

do, but to label this a free choice is misleading: it is neither free nor a choice. Under

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[103] J. Conrad, "נדב," etc., TDOT 9:219-226.

[104] Friedrich Hauck, "ἑκούσιος," TDNT 2:470.

[105] Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (Public domain, 2012), 32, Kindle.

compatibilism, the person literally has *no choice* but to do what God determines that they most desire. They are not *free* to do anything else.

Yet even if one sets aside the issues of choice and freedom, compatibilist free will still suffers from God's role in evil if God has determined all that happens and people's choices are aligned to what God made them most desire. Ware attempts to salvage God's role in evil by connecting it to God's providence. He looks at providence from two angles, and explains, "*Providence as preservation*, first, may be defined as follows: God . . . protects all of his creation from any harm or destruction that stands outside of his purposes for it," and "*Providence as governance*, second, may be defined as follows: God governs and reigns supremely over . . . all the affairs of his moral creatures," but "God's exhaustive governance [does not] justly implicate the impeccable and infinitely holy moral character of God by making him either the author of approver of evil."[106] However, this does not seem to hold up to scrutiny. Consider the horrid situation in which someone brutally raped and murdered one of God's creatures. According to this second item, God is neither the author or approver of this evil, but according to the first item, the rape was part of God's purposes (since the victim was not protected from the harm). How is God not at least the approver (if not the author) if it was part of his purpose?

At least Ware made an attempt at trying to defend this position. Christensen, on the other hand, says, "In some way that we don't fully understand—God is exonerated from culpability for human choices."[107] One appreciates his honesty here, but compatibilists not being able to give a good answer for this makes it a clear issue in favor of libertarianism, for which this issue is fully coherent within its system.

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[106] Ware, *God's Greater Glory,* 18.

[107] Christensen, *Free Will,* 79.

Are there not problems associated with the libertarian view as well, though? It is instructive to look at some of the objections that compatibilist Scott Christensen has to the libertarian view. First, he gives the example of a boy named Jimmy hating broccoli. He then alleges that "if libertarianism were true, then factors that supply reasons for one choice could also lead to an opposite choice."[108] He wonders how Jimmy hating broccoli could lead him to eating it. Christensen suggests that this shows how libertarianism fails, but he misrepresents the libertarian position, and thereby sets up a straw man. It is not the *same* reasons that would cause a person to make a different choice, but other reasons. Maybe spinach is a better example. Suppose that Jimmy hates spinach, but believes eating it will make him strong like Popeye. At some point, his desire to be strong may overcome his hatred of spinach. All people live in this world of sin. Two opposing forces tug on believers in opposite directions. The Holy Spirit pulls one way, and sin pulls the other. Spinach will not really make one strong like Popeye, just as sin will not deliver on what it promises. Rather, the person is enticed by sin and may be overcome by it.

A second criticism that Christensen levies at libertarianism is that if no *decisive* reasons exist for one's choices, then that person's choices are effectively random. He gives the example of Jane asking her husband Terry to buy a specific kind of expensive shampoo for her. Under libertarianism, as Christensen sees it, Terry might decide to buy spaghetti sauce instead.[109] Again, this is just an absurd straw man. Libertarianism does not work that way. People do not sever themselves from influences and do random things. They weigh competing influences and make decisions based on this. Terry will not buy spaghetti sauce, but he might buy a different

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[108] Christensen, *Free Will*, 30.

[109] Ibid., 31-32.

brand of shampoo that claims to do the same thing if it costs much less. Looking at all of these examples together, compatibilist free will does not appear to be free at all, and libertarian free will holds up to the criticisms made against it.

Turning from criticisms of libertarian free will, Norman Geisler criticizes the related Arminian idea that God chose those whom he foresaw would believe. He rejects this idea because according to him, salvation would then "not be based on divine grace but on human decision."[110] However, this is not the case at all. First, a human decision to believe in Christ does not in and of itself result in one's salvation. It only results in Christian faith. God, not man, made the decision that he would give salvation to those who believe. Humans can choose to believe. Only God can choose to give salvation to those who believe. Second, God still bases salvation on his grace. Without divine grace, humans would have no ability to believe. Accepting the free gift of grace that Jesus offers is not a human work, but simply appropriating what God has made available to people.

Ultimately, one must turn to the Bible and see how it treats human choices. When God interacts with people, does he interact with them as if everything has already been predetermined, or does he interact with them in such a way that they are led to believe that they truly have a choice in what they do? When he presents choices to people, do they only have a single choice or do they have multiple choices? Do Paul and the other biblical authors portray the future as fully determined or do they encourage their readers to change their ways and turn to God? To the extent that both views exist in Scripture, which view is more prevalent and/or most difficult to explain away?

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[110] Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 143.

There are a number of issues beyond the primary two of predestination and free will, and they will be dealt with as they arise in the process of going through the relevant verses. As with the primary two, it will be endeavored to clearly define what the key differences between the two positions are, and then see what each of the relevant passages do and do not say about each particular issue.

Chapter Four: Humans Have Libertarian Free Will

This chapter will separate the analysis of the relevant Bible passages on free will into two sections—one for each side of the debate. The first section will analyze several Bible passages that supporters of libertarian free will assert clearly indicate that humans have free will to either obey or disobey God as well as either accept or reject his offer of salvation. Such ability to freely obey or disobey is fundamental to the thesis of this paper, since people need this to freely choose what to set their minds upon. Also, as will be shown later, what people set their minds upon is critical to their ultimate acceptance or rejection of God's offer of salvation. In addition, this section will look at several passages that suggest that God desires all people to be saved, because if so, this supports libertarian free will, but goes against compatibilism, under which it would seem that God cannot desire all to be saved since he consigns many to eternal damnation before they were even born. The second section will examine those passages put forth by supporters of compatibilism and deal with predestination, election, and God's foreknowledge. This section will analyze what the Bible does and does not say about each of these terms as well as carefully determine the most viable interpretation for the contexts in which they are used. The research will show that the case for libertarian free will has more biblical support than that for compatibilism.

Passages Often Put Forth in Support of the Libertarian Position

Humans seem to have had free will from the beginning, as evidenced by Genesis 2:16–17, in which God commanded Adam not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve notes this command in her conversation with the serpent (Gen. 3:3), yet had the free will to disobey, since she and Adam ate from the tree. As a result, they were cast out of paradise. However, was this "choice" truly freely chosen (libertarian), or did God preordain it

(compatibilist)? Under a compatibilist scenario, Adam and Eve did what they most desired, and God determined in advance that this was what they would do. However, is this (a) a reasonable interpretation, and (b) consistent with what Scripture portrays?

Regarding the first question, it could potentially be reasonably interpreted that they did what they most desired, since Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). Is it reasonable to assume, though, that God created Adam and Eve with a desire to disobey him and commit the "original sin"? God certainly may have created the world perfect, but planned to almost immediately introduce corruption and decay. However, this does not seem like a logical thing to do. Why not just create the world imperfect to start with? Why create man in your image, but preordain that he disobey you in his first decision of consequence? It certainly does not seem like the obvious thing to do. Furthermore, and quite importantly, if humans were created "good," how then could they have anything other than good desires?[111]

Did God command Adam and Eve not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but at the same time make them do it? Does that seem like something a loving God would do? Did God deceive Adam and Eve into thinking that they had free will when they really did not? Did God purposefully introduce sin into the world? While all of this is theoretically possible, it all seems highly unlikely. God loves, he does not deceive, and he abhors sin. Overall, while one cannot definitively conclude from these passages that Adam and Eve had libertarian free will, the common-sense evidence suggests that this was the case.

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[111] Note that not all compatibilists appear to hold to this last particular position. For example, Feinberg argues that "good" in the context of Genesis 1 means performing one's appointed function, and so is not relevant to this discussion (Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 561).

Also, God said prior to this incident that all was very good, but immediately after, God cursed the serpent, created enmity, multiplied pain, cursed the ground, made man mortal, and banished Adam and Eve from the idyllic garden he had created for them. Something clearly changed. Sin had entered the world, and corruption and decay followed. Was free will lost at this point as well? Certainly, the natural person (ψυχικός) does not accept the things of the Spirit, nor can he understand them (1 Cor. 2:14). The word ψυχικός is used for someone in the unredeemed state inherited from the Fall.[112] It refers to someone who does not possess the Spirit, but is of the world.[113] Such a person cannot understand the things of the Spirit because only those who have the Spirit can understand these things. The person would fail to understand because he or she relies on human reason and intuition instead, which has no ability to discern spiritual matters.[114] However, this verse also shows why one cannot discern such matters. The person "does not accept" spiritual things, making it more a matter of volition rather than cognition.[115] The person in the unredeemed state actually rejects the things of the Spirit.[116]

But if the natural person cannot accept the things of the Spirit, how can anyone ever come to God and be saved? Thankfully, God does not leave man completely on his own. First, Paul noted that the ungodly and unrighteous are without excuse, because "what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" and "his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived" by them (Rom. 1:19–

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[112] Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 64-65.

[113] Eduard Schweizer, "ψυχικός," TDNT 9:661-63.

[114] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 100.

[115] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 65.

[116] Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 106.

20). God made enough of himself known to them, but unbelievers suppressed the truth and chose not to honor him (Rom. 1:18, 21). This passage speaks of people making bad choices in not honoring or giving thanks to God and *exchanging the glory of God* for idols. The fact that the people *exchanged* the glory of God means that at a minimum, they had the ability to accept it, but instead they chose to accept idols in its place. These people are clearly portrayed as having the ability to honor God but refusing to do so, and God revealing his wrath because of their refusal. It makes little sense for God to reveal his wrath against those who had no ability to honor him.

John suggested something similar when he stated that Christ "gives light to everyone" (John 1:9). Some scholars claim that this verse means that the light is given for judgment, as it reveals who people really are.[117] Thomas Schreiner supports this position, and gives the following justification: "Some are shown to be evil because they did not know or receive Jesus (1:10–11), while others are revealed to be righteous because they have received Jesus and have been born of God (1:12–13). John 3:19–21 confirms this interpretation."[118] This viewpoint is not compelling for a number of reasons.

First, 1:10–11 does *not* portray the light showing some to be evil. It does not portray the light showing anything. It simply indicates that some did not know or receive him. Second, 1:12–13 does *not* portray a revelation of some being righteous. It contains nothing about revelation. These two facts reinforce the need to be careful about what a passage says and what it does not say. Schreiner may or may not be correct in his interpretation of the overall passage, but these verses do not say what he claims.

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[117] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 161.

[118] Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach," 240.

Third, Schreiner correctly notes that 3:19–21 is consistent with his position, but that is not the context of this passage. It is the context of a passage eighty-two verses later. The actual context of this passage lies in 1:7 (just two verses distant, not eighty-two), which notes that John came to bear witness about the light, *that all might believe through him*. Enlightening people so that they may know enough to have the ability to choose to believe is consistent with this context in 1:7. Shining light on people to show whether they are forever unable or able to believe is not. Raymond Brown echoes this idea by noting that "the picture of light coming into the world to enlighten men is a messianic one taken from the OT, particularly from Isaiah."[119]

While Schreiner's view is a possible one, it is highly unlikely, and instead the view that gives support to the libertarian position is most probable, given the above analysis.[120] Furthermore, a number of reference works support this view. For φωτίζω, BDAG has an option (3.b.) of bringing to light or revealing something, but it does not place 1:9 here, but rather in a different option (3.a.), which is more about enlightenment.[121] Thayer states it even more directly, saying that for 1:9 it means "to enlighten spiritually, imbue with saving knowledge."[122] *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT) goes into even more detail, saying that it means here that "the 'illumination of every person' does not yet mean faith, but rather the God-given possibility that can lead to faith in everyone who opens himself to the divine

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[119] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 28.

[120] The key issue here is that Jesus gives light to *everyone*, giving *everyone* the ability to choose to believe, rather than the compatibilist view that the non-elect never had that ability.

[121] BDAG, s.v. "φωτίζω."

[122] *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "φωτίζω."

solicitation."[123] This last citation is consistent with the analysis above, where humans can choose to believe.

The last two passages to consider regarding God giving people the ability to come to and believe in Christ also occur in the Gospel of John—the first of which is often used to defend the libertarian position, and the second to defend the compatibilist position. The first is John 12:32, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The debate over this verse centers on the meaning of "all people." Some scholars take it at face value to mean every single person, while others take it to mean individuals from all categories of people. Thomas Schreiner gives a representative compatibilist view: "When Jesus speaks of drawing all people to himself by virtue of the cross, the issue in the context is how Gentiles can come to Jesus."[124] However, a closer look at the passage shows this not to be the case. First, the Gentiles in question were likely either godfearers or Jewish proselytes, because they were "among those who went up to worship at the [Passover] feast" (12:20). Second, the passage makes no mention of "how Gentiles can come to Jesus." It simply notes that some Greeks wished to see him. This request is the extent of their question. So, the issue of how Gentiles could come to Jesus does not even appear to be part of the context of even this earlier part of the passage.

More importantly, though, Jesus answered the Greek (Gentile) question of 12:21 in 12:23–26, answering effectively that anyone interested in what Jesus has to say needs to die and be born again, and follow him. The question—even if one reads into the text that it did have to do with how Gentiles can come to Jesus—was fully answered at this point, and then the topic changed, such that Jesus then had a brief conversation with his Father, then told the crowd (not

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[123] Martin Winter, "φωτίζω," EDNT 3:449-50.

[124] Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach," 242.

the Greeks nor Philip and Andrew) that God's voice was for them, and then continued a conversation with the crowd (including 12:32) in 12:30–36. John 12:32 is clearly not part of the context of Jesus's conversation with Philip and Andrew about the Greeks, but part of the conversation with the larger crowd, which at the Passover would have been overwhelmingly Jews. In this particular verse, either the compatibilist or libertarian view is possible, but given the above explanation, the simpler libertarian interpretation appears to be more tenable.

The final verse for this subtopic is John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Edward Klink notes that the word for "draw" (ἑλκύσῃ) implies that "the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of persons is unwilling to do so voluntarily," and he cites BDAG for this.[125] While BDAG contains this definition, it does not use it for this particular verse. Instead, it uses the definition "to draw a person in the direction of values for inner life, *draw*, *attract*."[126] Perhaps Klink chose a different definition because it fits better with a compatibilist viewpoint, but BDAG believes the softer definition (one more amenable to a libertarian viewpoint) is more appropriate. Marianne Thompson sees it the same way, saying, "In John the emphasis on God's love for the world argues strongly for the latter meaning."[127]

Bruce Ware claims, "This text teaches that the drawing of the Father is both effectual . . . and selective."[128] However, he bases this conclusion, in part, on two faulty premises. First, he

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[125] Edward W. Klink, III, *John,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 335.

[126] BDAG, s.v. "ἕλκω."

[127] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 152. See also William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 114-15.

[128] Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," 216.

says, "These two truths (i.e., only those drawn can come, and all those drawn do come) serve together to require the ECG doctrine of Calvinism."[129] While his first item is certainly correct (from 6:44), his second is not. He seems to base this on 6:37, in which Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." However, "gives" and "draws" are not the same thing, and nowhere in John does he equate them.[130] Ware appears to assume that they are the same.

Furthermore, they *cannot* be the same if the above analysis of John 12:32 is correct, since all people are drawn, yet not all are given. In 6:44, the Father draws people, and only those people from whom he draws can come. This verse does not address those he draws who do not come, and this group must exist based on the combination of 6:44 and 12:32. Further, the Father gives people to Christ, and all that he gives will come (6:37). In other words, drawing is necessary, but not sufficient, while giving is sufficient. Yet Ware continues this line of thought, saying, "When faced with persistent disbelief, Jesus affirms again unequivocally that only those drawn by the Father can come (6:65)." Similar to above, the word "drawn" does not appear in this verse. Here, Ware seems to assume "drawn" and "granted" mean the same thing, but this is not necessarily the case. Though even if these two words do mean the same thing here (since 6:65 is worded similarly to 6:44), that does not help his case since, as shown above, "drawn" and "given" do not mean the same thing, and all are drawn, but not all are given.

Finally, Thaddeus Williams claims, "The strong grammatical connection in John 6:44 between being drawn and being 'raised up on the last day,' precludes a universal drawing interpretation. . . If all of the drawn will be raised up to eternal life (as John 6:44 affirms), and if

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[129] Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," 218; ECG refers to "Effectual Calling and irresistible Grace."

[130] Additionally, William Klein makes a good case that in this passage God gives the *group* that consists of those who believe (Klein, *New Chosen People*, 112).

all are drawn, then it follows that all will be raised up."[131] The problem with this argument is that

John 6:44 does *not* affirm that all of the drawn will be raised up. That is wrong both

grammatically and contextually. First, the actual text is, "No one can come to me unless the

Father who sent me draws him." In other words, being drawn is a requirement for coming, i.e.,

only those who are drawn can come; it does not mean that *all* that are drawn will come. That is

simple grammatical logic. Second, Williams appears to base his position on the following

statement that "I will raise him up on the last day." The issue is to whom does "him" refer?

"Him" could easily refer to either the one who is drawn or the one who comes. Only by

assuming that it means those who are drawn, can Williams reach his conclusion. What he

seemingly misses, however, is what comes just before this verse (and a phrase directly in it). The

people were grumbling because they thought they knew who Jesus was, the son of Joseph, and so

they asked, "How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (John 6:42b). The very

next words are, "Jesus answered them" (John 6:43a). Just how, though, did he answer them?

After telling them not to grumble among themselves, his answer was, "No one can come to me

unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44a). Jesus was making a clear connection

between his coming down from heaven (and drawing all people to himself, per John 12:32) and

no one being able to come to the Father unless they are drawn. He was explaining that they *do*

have the ability, because they have been drawn—drawn through Jesus coming down to earth,

where he will soon give his life as their ransom. Second, Jesus said "unless the Father *who sent*

me draws him." What was the purpose of including "who sent me"? This was again to show that

this is how people have been drawn. Otherwise, Jesus was not answering their question at all.

Looking at it from a slightly different angle, the compatibilist assumes a narrow view (of who is

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[131] Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 69.

drawn), in which case, Jesus' "answer" does not address their question, whereas the libertarian assumes the broad view (all are drawn), which answers their question as follows: How can this be? It simply must be, because this is the way/process (and the only way) that God has chosen by which humans can be saved. So, a verse that at first appears to support the compatibilist position, turns out to better support the libertarian position in which God enables people to freely choose to come to him.

Putting all of these first several passages together, humans had libertarian free will from the beginning, but their misuse of this freedom brought sin into the world and severed their close relationship with God. Sin created a barrier to communing with God, but God drew people back to him and provided enough knowledge of him so that they had no excuse if they did not freely respond to his invitation. Sin certainly had an impact on humans' relationship with God, but it did not take away their libertarian free will to choose whether or not to believe with the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Several other passages support that humans have libertarian free will. Deuteronomy 30:19–20 will be discussed first, in which Moses, after having given a summary of all that came before, told the people that they have a choice between life and death, and encouraged them to choose life. Life consists of loving God and obeying him (30:1–10, 16), while death consists of turning away from God and worshiping and serving other gods (30:17–18). In addition, he told the people that the commandment to choose life was in their mouth and heart so that they could do it (Deut. 30:14).[132] He gave the choice in 30:19–20 in the second person singular, making it a

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[132] Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:8, where he used it to base salvation on one's faith: "Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

clear personal choice. This passage is perhaps the most critical passage in all of Deuteronomy, with some scholars describing it as the high point or the grand finale of the entire book.[133]

It may be helpful to break the passage into parts. It starts with, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today." Moses invoked heaven and earth as witnesses to the choice the people were about to make, showing the high significance of the choice. He next described the choice that they had before them: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse." After this he exhorted them to make the right choice: "Therefore choose life," followed by what will result from making the right choice: "that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers."

Lest one think that this refers simply to Israel living in the Promised Land, note that the first thing Moses said is that they should choose life so that they may live. Further, in the immediately preceding verse, he gave the result of making the wrong choice of turning away from God: "You shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess" (30:18). Yes, the land is part of the curse as well as part of the promise, but in each case, Moses *first* talked about either living or perishing.

Some commentators interpret "living" versus "perishing" as living longer and enjoying the Promised Land versus dying sooner and not being able to enjoy the Promised Land.[134] While this position is likely part of what Moses meant, it seems like it must mean more. The descriptions in the preceding verses are helpful in this regard: "I have set before you today life

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[133] J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy,* Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 430; Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy,* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 297.

[134] Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 711.

and good, death and evil" (30:15). The choice is not just between life and death, but also between good and evil. Further, those who choose life obey God's commandments, love God, and walk in his ways (30:16). On the other hand, those who do not choose life turn their hearts away from God, do not obey, and worship and serve other gods (30:17). All of these verses together seem to clearly describe those who believe versus those who do not. Choosing to follow God is the ultimate choice set before the Israelites as well as set before all humans of all times.

Also, Moses clearly presented this as a real choice that people must make on their own, not one that God has predetermined for them. Multiple commentators agree, saying that this is "an intensely personal choice,"[135] everything "depends on their decision to be faithful,"[136] "the options in the choice . . . are the most important that any man . . . has to face,"[137] the people hold "the keys to life in their own hands,"[138] and "Moses declares that we can choose between these alternatives."[139] While the scholars who wrote these words were focused on properly exegeting this passage and likely not thinking of compatibilist versus libertarian free will, all of these comments give an overwhelming aura of libertarian free will. It is almost impossible to read the passage or the comments on it in a compatibilist sense.

Next, while the Old Testament frequently mentions God choosing Israel, in Joshua 24:15, Joshua told Israel to "choose this day whom you will serve." Note again how the commentators

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[135] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy,* Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 292.

[136] McConville, *Deuteronomy,* 430.

[137] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 365-66.

[138] Block, *Deuteronomy,* 711.

[139] Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 748.

describe this. "Israel must decide whose slaves they will be;"[140] Joshua demanded that they make a choice and commitment;[141] the Israelites were asked to choose their loyalties, but Joshua did not threaten or coerce them;[142] God's choice of Israel forced the Israelites to choose between serving him or the other seemingly attractive gods;[143] and the choice that the Israelites had to make was "real."[144] Once again, these are presented as libertarian choices—real choices that the people must make between two alternatives, and not as a simple compatibilist choice that God has determined they will make in alignment with how he designed their will to desire.

Turning to the New Testament, in Mark 8:34, Jesus told the crowd that if they wanted to come after him (i.e., become a Christian, using the same language Jesus used to call Simon and Andrew),[145] they would need to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. It is insightful to contrast this verse with earlier passages in Mark, where Jesus sovereignly called the disciples, telling them to "follow me." Yet here, it starts with a person's volition ("If anyone would come after me"), followed by a personal decision ("let him deny himself"), followed by personal action ("and take up his cross and follow me").[146] It is especially interesting that the idea of denying oneself requires allowing God's desires to rule. On the surface, this could seem

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[140] Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words,* Focus on the Bible Commentary (2000; repr., Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2021), 205.

[141] Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Joshua,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 555.

[142] David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua,* The New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1998), 436.

[143] Trent C. Butler, *Joshua 13–24,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 322-23.

[144] Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 352.

[145] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 408.

[146] M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 244.

to support compatibilism, since under that schema, God's desire rules by default within a Christian. In fact, though, the opposite turns out to be the case.

This verse supports libertarianism over compatibilism for two reasons. First, Jesus spoke here not only to his disciples, but also to the crowd, which likely included unbelievers. Second, rather than following one's greatest desire, as in compatibilism, the people are called to go against their desires when they are told to deny themselves. Commentators state this fact a number of different ways: the people should not follow the way that they would choose, but the way Jesus has chosen;[147] they should renounce their own desires;[148] they need to refuse to determine their own desires;[149] they must disown "any claim that may be urged by the self,"[150] and "What Jesus calls for here is thus a radical abandonment of one's own identity and self-determination."[151] Ultimately, in both compatibilism and libertarianism, a Christian's greatest desire generally aligns with God's desire for them, but under compatibilism, doing so is determined in advance by God so that the person naturally does what God wants, while in libertarianism, people go against their own natural desires and instead do what God would have them do. This verse, and the commentators' explanation of it, clearly aligns much more closely to the libertarian view.

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[147] David E. Garland, *Mark,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 328.

[148] Mark L. Strauss, *Mark,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 372.

[149] Robert H. Stein, *Mark,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 407.

[150] William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 307.

[151] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 340.

In addition to what has been discussed so far, numerous other passages exhort people to believe. A sample of these follows. The first passage to consider contains Jesus' first words in the book of Mark: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The natural reading of this verse is that Jesus is exhorting people to believe, and some will choose to do so and others will choose not to do so. The issue here is very similar to, but not exactly the same as, the "ought means can" debate discussed earlier in this dissertation. More specifically, the issue here does not address whether someone is *able* to do what Jesus exhorts, but whether the people can freely choose whether or not to heed the exhortation or instead are predestined to either believe or not believe, and thereby really have no choice to make. In other words, when the average person reads this verse, would they understand this to imply that a person could choose whether or not to follow Jesus' exhortation, or would they understand this to imply that Jesus was just saying this for some rhetorical reason and people really had no choice whether to comply or not? It would seem that an overwhelming percentage of people would read this as implying the ability to choose freely.

Other verses with similar messages include "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36); "Repent and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:38); "Repent therefore, and turn back" (Acts 3:19); and "You should turn from these vain things to a living God" (Acts 14:15). The natural reading in all of these passages is that the person receiving the message can freely choose to heed it or ignore it. In addition, of course, the "ought means can" issue exists in all of these cases as well. If only those who were unconditionally predestined could believe, why exhort those in larger groups who were not predestined to believe if they were unable to? Would this not be disingenuous on the part of Jesus and his disciples, giving them false hope?

A somewhat more detailed passage, but with a similar message is, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:13–14). In this example, Jesus not only exhorted people what to do, but he also portrayed making the right choice as difficult and making the wrong choice as easy. The compatibilist position, on the other hand, implies that both choices are, in effect, easy, since believers will be given a desire to make the right choice, while unbelievers will be given a desire to make the wrong choice. How does the compatibilist explain how it is hard for someone to make a choice that they have been predetermined to make and they most desire to do?

Finally, the same issue will be examined, but from the other side. Compatibilists often give Romans 9–11 as an example of humans not having free will. Some of the verses in this passage will be investigated in the next section. Two verses in particular, though, that are often called out will be examined here: "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Rom. 9:15) and "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom. 9:18). The compatibilist says, "See, everything is one hundred percent dependent upon God's will." The libertarian responds, "You are correct—just not in the way you think."

When working to interpret these verses in light of the broader passage, one should first understand the point Paul endeavored to make with this passage. His overarching message concerns how both Israel and the Gentiles factor into God's plan of salvation. In particular, Paul wanted to show that God's election of Israel was not a failure, as some might have thought since

many Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.[152] With this in mind, Aaron Sherwood points out

that the irony of the first century situation is that God was now hardening the Israelites like he

did Pharaoh earlier, but showing mercy to the Gentiles like he did with the Israelites earlier. In

the first century, just as during the time of the exodus, God was giving mercy and hardening for

the sake of displaying his glory.[153]

James Dunn sees this broader passage relating to covenant responsibility, calling it an

"in-house Jewish argument." Given this narrower focus, it makes it unlikely that Paul intended to

deal with the matter of eternal reprobation here.[154] Regarding verse 18 specifically, C. E. B.

Cranfield also argues that it does not refer to one's ultimate destiny: "The words εἰς ἀπώλειαν

are indeed used in v. 22; but we have no right to read them back into v. 18."[155] The point about

Pharaoh does not relate to his salvation, but about Pharaoh's place in God's broader plan for

Israel.[156] William Klein helpfully notes that in the Old Testament, the writers "understood

election primarily as a task or function that God had placed" on individuals or groups rather than

relating to salvation.[157] In Romans 9:18, it indicates that God may unconditionally select

whomever he wills for service, but not that he does so for their eternal destiny. A compatibilist

might say that if God elects someone unconditionally for service, then it should be natural to

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[152] John E. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 127.

[153] Aaron Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, & Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 514-15.

[154] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 555.

[155] C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, International Critical Commentary, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 489.

[156] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 63.

[157] William W. Klein, "Corporate and Personal Election," in *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique,* ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 340.

assume that he would elect someone unconditionally for salvation as well. However, this is not the case, as throughout Romans 9–11, Paul noted that God pursued Israel, but they stumbled due to the condition of their lack of faith.[158]

Knowing that this passage concerns Israel and covenant responsibility and that it likely does not speak of people's eternal destinies, however, does not mean that nothing can be learned from it about human free will and the topic at hand. First, Douglas Moo says, "Paul's 'whomever he wishes' shows that God's decision to harden is his alone to make and is not constrained by any consideration having to do with a person's status or actions."[159] Moo's statement may be true, but is potentially quite misleading. Just because God is not *constrained* by anything related to a person, this does not mean that God is not *influenced* by such things. God wields complete control and can do whatsoever he chooses. He is not constrained by anything about humans. However, this does not mean that he may not choose to be influenced by something related to humans. That is a huge difference.

Second, these verses speak not about God's general will, but specifically about his mercy.[160] Yet God's mercy often closely relates to his granting of salvation. To the extent that these verses *do* relate to salvation, then combining these two thoughts (God is not constrained, but may be influenced, and his plan of salvation is part of his merciful will), Robert Picirilli summarizes these verses extremely well: "Just as God shows mercy to (saves) whom He wills, and wills to save believers; so He withholds saving mercy from (damns) whom He wills, and

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[158] Jack W. Cottrell, "The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 114.

[159] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 598.

[160] Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 484.

wills to damn unbelievers."[161] This is consistent with the immediately following verse (9:16): "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." No matter how much humans will or exert, they cannot save themselves, but must trust in God, who in his mercy, wills to save those who believe. Abasciano asserts something similar, noting that God chooses to have mercy on those who believe.[162]

In summary, in both the Old and New Testaments, people are exhorted to choose to believe in God or Christ, it is implied that they need to do this by suppressing their own will, and they are warned that making the right choice will not be easy. The Bible portrays this choice as a libertarian one and not a compatibilist one.

The final topic to cover in this section on libertarian free will is whether or not God desires that all people be saved. Several passages throughout the Bible appear to indicate that he does. If this is the case, it deals a significant blow to the compatibilist position, since in that view, God only chooses certain people to be saved and excludes all others. Of course, if it turns out that these passages do not say this, the compatibilist will still need to explain why God does not desire all people to be saved. The libertarian view, though, is consistent with this issue, since while God may desire that all be saved, he gives humans free will to either follow his desire or not.

Starting in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet asserted that God desires that all people be saved on more than one occasion. First, Ezekiel wrote, "'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?'" (Ezek. 18:23). The implied assumption in this verse is that those not spoken of, who are not

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[161] Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting View of Salvation—Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 76.

[162] Abasciano, "Romans 9 and Calvinism," 323.

wicked, are already in a state in which they will have life. So, when God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they would turn and live, this effectively shows that he desires all to be saved. Regarding this verse, John Taylor says that it is God's "will and purpose" that humans would be saved.[163]

However, shortly thereafter, God urged the people of Israel to repent, saying that he has no pleasure in the death of anyone and exhorts them to turn, and live (Ezek. 18:30–32). This passage is even more explicit in that it uses the word "anyone." The actual term is הַמֵּת, which is translated as "the dying one" or "anyone who dies." So, if God has no pleasure in anyone dying and he exhorts them to turn and live, this is a pretty clear universal desire on God's part that no one perish, but everyone live. Finally, later in the same book, God told Ezekiel to tell the people, "As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). Here, God reiterated his message from the prior two verses, but made his plea even stronger, first by starting it with an oath (As I live),[164] and second by saying, "turn back" twice in a row, likely for emphasis. These three passages give a clear indication of God willing all to be saved, but they also emphasize the need for people to choose a different path than the one they are on and turn from their ways.

Isaiah urged everyone to seek the Lord, and for the wicked and unrighteous to "return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6–7). This passage is not as strong as the three in Ezekiel, but it similarly indicates that

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[163] John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel,* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (1969; repr., Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 150.

[164] Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 247.

everyone who turns away from their wicked ways and returns to the Lord will be abundantly (or,

as some translations have it, freely) pardoned. Given that God exhorted the people to do this

without any indication of limitation, it suggests that he desires all to be saved. John Watts says,

"The verse is a classic expression of God's open invitation to those who resist his call,

determined to live their own way."[165] This open invitation naturally implies libertarian free will.

Turning to the New Testament, Paul said that God "desires all people to be saved (1 Tim.

2:4). The most natural reading takes this statement at face value, meaning literally every person.

Compatibilists often argue that it means "all kinds of people."[166] In this case, the parallel phrase

in 2:1 could be read as Paul exhorting his readers to pray for all kinds of people, including kings,

etc. This reading is possible, but it would only help the compatibilist if the parallel is maintained

and Paul meant for his readers to pray for just some individuals in each kind of people (just like

compatibilists claim that only some individuals from each kind of people are saved in 2:4). In

this case, that would mean to just pray for some of the kings and people in high positions.

However, the context does not support this at all. They are to pray for the kings so that they

"may lead a peaceful and quiet life." One cannot conclude from this that they are just to pray for

some subset of the kings so that some subset of his readers live this kind of life. No, the natural

reading is that they should pray for literally all people, including kings and all who are in high

positions, which is consistent with Jesus telling his listeners to pray for those who persecute them

(Matt. 5:44). Just as Christians should pray for all people (not just all kinds of people), so God

desires all people (not just all kinds of people) to be saved. "All people" includes even the worst

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[165] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 25, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 818.

[166] George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 119.

of sinners (1:15),[167] and is true whether or not they accept his offer of salvation.[168] Regarding this verse and the following one to be discussed, Jerry Walls charges, "Calvinists are determined to deny that Christ truly died for all in order to defend their claim that God has chosen to restrict his grace and salvation to those he has unconditionally elected to save, consigning the rest to eternal damnation."[169]

First Timothy includes a verse that puzzles many people: "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). Since all are not saved, what did Paul mean by the phrase "Savior of all people," and by "especially of those who believe"? Most commentators interpret the first phrase in one of two ways. The first way treats "all people" as "all kinds" of people, as many Calvinists do.[170] But does this make sense in the context? It seems not to do so. First, nothing in the entire chapter supports this interpretation. The only two kinds of people mentioned are those who depart from the faith (4:1) and believers (4:6, 10, 12), and, clearly, those who depart from the faith are not saved. Second, those who opt for this interpretation also opt for translating μάλιστα not as "especially," but as "I mean" or "that is." However, neither "I mean" nor "that is" nor anything similar is given as a definition in BDAG.[171]

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[167] James D. G. Dunn, "The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 390; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 84.

[168] I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (1999; repr., London: T&T Clark, 2006), 426; Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 86.

[169] Jerry L. Walls, *Does God Love Everyone? The Heart of What Is Wrong with Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 62.

[170] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 203; Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 160.

[171] BDAG, s.v. "μάλιστα."

But giving them the benefit of the doubt, their translation of μάλιστα defeats their interpretation anyway, since the phrase "I mean" or "that is" does two things: it clarifies and equates. For example, a school principal may say, "We are awarding prizes for the top ten students, that is, those with the ten highest GPAs." The GPA comment clarifies the "top ten" comment, and the two phrases (top ten and those with the ten highest GPAs) are equated, or mean the same thing. In this verse, then, "those who believe" would both clarify what is meant by "all kinds of people" and would also equate the two phrases. However, that is simply not possible. First, "all kinds" obviously means multiple kinds. For example, it would be fair to say, "all kinds of people, that is, Jews and Gentiles," since that would clarify what kinds of people are being discussed, as his listeners might have thought only Jews were eligible. Yet it would not make sense to say, "all kinds of people, that is, Jews," since Jews are a singular group, and cannot clarify or equate with multiple groups. In the same way, "those who believe" are a single kind of people, like Jews. Second, it would have been much easier for Paul to simply state, "God is the Savior of those who believe."

However, compatibilists likely do not actually mean "all kinds of people" here, but "some from all kinds of people." If this latter phrase is the correct translation (God is the Savior of some from all kinds of people, that is, those who believe), then that would support the Calvinist position, because "that is" would modify "some," and these "some" are clarified by and equate to those who believe. Unfortunately for Calvinists, the Greek simply means "all people." Stretching this to mean "all kinds of people" is one thing; stretching it to mean "some from all kinds of people" goes beyond what the simple Greek phrase suggests. So, for the Calvinist position to work, one must accept (1) that "all" means something akin to "all kinds of," despite there being nothing in the context to support this, (2) that either it means "all kinds of," which

simply does not work as a coherent translation here, or it means "some from all kinds of," which stretches the Greek too far, and (3) μάλιστα means something not included in BDAG.

Libertarians, on the other hand, take "all people" at face value, but interpret "God is the Savior of all people" in one of two related ways. The first way interprets this as "God wills all to be saved," and then the second phrase, combined with the next verse ("Command and teach these things") as saying that "God's universal salvific will is realized 'particularly' through proclamation of and belief in the gospel."[172] The second way translates the first phrase as "God provides a way of salvation for all," with the second phrase being about those who take advantage of what God makes available, and believe. Either of these interpretations in which "all people" is taken at face value, parallels what Paul said in 2:4, which was just reviewed prior to this. So, for the libertarian position to work, (1) one must stretch the meaning of "God saves" to "God wills to save" or "God saves preveniently," and (2) interpret "especially those who believe" as "especially through belief" or see the entire passage as describing two steps in the salvation process, whereby all people are saved from their inability to approach God through his prevenient grace, and those who believe are saved from their sins and experience full salvation.[173] This second option seems to be a fair possible interpretation of the passage, though it does not explain why Paul would split the process of salvation like this in this context. Ultimately, neither the compatibilist position nor either of the libertarian positions is fully satisfying, as each view requires an interpretation that is not fully obvious. The second libertarian

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[172] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 312.

[173] While space constraints prevent a full discussion of prevenient grace, Scripture offered in support of the concept include John 1:9; 12:32; Romans 2:4; 5:6–10; Titus 2:11; and 1 John 4:10, 19.

position seems to be least problematic, as it tortures the language the least, but this verse is probably viewed as not providing a compelling argument for either camp.

In the next verse under consideration, Peter clearly stated that the Lord is patient, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Peter's point here was that the reason for God's delay is to give sinners time to repent before judgment.[174] The debate about this verse, like some of the others, revolves around who is meant by "any" and "all." Moo takes both words to refer to all *believers* because immediately prior to this in the verse, Peter said that the Lord "is patient toward you," where he was clearly speaking to his Christian readers.[175] Richard Bauckham concurs, but notes that in principle, it is fair to apply this to unbelievers as well.[176]

With this principle in mind, Schreiner asserts that restricting one's understanding of "anyone" to just believers is not the best solution, but one should instead understand it as applying to everyone as it does in Ezekiel 18:32.[177] Peter Davids and Gene Green agree.[178] This verse could legitimately be interpreted either way, though even if it does only apply to Peter's Christian readers, that does not negate other passages in which it clearly or most likely applies to everyone without exception.

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[174] Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, The Anchor Bible, paperback ed. (New Haven, CT: Doubleday, 2004), 241.

[175] Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 188.

[176] Richard Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 313-14.

[177] Ibid., 382.

[178] Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 281; Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 328.

The final verse to consider in this section does not directly state that God desires all people to be saved, but it indirectly does. Paul, in his Areopagus address, announced that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance here means becoming a believer and escaping God's judgment. This verse effectively says that "God demands the conversion of all people in the entire world."[179] It is hard to avoid the conclusion that if God commands everyone to repent that he desires everyone to be saved. Also, no one argues that in this verse, Paul's words spoken to unbelievers about "all people everywhere" mean anything other than every single person in the world.

So, to summarize what has been learned from an examination of the eight relevant passages just considered, two of these verses contain encouragement (Isaiah) or God's command (Acts) for everyone to turn and be saved; one (2 Peter) could fairly be read as applying God's desire for all to be saved to either literally everyone or to the Christian readers; two (the 1 Timothy passages) more likely apply to everyone; and three (the Ezekiel passages) clearly apply to literally all people. Even those that one could read as applying to believers are not written in a way that would exclude unbelievers. When considered all together, these passages show that God does indeed desire everyone to be saved.

God desiring everyone to be saved then either leads to universalism (which both sides agree it does not) or to something impeding God's desire from being realized. The libertarian says that is most likely human freedom.[180] The compatibilist says, "Although God delights in the

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[179] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 740.

[180] Paul Helm, William Lane Craig, and Justin Brierley, "Calvinism vs. Molinism: Paul Helm & William Lane Craig," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 69.

salvation of all men, we don't know why he has decreed it for only some."[181] While it is true that there are certain mysteries that will not be understood in this life, the fact that libertarians can explain this and compatibilists cannot, strongly favors libertarianism.

Passages Often Put Forth in Support of the Compatibilist Position

While the passages examined above strongly suggest that humans have libertarian free will, compatibilists point to a number of passages that that they claim supports their position that humans do not have the ability to choose freely to believe, but rather that God made this decision for them before the beginning of the world. Each of these passages will be examined in turn, starting with the two passages in which the Greek word προορίζω (predestined) occurs in reference to believers that some take to support the idea of unconditional predestination, and therefore lack of libertarian free will.

The first of these passages, Ephesians 1:4–11, contains the word "predestined" twice, in verses 5 and 11. This passage also contains the word "chose" (ἐκλέγομαι) in verse 4. Understanding these two words is critical to interpreting this passage and to the overall issue being discussed. One should recognize that these two words, while closely related, do not mean the same thing, as some scholars have implied.[182] To "choose" means to select an individual or a group out of a larger group for some particular purpose. To "predestine" means to destine or decide beforehand. The best way to think of this is that "choose" determines the "who" and "predestine" determines the "what."[183] As an example, if a woman simply says that she chooses

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[181] Christensen, *Free Will*, 204.

[182] Carey C Newman, "Election and Predestination in Ephesians 1:4-6a: An Exegetical-Theological Study of the Historical, Christological Realization of God's Purpose," *Review & Expositor* 93, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 240.

[183] Klein sees this similarly, saying, "Predestination does not concern 'whom' God has chosen for glory, but rather 'what' he has predetermined for his people" (Klein, *New Chosen People*, 162).

a certain person or group, that only communicates the "who," but not the "what." If she simply says that she will predestine someone to something specific, perhaps a promotion, that communicates the "what," but not the "who." Therefore, the initial questions become: (1) Who has been chosen, and (2) to what have they been predestined?[184]

Before moving on, though, it may be helpful to look more closely at προορίζω, and more thoroughly verify this explanation. The word does not appear at all in the LXX and is only used six times in the New Testament. Two of those uses occur in this Ephesians passage, and another two in the next passage to be examined. Part of the problem in coming to a conclusion on evaluating its specific meaning is the rarity of the word. So, to best understand this word, one needs to examine both its etymology and its usage in context.

From an etymological perspective, the word can be broken down into προ, which generally means beforehand or in advance, and ὁρίζω, which BDAG defines as (1) to "establish a boundary, . . . *set limits to, define, explain*," and (2) "to make a determination about an entity, *determine, appoint, fix, set*." This second definition, when pertaining to people, BDAG further defines as "*appoint, designate, declare*."[185] This last explanation is likely most pertinent to the discussion, but the other information provides additional background to understand the concept more generally.

BDAG defines the full word as "decide upon beforehand, predetermine,"[186] and Thayer defines it almost identically: "to predetermine, decide beforehand."[187] However, both

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[184] In many cases, both the "who" and the "what" are known at the same time, but even in these cases, it is important to distinguish between "who" God has chosen and for "what" he has predestined them, because some scholars claim that "predestine" can mean "choose," and then make false conclusions based on this.

[185] BDAG, s.v. "ὁρίζω."

[186] Ibid., s.v. "προορίζω."

[187] *Thayer*, s.v. "προ-ορίζω."

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) and EDNT add a slight nuance, both noting that it means to predestine, but adding that since God is eternal, he ordains things before time, and so this word is a stronger or intensified form of ὁρίζω.[188]

Moving now to the contextual evidence, aside from the two uses in the current Ephesians passage and the two in the Romans passage to be discussed next, one of the remaining two uses occurs in Acts 4:28. Here, the word refers to the actions of those opposed to Jesus or perhaps the outcomes of those actions that God had "predestined to take place." Note that Luke first mentioned the "who" (those opposed to Jesus) and then said that these people will do "what" God has predestined that they will do.

The final use of προορίζω occurs in 1 Corinthians 2:7, a simple verse in which God predestined "a secret and hidden wisdom of God." Once again, predestination clearly involves a "what," and not a "who." So, unless something clear exists in either the Ephesians passage or the Romans passage to be examined later that contradicts this, to "choose" and to "predestine" are not the same thing, and the first refers primarily to the "who" while the second refers to the "what."

Before turning to the two occurrences of προορίζω in the Ephesians passage, it will be best to first complete an analysis of ἐκλέγομαι in this passage. Looking specifically at those chosen, the first thing to determine is whether God chose individuals or a group. In this particular passage, Paul uniformly used "us" and "we." Carey Newman notes that ἡμᾶς is a plural pronoun that "falls within 'the language of belonging' and refers to the Christian church, to those who are 'in Christ.'"[189] Klyne Snodgrass analyzes this similarly, saying that nothing in this passage

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[188] Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "προορίζω," TDNT 5:456; "προορίζω," EDNT 3:159.

[189] Newman, "Election and Predestination," 239.

focuses on individuals, and that "individuals are not elected and then put in Christ. They are in Christ and therefore elect."[190] Likewise, Klein states, "By their incorporation into Christ, Christians are the 'elect ones.'"[191] Cottrell explains why this is true, noting that Christians are "chosen *in* (ἐν) Christ, that is, because they are in Christ; they are not chosen *into* (εἰς) Christ, that is, in order that they may be in Christ."[192] This is an important distinction. Ben Witherington III takes this concept even further, and compares it to the election of Israel. Just as the group Israel was elected, individuals within the group could apostatize and no longer be a member of the group, and other individuals outside the group could become part of the group, like Ruth. In a similar way, Jesus was elected, and individuals could become "in Christ" through faith.[193] Abasciano explains this connection very well, including showing how in the Old Testament, "the group was elected in the corporate head, as a consequence of its association with this corporate representative."[194]

On the other side of the argument, Clinton Arnold asserts that the verb "chose" refers to individuals who make up a group. He bases this on the fact that ἐξελέξατο "was commonly used in the LXX for God's choice of individuals."[195] While true, it is also true that the same word was commonly used for God's choice of groups, such as Israel (Deut. 7:7; 14:2; Isa. 14:1), the tribe of Judah (Ps. 78:68), and the house of Eli (1 Sam. 2:28), among others. So, his point only shows

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[190] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 49.

[191] Klein, *New Chosen People*, 243.

[192] Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 61.

[193] Ben Witherington, III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 234-35.

[194] Abasciano, "Romans 9 and Calvinism," 309.

[195] Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 79-80.

that it *could* refer to individuals, but in no way suggests that it *must* refer to individuals. Overall, the argument in favor of this pertaining to a group rather than to individuals is much stronger, though not ironclad.

The only other two items that this passage directly indicates about God choosing people show that he did it (1) "before the foundation of the world," and (2) "that we should be holy and blameless before him" (v. 4). Note that neither these two items nor anything else in verse 4 say anything about whether God's choosing is based or is not based on anything inherent in those chosen. Nevertheless, some commentators address the issue here.

For example, Snodgrass asserts, "Election means that the existence of the people of God can be explained only on the basis of God's character, plan, and action, not on some quality in the people who are chosen. The initiative is always God's based on his 'grace.'"[196] It seems that he bases his first sentence on his second sentence. However, there is a key problem with this. The choosing can be entirely God's choice based on his grace, and still be based on something specific about the people chosen. "Grace" simply means "undeserved blessing freely bestowed on humans by God."[197] God's plan may include choosing to freely grant salvation to those whom he knows will believe, despite them not deserving it. This grace emanates from God's love, he gives it based on people's belief, and he secures the gift of salvation through the death of Christ.

Harold Hoehner, on the other hand, does a word study of "to choose," looking at both Old and New Testament passages. One of his conclusions from this is that the word

> is in the middle voice, as is in almost every instance, indicating a personal interest in the one chosen. Hence, God chose with great personal interest rather than a random impersonal choice. . . The point is that if God had not taken the initiative, no one would

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[196] Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* 48-49.

[197] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Grace," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 519-522.

have his everlasting presence and life. The real problem is not why he had not chosen some, but why he chose any. No wonder God is to be praised.[198]

While not as direct as Snodgrass, Hoehner takes a Calvinist position here. Like with Snodgrass, though, his conclusion does not follow from his premise. He seems to be taking an Arminian premise and landing on a Calvinist conclusion. Arminians would wholeheartedly agree that "God chose with great personal interest rather than a random impersonal choice." Yet, how can one reconcile this with the Calvinist position that God chose people based on nothing inherent in them? If God's choice was not random, and if it was based on nothing in the people chosen, then why would God have a great personal interest in some and not in others? If he had the same personal interest in others, then it must have been random, i.e., it had to either be random or based on something.

Also, this choice with great personal interest of only some, means that God knowingly condemns all the others to eternal damnation. If he loves all these other people equally with those he chose, how can he do this? If he does not love the others equally with those he chose, why not? What was it about them that caused this difference? The only reasonable explanation is that there *was* something different. This is where God's foreknowledge likely comes into play in this issue. Ultimately, Hoehner adds an important nuance to how "choose" is used in the Bible, with the idea of personal interest. This concept fits perfectly in a libertarian model but despite the best intentions, is not consistent with a compatibilist model.

Having completed an analysis of "choose," the focus will now shift to "predestine." As noted earlier, the Greek word προορίζω occurs twice in this passage. Once again, the key is to look at the "who" and the "what." In verse 5, the answer is clear: "he predestined us for adoption

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[198] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 175-76.

to himself as sons." Paul is speaking collectively of himself and his readers (and apparently for all believers everywhere) as the "who," and adoption as the "what." However, verse 11 by itself does not seem to directly supply the "what," but only the "who." The "who" clearly remains the same ("we"), but the "what" actually exists as well—it just comes before the "who" this time: "In him we have obtained an inheritance." This, then, mirrors verse 5. Having been predestined for adoption as sons, Christians have received the inheritance that comes with being sons of God. In other words, Christians have been predestined for adoption as sons and to receive the inheritance that comes with that adoption.

A second similarity to note between the two occurrences is that in the first case, the predestination happens "according to the purpose of his will," while in the second case, it happens "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." Feinberg claims that these phrases mean that predestination is unconditional and based solely on God's desires. Nothing in the passage indicates that God based it on anything other than God.[199] Feinberg's first statement, however, does not follow from his second statement. Just as the passage does not indicate that God took something else into account, it also does not indicate that God did *not* take something else into account. It simply says that God did it according to his purpose or the purpose of his will. Based solely on what these verses say, God's purpose may or may not have taken account of something else. More specifically, God's purpose could have involved giving humans free will. He may have desired that all people be saved and decided that the best way to do this is to allow people to freely choose or reject him, since otherwise, it is not really a choice.

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[199] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 680-81.

Interestingly, after again insisting that this verse provides no room for libertarian free will, Feinberg admits that the Arminian position on this is theoretically supportable. He concedes that in this view, since God was not forced to give humans this kind of free will and since he did not give up his sovereignty, but only the exercise of it, libertarian free will is consistent with God remaining absolutely sovereign. His problem with it, though, comes from his assertion that "no passage in Scripture (certainly not Ephesians 1:11) says that God made such a decision. If I could find even one verse to that effect, I would be a theological indeterminist (Arminian)."[200] Just after this, however, he further admits, "Actually, no verse tells us whether freedom is indeterministic or deterministic."[201]

Curiously, Feinberg states that libertarian free will is logical enough and consistent enough with the biblical record such that if just a single verse would explicitly say that humans have it, he would be an Arminian. Yet at the same time, not a single verse explicitly says that humans have compatibilist free will. So, what does Feinberg conclude from this information? He asserts, "In view of verses such as Ephesians 1:11, I believe we are free in a compatibilist sense. I see no other scripturally acceptable way to avoid a contradiction between the clearly biblical concepts of God's sovereignty and human freedom."[202] Effectively, his position is that the Arminian position is feasible (including its position on sovereignty, since God does not give it up, but just the exercise of it), but no verse specifically indicates that humans have free will, so he maintains his Calvinist position despite no verse existing that specifically says that humans have compatibilist free will, and somehow again claiming that any other position creates a

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[200] Feinberg, "God Ordains," 31-32.

[201] Ibid., 32.

[202] Ibid.

contradiction between God's sovereignty and human free will. It is amazing how quickly he switches from admitting that neither position has direct biblical support and libertarianism not being contradictory, to saying that anything other than the compatibilist position is contradictory, based on Ephesians 1:11. It seems as if he is so wedded to the compatibilist position, that he cannot see the implications of the argument he laid out. Based on his own words, it would seem that at the very least he would come to the conclusion that either option is feasible based on this passage.

In a somewhat similar, though not as direct, way, Ernest Best seems to not take his observations to their logical conclusion. He clearly takes a compatibilist stance, as he asserts, "Believers are believers not because they have chosen to believe but because God selected them before the world came into being (1:4). . . God knows they will be born and determines what thereafter their lives will be."[203] Yet Best maintains that moral effort is still required on the part of believers, because otherwise the later passages in Ephesians encouraging good conduct and threatening judgment would not have been written.[204] This, of course, strongly suggests that not everything has been predetermined, as Best claims, so how does he reconcile this? Curiously, Best argues that the author of Ephesians was "not aware" of the relation of the human will to the divine plan, because he exhorts believers to pray for others, and "their prayer could have no effect if everything is already arranged."[205]

Such a conclusion begs the question of whether it is reasonable to conclude that an author who writes strongly about both God's plan and the need for humans to behave in a certain way

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[203] Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (1998; paperback ed., repr., London: T&T Clark, 2010), 48.

[204] Ibid., 123-24.

[205] Ibid., 124.

never considered how the two issues are related. This view is not only unreasonable from a

human perspective, but it completely ignores the inspiration of Scripture and therefore suggests

that God is "unaware" of this connection as well. Furthermore, even if all of this were somehow

true, how can Best not address this seeming contradiction? If God determines everything in

advance, but at the same time, Christians are exhorted to behave in a certain way and to pray,

and are warned against judgment, how can he not take the time to explain to his readers how he

reconciles what Paul wrote in Ephesians? As was the case with Feinberg, a simple, logical

Arminian explanation exists that understands this passage without creating the contradictions

seemingly required by a Calvinist approach. If one does not accept the Arminian position, at a

minimum, that person should explain why their position better interprets the passage. Best,

unfortunately, leaves his reader with no satisfactory explanation.

Picirilli asserts, "When God acts in a manner that is in accord with His sovereign good

pleasure or will, He may act unconditionally or on the basis of conditions He Sovereignly

establishes. The words themselves do not tell us which applies in any given instance."[206] This

statement leads to the question of how one should determine whether God's actions are

conditional or unconditional, if the context of a passage does not clearly suggest one or the other.

While Calvinists do not generally say this overtly, they seem to assume that the simpler answer

should be the default, with unconditional being simpler than conditional. Yet is this the best

logic? It seems not. Rather, one should default to what would be most natural or most frequently

occurring.

Man being created in God's image suggests that the process of human choosing should be

a reasonable proxy for God's choosing. Consider almost any choice people make when facing

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[206] Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 68.

multiple options: choosing what to eat; where to go on vacation; whom to marry; what college to attend; what job offer to accept; what movie to go see; what book to read; what house to buy; etc. It would be a very rare situation for people to not consider any characteristic about the food, the vacation location, their potential spouse, where to go to college, etc. when making their choice. It would be even rarer still when they are choosing from the universe of options, as God does when he chooses which humans will be saved and which will not. For example, one might argue that if someone has to choose between two colleges they like equally, they may flip a coin and no characteristic about either college impacts their decision. However, if they are choosing from all colleges, including those that are poorly rated, located further from home than they prefer, do not offer their intended major, etc., they will invariably take into account some characteristic of the various options. The point is that when people make a choice from among multiple options, they always or almost always make that choice based on some characteristic of those options. Therefore, making a choice based on some characteristic of the available options should be the default.

Of course, just because humans operate this way, this does not mean that God operates the same way. Looking at God's choosing in Scripture, the vast majority of the passages do not indicate one way or the other whether God's choice takes into account anything about whom or what he chooses. There are, however, seven passages that potentially shed light on the issue. The first two passages to consider could possibly be construed to suggest that God does not take any characteristic into account, but when looked at closely, this is not the case. Romans 9:11 says that God chose Jacob over Esau "not because of works but because of him who calls." However, this verse contrasts human works with God's calling. It does not address whether or not God's calling takes into account anything (other than human works) about Jacob or Esau. Based on this

verse, God could certainly have taken something other than works into account in his calling.

Similarly, Romans 11:5–6 notes that the remnant is chosen by grace. Yet once again, in verse 6, it contrasts grace with works. It says nothing about whether God's grace takes anything else about people other than works into account when giving grace. So, these verses neither support nor contradict either the libertarian or compatibilist positions.

On the other hand, five verses support the idea that God *does* take something about people into account when choosing them. First Corinthians 1:27–29 is clear: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Here God clearly chooses the foolish, the weak, and the low and despised (who are in Christ Jesus, per verse 30). This passage is important because it gets at two key issues. First, it indirectly supports the idea from the previous two verses that nothing about human achievement (works, wisdom, strength, etc.) leads to God choosing them. Second, it is consistent with the examples of humans given above with regard to God basing at least this choice on something about humans.

James 2:5 is another verse that supports this concept, but also potentially creates some confusion: "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" Similar to the previous passage, God takes something about people into account in choosing them, this time choosing those who are poor. While this is clear, the Calvinist might argue that this verse supports their position in that God chose these people "to be rich in faith." Does that not defeat the Arminian position of God choosing those whom he knew would believe and instead show that God determined that the elect would believe?

This is one possible interpretation, but two items mitigate against that conclusion. First, the words "to be" are missing in the Greek. The Greek is literally, "ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει," or "choose the poor of this world rich in faith." In other words, while one can fairly add "to be" in the interpretation (as most interpretations do), one can also fairly read it as written in Greek, adding a comma—"the poor of this world, rich in faith" (as several other interpretations do.)[207] Second, and more importantly, during this time period, the word πτωχός, translated here as "rich," was a "technical term for the class of pious and humble people who put their trust in God for redemption and not in material wealth."[208] The final clause, "which he has promised to those who love him," supports this as it equates the poor with those who love God.[209] Understanding this "exemplifies the Bible's frequent juxtaposition of divine sovereignty and human responsibility."[210] Ultimately, if one adds "to be,", as most translations do, this verse should be understood as saying, "Has not God chosen the pious and humble people who put their trust in God and love him to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" It is not the faith of the people but the richness (of the faith that they already have) that God gives them. For the purposes of the current argument, though, the key here is that God again takes into account something about people when he chooses them.

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) by itself, does not explain whether or not something particular about people was a part of God's choice, but the broader

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[207] Bible translations inserting "to be" include the ASV, CSB, ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, and NRSVUE, among others. Those that do not insert "to be" include the BRG, KJV, Wycliffe, and YLT, among others.

[208] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 65.

[209] Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 195-96.

[210] Craig L. Blomberg, and Mariam J. Kamell, *James,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 114.

context does. In the parable that this verse closes, a man who was called was not chosen, because he did not have a wedding garment. Once again, there was something specific about the person called that determined whether or not he was chosen.

Turning to the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 16:6–12 tells the story of God choosing David to be king in place of Saul. When Samuel thought that God has chosen Eliab, God told him that he had rejected Eliab, because God looks on the heart. That is, God chooses based on a person's heart, which is a key fact to remember when considering the libertarian position of God knowing in advance whether or not a person will choose to believe in him. This dissertation argues that God knows this because he knows a person's heart—both currently and from eternity.

Finally, Deuteronomy 7:6–8 deals with God's choosing of Israel. This passage ranks as perhaps the example in the Old Testament most similar to God's choosing of the church in the New Testament. Just as Israel was God's chosen people in the Old Testament (and into the New Testament), the church serves as God's chosen people (the "elect") in the New Testament. While the comparison does not match exactly, it is instructive to note that in this passage, God told Israel that he chose them "because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers" (v. 8). The characteristic of the people in this example does not come across as directly as in the other examples, but still speaks of something specific about the people—those who are the descendants of the ones to whom God swore an oath. The takeaway from all of this is that when examining the passages in which God chooses, no examples exist of God explicitly choosing based upon nothing about the people, but five passages tell of God explicitly choosing based on something specific about those he selects. So, the evidence from both how humans choose and how God chooses supports taking a default position of God choosing based on some characteristic of people when the passage does not explicitly state one way or the other.

From here, the analysis of the Ephesians passage turns to understanding the meaning and implications of the end of verse 11: "him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." Both "works" and "all things" need to be understood properly in order to interpret this phrase. The Greek word translated as "works" is ἐνεργέω, and its transitive usage is defined as "to bring something about through use of capability, *work, produce, effect*."[211] This definition pretty clearly involves both the working and the outcome of that working. Marston and Forster, on the other hand, say that the word (transitive or intransitive) means to "energize," explaining, "It does not convey an impression of irresistible directive power, but rather one of stimulation."[212] One does not find such a definition in the primary Greek lexicons, but these scholars do seem to have correctly brought out a nuance to the meaning of the word. It does, at least in some instances, seem to describe God enabling or empowering humans to do something. The concept of bringing about an outcome through a capability does not change, but an added nuance of humans needing to take action on the enablement that God provides also exists, as will be shown below.

BDAG gives six verses in addition to Ephesians 1:11 in which ἐνεργέω is used transitively. In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul told Christians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." If the outcome of the work were entirely due to God, the believer would not be exhorted to do his or her part. This passage fits well with the idea of God enabling or empowering believers, yet believers needing to do their part.

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[211] BDAG, s.v. "ἐνεργέω."

[212] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 111.

The next two verses to consider both appear in 1 Corinthians 12, in which the ESV translates both uses of ἐνεργέω as "empower." Both of these verses (6 and 11) occur in a broader passage about the gifts of the Spirit. Verses 4–6 speak of the varieties of gifts, service, and activities, but "it is the same God who empowers them all" (12:6). Verses 8–10 list several specific spiritual gifts, after which Paul noted, "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit" (12:11). Both of these verses show that God gifts these abilities to Christians and is the empowering force behind the gifts, but the believers are the ones who must make use of the gifts which have been given to them.

The next verse, Galatians 3:5, in which Paul wrote of God working miracles among his readers, is less straightforward, since he asked if God works the miracles by "works of the law, or by hearing with faith." This clearly introduces a human element again, though TDNT explains it by saying, "the reference is to the miraculous demonstrations of power with which God gives force to missionary preaching."[213] This, again, is consistent with the idea of God empowering humans to achieve an outcome.

The final two verses both come from Ephesians, with the first (1:20) speaking of God working in Christ in his resurrection. Since the Bible describes this both as God's act (Rom. 10:9) and as Christ's act (John 10:17–18), this again fits with the idea of empowerment, though since Christ is God, its effectiveness as evidence for this position is not as strong. The final verse (2:2), speaks of "the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." While most translations use "work," as the ESV does here, both Mounce and NET use "energizing" the sons of disobedience. Once again, this shows a spiritual being ("the prince of the power of the air") empowering humans to deliver an outcome. This analysis demonstrates that when God "works"

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[213] Georg Bertram, "ἐνεργέω," etc., TDNT 2:652-54.

(ἐνεργέω) something, this does not mean that he necessarily absolutely determines that thing. First of all, God is not always the subject of the word, so the word itself cannot mean this. Second, even when God is the subject, he frequently empowers humans to do the actions which would bring about the desired outcome. Nothing in the verses analyzed suggest that God predetermined humans to do his will, but on the contrary, the biblical writers exhorted people to work out their own salvation, and elsewhere exhorted them to use their spiritual gifts. As such, the concept of God working all things in Ephesians 1:11b does not bring with it the connotation of God absolutely determining all things.

However, what about God working "all things (τὰ πάντα) according to the counsel of his will"? Compatibilists assert that this means that God determines everything that happens in the world. Ware says, "If we wonder whether 'all things' in 1:11 really refers to absolutely everything, we need to look back to 1:10 where 'all things' are united in Christ, 'things in heaven and things on earth.' Yes indeed, 'all things' means 'absolutely everything.'"[214] However, Ware's confident assertion does not hold up to scrutiny.

As always, context is key, and two different contexts can shed light on this issue. First, in one of the verses given in the analysis just above, 1 Corinthians 12:6, ἐνεργέω was used with τὰ πάντα, just as it is in Ephesians 1:11. Yet in the 1 Corinthians passage, τὰ πάντα clearly refers to all of the spiritual gifts, not absolutely everything. So, τὰ πάντα in conjunction with ἐνεργέω does not by itself necessarily mean literally all things. Second, as Ware indicates, τὰ πάντα is used in the verse immediately preceding Ephesians 1:11. Contrary to Ware, however, not only does this verse *not* refer to literally everything, but it *cannot* refer to literally everything. If it did, it would mean that every unbeliever and "even Satan himself" will be united in Christ, which is

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[214] Ware, *God's Greater Glory,* 69.

simply unbiblical.[215] This still begs the question of what exactly "all things" refers to here. The answer is found by going back one more verse and looking at verses 9 and 10 together, which shows that God made known "the mystery of his will . . . which he set forth in Christ as a plan . . . to unite all things in him." Paul explained, "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs" with the Jews (Eph. 3:6). In other words, τὰ πάντα "refers to 'all things' required for uniting Jews and Gentiles under one Head in one body."[216] In summary, not only does Ephesians 1:11 not explicitly say anything about God determining everything, but it does not even implicitly imply anything close to this.

The final item to examine in this passage is the phrase "in love," which occurs at the end of verse 4. This phrase can reasonably be interpreted as either connected to what comes before it or what comes after it. Of those who interpret it to be connected to what follows, i.e., "In love he predestined us for adoption," Calvinists such as Best believe that God "adopts because he loves those he adopts."[217] On the other hand, Arminians, such as Witherington say, "God, because of his great love, destined those who believe for adoption as sons."[218] The Calvinist must answer the question of whether God loves those he chooses not to adopt. If he does not, why, and how is that consistent with God's attribute of love, since according to the Calvinist, there was nothing inherently different between those chosen and those not chosen? If he does, why does God only adopt some rather than all, since he "adopts *because* he loves those he adopts" yet he also loves those he does not adopt? There is no good answer to these questions. For the Arminian, however, God clearly loves them all, but he has graciously chosen to save those who freely choose to

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[215] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 112.

[216] Cottrell, "Nature of Divine Sovereignty," 116.

[217] Best, *Ephesians*, 125.

[218] Witherington, *The Letters*, 234.

believe. Whereas the unbeliever in the Calvinist construct has no choice but to be an unbeliever, in the Arminian construct, the person does not believe due to his or her own choice. This interpretation of Ephesians 1:4 strongly favors the Arminian position.

The next passage to be examined, Romans 8:28–30, also includes the word "predestined" twice, in verses 29 and 30, and further includes both "called" and "foreknew." Both of these words are important to analyze, but the second one especially has implications regarding how what God knew about his people in advance may have had a bearing on his decision.

Since to foreknow (προγινώσκω) is such a key term in the debate about this passage, it is best to start with it. The obvious definition of this is to know something in advance. Grant Osborne accepts this definition,[219] but many scholars do not. Schreiner says it means that God has set his covenant favor and love on someone;[220] Frank Thielman asserts that it connotes "the loving relationship God has with his people;[221] Sherwood states its meaning as God personally knowing and fully understanding someone even before the person enters into a relationship with him;[222] Moo claims it means both to know or love beforehand and to choose beforehand;[223] and Feinberg asserts that it means the same as foreordination.[224]

These definitions span a large range that seem to veer a fair distance away from the more natural understanding of the word, so it will be helpful to delve further into a couple of the more

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[219] Grant R. Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Bellinghham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 251.

[220] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 257.

[221] Frank Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 410.

[222] Sherwood, *Romans*, 459.

[223] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 533; Other Calvinist scholars also equate "foreknew" with "foreloved." See Steve W. Lemke, "Is God's Grace Irresistible? A Critique of Irresistible Grace," in *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique,* ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 160.

[224] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 522.

common assertions, starting with foreknowing meaning "choosing." The verb προγινώσκω

appears just five times in the New Testament. Moo acknowledges that in two of these

occurrences, προγινώσκω does indeed mean to know beforehand. However, he claims that in the

other two occurrences outside of Romans 8:29, plus in the two occurrences of its cognate noun,

the term means, "enter into relationship with before" or "choose, or determine before."[225] This

begs the question of what the lexicons say—and this is where it gets interesting. Moo, BDAG,

and TDNT are generally aligned, though the lexicons have the two options of "know" or

"choose," and do not speak of a relationship.[226] On the other hand, both Thayer and EDNT have

only to know beforehand.[227] This suggests that the definitions given in the lexicons may suffer

from the same issue as elsewhere—that of theological biases impacting interpretation.

As a result, it is important to dig a little deeper in two areas: usage outside of the Bible

and a clearer understanding of each of the uses within the Bible. Marston and Forster are

unaware of any usage outside of the Bible where γινώσκω means "to choose."[228] The lexicons

seem to support this. Both lexicons (BDAG and TDNT) that give a definition of "to choose" for

προγινώσκω give zero examples from outside of the Bible for this usage. However, these same

two lexicons give numerous examples outside of the Bible where it means to foreknow. BDAG

references Philo, Josephus, Tatian, and Hermas; TDNT includes all of these along with

Euripides, Thucydides, Plato, Hippocrates, Demosthenes, Aristotle, and Justin where the word

means to foreknow.

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[225] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 532.

[226] BDAG, s.v. "προγινώσκω;" Rudolf Bultmann, "γινώσκω," etc., TDNT 1:689-719.

[227] *Thayer*, s.v. "προγινώσκω;" EDNT 3:153.

[228] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 225-26.

Given this information, the burden of proof falls on those who claim that the Bible uses a different definition than is used anywhere else. If the three verses under debate *can* support the "foreknow" definition used everywhere else, it must be assumed that it means the same thing in these verses unless the context or other evidence overwhelmingly supports something else. The first verse to consider is 1 Peter 1:20. This verse notes that Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times." Both Thomas Schreiner and J. Ramsey Michaels note the parallelism in this verse, in which "foreknown" is parallel to "made manifest," and "before the foundation of the world" is parallel to "in the last times."[229] While "chosen" would work as a translation in this verse, not only does foreknown work, but it works better because of the parallelism. Peter's point was that what was known to God before the foundation of the world has now been made known to humans in the last times.[230] Another parallelism exists between προγινώσκω in this verse and its cognate noun in 1:2, where it speaks of God's foreknowledge of the elect. Karen Jobes summarizes this point well when she says, "God knew the complete program of redemption before the foundation of the world. The revelation of this program is for the benefit of those who through the hearing of the gospel would put their faith in God and enter into the living hope of the new birth based on the resurrection of Christ (1:3)."[231] So, since "foreknown" works well in this verse, this first verse does not support "chosen" being a new definition for προγινώσκω found nowhere else.

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[229] Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 87; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 66.

[230] While using "foreknown" with Jesus may seem odd since he existed from all eternity, it is also true that he was chosen and destined from all eternity as well, so none of the choices for interpretation avoids this issue. "Knowing" Jesus does not simply mean being aware of Jesus, but that the Father knew everything about Jesus, including what he would do in the future. This comprehensive knowledge parallels what will be argued later in that God knows everything about people, including whether or not they will believe.

[231] Karen Jobes, *1 Peter,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 119.

In the second verse, Romans 11:2, "chose" actually seems to work better than "foreknew," since it parallels better with "rejected." However, "foreknew" still works in this verse. Also, Paul used the word "chosen" just three verses later (actually, he used the noun "choice," ἐκλογή, but it is typically translated as a verb here). He also used this same word when he wrote of the "elect" in verse 7. So, the option of using the normal word for "chosen" was available to Paul, but for some reason he decided to use "foreknew" instead. One should not be quick to dismiss Paul's choice of wording simply because an otherwise unknown definition seems to fit here better to the modern reader. Paul may have decided to use προγινώσκω because he wanted to emphasize God's eternal plan in knowing before the foundation of the world the relationship he would have with Israel. Sherwood puts this slightly differently, translating it as God "intimately understood [his people] beforehand."[232] Another possibility is that Paul was indicating that God foreknew those within Israel who would be true believers. While this verse presents the strongest case for treating προγινώσκω as "chosen," since "foreknew" still works, this single verse is not enough to declare a definition for the word not found elsewhere.

Only the final verse, the one under discussion, remains: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29a). Of course, "foreknew" works very well in this verse, as any Arminian will argue. Some Calvinists might protest that the verse says that God foreknows the person rather than something about the person, and since God foreknows everyone, this cannot mean what the Arminians claim. However, God foreknowing a person includes God foreknowing everything about that person, including if that person will believe. In addition, while Scripture includes a group described as "the elect," the Bible typically calls this group the ἐκλεκτός or the ἐκλογή, not the προεγνωσμένου. Once again, Paul chose the

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[232] Sherwood, *Romans*, 585.

word he used for a reason. More to the current point, since the translation "foreknew" works here in this final verse, this eliminates any grounds for coming up with a new definition for προγινώσκω not found elsewhere. Translating it as "chosen" becomes a theological choice, not an exegetical choice.

For the sake of completeness, it is worth taking a quick look at the two instances in which the New Testament uses the noun cognate of προγινώσκω. The first instance, 1 Peter 1:2, was discussed in the analysis of 1 Peter 1:20, and "foreknowledge" not only works, but it works better than "choice," since this is consistent with the overall passage as described above and it avoids the redundancy of saying "those who are chosen according to the choice of God." In the second instance, Acts 2:23, "foreknowledge" again works well. One might argue that Jesus being "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" is redundant, but this would be no more redundant than "the definite plan and choice of God." So yet again, these verses provide no basis for coming up with a new definition found nowhere else.

It is also worth looking at a slightly different angle, in which Feinberg argues that προγινώσκω means the same as "foreordain." First, he runs into the same problem as above, where since "foreknow" works in all of these verses, there is no basis for coming up with a new definition. Second, he makes assumptions without basis. Specifically, regarding 1 Peter 1:20, he asks, "How could God foresee Christ being the Redeemer without having chosen it to be so? . . . It is beyond reason to imagine that God first consults what he foresees himself doing before he ordains himself to do it."[233]

Feinberg makes two mistakes here. First, he deftly (and likely innocently) changes "foreknew" to "foresaw." These two terms are not the same. God does not need to look into the

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[233] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 523.

future to know what he is going to do. He simply knows it. Second, he asks how God could foresee without having chosen it to be so. Who said that he did? God may have indeed chosen Christ to be the sacrificial lamb in advance, but that is not the point. God making this choice and God knowing this choice are not the same thing. Once he made the choice, he certainly knew the choice. Peter could have easily used the word "foreordained" rather than "foreknew," but he did not. God may have both foreknown and foreordained this. Yet Peter chose to emphasize his foreknowledge for some reason. Just because foreordination or choosing may have been involved, this does not mean that foreknowledge was not involved. In addition, looking at the current verse of Romans 8:29, it makes no sense to say, "For those whom he predestined he also predestined," as it would read if Feinberg's definition were correct.

The rest of Feinberg's objections can be dismissed similarly, except for the point he makes about Romans 11:2, which was noted above as the verse in which "chosen" worked best. Feinberg's argument about this verse is long, but worth quoting in depth:

> If the point is that God previously decided to make Israel his special object of love, i.e., he established a relationship with them beforehand and covenanted that they should realize the fulfillment of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then to say that Israel is foreknown does guarantee that they won't be cast off. At the end of Romans 11 Paul invokes again the promises made to the fathers (v. 28), and then adds that God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. If people have libertarian free will and thereby can reject God, there can be no irrevocability about it . . . The most likely meaning of 11:2 is relational knowledge based on God's prior decision to covenant with Israel as his people. Prescience is not the point here.[234]

Whether he realizes it or not, Feinberg comes very close to the Arminian position here. First, he accepts that προγινώσκω means foreknowledge here ("knowledge based on God's prior decision"). He argues that in this instance it is relational knowledge rather than intellectual knowledge. However, that does not change the point being made here that the word means

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[234] Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 523-24.

foreknowledge, not something else (as Feinberg earlier argued that it meant foreordination).

Once one agrees that προγινώσκω means foreknowledge, then one can debate what type of

knowledge this entails, and there is no reason that the type of knowledge must be the same in

every context. Relational knowledge actually makes very good sense in this passage (Romans

11). It remains to be seen whether it means the same or a different type of knowledge in Romans

8:29.

So, back to Feinberg's argument on 11:2, yes, it is based on relationship, and yes, God

will absolutely keep his promises. What he overlooks, though, is that Israel needs to keep their

end of the bargain. God's gift and calling are irrevocable. He will not stop offering them. Yet

Israel still must accept them. Israel exercising her libertarian free will and rejecting God in no

way means that God has not kept his promise. Because of the covenantal relationship, God

continues to make his offer available. Getting back to the point of this section, though, nothing

Feinberg says shows that προγινώσκω means anything other than "foreknowledge."

Finally, some people claim that in the Old Testament, "know" can mean "choose."

Similar to with προγινώσκω, such usage has not been found outside of the Bible, but some claim

that the Hebrew word יָדַע (yāḏaʿ), often translated as γινώσκω in the LXX, has this meaning in a

small number of verses. Marston and Forster perform an in-depth analysis of these verses,[235] and

conclude that "any element of 'choice' is as a part of a relationship in any such use of *yāḏa'*. The

'knowing' focuses on the relationship, not the choice in the abstract."[236] Their analysis further

shows that יָדַע is used roughly 770 times in the Old Testament and translated as γινώσκω roughly

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[235] Amos 3:2–3; Hosea 13:5; Genesis 18:17–19; Jeremiah 1:5–6

[236] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 227.

500 times, yet only a handful of verses are claimed to support this interpretation.[237] In other words, if γινώσκω means "to choose" or "to preordain" at all, it only does so in situations where a special existing relationship is involved. When considering this in relation to Romans 8:29, it presents a dilemma for those who claim that προγινώσκω means to choose or ordain in advance. If it means this outside of a relationship, there is no evidence of such a usage in the Bible or anywhere else. If it means it within a relationship, it does not make sense to have a relationship with someone who does not yet exist.[238]

Related to this, S. M. Baugh claims that "foreknew" means relationship in Romans 8:29 as well. He asserts:

> The classic Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29, that God's foreknowledge of faith is in view, is clearly reading one's theology into the text. Paul does not say: 'whose faith he foreknew,' but 'whom he foreknew.' He foreknew us. . . We may wish to recall the lesson from Jeremiah 1:5; God has foreknown us because he fashioned each of us personally and intimately according to his plan. . . That Paul refers to the concept of a committed relationship with the phrase *whom he foreknew* in Romans 8:29 is confirmed by the context.[239]

Contrary to Baugh's claim, it appears that he is the one reading his theology into the text. Jeremiah 1:5 does *not* say that God fashioned each of us personally and intimately according to his plan. First, it only talks about Jeremiah specifically; extrapolating this to everyone is reading one's theology into the text. Second, the verse only talks about knowing him, consecrating him, and appointing him before he was in the womb/born. Jeremiah said nothing about fashioning him or anyone else "personally and intimately." This is reading one's theology into the text. Third,

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[237] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 227-28.

[238] Ibid., 243.

[239] S. M. Baugh, "The Meaning of Foreknowledge," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 194.

relationships are by definition in both directions. It is impossible for humans who have not yet been born to have a relationship with anyone, even God. Given this and the information learned above, προγινώσκω in both Jeremiah 1:5 and in Romans 8:29 must mean simply knowing in advance, as it does elsewhere.

The question for Romans 8:29 then becomes, "What is it about God's knowing people that Paul intended to get across in this verse?" God clearly foreknows everyone (and has some kind of relationship with everyone—after they are born), not just Christians. So, there must be something unique to Christians that Paul intended to convey here. The obvious conclusion is that this item is the person's faith, since that is the primary factor distinguishing believers from unbelievers. So, Arminians are not reading their theology into this verse, but rather coming to the logical conclusion based on all the evidence presented.

Turning back to Jeremiah 1:5, then, the better interpretation of God knowing Jeremiah before he formed him in the womb is that God knew in advance the heart of Jeremiah, and therefore knew also key issues related to the other parts of the verse, such as how Jeremiah would respond to his consecration and appointment. This interpretation is consistent with the Arminian position that God knowing believers means that he knew their hearts, and therefore knew how they would respond to his offer of salvation.

Moving on to the relationship of foreknowledge to free will, several scholars claim that absolute foreknowledge is inconsistent with libertarian free will. Interestingly, such claims come from both Calvinists and a certain segment of Arminians. For example, Donald Westblade, a Calvinist, states, "No attempt to carve a realm of freedom (to do otherwise) out of the wholly foreknown future can ever yield coherent results."[240] He adds that foreknowledge implies the

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[240] Westblade, "Divine Election," 71.

certainty of future events. Baugh agrees with Westblade, calling this issue the Achilles' heel of

Arminianism and saying that there can be no libertarian free will because of God's

omniscience.[241] R. C. Sproul, a third Calvinist, looks at the topic from a different angle, but

seems to confuse even himself since he first asserts, "Whatever God knows will happen, he

knows he can prevent from happening," but on the very next page claims, "If God knows in

advance what will happen, then what happens is certain to take place." [242] If it is certain to take

place, how can he then prevent it from happening? Alternatively, if he prevents it from

happening, how was it certain to take place? Either could be true, but not both. Sproul's

apparently contradictory statements point out that this issue can quickly get confusing if not

clearly thought through.

On the Arminian side, Rice says, "If the future is inevitable, then the apparent experience

of free choice is an illusion."[243] Likewise, Pinnock states, "If history is infallibly known and

certain from all eternity, then freedom is an illusion."[244] Other Arminians, on the other hand,

assert the opposite, saying that just because God knows something, that does not mean that he

caused it.[245] So, which is it? If the future is known in advance, does it eliminate free will or not?

The following example should help clear things up. Consider someone—call her Sally—

who has a friend, Dave. On Wednesday, Sally knows that two days earlier (on Monday), Dave

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[241] Baugh, "Meaning of Foreknowledge," 183.

[242] R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: Understanding the Role of the Human Will in Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 91-92.

[243] Richard Rice, "Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 127.

[244] Clark H. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 150. Both Rice and Pinnock are at the extreme end of Arminianism, and subscribe to what they call open theism.

[245] Cottrell, "Conditional Election," 69; Reichenbach, "God Limits," 110.

freely chose to order a steak rather than a salad at a restaurant. Most people would probably agree that this was freely chosen. Yet at this point (Wednesday), his having chosen the steak is determined, because it is in the past. Now that it is determined, does that change the fact that he freely chose it? Of course not. It is in the past. Yet, not only was it determined on Wednesday that he chose the steak over the salad, it was also determined that he *freely chose* the steak over the salad. However, if a brilliant scientist invented a time machine, and Sally went back in time and observed Dave eating the steak and not a salad, did the fact that she knew he was going to choose the steak remove the fact that he freely chose it? Again, of course not. It was already noted that after Dave chose it, it had been *determined* that he chose it freely. Just because Sally knew it, this did not impact in any way the fact that Dave freely chose it. Now, take the other side of that example, and suppose that Sally travels to the future and observes someone freely choosing to buy a red car rather than a white one. After this, she returns to her normal present time. When time passes and the person buys the red car, did the fact that Sally observed it in advance take away the person's free choice? No. Again, knowing something does not take away free choice. Just like the time traveler, God can know in advance what someone freely chooses to do.

The key insight here is that God not only knows what someone does; he also knows what someone freely chooses to do. So, if God knowing an event in advance determines that the event will definitely happen and become "determined," then God knowing in advance that a person freely chooses something "determines" that the person will definitely *freely choose* that thing. In other words, what Calvinists and some Arminians claim defeats the idea of libertarian free will (foreknowledge) actually makes libertarian free will determined to take place.

Although the early church almost certainly did not consider the idea of time travel, it was "emphatic in its denial that foreknowledge implied any predestination of events," with statements to this effect from Justin Martyr, Origen, and Jerome.[246] Furthermore, it appears that no one in the early church took the position that foreknowledge should be interpreted as predestination or anything similar.[247] Related to this, many early church fathers believed that predestination was dependent upon God's foreknowledge of people's faith.[248] This, of course, is the current Arminian position.[249]

Westblade, however, objects to this for two reasons. First, he claims that with infallible foreknowledge, God has the same reason or lack thereof to encourage people to believe as he does with unconditional predestination.[250] However, foreknowledge and predestination are very different. In the first case, those who ultimately choose to believe need to hear the message and be drawn, so missionaries or other means will need to be involved. In the second case, though, there is zero need for missionaries or anything else, since God has already ordained that they will believe through no action or anything of their own. He may choose to use missionaries or some other means, but they are not necessary, since the outcome is predetermined (and not simply known in advance). Second, he suggests that if God knows that what he does will not persuade people to believe, that he should experimentally try various other means until he hits upon the method that will work.[251]

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[246] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 236.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Westblade, "Divine Election," 70.

[249] Cottrell, "Conditional Election," 61; Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 83.

[250] Westblade, "Divine Election," 70.

[251] Ibid., 70-71.

Westblade's second suggestion does not work for two reasons. First, since God is omniscient, he does not need to experimentally try things; he simply knows what will and will not work. Second, God knows that "neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:30). In other words, the point is less about the message and more about the person. There is something innate in some people that they choose not to heed the prodding of the Holy Spirit, just as there is something innate in others that they choose to respond with belief. This difference in people's choices is the whole point of the Arminian position.

This completes the analysis of the term "foreknowledge." In summary, the evidence overwhelmingly supports that προγινώσκω only means to "foreknow." It does not mean to "forechoose" or to "foreordain." A sparsely supported argument exists for "know" to mean "have a relationship with," but even if this were true, it does not fit the context of "*fore*know" in Romans 8:29, since a human cannot have a relationship with someone before they even exist. In addition, libertarian free will can be completely consistent with absolute foreknowledge.

With that step completed, Romans 8:28–30 can be analyzed. Sometimes verse 28 gets ignored in the discussion, as the focus often lies on the "chain" from "foreknew" to "glorified." However, this verse is an important part of the discussion, because the concept of being "called" appears here as well as in the "chain," and the verses are closely connected. First, the two "those who" clauses in verse 28—"those who love God" and "those who are called according to his purpose"—refer to the same group.[252] Second, the fact that "if anyone loves God, he is known by God" (1 Cor. 8:3) connects this group with those who are foreknown. As a result, the people spoken of in verses 29–30 are the same as those spoken of in verse 28.[253]

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[252] Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 76.

[253] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 739; Sherwood, *Romans*, 834.

Next, the issue of group versus individual predestination needs to be addressed again, as it did in the Ephesians passage. Once again, opinions differ. Joseph Fitzmyer asserts that the view is corporate, and Paul "does not have in mind the predestination of individuals."[254] Sherwood agrees with the group concept, asseerting that God predestines the group of whomever it is that will believe. He does not choose the individuals, but lays out his plan for whomever meets his criteria of belief.[255] Judith Volf, on the other hand, insists that it speaks of the individual, since the "chain" shows that "the objects of God's saving activity are the same from start to finish."[256] However, it would seem that if God is focused on saving a group (such as those who believe) this object of his saving activity would be the same from start to finish as well. All the verbs in the passage are plural, which might give a slight nod to the group view, but as noted previously, since groups are made up of individuals, the distinction is not clear. It seems in this case, either view fits well with what Paul has written.

Calvinists and Arminians most strongly disagree on the issue of whether predestination is unconditional or conditional. In commenting on this passage, Schreiner acknowledges that προγινώσκω means "foreknow," but says it must be understood in a covenant framework such that God set his "electing and covenant love" on specific individuals, and "there is no basis, therefore, for the notion that human choice is ultimate in salvation. . . . God's decision . . . determines what human beings choose."[257] But, where in this passage does it say that God set his love on specific individuals or determines what people choose? Nowhere. While most of the

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[254] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans,* The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 522.

[255] Sherwood, *Romans*, 837.

[256] Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul & Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 13-14.

[257] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God,* 258.

passage speaks of what God does, there is a single phrase about what the people do—the people for whom God does these things, and that is that they love God. The passage does not indicate whether this was a voluntary choice on the people's part (libertarianism) or whether this was not their free choice, but rather something determined by God for a select group of individuals (compatibilism).[258] It simply does not directly address the issue.[259] This is the primary takeaway from this passage. Despite both sides claiming the passage supports their view, one could easily read this particular passage as consistent with either view.

While the preceding two passages are those cited most often in the debate, a number of other passages enter into the mix as well. The next set of verses to discuss will be other select verses that include a version of ἐκλέγομαι (chosen). This paper touched on Matthew 22:14 earlier, where it noted that there was something specific about those chosen (having a wedding garment) rather than having the same key characteristics as those not chosen. In addition to this observation, Michael Wilkins notes that "many" (πολλοὶ) "is a common Semitic universalizing expression, which is normally translated 'everyone' or 'all.'"[260] The other key takeaway from the broader parable associated with this verse is that while God calls and chooses, the people also do their own choosing.[261] Calling and response go hand in hand.[262] It should be noted that "those who turn out not to be 'chosen' have made their own choice in vv. 3–6."[263] They refused the call

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[258] See I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1969), 103.

[259] Sherwood, *Romans*, 839.

[260] Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 718.

[261] W. D. Davies, and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (1997, repr., New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 207.

[262] Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 632.

[263] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 827.

when the day came. Others may heed the call, but then attempt to come on their own terms, as in

verse 11. This passage shows that God's call can be "nullified" by people's choices.[264] This

parable clearly shows that God calls, but people can refuse his call, and that God chooses, but he

chooses based on people's choices. William Klein summarizes this well: "From the parable we

understand that people acquire 'chosenness' at the point of their decision to follow Christ."[265]

In Romans 9:10–13, two key issues emerge. First, some Calvinists claim that God chose

Jacob over Esau "apart from any basis in the personal circumstances of Jacob and Esau"[266] or

"entirely and utterly independent of anything to do with the brothers."[267] However, that is most

certainly *not* what the passage says. Paul only stated that it was not because of *works*; he said

nothing at all about whether or not it was due to anything else that God in his infinite knowledge

knew about Jacob or Esau.[268] Abasciano takes this further in looking at the broader context,

asserting that Paul defended here "God's right to name/regard those who believe in Christ rather

than ethnic/Law-keeping Jews as his covenant people/the seed of Abraham, a point confirmed by

the role of 9:10–13 and its main point of 9:11c–12b as a ground for 9:8."[269]

Second, scholars disagree on whether God's election in this passage pertains to salvation,

to service, or to something else. Ware argues that it cannot be for service because Romans 9:2

speaks of Paul's "great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart" for Israel, which must imply

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[264] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 892.

[265] Klein, *New Chosen People*, 48.

[266] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 580.

[267] Sherwood, *Romans*, 499.

[268] Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 562; Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 74.

[269] Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:10–18: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis*, paperback ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 52.

his concern over their salvation.[270] Why, though, if it were for salvation, would Paul have intense sorrow and continual anguish if he knew that God determined everyone's salvation in advance, based on absolutely nothing about them? If God determines absolutely everything, then Paul should sit back and relax, knowing that nothing he does matters and his kinsmen will either be saved or damned based on God's choice, since God will either make them believe or make them not believe. On the other hand, if eternal life is based on one choosing to believe or not, that could explain Paul's anguish. Romans 9:2 is not determining for 9:10-16, but related to all of 9-11, where the issue of faith is key. A Christian can have anguish if a human makes a wrong choice; why would a Christian have anguish over God making what must be a correct choice?

On the other hand, Cottrell argues that election in this passage must be for service because it is the only solution that appropriately addresses the issue of God's righteousness. God's promise to Israel has not failed (9:6a), because "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (9:6b). In other words, "there are two 'chosen peoples,' two Israels; but only remnant Israel has been chosen for salvation. Contrary to what the Jews commonly thought, ethnic Israel as a whole was *not* chosen for salvation but for service."[271]

Furthermore, the passage does not say that the older will be saved, and the younger will not, but states, "The older will *serve* the younger" (9:12, italics mine). Marston and Forster, however, take a much different approach to this passage and assert that the passage does not even speak about individuals, but about nations. They reason that the person Esau never served the person Jacob, but the nation of Edom did indeed serve the nation of Jacob (Israel). "Paul's

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[270] Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian," in *Perspectives on Election: 5 Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 9.

[271] Jack W. Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," in *Perspectives on Election: 5 Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 125.

point is that God made his choice of Israel when both nations were still in the womb, and neither

had done good or evil. The choice of the nation was not a reward for merit, but part of a God-

determined strategy."[272] This position is supported by the fact that the verse quoted in 9:12 is

from Genesis 25:23, in which God said to Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb, and two

peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall

serve the younger." Abasciano argues that while the individual Jacob and Esau factor into this

statement, "the primary reference is to the struggle for dominance between the nations that

would descend from these two brothers."[273] In addition, the verse cited in 9:13 is from Malachi

1, which was written roughly a millennium after the birth of Esau and Jacob, and the context

clearly supports the position that nations are in view. For example, it says, "I have loved Jacob

but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the

desert" (Mal. 1:2b–3), and immediately afterward speaks of Edom. Abasciano sees the Malachi

passage similarly to the Genesis passage, seeing it as primarily corporate.[274] Overall, this passage

in Romans does not specifically indicate one way or the other if there was anything inherent in

Esau or Jacob apart from works; if related to individuals, likely refers to service rather than to

salvation; and if related to nations, as seems likely, does not refer to salvation at all.

Two chapters later, but still part of the same overall message, Paul wrote of a remnant of

Israel chosen by grace and not based on works (Rom. 11:5–6). Westblade (a Calvinist) claims,

"Paul insists that the presence of a faithful, elect remnant has nothing to do with its human deeds

or distinctives and has solely to do with the mercy of God."[275] Yet again, a scholar claims

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[272] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 51.

[273] Abasciano, *Romans 9:10–18*, 6.

[274] Ibid., 18.

[275] Westblade, "Divine Election," 84.

something not in the text. Yes, Paul said that it has nothing to do with human deeds (works), but nowhere did he say that it has nothing to do with human distinctives. It can be by grace, and still have a basis in distinctives. Elsewhere, Paul equated those whom God called with those who love him (Rom. 9:28). This is the distinctive. It is still by grace, because it has not been earned. "Chosen by grace" in no way indicates that God chooses people apart from faith.[276] Paul clearly asserted, "By grace you have been saved through faith," indicating the close connection between grace and faith, and being clear that it is not based on *works*. "The remnant of the present time . . . is the . . . Jews who have believed in Christ."[277] This passage also simply does not indicate whether or not God bases his decision on something specific to people or not.

The commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:4 contains a helpful and generally consistent view of "the elect." First, the use of ἐκλογή is part of the "language of belonging."[278] Related to this, Paul most likely used this term to speak of believers as a whole rather than individuals.[279] This is because being "elect" presupposes that one is part of the community of believers.[280] Finally, "it appears to be the case that the term *elect* is always applied to those who have actually become members of God's people rather than to those whom God has predestined to salvation before they have actually received it."[281] This understanding may be helpful as other passages are analyzed.

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[276] Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, 104.

[277] Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 548.

[278] Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 77.

[279] Michael W. Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 48; Klein, *New Chosen People*, 156.

[280] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 31.

[281] I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology*: *Many Witnesses, One Gospel*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 241.

Second Peter 1:10 generates a significant amount of debate because it exhorts believers to "confirm your calling and election," which raises questions for those who hold that calling and election are one hundred percent on the part of God, with nothing required on the part of humans. Commentators generally agree that God provides everything that people need to live a godly life. Yet in order to attain final salvation, Christians are required to produce "the ethical fruits of Christian faith,"[282] must practice Christian virtues,[283] must believe,[284] or must engage in the correct moral response.[285] Peter said that engaging in these actions will keep them from falling. Since Peter was writing to Christians here,[286] "falling" means losing one's salvation, as supported by scholars from both the libertarian and the compatibilist positions.[287] This passage shows that Christians must take specific (libertarian) actions to ensure their salvation.

Revelation 17:14 speaks of those with Jesus when the kings make war on the Lamb, describing them as "called and chosen and faithful." The analysis of Matthew 22:14 showed earlier that the called and the chosen are not the same, and that the chosen comprise a subset of the called. This relationship suggests that the faithful are also not the same as those in the other categories, and potentially a subset of the chosen, if the same relationship holds from the first two. While not certain, this verse suggests that being chosen is not something final, but its

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[282] Davids, *The Letters*, 188.

[283] Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 305.

[284] Moo, *2 Peter, Jude,* 59.

[285] Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, 190; Duane F. Watson, "The Second Letter of Peter: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 772.

[286] Peter's audience is clearly Christians, as evidenced by his addressing them as "those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours" (1:1) and as "brothers" (1:10), and therefore the two uses of "you" in the last clause of this verse imply that it is Christians who would fall if they do not "practice these qualities."

[287] Davids, *The Letters*, 189; Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 305; Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, 191; Watson, "The Second Letter," 772; Green, *Jude & 2 Peter,* 202.

continuance depends on one being faithful. This conclusion finds support in John 6:70, where Jesus chose all twelve disciples, but Judas clearly was not faithful.

As noted earlier, God chose believers before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Jesus echoed this thought, noting that the kingdom was prepared for believers from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). Also, both Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 mention those whose names were not written in the book of life before the foundation of the world. All of these verses consistently support the fact that God chose people before creation, but none of them indicate one way or the other if there was anything inherent in the people that influenced his choice.[288]

Other verses and passages that relate to this topic include Acts 13:48, which contains the key phrase, "and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Some compatibilists see this verse as giving strong confirmation to their position. C. K. Barrett claims, "The present verse is as unqualified a statement of absolute predestination . . . as is found anywhere in the NT. Those believed who were appointed . . . to do so."[289] Unfortunately for Barrett, this verse not only does not support the compatibilist position, it also does not say what he claims it does. It most clearly does *not* say that people were appointed to believe, but instead clearly states that people were appointed to eternal life. This difference is key. Ware, however, is just as adamant, arguing, "Only an unconditional view of election can account for what Luke says here."[290] Yet this is clearly not the case. This verse simply states, "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Consider what this verse implies from both perspectives. From a libertarian

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[288] Psalm 69:28 suggests that the names of unbelievers were also written in the book of the living, which would seem to be inconsistent with the other verses if it is speaking of the same book. However, while one cannot be certain, it is generally agreed that the New Testament verses speak of a different book from the one in Psalm 69:28.

[289] C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14*, International Critical Commentary (1994, paperback ed., repr., London: T&T Clark, 2006), 658.

[290] Ware, "Divine Election," 9.

perspective, this would read, "All whom God foreknew would choose to believe, believed at this point." From a compatibilist perspective, this would read, "All whom God determined would believe, believed at this point." Both are valid interpretations. Both sides agree that these people did not believe prior to this point.

However, note the beginning of this verse: "And when the Gentiles heard this." While not conclusive, this appears to be the reason for them believing. Why else would Luke mention this, if it had no relevance to them believing? This is consistent with Paul's point when he asked, "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom. 10:14). This connection between believing, hearing, and preaching would fit with the libertarian position, since this could impact people's free will. It cannot fit with the compatibilist position, because the only determining factor is God's determining choice before the world began. As such, this verse is consistent with both positions, but actually supports the libertarian position a bit more due to this last factor.

Matthew 18:21–35, the parable of the unforgiving servant, does not directly speak to the current issue, but indirectly adds value to the discussion. God, in his mercy, freely grants forgiveness, yet it remains conditional on the response of the person forgiven. "This is the point of His parable. To deny this is to deny that the parable has meaning."[291] In other words, just because God freely gives something, this does not mean that he gives it unconditionally.

John 1:12–13 has resulted in some puzzling exegesis on the part of certain scholars. Robert Yarbrough claims, "Those who savingly received the Messiah for who he truly was

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[291] Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 39.

(1:12) did so because they were "born of God" (1:13)—and not vice versa."[292] Christensen asserts something similar: Some people "suppose that exercising faith and repentance causes one to be born again. But no one can cause his or her own birth (John 1:12–13). . . Believing in his name is preceded by the spiritual birthing that God alone achieves."[293] The problem with the views of these two scholars is that the verses they cite say the exact opposite of what they claim. "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (v. 12). It is those who first believed in him that he gave the right to become children of God. How then does one become the child of God? By being born of God (v. 13). So, first they believed, then they were given the right, then they were born of God. How could this possibly be interpreted in any sensical way to say that people were born of God first, and then after this were given the right to become children of God? Being born of God *is* becoming a child of God. Yes, the people themselves cannot be born again through their own efforts—being born of God is done solely by God. However, this passage shows that God does this for those who choose to believe in him.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul related that God chose his readers "as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." Instead of using the more typical word for chose (ἐκλέγω), he used the rarer αἱρέω here, which usually is not as strong, but rather simply indicates preference.[294] He also noted that they are saved both through an act of

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[292] Robert W. Yarbrough, "Divine Election in the Gospel of John," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 49.

[293] Christensen, *Free Will*, 184-85.

[294] Marston and Forster, *God's Strategy*, 158.

God (sanctification) and through an act of the person (belief in the truth). Like some of the other verses, this verse could support either the compatibilist or libertarian position.

In writing to Timothy about certain individuals who have swerved from the truth, Paul tells him, "'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19), loosely quoting from the Old Testament. Regarding this verse, Thomas Schreiner contends, "God knows and ordains from the beginning who belongs to him and who does not."[295] Clearly, this verse does *not* say anything about God ordaining people from the beginning, so it cannot be used in defense of that concept. Schreiner further asserts, "Paul immediately adds that those who belong to the Lord demonstrate that they belong to him by their good works."[296] However, yet again, the verse does not say this. "Depart" is an imperative in both the English and the Greek, and is an exhortation to Christians to "depart from iniquity." This differs immensely from being a statement that demonstrates belonging by good works. This verse simply shows that God knows who are his, and such people should refrain from sinful behavior. Like other passages, it simply does not address whether or not God predestines to eternal life conditionally.

Titus 2:11 matters to the discussion because salvation made available to all people would be inconsistent with the compatibilist position that it is only available to those whom God predestines to believe, whereas it would be consistent with the libertarian position of prevenient grace. In this verse, Paul said, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people." While most Bible versions translate it this way (e.g., ESV, NASB, NET, NIV,

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[295] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 300.

[296] Ibid.

NRSVUE), Schreiner and a handful of others translate it as "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."[297]

William Mounce, however, rejects such a translation. He points out that "the anarthrous σωτήριος must be in the predicate," and that "σωτήριος followed by the dative is a classical construction meaning 'to bring deliverance.'"[298] His conclusion that this means that God has "made deliverance available for all people"[299] aligns with other commentators' views that it means "salvation is intended for all people,"[300] "salvation is universally offered to all without exception,"[301] "God's grace brings salvation to *all* people for them to *accept*,"[302] and this is consistent with "Paul's emphasis on the universality of access to God's grace throughout his letters."[303]

The other attempt to avoid the universality of the offer is to accept the above translation, but then claim that "all" means "all kinds" of people here, as has been claimed for other verses as noted earlier. George Knight suggests that this could be the case because it shows that even slaves (who were mentioned just prior to this verse) are included in this offer.[304] That seems to be a stretch, however, since nothing indicates that slaves would not have been included. In mentioning slaves just prior to this, Paul treats them no differently than the other categories of

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[297] Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach," 241.

[298] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 422.

[299] Ibid.

[300] Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 268.

[301] Thomas D. Lea, and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 310.

[302] Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 338.

[303] Towner, *The Letters*, 746.

[304] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 319.

older men, older women, young women, and younger men. In addition, Paul was quite clear in another letter from years earlier, when he wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Both Towner and Liefeld agree that "all" means "all," and not "all kinds."[305] The best interpretation of this verse seems to be one that more closely aligns to the libertarian view rather than the compatibilist view.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined numerous Bible passages held up by one side or the other in support of its view. It showed that several of these passages do not clearly support either side, but could legitimately be read either way with equal ease. Several other passages can be legitimately read either way as well, but offer somewhat stronger support for one position or the other. On the issue of free will, passages from both the Old and the New Testament contain exhortations for people to believe, and do so in such a way that libertarian free will is the natural reading. On the issue of God desiring all people to be saved, a few verses state this unequivocally, while others strongly imply this. The weight of the biblical evidence on this issue clearly sides with the libertarian position. Finally, on the issue of predestination, an in-depth analysis of the key passages and of key words from these passages showed that none of the key passages affirm that predestination is unconditional. If anything, the evidence shows that there should be a tendency to interpret God basing his choice on something specific about those he chose. The analysis also showed that libertarian free will can be entirely consistent with God's complete foreknowledge.

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[305] Towner, *The Letters*, 746; Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 338.

Overall, the evidence shows that (1) the plain reading of numerous Bible passages portrays people as having libertarian free will; (2) the fact that God *desires* that all are saved strongly favors libertarian free will, since this explains why God does not actually save all; and (3) the passages that speak of predestination slightly favor it being conditional on people choosing to believe. Putting all of these together, while the evidence does not rule out the possibility of the compatibilist position, it gives strong support for the libertarian position. This demonstration that humans have libertarian free will is foundational to the argument that sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer. Only with true free will do humans have a synergistic role in their sanctification and salvation.

Chapter Five: Believers May Apostatize, so Must Persevere

With the issue of free will addressed, this dissertation will now turn to the issue of whether or not believers can apostatize. If apostasy is impossible, then what believers set their minds on becomes irrelevant to their ultimate salvation, since their salvation would be guaranteed. On the other hand, the possibility of apostasy makes one's mindset key, as will be shown in the next chapter. Similar to the broader issue of free will, multiple understandings about the possibility of apostasy exist. As noted in Chapter One, this paper will use the terms "mutable" and "immutable" to describe the position of those who believe that Christians can apostatize and those who believe Christians cannot apostatize, respectively. The two main camps on this issue come to opposite conclusions. The immutable view (often espoused by Calvinists) argues for eternal security.[306] God will complete what he has started and not allow one to fall from the faith. Against this, the mutable view (held by many Arminians) argues that true believers can apostatize. This chapter will start with an examination of the views of these camps, including some of the differences within each of them. The premise of this chapter is that believers must continue to choose to believe until the end or they will not be saved. Said another way, the choice to trust in Jesus Christ as one's Savior is generally open to humans their entire lives, and they have the ability to change their choice over time in either direction.

After this, the chapter will explore several passages that suggest that true believers can apostatize. Most of the relevant passages relate to humans falling from the faith, but a few relate to a believer who has fallen and returns. Numerous passages suggest that believers can fall from the faith, though some make this point more clearly than others, and none escape the debate

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[306] While Calvinists often prefer the phrase "perseverance of the saints," that term can be confusing, since perseverance is a key concept of both camps.

entirely. Related to this, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of perseverance. One may not consciously make a decision to reject God, but may fall away from God by not continuing to make him the priority in one's life. This section will examine several passages that deal with the issue of perseverance.

This chapter will then turn to the opposite side of the debate and investigate several passages that many scholars assert support the idea of the eternal security of the believer. Supporters of this position especially look to the Gospel of John, but appeal to passages from across the New Testament. One of the key areas to understand in this debate centers around the issue of while God protects believers from outside harm, might he at the same time allow believers to leave him of their own accord?

Overall, multiple passages show that a believer can fall away from the faith and/or that perseverance to the end is critical, and also a number of passages are claimed to support the eternal security of the believer. As in the previous chapter, this chapter will first examine all of these passages on their own, looking specifically at what the passage says and ignoring what is not directly included. These passages will then be categorized relative to how strongly they support one position or the other, or perhaps upon examination do not really support either position. This analysis will show that the case for the possibility of apostasy (mutability) is stronger than that for eternal security (immutability). The implications of this for one's mindset will be discussed in the following chapter.

Major Views on Apostasy Versus the Security of the Believer

A broad spectrum of views exists, so it is an oversimplification to speak of immutable versus mutable views of the security of the believer, but this presents the simplest categorization. At one end of the immutable view is what may be called the "classical Calvinist" position, which

derives directly from the Calvinist position on predestination and free will. Because God unconditionally elects people to salvation, "necessary perseverance follows. Since believers did nothing to get into a state of grace, they can do nothing to get out."[307] A second immutable view starts with the libertarian (Arminian) premise that God conditionally elects people to salvation, but then takes on the Calvinist view of eternal security.[308] A key proponent of this position, Norman Geisler, calls this moderate Calvinism, though many would argue that it is better described as moderate Arminianism. Those who hold to this position base their stance on various Scripture passages which will be explored later in this chapter.

The other major view, mutability, takes the position that it is possible for Christians to apostatize. Within this camp, a "Reformed Arminian" position maintains that Christians have libertarian free will and can apostatize, though they hold that this can happen only through an overt act of turning from the faith and also that once this happens, it cannot be reversed.[309] What has been dubbed a "Wesleyan Arminian" position also adheres to the concept of libertarian free will, but in this view, believers can apostatize either through unbelief or through unconfessed sin. In addition, those who have apostatized may return to God and be saved through repentance and renewed faith.[310]

Norman Geisler, who advocates for what he calls the moderate Calvinist position, contends that the classical Calvinist position gives security without assurance, and the Arminian

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[307] Matthew J. Pinson, "Introduction," in *Four Views on Eternal Security,* ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 11.

[308] Ibid., 13.

[309] Ibid., 15-16.

[310] Ibid., 19.

positions give assurance without security, whereas his position gives both.[311] He argues that in the classical Calvinist regime, people do not know whether or not they are truly Christians until the end, so they do not have assurance. In the Arminian regime, believers can have current assurance since they are true believers, but cannot have permanent security (or even permanent assurance), since they could apostatize. His moderate Calvinist approach, he argues, gives people both security and assurance, since once they have faith, they are saved, even if they fall from the faith later.

While this chapter will address these views, it will first address the issue of whether or not someone is a "true" Christian. Grudem, who falls in the classic Calvinist camp, says, "The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again."[312] He uses the word "truly" twice in the sentence to delineate "true" Christians from false "professing" Christians. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* calls this issue out as well, noting that the Calvinist position concedes that "perseverance does not apply to all who profess faith, only to those given true faith. Those who fall away were never in grace. This explanation is almost circular: the assurance of perseverance belongs only to those who show their sincerity by persevering."[313] The reason many Calvinists call this out is because several passages appear to clearly call for an Arminian position, and one can get around this only by claiming that those spoken of were not truly

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[311] Pinson, "Introduction," 13-14.

[312] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 970.

[313] Reginald E. O. White, "Perseverance," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 907-909. Note that multiple views on this issue exist within Calvinism, and some Calvinists may prefer replacing the word "sincerity" with "election" and others with "regeneration" to better reflect their particular positions.

Christians. This chapter will examine these passages closely to see which position most accurately reflects what the Bible actually says. Arminians hold a seemingly similar position, but with a crucial difference: perseverance determines who will be saved, not who are true Christians. These two positions should not be confused.

Before moving on to look at the specific passages under debate, this section will briefly consider another claim made by strict Calvinists. Since they must acknowledge the numerous "warning passages" in Scripture, they claim, "The warning passages are *means* which God uses in our life to accomplish His purpose of grace."[314] In other words, since in their view, God has determined everything in advance, these passages do not actually imply that a Christian *could* fall from grace, but that reading these passages is what keeps Christians from falling away from the faith. As this chapter explores these passages, consider whether or not (a) this is the natural reading of the passages, and (b) if a Christian (under the Calvinist view) knows for certain that they cannot fall from the faith, if such verses would be likely to impact their behavior. In other words, since behavioral change cannot impact what has been absolutely determined to take place, do such verses have any true incentive to make people change their behavior?

One Can Change Their Choice Over Time

This section will first explore Bible passages that have been taken to support the position that believers can fall from the faith. It will look at the passages in the order in which they appear in the Bible. After this, it will examine passages that go even further and seem to support the position that those who have fallen from the faith can return and become believers again.

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[314] John MacArthur, "Perseverance of the Saints," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 11.

Matthew 24, in which Jesus spoke of the end of the age, contains multiple references that seem to support the position that believers can fall from the faith. First, Jesus spoke of people being led astray in verses 4, 5, 11, and 24. The first of these verses clearly refers to believers, since Jesus here warned his disciples not to be led astray. In fact, this warning comprises the opening words of his answer to the disciples' question of when the end will come and what the signs of it will be, and so clearly holds a level of importance. The second and third of these verses are not warnings, but factual statements of what will actually happen, in which Jesus said that people coming in his name and false prophets will lead many astray. The fourth verse (24:24) points out that the signs and wonders performed by the false prophets and false Christs will be great enough "to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."

The issue with this, thus, becomes whether "led astray" equates with "leaving the faith" or not. BDAG gives the primary definition for the underlying Greek word, πλανάω, as "to cause to go astray from a specific way," and lists the usages in Matthew 24 under the second subset of this definition, "mislead, deceive."[315] Osborne affirms this word "is used often in this discourse (24:4, 5, 11, 24) to signify false teachers who lead others astray into apostasy."[316]

Jesus also used a second key phrase in this discourse, saying, "many will fall away" (24:10). Scholars disagree over the meaning of the underlying Greek word, σκανδαλίζω, in this verse. BDAG includes this verse in a category that refers to "people who have been led astray, but who have not altogether fallen away from the faith."[317] Thayer does not include BDAG's

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[315] BDAG, s.v. "πλανάω."

[316] Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 873.

[317] BDAG, s.v. "σκανδαλίζω."

final qualification, and simply defines the passive (which it is here) as "to fall away."[318] TDNT

contains more specifics, and comes to a different conclusion from BDAG, asserting that the noun

is used in reference to one's relation to God and denotes "the cause of both transgression and

destruction . . ., for a fall in faith is a fall in the absolute sense. The force of the verb σκανδαλίζω

is even stronger," as it denotes "the actual taking place of the fall."[319] Similarly, EDNT notes that

the "pre-Christian verb . . . refers to the offense that results in the loss of salvation," and in the

New Testament, the passive form most often means to "fall away from faith." It includes

Matthew 24:10 under this definition.[320] Many commentators agree, arguing that its usage here

"seems to have its most serious sense, of a fall which is not just a temporary setback but involves

the abandonment of God's way and the loss of salvation;"[321] it refers to "(fallen-away) fellow

Christians who will be the instrument of betrayal to hostile authorities;"[322] "many will turn away

from the faith and . . . will become enemies of Jesus and turn against his followers, their former

fellow disciples;"[323] and "there will be a great 'falling away' or apostasy from the faith."[324]

Finally, Jesus said, "And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be

saved" (24:22). While most commentators argue that "saved" in this context refers to being

saved physically, at least one commentator argues that it refers to spiritual salvation.[325]

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[318] *Thayer*, s.v. "σκανδαλίζω."

[319] Gustav Stählin, "σκάνδαλον,σκανδαλίζω," TDNT 7:339-358.

[320] Heinz Giesen, "σκανδαλίζω," EDNT 3:248.

[321] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 906.

[322] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 965. Note that the material in the quotation, including the parenthetical expression, is directly quoted from this source.

[323] Wilkins, *Matthew,* 775.

[324] Osborne, *Matthew,* 875.

[325] David L. Turner, *Matthew,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 578.

Unfortunately, none of the commentaries reviewed gives an explanation for their translation. In an attempt to come to a conclusion on this, two items will be considered. First, Jesus used the word "saved" (and the Greek word behind, it, σῴζω) in 24:13 in a salvific sense (see the analysis of this verse in the following section on perseverance). Might this imply that it has a salvific sense in 24:22 as well? Perhaps, but nothing precludes Jesus from using it in two different senses within the same discourse. Second, and most importantly, one needs to consider the broader context of Jesus' message. Of the seventeen preceding verses of the discourse, only four clearly mention physical danger. The first two of these (24:6–7) do not directly relate to the audience's safety, since they will "hear of" wars and rumors of wars, and there will be famines and earthquakes "in various places." The third verse (24:9) most clearly directly affects the audience. However, this verse says nothing about fleeing physical danger, but rather that they *will* face tribulation and be put to death. The fourth verse (24:21) states that the worst tribulation in the history of the world will take place. However, such tribulation will not only be physical, but will also be spiritual.

In fact, seven of the seventeen preceding verses clearly speak of the spiritual (24:4–5; 10–14), as do the five immediately following verses (24:23–27), which speak of false Christs, false prophets, and the deception of potentially even the elect. The primary message that Jesus gave here about the signs of the end is that Christians should be on their guard because there will be intense spiritual pressure to go astray and fall from the faith.

Jesus noted both that if the days had not been cut short, no human would be saved, and that the days were cut short for the sake of the elect. Given that just prior to this, Jesus warned that some Christians would face tribulation and be put to death, 24:22 cannot mean that all the elect will be physically saved. It could perhaps mean some of the elect will be physically saved

(since if no humans at all were saved, then none of the elect would be saved), but it could also mean that the spiritual temptation will be so great at this time that no human would be spiritually saved. If the elect consists of those who will persevere until the end, cutting short the days may be what keeps this group elect. In summary, the analysis of these three items together suggests that this passage does not provide an ironclad case for the possibility of apostasy, but a fair case may be made that it does.

Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower, as given in Mark 4:13–20 and especially Luke 8:11–15, provides a much stronger level of support for the possibility of apostasy. While the second example in the parable, where the seed falls on rocky ground, contains the primary case for apostasy, the first and fourth examples add further support.[326] In the first example, the devil takes away the word "so that they may not believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). The key takeaway from this first example for the purposes of this section is that the belief spoken of here (that was prevented) would have resulted in salvation and if one does not believe, that person will not be saved.

The second example clearly describes those who "believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away" (Luke 8:13). Commentators generally agree that to "fall away" here means "desertion from the faith"[327] or apostasy.[328] Darrell Bock effectively concurs, saying that it means here "to fall away from God's Word and to reach the point where faith is no longer

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[326] While those spoken of in the third example also are apostates, that example only indicates that they "hear" and that their fruit does not mature, but does not directly address their belief (like the first and second examples) or their holding the word fast (like the fourth), and so does not provide as clear as evidence as the others. Further, the third example is not needed to prove the point made from the other examples.

[327] Strauss, *Mark,* 187.

[328] Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 222; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX,* The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2009), 712; John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 385-86; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 205-06.

present."[329] However, he then immediately suggests, "Faith that appears a short time is not faith,

since other New Testament texts suggest that genuine faith never lets go of Jesus (John 15:1–6;

Col. 1:21–23; 2 John 9)."[330] Geisler takes a similar position, claiming that this verse does not

refer to "saving belief" but to "nominal (non-saving) belief."[331]

However, the three passages Bock references most certainly do not suggest that "genuine

faith never lets go of Jesus." His first reference will be discussed once the analysis of this current

passage is complete, his second reference will be discussed in the next section (on perseverance),

and his third reference never once mentions faith, let alone delineates between genuine and false

faith. Furthermore, as noted above, the immediately preceding verse spoke of faith connected

with salvation, so a different meaning of the word in such close proximity would need something

clear in the context to suggest something different. No such thing exists, and the plain reading of

the text suggests the meaning remains the same. Rather, as Joel Green says, "One cannot escape

the fact that Jesus focuses so heavily on the possibility of short-term faith."[332] The issue of

perseverance will be explored more fully in the next section, but given its clear connection with

the idea of faith that does not endure, it is worth noting that the fourth example from this parable

emphasizes that those represented by the good soil "hold fast" the word, which suggests "a

sustained process that will lay the groundwork for a foundation that will withstand all possible

assaults on faith."[333] Furthermore, these people "bear fruit with patience," where the word

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[329] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 231.

[330] Ibid., 231.

[331] Norman L. Geisler, "A Moderate Calvinist View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security,* ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 71.

[332] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 329.

[333] David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 3 ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 345.

underlying "patience" is ὑπομονή, which means "steadfastness, endurance, perseverance," and should be seen as the contrast to those in the second example who only believe for a short time.[334]

This passage strongly supports the view that one can apostatize from the faith. Scholars like Bock and Geisler try to get around this by claiming that "faith" does not really mean "faith" in some instances or that there are different kinds of faith. However, despite their best attempts, they do not provide compelling biblical support for their views. To further show this, Bock's first biblical passage that he claims for support will be examined next.

Regarding Bock's claim, the first thing to note about John 15:1–6 is that, like 2 John 9, it does not mention faith at all, let alone distinguish between genuine and non-genuine faith. Instead, it discusses those who abide versus those who do not. While faith is certainly necessary for abiding, one should note that in 15:2 Jesus said, "Every branch *in me* that does not bear fruit he takes away" (italics mine). These branches are already in Christ and then are taken away. Paul, who used this phrase frequently, explained, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). John also used the phrase similarly. For example, he stated, "By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:5–6). Clearly, those "in Christ" are believers.[335] It is believers, then, who do not bear fruit who are taken away. Several scholars concur, saying that the unfruitful branches refer to apostate

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[334] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 33.

[335] See also John 14:20; 16:33.

Christians;[336] this verse refers to those who were Christians but are now dead;[337] "John makes apostasy a real danger that can indeed occur;"[338] and it is hard to imagine Jesus saying, "I am the vine, and all who are professing members of my Church and joined to the company of my people, though not necessarily joined to Me, are the branches in Me."[339]

On the other hand, Michaels says, "Whether they were once alive and truly united to the Vine is left unexplored, but the very term 'life eternal,' so characteristic of this Gospel, renders it doubtful."[340] This explanation fails on three accounts. First, as noted above, the branches that are taken away and burned are branches that were in Christ. If Jesus is the vine, and the branches were in the vine, as Jesus clearly stated in 15:1–2, then the issue of them being "truly united to the Vine" is not left unexplored, but rather explicitly affirmed. Second, "only what has first been alive can become withered."[341] Third, Jesus' gift of "life eternal" is contingent upon the recipients believing in him, which will be explored further later in this chapter.

Robert Mounce also objects to using this passage to support the possibility of apostasy, saying, "Theological questions of this magnitude, however, must never be decided on the basis of secondary elements in an allegory. The nature and extent of eternal punishment should be determined by less figurative passages found elsewhere in Scripture."[342] However, what is his

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[336] Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 473.

[337] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 28.

[338] Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 254.

[339] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 45.

[340] J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 807.

[341] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 46.

[342] Robert H. Mounce, "John," in *Luke – Acts*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2007), 575.

rationale for saying that these are secondary elements? This short passage has (1) branches taken away that do not bear fruit (v. 2); (2) branches cannot bear fruit unless in the vine (v. 4); (3) Jesus saying, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5); and (4) those not in Christ are thrown away and burned (v. 6). These are four mentions of those who do not abide in Jesus in the six verses of the passage, and in two of the four mentions, being thrown away is stated. This is, in fact, *the* primary message of this passage: One must abide in Jesus or else he or she does not have life and will be thrown away and burned. It is one or the other. What other more primary message is there here?[343]

The debate over 1 Corinthians 9:27 centers on whether Paul's comment about potentially being disqualified relates to his salvation or something else. Anthony Thiselton says that it does not refer to salvation, but to "failures of an unspecified nature."[344] Blomberg agrees, and suggests that it likely refers to "testing in the context of Judgment Day" as noted earlier in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.[345] This is not compelling for two reasons. First, in this earlier case, one's *work* is being tested ($\delta o\kappa\iota\mu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$), and Paul notes that if the work does not meet the test, it will be burned up, though *the person will still be saved*. Yet in the current verse, it is Paul himself (not any of his works) who could be found not to pass the test ($\dot{\alpha}\delta\acute{o}\kappa\iota\mu o\varsigma$), and by analogy, Paul would be destroyed and not saved. (See further below on the meaning of $\dot{\alpha}\delta\acute{o}\kappa\iota\mu o\varsigma$.) Second, while a passage six chapters earlier could certainly be related to this issue, more immediate

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[343] While John's other uses of abiding in Christ are not as explicit as in John 15, they are consistent with the idea of those abiding in Christ being Christians (John 6:56 and several verses in 1 John 2–4). In addition, on more than one occasion, John discussed the concept of those who no longer abide: those who believed, but to whom Jesus did not entrust himself (John 2:23–25); disciples who left Jesus (John 6:60–71); and people who were with the church but not *of* the church (1 John 2:18–19).

[344] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 717.

[345] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 185.

context should take precedence over something more distant. In the current context, Paul used the entire chapter to build up to the point of the importance of the gospel and salvation (v. 22–23)—not of some unspecified rewards related to salvation.[346]

Paul then followed this up with an exhortation to achieve this salvation,[347] and he did this in three parts. First, he directly exhorted them to behave in such a way as to obtain it, using "you" (v. 24). Then, he emphasized the importance of self-control in this endeavor and noted the eternal implications, using "we" (v. 25). Finally, he reiterated how they should behave, giving his own behavior as an example, using "I" (vv. 26–27a).

As a postscript, Paul noted that he must practice what he preaches, or he himself will be disqualified (ἀδόκιμος). While BDAG and EDNT do not address this issue, but rather define the term generically, Thayer says that ἀδόκιμος in this verse means "reprobate."[348] TDNT goes even further, saying that in general in the New Testament, this word group refers to attestation in the test for salvation or judgment, and in this particular verse reflects Paul's concern regarding "the testing of assured salvation in the concrete situation of daily life."[349] The preponderance of the evidence shows that Paul here worked to make certain that he would not face the real possibility of falling from the faith.

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[346] Paul used the word "gospel" eight times in this passage, which, of course, Paul defined as the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

[347] There is nothing in the immediate context to suggest that Paul abruptly changed the topic from salvation itself to rewards associated with salvation.

[348] *Thayer*, s.v. "ἀδόκιμος."

[349] Walter Grundmann, "δόκιμος," TDNT 2:255-260.

Many commentators agree, saying it refers to one's "destruction;"[350] "The immortal crown to be won (9:25) is not a good job-approval rating as an apostle, but salvation;"[351] The fear is not obtaining "the eschatological prize;"[352] Paul disciplined himself so that he should not "become a reprobate, one rejected;"[353] and "The immediate context establishes the fact that Paul's fear was the possibility of losing, not opportunities or rewards for service, but the salvation of his own soul."[354]

In Galatians 4:8–9, Paul addressed those who know God and are known by God, and asked how they can turn back to that in which they were enslaved prior to knowing God. Two words stand out as key to appropriately interpreting this verse. First, as used in this passage, to know and be known by God means these people are Christians. Bruce says, "There is no real distinction between being known by God and being chosen by him."[355] Moo and Frank Matera agree that this means these people are part of the elect.[356] Second, to turn back (ἐπιστρέφω) "is a technical term for either religious conversion or religious apostasy. Its use here in the present tense indicates that the Galatians' action of apostatizing was then in progress."[357] Turning back

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[350] Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 414.

[351] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 444.

[352] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 485.

[353] Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 169.

[354] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 37.

[355] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 202.

[356] Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 275-76; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2007), 157.

[357] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 180.

would be to repudiate the freedom that Christ had given them,[358] and they could only do so by their own decision to deliberately submit to them again, since the στοιχεῖα no longer have the power to make them submit.[359] These verses seem to clearly show that Christians may choose to apostatize from their faith and voluntarily turn back to their former ways. If one objects that these people were not true Christians, they need to reconcile not only their knowing and being known by God, but also the fact that Paul addressed his audience as "brothers" (1:11; 3:15); he asked them if they received the Spirit by "works of the law or by hearing with faith" (3:2); and he told them, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (3:26). These citations make it difficult to argue that these people were not true Christians.

In Galatians 5:1, continuing the same theme, Paul exhorted his readers not to "submit again to a yoke of slavery." While the freedom here most likely refers to submission to the Torah, Paul may also have had in mind submission to the powers of the old age from the passage just discussed.[360] Longenecker notes that in this verse, Paul concisely included both the indicative and the imperative of Christian salvation.[361] Note also that both "stand firm" (στήκετε) and "submit" (ἐνέχεσθε) are in the present tense, indicating the ongoing or habitual need to do these things.[362] While one could argue that Paul was simply urging progress in sanctification here, the actual wording seems to better support the view that he was exhorting his readers to not turn away from their faith and turn back to their pre-Christian state.

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[358] David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 365.

[359] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 204.

[360] Moo, *Galatians*, 320.

[361] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 225.

[362] DeSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 410.

Paul further addressed this theme in Galatians 5:4, where he told his readers that they "are severed from Christ" and that they "have fallen away from grace." Scholars debate the use of the aorist verbs here, with some seeing these as past-tense actions that have already occurred,[363] while more see the aorist used in a gnomic sense to get the readers' attention. I.e., *if* you do this, you will be severed and will have fallen away.[364] However, for the purposes of the present discussion, this distinction is irrelevant, since in either case, it shows the possibility of apostasy. Yet if one takes it as past tense, it shows a nice progression across these three Galatians passages, with in the first, Paul questioning how they could do this, in the second, Paul exhorting them not to do it, and in the third, Paul noting that at least some of them have already done it. Those who believe that Christians cannot apostatize take this verse in the gnomic sense, yet at the same time see this as something that is only theoretically possible rather than actually possible. However, warning someone of something that cannot possibly happen begs the question of how such a warning would actually serve as a deterrent for them.

Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 3:5, Paul wrote that he feared that the tempter may have made his labor in vain. There should be no illusion that those to whom he wrote were not Christians. Here he clearly wrote to the church (1:1), called them brothers (1:4; 2:1, 9, 14) and believers (2:13), and spoke of their faith (1:3, 9). Further, the fact that "the Tempter has targeted them means that they are indeed the people of God."[365]

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[363] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 228.

[364] DeSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 420; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 314-15; Moo, *Galatians*, 325-26; Volf, *Paul & Perseverance*, 214; Scot McKnight, *Galatians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 250.

[365] Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 217.

Furthermore, Abraham Malherbe writes, "The aorist *epeirasen* ('had tempted') indicates that at the time he sent Timothy, Paul had feared that the Tempter (cf. Matt. 4:3) had already tempted them, and the subjunctive *genētai* ('had been') implies his uncertainty about the outcome of the temptation."[366] "Fear results from what might really happen, not from what cannot happen and is only hypothetically possible."[367] Several commentators assert that Paul feared that the Thessalonians had apostatized, saying that Paul genuinely feared for his converts' faith because the danger was real;[368] the verb used implies temptation that overthrew the Thessalonians' faith;[369] and the fear was that the Thessalonians had "renounced their Christian beliefs and way of life."[370] While one might suggest that instead Paul may have only feared that the Thessalonians were losing ground in their process of sanctification, the term εἰς κενὸν means something much stronger, with BDAG's meaning of "without purpose or result,"[371] TDNT saying, "There is a suggestion of futility,"[372] and EDNT saying, "It means *in vain* in the sense of *unsuccessful*, *ineffectual*, or *powerless*."[373] Such definitions support that this verse seems to show that true believers can apostatize, as Paul's real fears strongly suggest.

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[366] Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians,* The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 195.

[367] Gary S. Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 13, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 139.

[368] Holmes, *1 & 2 Thessalonians,* 104-05.

[369] F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 63.

[370] Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 132.

[371] BDAG, s.v. "κενός."

[372] Albrecht Oepke, "κενός," etc., TDNT 3:659-62.

[373] Michael Lattke, "κενός," EDNT 2:281-82.

Paul was even more direct in 1 Timothy 4:1, saying, "Some will depart from the faith."

Commentators generally agree that ἀφίστημι (depart from) means to apostatize here,[374] with

some going further by noting that this is not a careless act, but a deliberate abandonment or

renunciation,[375] a rejection of "the sum total of the Christian way,"[376] or "active rebellion against

God."[377] Multiple lexicons and dictionaries leave it somewhat vague, with EDNT's general

definition being "separate, fall away" and specific to this verse being "fall away;"[378] BDAG's

general definition is "to distance oneself from some person or thing, go away, withdraw," and for

this verse adds "fall away, become a backslider;"[379] and Thayer has, "*to withdraw one's self*

from."[380] However, while "fall away" and "backslider" could be interpreted to possibly mean

something other than full apostasy, to "separate," "distance oneself from," and "withdraw one's

self from" suggest full apostasy. TDNT, in line with this latter view, is explicit, saying,

"According to 1 Timothy 4:1 apostasy implies capitulation to the false beliefs of the heretics."[381]

Geisler dissents from this view by focusing on the phrase "the faith" and arguing that this

phrase

> is used by Paul in the Pastoral Letters (see 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:18; Titus 1:13) and
> elsewhere (1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 2:7); as well as in Acts (see Acts 6:7;
> 13:8; 14:22), as equivalent to 'the Christian faith' with all its essential doctrines (1 Tim.

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[374] Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 538; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 188.

[375] Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 149.

[376] Towner, *The Letters*, 289.

[377] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 235.

[378] EDNT 1:183.

[379] BDAG, s.v. "ἀφίστημι."

[380] Thayer, s.v. "ἀφίστημι."

[381] Heinrich Schlier, "ἀφίστημι," etc., TDNT 1:512-13.

3:9; 4:6) and ethics (1 Tim. 6:10). One may give mental assent to "*the* faith" without really making it *one's own personal* faith.[382]

This rationale fails for two reasons. First, multiple New Testament examples exist in which "the faith" clearly refers to one's own personal faith. For example, this term was used in Acts 3:16, where the lame man was healed by "the faith that is through Jesus" – clearly personal faith, not mental assent to doctrines. It was also used regarding "the faith" of Abraham in Romans 4:12, 16, which is clearly personal faith, and when Paul exhorted the Romans, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God" (Rom. 14:22), which is also personal faith and not mental assent.

Second, the very verses cited by Geisler do not hold up to scrutiny as support for his position. While the concept of the Christian faith along with its doctrines and ethics may be a part of what is meant in these verses, the verses also imply a true, personal faith, not just mental assent. For example, when Paul told Timothy that deacons "must hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9), he clearly did not mean that they should give mental assent to doctrines with no personal faith. Similarly, in 2 Timothy 2:18, the issue cannot be upsetting people's mental assent to Christian doctrines, but rather their personal faith.

Turning to Geisler's next set of verses, in 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul exhorted his readers to "stand firm in the faith." How could Paul possibly have meant to stand firm in your impersonal mental assent here to doctrines here? Finally, from his third set of verses, in Acts 6:7, Luke said, "A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Is it fair to claim that Luke celebrated people giving mental assent to doctrines here, or did he celebrate the fact that many of the priests had personal faith? In all of these verses, while a connotation of the broader Christian

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[382] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 91.

faith and its doctrines may be present, in every case true, personal faith is understood to be present as well. As such, the interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:1 is best understood as dealing with apostasy.

In 1 Timothy 5:9–15, Paul wrote about widows, and noted that some have "abandoned their former faith" (5:12) and some have "strayed after Satan" (5:15). Lea and Griffin argue that this does not necessarily mean apostasy,[383] but Shank, Marshall, and Towner all insist that it does refer to apostasy.[384] First Timothy 6:9–10 is straightforward, with Paul noting people being plunged into ruin and destruction, and people who have wandered from the faith. The Greek words behind "ruin" and "destruction" are standard terms for "the eternal destruction of the wicked.[385] People wandering from the faith refers to apostasy.[386]

While most of the debate around the next passage, 2 Timothy 2:10–13, centers on the four "if" statements in 11–13, one should not ignore verse 10, since that verse suggests that salvation is not certain even for the elect, because Paul was taking action (enduring everything) *that they may obtain salvation*. Verse 12a is also important because it shows the need for endurance, but the bulk of the debate revolves around 12b and 13a. Verse 12b is clear that "if we deny him, he also will deny us." Some commentators point out that this denial is not temporary, like that of Peter, but final,[387] and some take it further, noting that it "carries fearful eternal

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[383] Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 153.

[384] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 176; Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 605; Towner, *The Letters*, 358.

[385] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 345.

[386] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 176; Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 651; Towner, *The Letters*, 403.

[387] Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 210; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 406.

consequences,"[388] or that it "speaks of apostasy in its fullest sense."[389] Mounce explains, "The

implied warning in line 2 is the primary thrust of line 3. If believers do not endure and do

apostatize, then Christ will claim before the judgment seat that he never knew them."[390]

Commentators also generally agree that these verses refer to Christians.[391]

Regarding the fourth line, where "if we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2:13a),

Schreiner says this relates to God being faithful to the saving promises he made to his people.[392]

His comment seems correct, but it is critical to understand exactly what God being faithful to his

promises does and does not mean. Shank says it well: "While the faithlessness of many in Israel

did not nullify the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises, neither did the faithfulness of

God prevent the faithlessness of many of his covenant people (Rom. 3:3–8)."[393] He later says,

"To assume that Christians cannot become lost because of the faithfulness of God is to ignore an

essential part of the truth. The faithfulness of God cannot avail for men who become

unfaithful."[394] This is a key insight for this topic. Humans can apostatize at the same time that

God remains faithful. God's promises in this regard are for those who remain faithful to him.

Hebrews contains four warning passages plus another passage relative to this topic.

Starting with Hebrews 2:1–4, the first thing to note is that "we" refers to those "who are to

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[388] Towner, *The Letters*, 512.

[389] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 517.

[390] Ibid.

[391] Towner, *The Letters*, 511; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 517.

[392] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 299.

[393] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 109.

[394] Ibid., 110.

inherit salvation" (1:14),[395] as the author used it to identify with his readers.[396] The issue then becomes what is meant by "drift away" and "neglect." Regarding the first term, Gareth Lee Cockerill describes it as "culpable" and says that it can lead to falling "away from the living God" as described in 3:12,[397] while Thomas Schreiner goes further and says that it is another term for apostasy.[398] The second term should be treated similarly, as the "eschatological judgments that await apostates and sinners" will be borne by those who neglect the message they have heard.[399] While this passage by itself does not definitively refer to apostasy, it suggests it very strongly.

Hebrews 3:12–14, on the other hand, explicitly gives an exhortation against apostasy. The passage starts by addressing it to "brothers," which clearly refers to Christians. In addition, one cannot fall away from God unless one already has a relationship with God. Numerous commentators affirm that this passage clearly refers to apostasy.[400] Furthermore, the grammatical construction of this passage shows that the threat of apostasy is real and urgent."[401]

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[395] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 86.

[396] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 116.

[397] Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 118.

[398] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 80.

[399] Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews,* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 65-66; see also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2001), 206.

[400] Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews,* Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 65; Fred B. Craddock, "The Letter to the Hebrews: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 521; Koester, *Hebrews,* 265-66; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 117; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 126; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 117; David G. Peterson, *Hebrews,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 114.

[401] Attridge, *Hebrews*, 116; Craddock, "Letter to the Hebrews," 521.

The author of Hebrews in 4:1–13 similarly speaks to Christians, as evidenced by using "let us fear" in the very first verse. Therefore, in this passage, the author exhorted his readers (believers) to persevere and enter God's rest. Michael Horton, however, says, "The question posed is not whether those who have entered God's rest can be expelled from it but rather whether those who are in the desert will 'fall short of it' (4:1)."[402] He seems to be implying that this verse, therefore, does not refer to believers. However, such a position not only ignores the "us" in verse 1 but also the "us" in verse 11, in which the author says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest." Furthermore, verse 10 states, "For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his." These additional facts strongly suggest that a Christian enters God's rest at the end of his or her earthly life.[403] One might object that verse 3 uses a present tense of "enter," but this present tense is paired with an aorist "who have believed." In other words, the author does not say that those who have believed *have entered* the rest, but that they *enter* it. This construct could either be the case of the Greek present being used in a future sense, or perhaps it suggests that because of their belief, they have gained entrance, but that ultimate entrance is contingent upon continuing to believe. The preponderance of the evidence again supports the possibility of apostasy.

Hebrews 6:4–8 is one of the most controversial passages in the Bible and one of the most debated, so this section will go into more depth than some of the others. The plain reading of the text is effectively that it is impossible to restore to repentance a believer who has fallen away. The immediately following analysis will focus on whether the person referenced is a believer and

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[402] Michael S. Horton, "A Classical Calvinist View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security,* ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 35.

[403] Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 211; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 131; Peterson, *Hebrews,* 125; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 145.

the meaning of falling away, while the issue of restoring to repentance will be addressed later in this section where that topic is discussed directly.

The first of the six personal descriptors, "who have once been enlightened," is generally taken to be a reference to Christian conversion.[404] However, Wayne Grudem, who acknowledges this as a possible legitimate interpretation, argues that it is inconclusive and does not necessarily mean this.[405] However, the context both here and in 10:32 strongly suggests that conversion is indeed what is meant. Another objection to the general view is that the author of Hebrews had the wilderness generation in mind when writing this and wanted his audience to see a connection between themselves and this group. In this particular instance, the pillar of fire is described as analogous to being enlightened. The argument then is that since the wilderness generation was said to have an "evil heart of unbelief," the recipients of the book of Hebrews were not genuine believers.[406] However, not only was Moses part of this group and evidently a true believer, the pillar of fire was not a one-time enlightenment (ἅπαξ) and only enlightened them at nighttime. The analogy simply does not work. Another argument that the addressees in Hebrews were not believers is that being enlightened was a "presalvation" work of learning what the message of the

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[404] Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 269; David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, vol. 35, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 351; Koester, *Hebrews*, 313.

[405] Grudem, Wayne, "Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from the Warning Passages in Hebrews," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 137-144.

[406] David Mathewson, "Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 61, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 224.

gospel was.[407] However, having been enlightened does not simply signify having learned what the gospel means but also having resulted in the renewal of one's mind and overall life.[408]

The second description, "who have tasted the heavenly gift," refers to experiencing Christ himself or the salvation he brings.[409] Paul typically used "gift" to refer to blessings associated with salvation,[410] and to "taste," as used here, means to experience to the full.[411] The last two objections raised in the previous paragraph (wilderness generation analogies and presalvation work) are raised with this and the other descriptions as well, but will not be individually addressed here and going forward because they were already shown not to be strong arguments, and the cases against them here and onward are similar to what has already been shown.

The third of the six descriptions, "have shared in the Holy Spirit," has two key facets to it. First, the word for "shared" (μετόχους) indicates a full participation in something. It is used in Hebrews this way in 2:14; 3:1; 3:14; 5:13; and 12:8. Second, reception of the Holy Spirit, as noted in Acts 15:8 and Romans 8:9 is "the clearest indication in the NT that one is a Christian."[412] Grudem once again agrees that the term could mean this in this verse, but again says that it does not necessarily mean this. He suggests that it could simply mean that a person was associated with the Holy Spirit in some way, perhaps even using some spiritual gifts they

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[407] Kenneth Samuel Wuest, "Hebrews Six in the Greek New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119, no. 473 (January 1962): 47.

[408] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, vol. 47A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 141.

[409] Peterson, *Hebrews*, 153.

[410] George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 218.

[411] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 320.

[412] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 185-86.

have received this way.[413] However, he does not show where in the New Testament a nonbeliever sharing in the Holy Spirit has ever been suggested as possible or how a nonbeliever could possess a spiritual gift.[414] This seems to be a stretch to avoid the natural reading of the text.

The fourth and fifth descriptions, "have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come," will be looked at together. They can be seen as a summary of the previous two descriptions, since Christ is the Word and experiencing him is effectively the same as tasting the goodness of God's Word, and experiencing the Spirit is related to tasting the powers of the age to come, since it is the Spirit who enables experiencing these powers.[415] These two descriptions also can be seen as a reference to one's conversion as in the first characteristic, as can be seen by looking back to the "great salvation" that was declared by Christ (2:3) and borne witness by God through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4).

Looking at all five of these descriptions together, it is difficult to see why the author of Hebrews or anyone else would use such descriptions to describe nonbelievers. Since the natural reading would lead one to assume that they are believers, it would be incumbent upon the writer to provide a clear indication that this was not the case if, in fact, it was not. Nothing in the immediate text suggests they are not believers, and the text on either side of these verses clearly addresses believers. To suggest that they are not believers seems to come from a predisposed theological position rather than from an exegesis of the actual text.

The next topic to address is the sixth description of having fallen away. If, as argued above, the first five descriptions show that those being discussed are true Christians, then what

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[413] Grudem, "Perseverance," 153.

[414] Allen, *Hebrews*, 353.

[415] Peterson, *Hebrews*, 154.

exactly does falling away entail? It should be pointed out here that if the people being discussed were not true Christians, then apostasy would not be an option, because how could someone apostatize from something they never believed? In TDNT, the actual Greek word behind apostasy (ἀποστασία) is described as coming from a Jewish tradition "which speaks of complete apostasy from God and His Torah," and is also "applied to the apostasy of Christians from their faith to error and unrighteousness."[416] Similarly, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines apostasy as "deliberate repudiation and abandonment of the faith that one has professed."[417]

Despite this fact, Grudem, who as shown above believes that the previous descriptions do not refer to Christians, accepts that "the falling away is so serious it could be rightly called 'apostasy.'"[418] But Grudem appears to be in the minority, as a very high percentage of scholars accept that the descriptions refer to Christians.[419] Others who disagree with the idea that this passage asserts that Christians can commit apostasy tend to accept the people being discussed are Christians, but argue that "falling away" does not mean apostasy.

For example, Randall Gleason argues that it instead means falling into a permanent immature state and a once-for-all decision to no longer trust that God will save them from their present troubles.[420] It is hard to see how this can be the case, though. First, how can people "fall into" a state in which they already existed? The whole point of this passage is that the believers had already fallen into a state of immaturity. They are certainly being warned of the implications

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[416] Heinrich Schlier, "ἀφίστημι," etc., TDNT 1:512-13.

[417] Luder G. Whitlock, "Apostasy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 85.

[418] Grudem, "Perseverance," 153 (footnote 48).

[419] Marshall, *Kept*, 142.

[420] Randall C. Gleason, "A Moderate Reformed View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 354.

of staying in this state, but "falling into" would not be a good term to describe maintaining their current condition. Second, it is hard to see how not trusting God permanently can describe someone who is saved. Related to this, Gleason says about a parallel passage that instead of meaning apostasy, it was simply treating Jesus' "sacrifice as if it had no more cleansing value than other sacrifices."[421] How is that not apostasy? Can one truly be a Christian if they do not recognize the power of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Finally, Gleason argues that instead of spiritual death, the ramifications are the loss of unspecified blessings.[422] Allen comes to a similar conclusion.[423] This seems to be inconsistent with the author's passion for his recipients. He is desperately trying to motivate them to move to maturity. The threat of spiritual death should be incredibly motivating. The threat of some unspecified blessings would likely not be. If heaven is infinitely better than earth for everyone, while additional blessings would be nice and should be desired, it is hard to see how this would motivate his lethargic audience to take action. At the least, it would seem as if the author would have been more specific in what these may entail if this were what he meant.

It should also be pointed out here that Allen asserts that the word in question, παραπίπτω, is used five times in Ezekiel, and in none of these cases does it refer to apostasy.[424] Yet Schreiner examines these same five usages and concludes the exact opposite—that it "clearly designates apostasy."[425] One must side with Schreiner in this disagreement. Take, for example, the word's use in Ezekiel 18:21–24. This passage speaks of a wicked person turning away from sin and

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[421] Gleason, "Moderate Reformed View," 360.

[422] Ibid., 356.

[423] Allen, *Hebrews*, 377.

[424] Ibid., 360.

[425] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 187.

turning to righteousness, in which case he shall not die, but live; and a righteous person turning away from his righteousness (παραπίπτω) and then doing wickedness would not live, but die. Clearly this passage is not talking about physical life and death, for both people spoken of will physically die. It is clearly speaking about spiritual life and death.

Many scholars take the position of Schreiner on this and agree παραπίπτω indeed describes apostasy in Hebrews 6:4. It has variously been described as neglecting the great salvation of 2:3,[426] "a willful rejection of salvation,"[427] a deliberate decision to not take part in the gift of the Holy Spirit,[428] and a "calculated renunciation of God."[429]

The ensuing two verses (6:7–8) then simply give a visual metaphor for what Paul just stated previously. God's gifts to believers in 6:4–5 are like the rain that falls on the ground, and the crucifying and shaming Christ are like the thorns and thistles.[430] Note that the correspondence is between people and land and between crops and works. Just as the land receives the rain, the people receive God's blessings, and just as the land produces good or bad crops, the people produce good or bad works. These correspondences are important because verse eight connects the *land* with the curse and the burning, not the thorns and thistles, which supports the idea that the fire of divine judgment is being discussed here, not the burning up of one's works. Also note that nothing indicates that the land is being burned as a way of getting it

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[426] Gareth Lee Cockerill, "A Wesleyan Arminian View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 273.

[427] Buist M. Fanning, "A Classical Reformed View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 181.

[428] Johnson, *Hebrews*, 161.

[429] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 142.

[430] Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 326.

ready for new planting.[431] Its end (τέλος) is to be burned. A good comparison to this is when

Paul, speaking of the servants of Satan, said, "Their end will correspond to their deeds" (2 Cor.

11:15), where he used τέλος as well. In addition, the author described the land as being

"worthless and near to being cursed," and something being cursed is not reflective of something

being prepared for renewal.

The last item to discuss here is the concept of "being near" to being cursed. Allen says

that this shows that apostasy was not the topic being discussed, because they would not be in

danger of being cursed but actually would be cursed.[432] But "being near to" does not necessarily

mean "being in danger of." In fact, it can easily be interpreted temporally, suggesting that the

curse is inevitable; it is just a matter of time.[433]

In Hebrews 10:26–31, commentators generally agree that this addresses believers[434] and

refers to apostasy.[435] Similarly, in Hebrews 12:25–29, the author warned his Christian readers

not to reject or turn away (ἀποστρέφω) from God, which also refers to apostasy.[436] Scot

McKnight does a masterful job of analyzing these five warning passages together and noting

how the strong parallelism across the five affirms that Christians are the subject and apostasy is

the sin being discussed.[437]

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[431] Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 328.

[432] Allen, *Hebrews*, 379.

[433] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 191.

[434] Allen, *Hebrews*, 520-21; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 292; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 261; Koester, *Hebrews*, 451.

[435] Attridge, *Hebrews*, 292; Guthrie, *Hebrews,* 355; Hagner, *Hebrews,* 169; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 262; Koester, *Hebrews*, 451; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, vol. 47B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 291; Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 324; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 323.

[436] Attridge, *Hebrews*, 380; Craddock, "Letter to the Hebrews," 615; Hagner, *Hebrews,* 230-31; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 478.

[437] Scot McKnight, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions," *Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 21-59.

Second Peter 1:10 was briefly discussed in the last chapter, noting that it spoke of apostasy. Similarly, all of the following chapter in that letter appears to speak of Christians apostatizing, with "denying the Master who bought them" (2:1), "forsaking the right way, they have gone astray" (2:15), "For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved" (2:17), and "after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first" (2:20). Many commentators support this view,[438] though Jerome Neyrey curiously says that what Peter spoke of is not apostasy, but simply a "rejection of divine judgment and pursuit of wickedness without fear."[439] However, it is hard to see how such a person could not be an apostate.

First John 3:6 ("no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him") has been taken by some to indicate that those who fall away were never Christians in the first place. However, Shank says this is a misinterpretation of the Greek perfect, which is used here ("seen" or "known"). The Greek perfect carries with it the connotation of an action that continues on into the present. The idea here is that although they may (or may not) have known God in the past, the fact of their continuing sin erases that knowledge such that as long as they continue to sin, it will be as if they have never known him. The claim that these people were never Christians would have required the use of either the aorist or the imperfect.[440] In this same letter, John

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[438] Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, 240; Davids, *The Letters*, 221, 250; Green, *Jude & 2 Peter,* 240; Moo, *2 Peter, Jude,* 145-46; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 175.

[439] Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 188-89.

[440] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 98-99.

wrote of a sin leading to death (1 John 5:16) as distinguished from those sins that do not lead to death. Several scholars associate the former with apostasy.[441]

Finally, two passages in Revelation that speak of the "Book of Life" are worth considering. Revelation 21:27 says that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will enter the new Jerusalem that will come down from heaven. Yet in Revelation 3:5, Jesus said that he will not blot the names out of the Book of Life of those who conquer. If names were permanently written into this book with no possibility of being blotted out, such a statement would be meaningless. While this does not say that names will necessarily be blotted out (which suggests apostasy on their part), it strongly suggests the possibility of names being in the book of those who do not conquer, which would then be blotted out.

Overall, the possibility of a Christian apostatizing from their faith seems very strong across numerous verses. However, before turning to the next step of the argument, a handful of verses will be examined that address whether someone who apostatizes can return to the faith. Hebrews 6:4–6 has often been held up as a passage in support of the irrevocability of apostasy. On the one hand, it seems pretty straightforward that it is impossible to restore apostates to repentance. The reason given is that they are "crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt" (6:6).

On the other hand, this verse contains two items that might mitigate against that conclusion. First, the text does not say for whom it is impossible. Most scholars hold that this refers to God, while others suggest it could be the author. However, since the Greek word for "restore" is a present active infinitive, it does not address whether the person could restore

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[441] I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 250; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 316-17; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, rev. vol. 51 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 285.

themselves to repentance, which would require a present middle infinitive. Second, the two reasons given are present active participles, indicating that the action is occurring at the same time as when it is impossible to restore to repentance. Some scholars take this to imply that if the person stops these actions, restoring to repentance becomes a possibility again.[442]

Given the uncertainty here, other passages need to be considered which may help. Ezekiel 18:32 was mentioned earlier in terms of God desiring all to be saved, but the broader passage of 18:30–32 discusses Israel (who were the chosen people), who had put themselves in a sinful state that would lead to their spiritual death, but God exhorted them to "make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit" (18:31b), so they would live. Similarly, Isaiah encouraged the wicked person to *return* to the Lord (Isa. 55:7), again suggesting that someone who was once with the Lord and left, could return. Jeremiah said something similar, when he said, "Return, O faithless sons" (Jer. 3:22), as did Hosea (Hos. 6:1).

Hosea then got even more explicit, when he quoted the Lord saying, "I will heal their apostasy" (Hos. 14:4). The Hebrew word used here, מְשׁוּבָה (*mᵉšûḇâ*), is defined as "turning back, apostasy" in BDB,[443] and said to refer "basically to 'apostasy' from God" in the Old Testament, according to TDOT.[444] This verse seems to clearly state that apostasy can be remedied by God.[445]

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[442] Guthrie, *Hebrews,* 220; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 318.

[443] BDB, s.v. "מְשׁוּבָה."

[444] Heinz-Josef Fabry, "שׁוּב," etc., TDOT 14:461-522.

[445] Most of these Old Testament passages are directed to corporate Israel, and the distinction between national repentance and individual repentance is not clearly delineated. Isaiah 55:7 is the lone verse in this group that directly speaks of the individual. However, it would seem that in order for a nation to return from apostasy, it would require individuals in that nation to return from apostasy.

Turning to the New Testament, in Galatians 4:19, Paul said that he is "again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" McKnight notes that Paul needs to "'again' go through the process of leading them to the faith," and Schreiner that "the Galatians need to be converted all over again." However, they both quickly back off of the implications of these statements, saying that one should not speculate "whether Paul thought an apostate could once again be born again,"[446] and that "the language used here should not be unduly pressed to say that the Galatians are now damned in Paul's eyes and literally need to be converted."[447]

Perhaps the most pertinent New Testament passage on the issue of returning from apostasy comes from Paul, in Romans 11:17–24, where he wrote of branches on an olive tree. The tree Paul described contains natural branches, some of which were broken off due to unbelief, but will be grafted back in again if they do not persist in their unbelief. The tree also contains wild branches that have been grafted in, but these also remain only through faith, or else they, too, will be cut off. The two other key items in this verse are first, that all of the branches attached to the tree (natural or wild) receive nourishment and support from the root, and second, God shows severity toward those who have "fallen." The reality of apostasy is clear here, since the wild branches are grafted in because they are believers, but will be cut off if they fail to continue to believe.

However, the reality of return from apostasy is here as well. Some claim that this is not the case, since they assert that the natural branches that were cut off are Jews who have not accepted the gospel,[448] and that "Paul does not contemplate here the question of whether Gentile

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[446] McKnight, *Galatians,* 221.

[447] Schreiner, *Galatians,*289.

[448] Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 614.

believers will actually apostatize."[449] Certainly, at a minimum, this verse shows that the *people of God* may apostatize and return, where the people of God may be comprised of both Jews prior to Christ's coming and Christians since. However, it seems that it goes further and shows that *Christians* can apostatize and return. First, *all* of the branches receive nourishment from the root, including the original branches that were later cut off. Such nourishment suggests that they were Christians. Yet even more importantly, the ones cut off are described as those who have "fallen." This word again suggests that they have fallen from the faith.

Thielman describes this tree as "the tree of God's eschatological people," and describes the natural branches that were cut off as those "who once rejected the gospel."[450] Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear (especially in Hebrews) that faith has always been a requirement to be a part of God's eschatological people. This necessity of faith and the Jews' rejection of the gospel makes it hard to argue against the idea of apostasy and return here. Osborne comes to a similar conclusion, saying that both Jews and Gentiles who were cut off can return to Christ and be forgiven. "God treats both groups the same."[451] Dunn describes it well when he says, "It is not a once-for-all refusal of belief (or act of faith) which is decisive for condemnation (or salvation) but the persistence in that attitude."[452] Volf also asserts that God's severity is reversible, adding, "God's kindness is not a reward for those who believe but divine grace itself directed toward the fallen"[453]

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[449] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 607.

[450] Thielman, *Romans*, 544.

[451] Osborne, *Romans*, 356.

[452] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 665.

[453] Volf, *Paul & Perseverance*, 200-01.

Finally, James described someone who had fallen from the truth and been brought back (Jas. 5:19–20). This passage is frequently taken as someone apostatizing from the faith and being brought back into the faith.[454] Considering all of these passages together strongly suggests that one can apostatize from the faith and then later return to it, laying another key piece of the foundation for the topic of mindset to be discussed in the next chapter.

The Nature and Importance of Perseverance

Related to this, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of perseverance. Either consciously making a decision to reject God, or falling away from God by not continuing to make him the priority in one's life, marks the lack of perseverance necessary for salvation. The passages discussed in this section add further support to the role of one's mindset in their ultimate salvation. Although the number of passages about perseverance may not be as high as some might expect, certain of the passages to be examined here are quite clear on the point, making any question about the quantity moot.[455]

This issue comes across clearly in Matthew 10:22, in which Jesus stated, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." The word "saved" here cannot mean "saved from death," since that would simply be a truism. It must mean Christian salvation.[456] Wilkins says it well: "The test of a disciple's real commitment to Jesus is whether he or she remains steadfast to the end."[457]

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[454] Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 198; Martin, *James*, 218; Dan G. McCartney, *James,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 263; McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 453; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 315.

[455] Each book of the Bible was written for a specific purpose and occasion, especially the New Testament letters, and the concept of perseverance simply may not have been as urgent of an issue as other topics for these particular occasions.

[456] Osborne, *Matthew,* 390.

[457] Wilkins, *Matthew,* 394.

Jesus repeated these exact same words later, when he told his disciples about the signs of the end

of the age (Matt. 24:10–13). In this case, Jesus contrasted those who fall away (v. 10), are led

astray (v. 11), and whose love grows cold (v. 12), with those who endure to the end (v. 13). This

contrast strengthens the case for this referring to spiritual salvation. Wilkins also holds that this

refer to spiritual salvation, but argues that those who fell away were not true disciples.[458] Yet

Marshall counters that while one might be able to conclude that those references were not true

disciples from verses 10–11, "the difficulty is to extend this interpretation to verse 12," and to

see "how any other than real believers can be meant."[459] Geisler takes a slightly different angle,

saying, "Their perseverance is a *sign* of their salvation, not a *condition* of it."[460] However, this

angle falls prey to Marshall's point as well.

Jesus' parable and explanation in Luke 12:35–48 about being ready for the master's

return engenders the same debate as above. Three key areas in this passage deserve special

attention. First, the passage deals with eschatological destiny, as evidenced by the implied

eschatological banquet feast in 12:37 for those who are ready[461] and the fate in 12:46 for those

who are not.[462] Second, while some scholars assume that the faithful servant differs from the

servant who was put with the unfaithful, the "demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος is emphatic.

Language forbids any assumption that more than one servant is in view."[463] In other words, he

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[458] Wilkins, *Matthew,* 775.

[459] Marshall, *Kept*, 73.

[460] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 89.

[461] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 501; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV,* The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary, paperback ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2005), 986; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1175.

[462] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53,* 1183; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 704; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 544.

[463] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 35; see also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 542.

who was faithful originally became unfaithful as time went on. Third, not only did Jesus speak of the importance of perseverance in this passage (staying ready for the master's coming), but he also directly exhorted his hearers, including his disciples, to stay ready in both 12:35 and 12:40. If perseverance was only a sign rather than a condition of salvation, there would no need for such exhortations.

John 15:1–6 was discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the possibility of apostasy, but should also be referenced here, since it also speaks of perseverance. The word μένω, which occurs frequently in this passage, means to "remain, stay, continue, abide," and specifically within this verse, denotes "an inward, enduring personal communion."[464] In other words, this passage speaks of the importance of remaining in Christ. Also, in both 15:4 and 15:9, the word occurs in the imperative, and in five other places occurs in the subjunctive. As noted earlier, Jesus spoke of those who were "in" him, which means Christians. The imperatives and subjunctives strongly suggest that those who are already in him, must actively continue to stay in him, that is, persevere in their faith.[465]

Paul said that God will give eternal life "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality" (Rom. 2:7). However, the word translated as "patience" here (ὑπομονή) is better seen as active perseverance,[466] "persistence in seeking to do what is godly,"[467] or "steadfast perseverance in good works."[468] Paul again insisted on the necessity of

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[464] BDAG, s.v. "μένω."

[465] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 998; Osborne, "Soteriology," 253.

[466] Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 204.

[467] Sherwood, *Romans*, 171.

[468] C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 147.

perseverance when he told the Corinthians that they are being saved *if* they hold fast to the

gospel that he preached to them (1 Cor. 15:2). Fitzmyer says their salvation is "conditional" on

adhering to the gospel;[469] Blomberg states that Christians must continue to believe what they

believed when they became Christians and persevere to the end;[470] Garland says, "If they do not

have faith that holds out, they believed in vain;"[471] and Schreiner declares, "Eschatological

salvation is conditioned on perseverance in the gospel. Paul never viewed faith as a static reality

that cancels out the need for present and future faith."[472] Paul once again focused on the

importance of perseverance when he said, "In due season we will reap, if we do not give up"

(Gal. 6:9). This statement refers to perseverance leading to eternal life,[473] perseverance leading to

the eschatological harvest,[474] or one's judgment being based on perseverance.[475]

Philippians 2:12–13 is a classic text on the issue, as Paul told his audience to "work out

your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you." Gerald Hawthorne

and Ralph Martin argue unconvincingly that this is a corporate, rather than individual,

exhortation, and interpret σωτηρία as "well-being," as it is commonly used with that sense in the

papyri and LXX.[476] However, Thielman points out that Paul used σωτηρία eighteen times in his

writings, with the normal meaning of salvation clearly intended fifteen of those times and likely

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[469] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians,* The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 545.

[470] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 295.

[471] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 683.

[472] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 318.

[473] DeSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 495-96.

[474] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 265.

[475] McKnight, *Galatians,* 288.

[476] Gerald F. Hawthorne, and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 139-40.

intended two other times, which makes it unlikely that he would have used a different meaning in this passage.[477] Further, Peter O'Brien argues more convincingly that the exhortation is not corporate, but common, applying to all the believers at Philippi.[478] Moisés Silva says, "It is impossible to tone down the force with which Paul here points to our conscious activity in sanctification. . . For all that, our dependence on divine activity for sanctification is nowhere made as explicit as here."[479] This text clearly portrays the synergistic reality of sanctification. God empowers, but humans must do their part.

Colossians 1:21–23 seems quite straightforward in support of the need for perseverance, with Paul telling his readers that they will be presented blameless *if indeed* they continue in the faith. Almost all commentators acknowledge the conditionality involved here.[480] However, two objections have been raised to this. First, O'Brien argues that the Greek term εἴ γε (translated here as "if indeed") does not express doubt, and so Paul is confident that they will persevere.[481] McKnight counters that while it does not express doubt, it also does not express confidence, but

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[477] Frank Thielman, *Philippians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 137.

[478] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 279.

[479] Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 122. See also Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 244; Morna D. Hooker, "The Letter to the Philippians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 144.

[480] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988), 65-66; Robert McL.Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 165; Markus Barth, and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians,* The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2005), 223; David E. Garland, *Colossians/Philemon,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 97; David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon,* Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 109.

[481] Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 69.

should be seen as neutral.[482] Witherington states it slightly differently, saying, "Paul has no serious doubt about the outcome, *provided* the Colossians stand firm and be immovable."[483] In other words, perseverance is necessary for salvation.

Second, some scholars claim that those who do not persevere were never true believers.[484] N. T. Wright says, "From God's point of view, genuine faith is assured of continuing to the end. From the human point of view, Christians discover whether their faith is of the genuine sort only by patient perseverance."[485] Whereas those who affirm mutability hold that Christians must persevere in their faith until the end, those who subscribe to immutability, like Wright, suggest persevering until the end simply shows that one's faith was genuine. Yet nothing in the context delineates what the difference between genuine and non-genuine faith is. Rather, the context simply indicates that Paul was speaking to those who are true Christians, since he addressed these words to "the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae" (Col. 1:2).

Hebrews 10:36 states, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised." Commentators variously describe this as alluding to salvation,[486] that "God's promises are . . . realized only for those who hold out to the

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[482] Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 177.

[483] Witherington, *The Letters*, 140; see also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 110.

[484] G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 116.

[485] N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986), 88.

[486] Attridge, *Hebrews*, 301.

end in doing his will,"[487] "those who turn away . . . will face judgment rather than salvation,"[488] and "the 'righteous' will obtain eternal life by such perseverance."[489] Similar messages occur in James 1:12; 1 John 2:24–25; and Revelation 2:10, but the foregoing is sufficient to show how actively choosing to persevere is required for salvation.

What the Bible Says About God Protecting Believers

On the other hand, immutability proponents claim that the Bible affirms once a person is saved, such salvation cannot be lost. This idea seems especially prevalent in the writing of John. One of the concepts to explore here is the difference between Jesus protecting believers versus the believers leaving Jesus on their own. Jesus may declare that he will not let anyone take people from him, but this does not necessarily mean that he will not let his people leave on their own if they so choose. Another key issue to be explored is whether those whom God gave to Jesus are those he knows will endure to the end (rather than by giving them to Jesus, they will thereby endure to the end).

These points are critical. The previous two sections strongly demonstrated that the Bible shows that Christians can fall from the faith and that Christians must actively persevere in their faith to attain salvation. In order for the passages considered next to counteract these points, they must conclusively show that it is impossible to fall from the faith and that active Christian perseverance is not needed. Arguments from silence, such as passages not mentioning whether or not Christians must actively persevere, are not evidence that contradicts the conclusions reached prior to this section.

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[487] Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 551-52.

[488] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 335.

[489] Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 512.

There are a number of biblical passages that scholars assert support the idea of the eternal security of the believer. While not covering all of these passages, Normal Geisler provides a fairly comprehensive overview by giving twenty-seven passages that he says stand out as biblical arguments for eternal security.[490] His overview will be used as an initial framework, but before diving deeply into the subset of these passages that are more compelling, those that can be dismissed more easily will be more briefly addressed. Starting with Job 19:25–26, Geisler argues that since Job knew in the present tense that his Redeemer lives and that in the future he shall see God, this implies his eternal security.[491] Even if Geisler were correct about this, though, it is not out of the realm of possibility that Job had a greater level of knowledge than other believers, as he was truly unique, being called "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3) and described by God as "there is none like him on the earth" (1:8; 2:3). If so, Job's case would not necessarily apply to all other believers.[492] This is admittedly quite speculative, but if instead, one treats Job the same as any other person, a problem still exists. Geisler's conclusion assumes that Job's statement about the future will certainly come to pass. Yet Job also asserted, "My eye will never again see good" (7:7), and this clearly did not come true. He also indicated multiple times that death was final, including when he told God, "For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be" (7:21). Christians know that this also is not true. If God had told Job that his Redeemer lives and that Job would see God, then Geisler would have a point. However, any human—including Job—stating this in no way implies his or her eternal security.

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[490] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 70-77.

[491] Ibid., 70.

[492] Note that this situation is very different from that with Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:27, where the context shows that he was giving himself as an example of what he was exhorting his readers to do.

Next, Ecclesiastes 3:14 is held out as an argument in favor of eternal security because "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the wisest man who ever lived said, 'I know that everything God does will endure forever,'" and since salvation is a work of God, it must be forever and unable to be lost.[493] There are at least two problems with this conclusion. First, this same wise man said, "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil" (Eccl. 2:24) and also "What happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity" (Eccl. 3:19). Should Christians adhere to these two statements as well? Clearly not! Christian life is much more than eating, drinking, and finding enjoyment in toil. It is much more about loving and serving God and others. Also, while the fate of man's earthly physical body may be the same as the beast's, what happens to humans differs vastly from what happens to animals, as humans will spend eternity in either heaven or hell. The problem with this position is that the context of the bulk of the book reflects the speech of Qohelet (or the Preacher), who operates "under the sun." He repeats something close to what was quoted above in 2:24 four other times in the book (3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18; and 8:15). This phrase is the "theology" of Qohelet, who while he acknowledges the importance of fearing God, keeps coming back to the refrain of effectively eat, drink, and be merry. In stark contrast to this, the final verses of the book are by someone other than Qohelet, and his "theology" is "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:13–14). Tremper Longman III explains this contrast, saying, "In a masterfully succinct manner, then, the book ends with three phrases that point away from skeptical thinking and

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[493] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 70-71.

toward a theology consonant with the rest of the OT: wisdom, law, and prophets."[494] One must remember that the inspired Bible contains characters who sometimes make unorthodox statements.

Furthermore, there is a second problem with Geisler's conclusion from this verse. Clearly, not absolutely everything God does endures forever. God made the heavens and the earth "very good," and yet they did not stay "very good" once Adam and Eve sinned. Not only this, but the current heaven and earth will pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1). So even if Qohelet was correct in his statement that "everything God does will endure forever," the "everything" of the statement must be qualified in some way. Nothing in the passage suggests that salvation is part of what is included in it. In fact, one might come to the opposite conclusion, since the verse concludes with "God has done it, so that people fear before him." It does not seem to make sense that God made salvation unable to be lost so that people fear before him. If anything, knowing that it could be lost would seem to engender a greater level of fear before him.

Geisler asserts that John 3:18 means that if a person is a Christian now, then that person is also not condemned now and will not be later. He says, "Just as one is condemned already for not believing in Christ, even so one is saved already for believing in him."[495] Everything he says makes sense except for his addition of "will not be later." That is simply not in the verse. If Geisler believes that those who believe now will believe forever, it seems that his logic also implies that those who do not believe now will never believe. However, that is clearly inconsistent with the Christian faith. The Bible often speaks of people who did not believe, who

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[494] Tremper Longman, III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 39.

[495] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 71.

later came to believe. That is the entire purpose of evangelism. In fact, when one considers

unbelievers coming to faith, it actually reveals that this verse comes closer to supporting the

opposite of eternal security. Since, of course, those who do not believe can later come to faith,

this verse says that those who are currently condemned (unbelievers) can later be removed from

their state of condemnation. Given the parallel between the two types of people, this suggests

that those who are currently not condemned (believers) can later be moved into a state of

condemnation if they do not continue in their belief.

Next, Geisler asserts that John 5:24 assures that Christians will never be condemned.[496]

However, it can only be read this way with an eternal security presupposition in mind. For

purposes of this issue, the verse essentially says that those who believe have eternal life and have

passed from death to life. Logically, based on this, if people stop believing, they then no longer

have eternal life and have passed back from life to death. It does not use an aorist for "believe,"

which would suggest that if this was a one-time event, that it happened in the past, but uses a

present tense. As such, believing is required for eternal life. This verse simply does not address

whether or not one can fall from the faith, and does not support either position.

The fifth passage to be considered can be similarly dismissed. In Romans 4:5–6, Paul

said that for those who believe in Christ, their faith is counted as righteousness. Geisler rightly

says that therefore "there is no sin that can keep us out of heaven."[497] Sin is not the issue, though;

belief is. Yes, the sin of believers will be forgiven and will not keep them out of heaven, but if

believers turn away from the faith and apostatize, their lack of belief will keep them out of

heaven. One's faith is counted as righteousness, but if one apostatizes and no longer has faith,

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[496] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 71.

[497] Ibid., 72.

that person then no longer has the righteousness that was based on that faith. This verse adds to the list of those that simply do not address the issue of eternal security one way or the other.

Romans 8:33 raises a different issue than what has been discussed previously. Paul asked, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" The issue in this verse is who exactly comprises God's elect? Is it anyone who ever believed at any time, or is it anyone who remains faithful until the end? If it is the latter, then this verse also does not support eternal security.

Geisler then claims that 1 Corinthians 12:13 supports his position since Christians were made members of Christ's body, and if one fell away, they would have to be severed from the body, and the body would thus be dismembered.[498] However, this is simply a metaphor, which should not be taken overly literally. The metaphor simply does not address how members enter or leave.

Second Corinthians 5:17, 21 are two other verses that do not support eternal security as claimed. Anyone in Christ is a new creation (v. 17)—which is a critical and powerful reality, but the verse contains nothing about the ability or inability of one to revert to their prior condition. Yet Geisler connects this verse with verse 21, and concludes that "this guarantees us a place in heaven [because] we have been robed in 'the righteousness of God.'"[499] However, the verse does not describe us having the righteousness of God as a completed past tense event, but rather as a potential future event ("that in him we might become the righteousness of God").[500] Furthermore, Geisler leaves out the connecting verses, which shed additional light on what Paul

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[498] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 74.

[499] Ibid.

[500] While Paul elsewhere also describes this as a future event, in other places, he speaks of righteousness that Christians have already accounted to them, but this is based on their having faith (Rom. 4:3–22; 9:30; 10:4–6; Phil. 3:9), and does not address whether or not one can depart from the faith (and thereby lose the accounted righteousness).

was saying here. Verse 18 states, "Christ reconciled *us* to himself," but verse 20 adds, "We implore *you* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." This is one of many examples of Paul's combination of the indicative and the imperative. Christ has (already) reconciled *us* (*you*, the Corinthians, and me, Paul), but *you* must still be reconciled. In fact, one could read this as Christ already having done his amazing part in making believers a new creation, but now the believers must do their part and persevere unto the end. This passage overall is another one which not only does not support eternal security, but leans in the other direction, as it exhorts additional action from the believers.

In Ephesians 2:5–6, Paul said that God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Geisler rightly notes that this means that believers are already in heaven positionally because God put them there, but then he says, "We can no more be kicked out of our heavenly position than Christ can."[501] There are three problems with this conclusion. First, Christ is perfect, cannot sin, and cannot renounce his Sonship, since he is God himself. Believers, on the other hand, are not perfect, do sin, and can renounce their faith, as shown earlier, since they are only human. Second, Satan was also put in heaven by God, and yet he got kicked out of his heavenly position when he rebelled. The analogy with Satan is closer than the analogy with Christ, since believers are fallible created beings, like Satan was, and not part of the triune God. Third, in these two verses, Paul said that Christians were (1) made alive with Christ and (2) raised up and seated with him in heaven, but note that between these two items, Paul inserted "by grace you have been saved." His purpose was to remind his readers how this came to be, but then just two verses later he repeated and expanded the point: "By grace you have been saved through faith." In other words, it is only *through faith* that one is positionally in

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[501] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 75.

heaven. God has graciously made Christians alive with Christ—the greatest gift the world has ever known—but they can only enjoy that for eternity if they persevere in their faith.

Geisler takes Paul's mention of the Book of Life in Philippians 4:3 to be evidence of eternal security, and bases this on his interpretation that Revelation 3:5 asserts that once one's name is in the Book of Life, it cannot be taken out.[502] However, as shown earlier, Revelation 3:5 does not state that one's name cannot be taken out. Instead, it shows that those who conquer will not have their names taken out of the Book of Life, and that one's name being blotted out is a real possibility. Nothing in Philippians 4:3 speaks of eternal security. One can only judge what is implied in one's name being written in the Book of Life by looking at Revelation 3:5, which suggests the opposite of what is claimed.

Paul's confidence that Christ is able to guard what has been entrusted to him (or what he has entrusted to God) in 2 Timothy 1:12 is seen as assurance of perseverance by Geisler.[503] However, while Geisler sees this as one's salvation, in both other instances where the term παραθήκη occurs, it refers to "both preserving and proclaiming the apostolic gospel."[504] If this is also in view here, which is likely, since Paul was near the point of death and was exhorting Timothy to carry on his work, then one's salvation is not even the topic of discussion here, and this passage is irrelevant to eternal security.

Next, in 2 Timothy 4:18, Paul expressed his confidence that the Lord will bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom. Geisler again sees this as evidence of the eternal security of the believer.[505] However, eternal security does not follow from this verse. Paul's confidence was

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[502] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 75.

[503] Ibid., 76.

[504] Towner, *The Letters*, 476.

[505] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 76.

based on Christ. Those who hold that Christians must persevere to the end have the same confidence that Christ will bring them into heaven.

Geisler asserts that Hebrews 10:14 means that Christ's sacrifice on the cross "secures forever the salvation of the elect."[506] Arminians can agree with Geisler on this, but this is only because they see the elect as those who are seen to persevere until the end. Given this difference of understanding of who comprise the elect, this verse cannot be taken to support the eternal security of the believer, as understood by Geisler.

Geisler also sees the description of Jesus as the perfecter of our faith in Hebrews 12:2 as evidence of eternal security.[507] If Jesus perfects or completes our faith, then, he says, it certainly cannot be lost. Yet in the immediately preceding verse, the author of Hebrews exhorted his readers to persevere in what lies before them. Then in the immediately following verse, he exhorted them to not grow weary or fainthearted, and continues to exhort them to endure. What is the purpose of the exhortations if everything is immutable? In fact, when exhorted to run with endurance, believers are to look to Jesus, the perfecter of their faith. In other words, they should not take a laissez-faire attitude because Jesus has perfected their faith, but rather to use Jesus' perfecting as encouragement to continue to persevere. While believers cannot persevere without the enablement of the Holy Spirit, neither will Jesus fully perfect their faith unless they do their part and persevere. Looking at Hebrews 12:2 in isolation may suggest a monergistic security for the believer, but looking at it in its broader context suggests a synergistic path to salvation.

First Peter 1:5 is another verse that has an interpretation that depends on whether one sees God as unilaterally having people follow his will or instead as doing his part in the process of

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[506] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 76.

[507] Ibid.

salvation while allowing humans to use their free will to either comply or disobey. The key to understanding this verse is to see that God does not unilaterally guard people unto salvation, but rather guards them *through faith* unto salvation. Yet again, both God and humans must do their parts in order for salvation to be secure. This position is further supported by Peter's exhortation not to be conformed to one's former passions, but to be holy in one's conduct (1:14–15) and by his exhortation to be mindful of God when enduring (2:19ff). This broader context shows that this verse (1:5) does not support eternal security, but rather supports the need for ongoing perseverance.

Finally, Geisler claims Jude 24–25 gives assurance that a believer cannot forfeit his or her place in heaven.[508] This, again, however, is not the case, and the context suggests the opposite. The Greek word used for stumbling (ἄπταιστος) occurs only here in the Bible, and the lexicons do not go into any detail beyond "not stumbling," so it may or may not refer to apostasy. Just prior to this passage, though, Jude called on his readers to persevere, to keep themselves "in the love of God" (Jude 21). Believers must clearly do their part here. Further, Jude did not say that God keeps them from stumbling, but that he "is able to keep" them from stumbling. One cannot simply ignore these words. Jude used them for a reason. God being able to do something does not mean that he necessarily does it. Jesus used the same word (δύναμαι) when he told his disciples, "Rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28, NASB). Clearly God did not destroy the souls and bodies of the disciples in hell. He will only destroy the soul and body of someone who chooses not to believe. Similarly, in Jude 24, God will only keep from stumbling those who persevere in the faith, as Jude exhorted

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[508] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 77.

his readers to do just a few verses prior to this. In other words, Christ is able to keep them from stumbling, and *will* keep them from stumbling *if* they continue to persevere in their faith.

This final passage completes an analysis of the (sixteen) passages given by Geisler that are dealt with more easily. However, the other eleven passages that he uses to support his position require a more in-depth analysis because the explanation is more complex. These eleven passages, along with a number of other passages put forth by other supporters of eternal security, will be addressed next.

First, the language in Matthew 25:34–41 that is under debate, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34b), can be interpreted in multiple ways. Those who affirm immutability argue that it refers to specific people chosen in advance, while libertarians argue that it refers "to the class of the saved as a whole" who will be shown to be worthy at the time of judgment."[509] As such, this passage does not support either position.

People who believe in eternal security also often cite John 6:37, in which Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Edward Klink says therefore, "those the Father brings in the Son will keep in,"[510] and Geisler says this shows that "everyone who is saved is saved permanently!"[511] However, this verse says neither of those things. Never casting out is not the same as keeping in or saving permanently. Both scholars fail to consider that the people left of their own volition. God has kept his promise not to cast them out even if the people leave on their own. Geisler also cites John 6:39–40 as a passage in which Jesus declared, "I shall lose none of all that he [God] has given me."[512]

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[509] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 963.

[510] Klink, *John,* 333.

[511] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 71.

[512] Ibid.

However, Jesus does not say that in this passage, but rather that "this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me," which is a key difference, since as noted previously, the Bible includes multiple examples where God's will is not carried out. Further, Jesus did lose Judas, and further still, even if this specific case is set aside, those God gave to Jesus may be those that he knows will persevere until the end.

John 10:25–30 contains two key phrases that must be properly understood. First, Jesus said, "No one will snatch them out of my hand" (10:28b). This statement falls prey to the same issue as immediately above, where it only refers to outside factors and not with people leaving on their own. Second, Jesus also said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (10:28a). This statement is much stronger, but the key here is to understand who Jesus meant by "my sheep." If the sheep refer to anyone who ever believed, this would be a strong statement in favor of the eternal security of the believer; but if the sheep refer to those who persevere in their belief until the end, then this fits strongly with mutability, where God grants eternal life to those who persevere to the end. Support for this can be found in the fact that the sheep hear Jesus' voice and follow him, where both verbs are in the present tense, which often indicates progressive action. That is, they are sheep as long as they hear and follow, but cease to be sheep if they cease to hear and follow. [513]

Adherents of immutability sometimes argue that John 15:16 supports their position because Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Raymond Brown claims that this

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[513] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 56.

"undoubtedly" refers to all Christians who were chosen of God.[514] However, the context seems to more strongly support that this refers to Jesus choosing his disciples for service.[515]

Similar to other passages already reviewed, John 17 also contains the idea of those God gave to Jesus. However, one must be careful not to read into this what does not exist there. Klink says, "By describing the 'elect' not by their act of faith but by the action of God, Jesus emphasizes that this entire event is from 'above.'"[516] This is an argument from silence. One could just as incorrectly claim that Jesus' command, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16) describes only one's act of faith, so none of the event is from above. Scripture clearly emphasizes both parts.

The key verses to consider in this chapter are verses 2, 12, and 20. First, God gave Jesus "authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom [God had] given him" (17:2). Second, Jesus guarded those God gave him, and one of them (Judas) was lost (17:12). Third, the combination of verses 12 and 20 shows that prior to verse 20, Jesus spoke of his disciples, and then spoke of all Christians afterward. How one sees Judas in this passage has significant implications for its overall interpretation. One could potentially interpret this as God giving Jesus those who believe, Jesus has the authority to give eternal life to those God has given them, some, like Judas (one of twelve), fall away (are lost) and so a portion of future believers could also fall away, and Jesus grants eternal life to those who do not fall away (a mutable view). Alternatively, one could treat Judas as the singular exception to the rule, in which case Jesus grants eternal life

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[514] Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 683.

[515] Mounce, "John," 578-79; Thompson, *John*, 330; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 275; Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 815; Klink, *John,* 658.

[516] Klink, *John,* 713.

to all who are given to him, with this group being either those who ever believed (immutable) or those who persevere in their belief until the end (mutable). As such, this passage also does not give proof of the immutable view.

Geisler also claims that Romans 8:29–30 (which was discussed earlier) shows that those who were predestined will also be glorified, and thus proves the eternal security of the believer.[517] But Paul did not say that people were predestined to believe, but to eternal life (to "be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"). This distinction is critical. As discussed earlier, those predestined could either be those whom God foreknew would *choose* to believe and *choose* to persevere in their belief or those whom God determines would believe and persevere. Only by assuming the latter can Geisler come to his conclusion.

Just after this, Paul gave a lengthy list of items that cannot separate Christians from the love of Christ in verse 35 and from the love of God in verses 38 and 39. Scholars debate whether the Christians themselves are included in this list (i.e., they could separate themselves). While they are not explicitly included, some such as Moo argue that they should be implicitly included,[518] while others such as Osborne argue that they should not.[519] However, perhaps the more pertinent issue is what is meant by being separated from the love of Christ or God. God will always love humans because that is his nature. However, this is not the same as granting humans salvation. God will always do his part in salvation, which includes loving his people; but Christians must still do their part, which is persevering to the end.

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[517] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 73.

[518] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 547.

[519] Osborne, *Romans*, 268, 330.

Geisler takes Romans 11:29 to claim that the gift of salvation is irrevocable.[520] However, Paul's reference to the gifts and the calling of God here clearly refers to that for Israel.[521] Yet even if one applies this to people today, although God does not revoke what he offers, people can still choose to reject it.

First Corinthians 1:8–9 seems to give strong support to the security of the believer, since Paul said that God "will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." However, Gordon Wiles asserts that Paul moves from giving thanks to expressing hope, such that it should read, "so that you may indeed continue to confirm them until the end, so that they may be guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."[522] Fee rejects this interpretation,[523] but Wiles raises a good point, asking if Paul would really praise them for not lacking any spiritual gifts, when later in the letter he discusses how they abuse these gifts and how the gifts have made them arrogant.[524] Further, stating that the Corinthians had eternal security would not be consistent with Paul's later comment that they were being saved *if* they held fast to what he preached (15:2). Wiles' view seems to have some merit.

This appears to fit with the overall tenor of the letter, as Paul frequently addressed the Corinthians' inflated view of themselves as people of the Spirit.[525] As Garland explains, "They became 'puffed up' and 'arrogant' and fancied themselves to be 'spiritual ones' (3:1; cf. 2:13,

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[520] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 73-74.

[521] Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 581; Craig S. Keener, *Romans,* New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 138; Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 626; Jewett, *Romans*, 708; Sherwood, *Romans*, 625; Osborne, *Romans*, 367; Shank, *Life in the Son*, 358.

[522] Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul*, SNTS §24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 100.

[523] Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 41.

[524] Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 99.

[525] Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11-12.

15; 9:11; 12:1; 14:37), 'mature' (2:6), and 'wise' (3:18; 4:10)," yet Paul "will not address them as spiritual ones; they are instead fleshly (3:1), too much caught up in this world and its values."[526]

Some scholars cite Paul's statement that God "has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Cor. 5:5) as evidence of the security of the believer. However, the Greek word (ἀρραβών) does not connote the idea of simply a guarantee as much as it does earnest money. BDAG defines it as a legal or commercial term regarding the "payment of part of a purchase price in advance, first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge, which secures a legal claim to the article in question." [527] In other words, such a down payment (which may obligate the purchaser to pay in full) is not unilateral, but requires the person that God is "purchasing" to give himself or herself fully to God. If someone signs a contract and makes a down payment on a home that obligates them to pay the full amount, but the current owner destroys the home before the new owner can take possession, the new owner would no longer be obligated to pay the full amount. Similarly, if a believer apostatizes, then they have corrupted what God purchased, and he is no longer obligated to give them eternal life.

Another of Geisler's claims is that the fact of predestination in Ephesians 1:4–5 supports his position,[528] but once again, his conclusion rests on the assumption that those predestined are those who have believed at any time rather than God predestining to eternal life those he knows will believe until the end. Likewise, he cites the guarantee (ἀρραβών) in Ephesians 1:13–14,[529]

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[526] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 13-14; Also, this raises the question of why Paul addressed the Corinthians as believers given his comment in 3:1. Perhaps they were still Christians, but were dangerously close to falling from the faith.

[527] BDAG, s.v. "ἀρραβών."

[528] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 74.

[529] Ibid., 74-75.

but as noted above, this is not a unilateral guarantee, so neither of these passages clearly supports

his position.

Geisler also adamantly asserts that Philippians 1:6 proves eternal security. He says, "God

finishes what he starts. To deny this is a slur on the divine character."[530] Most commentators

agree that the work God starts refers to salvation[531] and that he finishes what he starts, but

disagree over whether what God starts is the entire work of salvation (monergism) or only God's

part in salvation (synergism). Ashby insists that the parenetic portions of Scripture support a

synergistic view.[532] Shank affirms this view, noting Paul's exhortation for perseverance in 3:16.

He asserts that Paul does not base his confidence on "some inexorable divine law which must

continue operative regardless of the conduct of the Philippians. Quite to the contrary, his

confidence stems from his observation of the personal conduct of the Philippians themselves, as

evidenced in both verses 5 and 7."[533]

Taken out of context, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 could be seen as supporting eternal security,

but "the call to holy or sanctified living" occurs throughout the entire letter and especially in its

second half.[534] First Thessalonians 5:23–24 is a wish prayer that concludes the section beginning

with another wish prayer in 3:11–13, with the two forming a "bracket around the parenetic

material in 4:15–5:22, which has as one of its principal goals that of aiding the Thessalonians in

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[530] Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 75.

[531] Fee believes the work likely refers to one's salvation but notes that one cannot be certain of that (Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 86-87.) Hawthorne and Martin, on the other hand, believe it refers to "advancing the gospel *by* human means and, in this instance, by the Philippian church" (Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 25).

[532] Stephen M. Ashby, "A Reformed Arminian View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 167.

[533] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 106-07.

[534] Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 419.

the process of sanctification."[535] The prayers and the parenesis make no sense if the

Thessalonians' salvation has been predetermined.

Peter told his readers that by God's power, they are "being guarded through faith for a

salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). Most commentators recognize the

importance of the words "through faith," saying, "Peter requires perseverance;"[536] "the only

condition God sets for his people is that they must have faith;"[537] "in 1 Peter, πίστις . . .

characteristically refers to the maintaining of allegiance;"[538] "the stated purpose of Peter's letter

is to convince his readers to stand firm in the "true grace of God;"[539] and Christians receive

protection "through committing themselves in trust and obedience to God."[540] However, Grudem

claims that Christians are not only guarded from external forces, but are guarded against

themselves apostatizing as well. He cites 2 Corinthians 11:32, in which "at Damascus, the

governor 'guarded' the city in order to seize Paul."[541] However, this analogy does not work at

all. It might have worked if the governor was guarding Paul to prevent him from escaping to a

place where he would be killed; but on the contrary, in Damascus, the *city* was guarded so the

governor could find Paul so that he could seize him. In Peter's letter, the *person* is guarded and

God knows the exact location of the person and has him or her in his care. Neither example

shows someone guarding people to prevent them from harming themselves.

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[535] Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 205-06.

[536] Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 72.

[537] Scot McKnight, *1 Peter,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 71.

[538] Michaels, *1 Peter*, 23.

[539] Jobes, *1 Peter,* 87.

[540] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53.

[541] Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (1988, repr., Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 63.

Finally, Geisler sees 1 John 3:9 as "confirmation" of eternal security, since "the word 'cannot' indicates that a true believer has a divine nature that guarantees ultimate salvation."[542] However, this is not the case, because elsewhere in this letter, John also asserted, "everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him" (2:29), "whoever loves has been born of God" (4:7), and everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (5:1). People can stop practicing righteousness and stop loving, just as it has been shown in this paper that people can stop believing. Doing these things at some point in their lives does not guarantee ultimate salvation; persevering in doing them is what guarantees ultimate salvation. The overall point of this section was not to add further proof of the mutable position, but rather to show that passages alleged to prove the immutable position do not hold up to scrutiny.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a brief overview of the mutable position, for which apostasy is a real possibility for believers, and of the immutable position, which holds that once someone believes, they are secure for eternity. The first section explored numerous passages that showed that Christians can indeed fall from the faith, as well as a smaller number of passages that showed that they could return to the faith again after falling away. The following section gave further support to the mutable position by showing numerous passages that emphasized the need for Christians to persevere in their faith. Finally, the chapter analyzed passages claimed to support the immutable position, and found none that clearly supported the security of the believer. Part of the key to understanding this overall issue is that oftentimes it is not clear whether the person being spoken of was someone who ever believed (which would support the

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542 Geisler, "Moderate Calvinist View," 77.

mutable position) or someone who persevered in their faith until the end (which would support

the immutable position).

Chapter Six: Mindset is Key

Given that humans have libertarian free will to believe and must use that free will to persevere in their faith in order to attain final salvation (as shown in the previous chapters), this chapter will show that it is one's mindset that determines whether or not one continues to believe until the end. Only a mindset consistently set on the Spirit will result in one's continuing faithfulness. This chapter will start with some key preliminary issues before moving to a new section analyzing key Bible passages that support this broader premise. These passages deal with the dichotomy between flesh and spirit, and one of the key areas this chapter will explore is whether those "in the flesh" refers to unbelievers or could also refer to believers at various points in their lives. Related to this idea, this chapter will examine whether one's mindset is the cause or the result of living in the flesh or the Spirit. While the issue of flesh versus Spirit is especially prevalent in Paul's letters, passages from Matthew, Hebrews, and 1 John will also be considered.

One's mindset also closely relates to dying to sin, to the law, and to the other elemental spirits of the world, and the next section in this chapter will analyze passages containing references to dying to these items and show how this further solidifies the premise on mindset stated at the outset of this chapter. Key aspects to explore include what dying to sin actually means, how it relates to the concepts of "realm" and "age," and whether "having died to sin" is a single moment in the past or is incomplete—though this difference is somewhat nuanced.

The final section of this chapter explores how one's mindset solidifies over time, whether focused on the things of the earth or the things above. People whose minds are set on earthly things will eventually become immeasurably sinful. On the other hand, a person whose mind is consistently set on the things above eventually becomes one with God in some sense. The vicious downward circle of the wrong mindset is replaced with a virtuous upward cycle of the

right mindset. The process of transformation (as used in Romans 12:2) and sanctification brings

a believer closer and closer to God over time. Both setting one's mind on the Spirit or the flesh

generally remain options one's entire life, but due to the solidification of one's mindset, the

probability of change becomes less and less likely. The sinful mindset eventually becomes

irreparably hardened, as an analysis of the appropriate biblical passages will show. Alternatively,

sanctification eventually leads to a more complete union with and becoming more in the image

of Christ. Therefore, understanding both the criticalness of mindset and how it progresses is key

to a solid understanding of one's eternal destiny. This overall section will examine passages from

throughout the Bible in support of its premise.

Some Preliminary Issues

A few preliminary issues must be addressed before examining the passages that deal

directly with one's mindset. First, while whether one chooses to trust in Christ depends upon

one's mindset, it must be emphasized that this is only possible due to God's (prevenient) grace.

Without this, people would not even have this choice. However, as discussed previously, God

does not force the person in either direction, but rather, he calls people to him, yet leaves the

decision to trust in him in their hands.[543] In the same way, God leaves the decision of upon what

one sets his or her mind in the person's hands as well. God enables, encourages, and reasons with

people, but he does not force them to choose a certain way. The criticalness of mindset choice is

why the earlier investigation into the issue of free will was so important.

Second, just as people's choice to trust in Jesus is a binary choice, their choice of mindset

is also a binary choice, aligned with their choice regarding Jesus. While in one sense a myriad of

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[543] See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 159.

possibilities exists regarding on what people set their minds, in a more important sense, there are only two choices: the Spirit or the flesh, which is also described as the things above or the things below. Just as Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30),[544] he also said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24). The word translated as money here, μαμωνᾶς, more broadly means "'property,' 'earthly goods,' but always with a derogatory sense of the materialistic, anti-godly and sinful."[545] In other words, one's master is either God or the sinful things of the earth. Paul clearly showed that sin can reign as one's master, and he exhorted his readers to make God their master instead (Rom. 6:12–14). One's master directly relates to one's mindset, as one's thinking determines one's identity: "For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Prov. 23:7, NASB). Ed Marks asserts, "We are either in the spirit or in the flesh; there is no third place for us to be."[546]

Similarly, Chapter Two showed that whenever the word "mind" appears in a non-neutral sense in the New Testament (fifty-four times), it always relates to either the Spirit or the flesh. This binary usage will be further seen in the analysis of the passages in the next section.

Finally, it is worth briefly considering T. W. Hunt's view of what he calls the principles that govern the "actions that God has commanded us to take with our mind." He describes three

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[544] One may question how Luke 9:50 fits here, in which Jesus said, "The one who is not against you is for you." There are two related keys to this. First, the exclusive phrase, Matthew 12:30, follows a discussion of those inside versus outside of a kingdom, while the inclusive phrase, Luke 9:50, follows a discussion of someone who performed exorcisms in the name of Jesus. Second, the exclusive phrase is singular, dealing with being for or against Jesus, while the inclusive phrase is plural, dealing with being for or against the disciples. In other words, someone who is not aligned with Jesus is by nature against him, but a believer who is not part of a particular Christian group (like the disciples) and not acting against them, is for them. Those against Jesus would not have their minds set on the Spirit, while the one "not against" the disciples, who apparently was effective with exorcisms in Jesus' name likely did have his mind set on the Spirit. See also James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 291-92.

[545] Friedrich Hauck, "μαμωνᾶς," TDNT 4:388-390.

[546] Ed Marks, "Setting Our Mind on the Spirit," *Affirmation & Critique*. 21, no. 1 (2016): 37.

principles that come from specific commands given in the New Testament regarding the mind. Further, he sees these three principles as the beginning, middle, and end stages of a "process that culminates in spiritual maturity."

The first, the "will principle," which he bases on Colossians 3:2, aligns closely with the main thrust of this chapter, and that is to set one's mind on the Spirit (or things above) rather than the flesh (or things of the earth). Hunt contrasts the will with one's instinct, and it enables people to do what they might not naturally otherwise do, as it is often easier to control one's will than one's emotions.[547]

Hunt bases his second, the "river principle," on a combination of Romans 12:2 ("Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind") and John 7:38 ("Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'"). His point is that Christians constantly need to be growing in their faith and maturity and should not become stagnant. To this end, he says, "An organism that is not renewing itself is dying."[548] The two verses cited and their concepts of renewal and maturity are brought together even more tightly in Titus 3:5 ("He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"). The key process in one's salvation by the renewal of the Holy Spirit is closely tied to setting one's mind on the things of the Spirit, since doing so is "life and peace" (Rom. 8:6).

His third, the "readiness principle," he bases on 1 Peter 1:13 ("Prepare your minds for action," NASB). Just as Jesus was always alert and ready to respond to whatever came his way,

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[547] T. W. Hunt, *The Mind of Christ: The Transforming Power of Thinking His Thoughts* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 13.

[548] Ibid., 14; While Hunt's general point is correct, it is taking John 7:38 out of context, where Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit, who obviously does not renew, but provides the power for the person to renew.

Christians should also always be prepared for any enticement by Satan or the world. He says, "Readiness is being qualified for service."[549]

While Hunt gives a good biblical view of setting, transforming, and preparing one's mind, for purposes of this paper, all three of these ideas are subsumed in the first. When people consistently set their minds on the Spirit or the things above, their minds will gradually be transformed and ultimately be in such a condition to always be prepared for whatever may arise. Setting one's mind is not just an initial action to take, but an action that must be taken constantly throughout all of one's life, choosing to focus on heavenly rather than earthly things.

Mindset Is Determining Factor in Following Christ

When examining biblical passages that deal with one's mindset, Romans 8:3–8 is the primary passage that delivers the core message of this paper. N. T. Wright contends that "the vital role of the mind" is a central theme of Paul's letter to the Romans.[550] Wright further says that "This development of a Christian 'mind,' . . . in the sense of developing the freedom to think wisely and carefully about particular vocational and innovatory tasks, is at the heart of Paul's vision of Christian character."[551]

Before examining that passage, though, Romans 7, which has engendered an enormous amount of passionate debate over the centuries, needs to be considered first. It would require too

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[549] Hunt, *Mind of Christ*, 14-15.

[550] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1121.

[551] Ibid., 1124. Wright bases his position on the progression of concepts starting in Romans 1:20-25, 28, which he asserts shows that people can grasp the truth about God, one's mind determines one's behavior, and the mind is closely associated with the heart. Based on this understanding, idolatry creates a "darkening of the heart," "dehumanizing behavior," and ultimately an "unfit" mind. This concept is then shown in reverse in 4:19–21 with Abraham, and then the "dilemma of the mind" is shown and resolved in 7:7–8:11. Finally, Paul concluded this position with 12:1–2, where the "renewing of the mind . . . is the key to Paul's regular motif about learning to think straight, about not being deceived."

much space for this paper to delve into Romans 7 with any depth, so this section will deal just

briefly with the last few verses, which touch directly on the mind, and how this sets up what

follows in Romans 8:3–8. In the second half of Romans 7, Paul wrote about the battle raging

within himself and how he was unable to do what he wants to do. He summarized this in part by

saying, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law

waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in

my members" (Rom. 7:22–23).[552] This left Paul in a defeated position, because the law of sin in

his members had won out over the law of God in his mind.

However, this is just the set up to what comes next in Romans 8. As fallen human beings,

sin indeed does rule in people, but Christ, through his death and resurrection, has made it so that

sin no longer has the authority to rule in those who believe in him. The issue for the Christian has

changed from one of authority to one of submission. The first problem for many Christians is

that they have lived under sin's authority for so long, and sin continues to act as if it still has

authority, that out of habit they continue to cede authority to it. The second problem is that

Christians often use their freedom from sin's authority to try to serve God fully on their own

power. This behavior can be seen in the final verse of Romans 7, in which Paul said, "So then, I

myself serve the law of God with my mind" (Rom. 7:25). The problem is in the "I myself."[553]

Christians will continually fail if they operate this way. Instead, they must change from

submission to sin to submission to God (see Rom. 6:15–23). Just after Paul's "I myself"

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[552] "The meaning of ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος here must be much the same as that of ὁ νοῦς μου in v. 23 and ὁ νοῦς in v. 25" (Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 363).

[553] This view depends upon how one interprets αὐτὸς ἐγὼ here. Several commentators see the emphatic nature of this as meaning something along the lines of "I by means of my own resources and abilities apart from God" (Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 672). See also Jewett, *Romans*, 473; Osborne, *Romans*, 217-18; Thielman, *Romans*, 364-65; William Sanday and Arthur C, Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary 5th ed. (LaVergne, TN: Legare Street Press, 2023), 178; contra Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 397.

statement, he gave the glorious news about having been set free from the law of sin and death, which leads directly to the passage to be discussed next in more detail.

Regarding this passage, Romans 8:3–8, commentators generally agree that one's mind is either set on the flesh or on the Spirit. "There is no middle ground here."[554] However, scholars differ on whether these descriptions refer separately to believers (Spirit) and unbelievers (flesh), or to different states that could both exist in believers. In other words, while the spiritual state could not belong to an unbeliever, could the fleshly state belong to a believer?

Sherwood rejects this possibility, saying that it refers to either believers devoted to Spirit-empowered righteousness or unbelievers devoted to sinfulness.[555] Fee believes similarly, noting that the "'mind of the flesh' is an unrelenting hostility toward God."[556] Lloyd-Jones also accepts this view, but from a slightly different angle, arguing that those in the flesh cannot refer to so-called 'carnal' Christians as opposed to 'spiritual' Christians, because those at enmity with God cannot possibly be Christians.[557] Schreiner concurs, arguing that the two mindsets refer to separate ontological categories—it defines their very nature.[558]

However, a closer look at these various rationales suggests that they do not seem to hold up to scrutiny. Regarding Sherwood's argument, are Christians truly "devoted to Spirit-empowered righteousness" at all times? "Devoted" is a strong word. It would seem that many Christians are not fully devoted to righteousness a great deal of the time. Also, Scripture clearly

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[554] Jewett, *Romans*, 488.

[555] Sherwood, *Romans*, 422.

[556] Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 542.

[557] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, Exposition of Chapter 8:5-8:17, The Sons of God* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 3, 11.

[558] Schreiner, *Romans*, 410-11.

states that Christians sin. Are Christians devoted to righteousness while they are sinning? That hardly seems possible. One might argue that the idea of mindset should be thought of more as an overall general stance rather than something that can vary, but the research done in Chapter Two and verse-specific lexicon definitions show otherwise. Recall that the three relevant domains were the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, to employ one's faculty for thoughtful planning, and to keep on giving serious consideration to something. None of these relate to a static state, and the second two require active thought. More to the point, the verse-specific material for Romans 8:5 in BDAG gives a first-level definition for φρονέω of "to give careful consideration to something," and a sub-definition of "take someone's side, espouse someone's cause."[559] These matters clearly can and likely do change over time and are not static, let alone ontological. Similarly, for this verse, Thayer gives a general definition of "to seek one's interests or advantage; to be of one's party, side with him," and specifically concerning Romans 8:5 says, "to pursue those things which gratify the flesh, . . . the Holy Spirit."[560] Again, one can easily change what they pursue at any given time. When a Christian sins, they are pursuing "those things which gratify the flesh," not what gratifies the Holy Spirit.

Fee, though, takes a similar stance, arguing that people whose minds are set on the flesh are "completely given to the ways of the flesh. In colloquial parlance, such people 'think flesh, eat flesh, sleep flesh,'" and "the opposite is true of believers."[561] Christians who "think Spirit, eat Spirit, sleep Spirit" may be ideal, but doing so is not a reality for most believers. Additionally, as noted in the paragraph above, this is not what φρονέω means. Furthermore, Fee's claim that

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[559] BDAG, s.v. "φρονέω."

[560] Thayer, s.v. "φρονέω."

[561] Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 541.

those whose minds are set on the flesh have "an unrelenting hostility toward God"[562] seems to go

beyond Paul's simple statement that "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" (τὸ

φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν). Paul asserted nothing about "unrelenting" hostility. EDNT

explains, "'Hostility against God,' in the context of the dualism of flesh and Spirit in relation to

God (Rom 8:7f.), is the practice of striving after the σάρξ."[563] In other words, having such a

mindset itself is what creates the hostility. So if, as suggested above, Christians can change their

mindsets temporarily to be set on the flesh, by definition they can be hostile to God during this

time. This conclusion goes directly against what Lloyd-Jones claims as well.

The definitions of φρονέω given above show that contrary to Schreiner's position, one's

mindset is not ontological. Further, Schreiner seems to inadvertently suggest this very thing, by

noting that while φρονέω can be used in a hortatory sense, it is not used that way in this passage.

Yet one of the verses he cites that uses it in a hortatory sense is Colossians 3:2 (which will be

discussed below), where Paul used it with essentially the same topic, such that he exhorts his

Christian readers to "set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."[564]

In other words, the usage of the exhortation further supports that Christians do *not* have an

unchangeable nature. Just as one's nature changes when becoming a Christian, it can also change

after one has become a Christian.

Longenecker supports the idea of a changeable mindset when he says, "Thinking and

living 'according to the fleshly nature' is not only the situation of the unregenerate, it is also a

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[562] Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 542.

[563] Michael Wolter, "ἔχθρα," EDNT 2:93-94.

[564] While Paul used "things that are on the earth" in Colossians 3:2 versus "things of the flesh" in Romans 8:5, it seems clear that these statements refer to the same thing, since in Colossians 3:5, he described what these earthly things are, and this description aligns very closely to Paul's longer list of "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19.

real possibility, as well as a sad reality, for many who claim to be Christ's own."[565] Thielman

similarly asserts, "The pattern of life dictated by the flesh and the pattern of life dictated by the

Spirit are rivals grappling for influence over the person."[566] Cranfield adds that fallen humans

have enmity against God, but "even in the Christian this is still true, as 7:14–25 has made clear:

but in the Christian fallen human nature is not left to itself."[567]

Jewett and Moo take a different tack, with Jewett arguing again that the two mindsets

refer to believers and nonbelievers, "whose very being is determined by the realm to which they

belong."[568] Moo concurs, noting that "Paul used 'in' to connote the idea of 'realm,' with flesh

and Spirit denoting those 'powers' that dominate the two realms of salvation history."[569] Dunn,

taking the other side of the argument, also bases his view on the two realms (or epochs or ages),

saying that the distinction is between two epochs, where the alternatives relate to "the ethical

character of everyday decisions and relationships."[570] However, Dunn notes that this should not

be seen "as an ontological classification, as though Paul envisaged two classes of humankind,

created differently and forever locked into a particular character and destiny."[571] The point is that

believers have not fully moved from the old realm or epoch to the new, but that they live in the

"already but not yet" reality that exists until Christ comes again. "In terms of perspective and

paradigms, as in 8:2–9, it is a case of either-or. But in terms of the continuing eschatological

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[565] Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 697.

[566] Thielman, *Romans*, 383.

[567] Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 386-87.

[568] Jewett, *Romans*, 486.

[569] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 486.

[570] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 424.

[571] Ibid., 425.

tension, it is a case of both-and . . . until God completes the salvation process by 'giving life to their mortal bodies' (8:11)."[572]

Paul's regular use of the indicative with the imperative, which will be discussed more fully in the next section about dying to sin, shows that while in one sense Christians have already moved into the new realm (the indicative), in another sense they are exhorted to stay in the new realm (the imperative). Although Schreiner argues that these particular verses constitute a description rather than an exhortation,[573] Verena Schafroth notes that while no imperative exists in these verses, "one might argue that the imperative follows from the way the indicative is presented here," at least implicitly.[574] Similarly, Richard Dillon argues that "the antithesis between life in the two spheres [drives] the argument . . . from the indicative mode to the imperative."[575] Clearly, Paul was making a point that is intended to influence his readers' thinking and behavior.

Regarding Christians and the flesh, Moo says, "'Being in the flesh' (v. 8) is *not* a possibility for the believer."[576] However, it seems that instead, Paul's point was that *staying* in the flesh is not a possibility for someone who remains a believer. As shown in the previous chapters, believers can apostatize and can also return to the faith. They will certainly be in the flesh when they apostatize and they will generally not be in the flesh when they return to the

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[572] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 480.

[573] Schreiner, *Romans*, 411.

[574] Verena Schafroth, "Romans 8: The Chapter of the Spirit," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 30, no. 1 (2010): 84.

[575] Richard J. Dillon, "The Spirit as Taskmaster and Troublemaker in Romans 8," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (October 1998): 694.

[576] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 486.

faith.[577] But more than this, no believer is fully one hundred percent in the Spirit at all times. Rather, Paul was describing an ideal state here.[578] Moo himself hints at this when he says, "the life-giving power of God's Spirit is finally effective only in those who continue to let the Spirit change their lives."[579] Furthermore, Paul, speaking to the Corinthian Christians, said, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh" (1 Cor. 3:1). Commenting on this verse, Moo says these Christians were "'worldly' in their outlook," "following the values of this world," and had a "way of thinking that is inconsistent with their true status of 'people of the Spirit.'"[580]

For the purposes of this paper, showing that Christians may not be "in the Spirit" at times is not critical; what is critical is that this analysis shows that Christians' minds are not always set on the Spirit. At times—and often more than just fleeting moments of time—Christians' minds are set on the flesh, which is where the danger lies and is why the Bible so frequently exhorts Christians to the right mindset and right behaviors. Paul clearly said, "To set the mind on the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6). Living in the overlap of the two ages, Christians are prone to let their minds think of earthly things rather than heavenly things from time to time. If they do not actively and continually set their minds on the things of the Spirit, their overall mindset and

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[577] Note that Paul seemed to refer to "being in the flesh" as locative rather than ontological in this passage. First, note that in verse 5, while some versions use the phrase "live according to the flesh," the actual Greek is "are according to the flesh." "Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh" (NASB). Second, in verse 7, Paul spoke of those who set their minds on the flesh as being hostile to God, and then in verse 8 he added that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Paul seemed to use "in the flesh" and "minds set on the flesh" almost interchangeably.

[578] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 425; Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformational Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 119.

[579] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 485.

[580] Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 118.

outlook can become worldly or fleshly, as had happened with the Corinthian believers. Left unchecked, this will lead to spiritual death.

Finally, there is some debate over whether living in the flesh leads to a fleshly mindset or if a fleshly mindset leads to living in the flesh. In reality, both of these angles likely come into play. The more one thinks about something, the more likely that person is to take part in it, and the more one takes part in something, the more likely they are to think about it. As noted earlier, Christians are still saddled with their sinful nature, but at the same time, they have the Holy Spirit, who enables them to step away from that nature, since it no longer rules them. The sinful nature and the Holy Spirit each pull Christians in an opposite direction. Christians must choose which of these they are going to allow to direct their lives.

This section will turn next to Matthew 16:23 since it brings an interesting perspective to some of the key facets of Romans 8:3–8. In this verse, Jesus said to Peter, "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Matthew here used the same word for setting one's mind (φρονέω) as Paul used in Romans 8:6. Also, just prior to this, Jesus told Peter that his answer that Jesus was the Christ was revealed to him by the Father, and in his statement that Jesus rebuked, he called Jesus "Lord." Clearly, in the combination of Peter's statements and his overall relationship with Jesus, he meant something more than just "master" when he called Jesus "Lord." Yet Paul said, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

Jesus' usage of φρονέω with Peter further undermines the argument that those whose minds are set on the Spirit are believers, while those whose minds are set on the flesh are unbelievers.[581] If this were true, Peter would have been a believer when the Father revealed to

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[581] Interestingly, Lloyd-Jones, who insists that Romans 5–8 contrasts Christians with non-Christians, uses this Matthew passage as an example of someone setting his mind on the flesh, paraphrasing Jesus as saying, "The

him that Jesus was the Christ and when he called Jesus "Lord," but then quickly became an unbeliever when his mind was set on earthly rather than heavenly things. Instead, it makes much more sense to understand this as believers lapsing into earthly thinking from time to time. Of course, one must be careful about comparing the two passages, because the passage with Peter obviously happened prior to Christ's death and resurrection, while the Romans passage was written afterward, but the sentiment remains the same. Those who are close followers of Jesus do not always have their minds set on the Spirit, but are exhorted to do so and rebuked when they do not.

John expressed a similar thought to that in Romans 8:3–8, but used love instead of mind: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:15–16). Perhaps related to this, 1 Corinthians 13:13 is an interesting passage, because it ends with "the greatest of these is love." Given the importance of faith, one might expect faith to be elevated above love. However, it may be that love is greatest because you love what you set your mind on and vice versa.

In Romans 12:2, Paul exhorted his readers to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind," which is enlightening because it focuses not on what Christ does, but on what the person must allow.[582] Clearly, this transformation cannot be done without the Holy Spirit, but Paul

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trouble with you, Peter, . . . is that your whole mentality is wrong, your whole way of thinking is wrong; you are not thinking the things of God, you are thinking the things of man" (Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-8:17,* 8).

[582] Both "do not be conformed" (μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε) and "be transformed" (μεταμορφοῦσθε) are imperatives, and therefore commands, but they are also passives. In the second case, this indicates that believers must *allow themselves* to be transformed. A passive command is effectively a command to surrender to the one who will act. The believer must surrender to the Holy Spirit and follow his lead rather than surrender to the powers of the world. See Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 607. Setting one's mind on the flesh results in letting oneself be conformed to the world, while setting one's mind on the Spirit results in letting oneself be transformed into the image of Christ.

emphasized the importance for the believer to cooperate in renewing his or her mind.[583] Doing so

may include both avoiding thinking about earthly things as well as focusing on heavenly

things.[584] Furthermore, the renewing of one's mind does not happen immediately upon

conversion. A learning curve is involved,[585] and it is ultimately a lifelong process.[586] Moo states it

very well:

> This renewing of the mind . . . does not automatically happen to us when we believe.
> God's Spirit . . . provides a whole new orientation to our thinking. But our thinking itself
> is not instantaneously changed. . . [We] must respond to the Spirit's work and actively
> engage in the process if it is to happen. The key question then becomes: What are we
> feeding into our minds?[587]

Ultimately what Christians decide to set their minds on is critical to the success that they

have in transforming their minds. Effectively, their minds must be "made new again and

again."[588]

Romans 7 and 8 together present a strong statement of the synergistic process involved in

salvation. Humans will absolutely fail trying to reach the goal on their own. God, on his own, has

provided the way for humans to reach the goal. Yet humans must still take hold of what God has

provided. Humans can do this by setting their minds on the things of the Spirit, but Paul also

made it clear that this only happens when humans submit their will to that of the Spirit and work

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The renewal of the mind transforms the person, and this is done by setting one's mind on the Spirit and allowing the Spirit to rule.

[583] Thielman, *Romans*, 569; Raymond Laird, *Mindset, Moral Choice and Sin in the Anthropology of John Chrysostom* (Macquarie Centre, Australia: SCD Press, 2017), 2.

[584] Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 153.

[585] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 273; see also Ephesians 5:10.

[586] Osborne, *Romans*, 381-82; see also Ephesians 4:11–16.

[587] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 398-99.

[588] Osborne, *Romans*, 381.

in conjunction with the Spirit. First, the Spirit of God must dwell in them (8:9). Second, it is the Spirit who gives life (8:10–11). Third, Christians put the deeds of the body to death by the Spirit (8:13). Fourth, they are led by the Spirit as sons of God (8:14–15). Fifth, the Spirit bears witness with Christians' spirits. Sixth, the Spirit helps Christians in their weakness (8:26). Seventh, the Spirit intercedes for Christians according to the will of God (8:26-27). One can see from this list that Christians and the Spirit have synergistic roles in all of this.

A key verse regarding the challenge facing people who follow Christ is Galatians 5:17, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." While the general sense of this verse is plain, some of the specific nuances are less clear. Frank Matera says that "'Flesh' and 'Spirit' represent two totally different ways of living. The Galatians must choose one or the other; they cannot choose both."[589] While as a general point this is correct, it seems to miss what Paul was trying to convey here. Paul was writing to Christians, who have the Spirit, and so implicitly they have made the choice that their way of living will be by the Spirit. The problem is that in their day-to-day activity, they do not always make the correct choice. In addition, the correct choice is rarely easy because of the battle between flesh and Spirit. In other words, the issue is not a lifestyle choice at a general level, but a decisioning choice at a specific level. In the immediately prior verse, Paul exhorted them to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Later, he encouraged them to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25) and to "sow to the Spirit" (6:8). They have the Spirit, so

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[589] Matera, *Galatians*, 200.

they are able to do this, but they must still choose to do it. Thomas Schreiner says it well: "Life

in the Spirit cannot be reduced to autopilot or cruise control."[590]

Douglas Moo acknowledges the difficulty in interpreting this verse, and while no

particular interpretation is without its difficulties, he believes the best view is that "the flesh and

the Spirit are fighting each other, and their power and influence determine the direction of one's

life; as a result, you cannot do what you yourselves want (but only what the flesh or the Spirit

wants)."[591] Moo appears to be wrong in framing it this way, because it seems to take human

responsibilities out of the equation altogether (though he may not actually be intending to imply

this; see below). F. F. Bruce, on the other hand, addresses this directly, saying, "the believer is

not the helpless battleground of two opposing forces," and can choose to either yield to the flesh

or obey the Spirit.[592] Moo addresses one side of this equation as well, saying, "Only by allowing

the Spirit to take control, then, can the believer experience victory in this battle."[593] Both

scholars seem to be completely correct in this sentiment—though, whether intentional or not, one

could interpret both of their points as a one-time decision. It would be better to bring in

Schreiner's point here and combine it with Bruce's and Moo's: the believer must continually

yield control to the Spirit in the multitude of battles that they will face day in and day out.

Christian life entails a constant struggle.

As noted above, in Galatians 6:8, Paul said, "For the one who sows to his own flesh will

from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap

eternal life." While this verse does not directly use the word "mind," sowing to the flesh or the

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[590] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 288.

[591] Moo, *Galatians*, 356.

[592] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 245.

[593] Moo, *Galatians*, 356.

Spirit would certainly entail using one's mind in directing a person's words and deeds. DeSilva describes this verse as a choice between consistently *devoting* oneself to following the lead of the Spirit versus *giving oneself over* to the desires of the flesh.[594] As in Romans 8, there are only two choices available to people, and the ramifications of these choices point to one's eternal destiny.[595]

In Ephesians 4:23, Paul reminded his readers that when they learned Christ, they were exhorted to "be renewed in the spirit of your minds," and he sandwiched this between putting off one's old self and putting on one's new self. Arnold points out that the mind is the place where human choices are made, and he interprets this verse as "the mind is being renewed by the Spirit."[596] Andrew Lincoln summarizes this well when he says, "The present tense of this infinitive underlines the continuous nature of the renewal that is still required, and the passive voice suggests that this takes place as believers allow themselves to be renewed."[597] Snodgrass agrees with the continuous nature of the renewal, but further notes that the alternative is for the old self to be deluded into a flesh-focused downward spiral. He also points out that the concepts of "putting off" and "putting on" that envelop this verse describe dying and rising with Christ, which the next section of this paper will discuss.[598] This verse again reinforces the synergism between the believer and the Holy Spirit.

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[594] DeSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 493.

[595] Schreiner, *Galatians,* 369.

[596] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 289.

[597] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 287.

[598] Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* 234-35.

Scholars debate whether Philippians 2:5 should be interpreted kerygmatically (reminding believers how they came to be in Christ), or ethically (an ethical exhortation to be like Christ). O'Brien gives a lengthy analysis of each view and concludes that the latter is the better interpretation, though he sees this involving more than just one's mind.[599] Thielman argues that Paul's point is social rather than mental,[600] while Fee argues that it includes both.[601] Hunt, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the mind, saying that this verse tells us that "we are to have the mind of Christ," that "we are to think like Jesus," and that our mind should "have the same characteristics that Christ's mind has."[602] He further argues that while "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) from the time we became Christians, "the spiritual mind will develop in the same way that a little child's mind develops. . . In us, the mind of Christ matures in a process of growth.[603] Hunt's summary fits well with the analyses of Romans 8 and Romans 12, above.

In Philippians 3:19, Paul wrote again of those "with minds set on earthly things," but commentators disagree regarding to whom this specifically refers. Suggestions include "immoral and licentious people,"[604] those who only claim to be Christians,[605] and those who likely are or were Christians, but whom Paul "now assigns to a place outside Christ, precisely because they have abandoned Christ."[606] Regardless, the end of these people is destruction, consistent with Paul's point in Romans 8.

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[599] O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 205.

[600] Thielman, *Philippians,* 115.

[601] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 200.

[602] Hunt, *The Mind of Christ*, 7.

[603] Ibid.

[604] Silva, *Philippians*, 180.

[605] Hooker, "The Letter to the Philippians," 166.

[606] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 371.

The first half of Philippians 4 contains a list of exhortations that enables one to stand firm in the Lord, as urged in the first verse.[607] The concepts of mind and mindset as discussed in this paper appear twice in this passage. First, by rejoicing, being reasonable with everyone, not being anxious, and requesting in prayer with thanksgiving, one's heart and mind will be guarded in Christ (4:4–7). These exhortations show the virtuous cycle of positive mental actions leading to the protection of the mind, which, in turn, should make it easier for more of the same. Second, one should think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or worthy of praise, and then practice what one has learned from Paul, so that the God of peace will be with the person (4:8–9). The ESV translation of "think about" is perhaps better understood as BDAG's definition of "to give careful thought to a matter, think (about), consider, ponder, let one's mind dwell on."[608] Hawthorne and Martin translate it as "focus your minds,"[609] and O'Brien as "let your mind continually dwell on these things."[610] When understood this way, this verse conforms quite closely to the similar concept in Romans 8.

Colossian 3:2 is effectively the imperative corollary to Romans 8:5, with the things that are above replacing the things of the Spirit and the things that are on earth replacing the things of the flesh. This verse will be examined more closely in the next section as part of an analysis of the broader passage in which it occurs.

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[607] Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 248.

[608] BDAG, s.v. "λογίζομαι."

[609] Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 248.

[610] O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 507.

Mindset and Dying to Sin

One's mindset is also closely related to dying to sin, to the law, and to the other elemental spirits of the world, which further solidifies the conclusion reached immediately above. While in Romans 8:3–8 Paul gave an *explanation* of the importance of mindset, in Colossians 3:1–11, Paul *exhorted* his readers to set their minds on the things that are above (v. 2), using the same word, φρονέω, that he used in the Romans passage. They should do this *because* they have died (v. 3), and Paul then further exhorted them to "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (v. 5). This example of Paul's somewhat common use of combining the indicative with the imperative relates to the previously-discussed issue of the Christian living in the overlap of two ages, and will be discussed more fully later in this section.

Essentially, Christians have died to the old world and have been raised with Christ into the new world. They have, in effect, renounced their citizenship in the old, and taken on citizenship in the new—in heaven with Christ. Yes, they still physically live on earth, but they are no longer subject to the spiritual rulers of earth, but rather only subject to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Just as Christ is in heaven, Christians must also consider themselves spiritually in heaven while physically on earth. To live properly as citizens of heaven, believers must set their minds intently on Christ and the things above, which means completely reorienting their existence to one of full devotion to Christ, empowered by their union with Christ. Doing so also enables them to avoid the snares of the old world in which they were so often caught.

Furthermore, while the earlier passage focuses on the result of the choice of mindset one makes—resulting in either spiritual death or spiritual life (Rom. 8:6), the latter passage focuses on the behavior that should follow from the correct mindset—ongoing carnal death, which results in spiritual life (Col. 3:3–5). In fact, Paul went so far as to say that Christ *is* a Christian's

life. What did he mean by this? Clearly, Christians have been raised with Christ, but the statement that Christ is their life brings out what this means more emphatically. It also reinforces and strengthens what it means to seek and set one's mind on the things that are above. Doing so takes it beyond sharing one's life with Christ,[611] and involves a total submission of every part of one's being to Christ.[612] Not a single facet of one's life can be set aside and continue to operate under the rules of the old world. For Christ to be one's life, Christ must become their identity, such that the Christian has no life outside of Christ.[613] One must start by seeking and setting one's mind on the things that are above, but then embrace this so fully that Christ becomes one's entire life.

Romans 6:1–14 sheds further light on Paul's indicative/imperative of having died to sin and needing to continue to die to sin, and how this relates to the importance of one's mindset. Paul brought this out early and strongly when he said, "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (6:2). The indicative of having died to sin has already happened, but the implied imperative suggests that at least some Christians were not taking advantage of God's freeing them from the power of sin (including Paul in Romans 7). Paul's explicit imperative comes later: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11). The Greek word translated as "consider" here (λογίζομαι) is the same word used in Philippians 4:8 (discussed earlier) that involves giving careful consideration to something, which obviously requires using one's mind appropriately. Commentators describe Romans 6:11 as "Christians are also to arm themselves with the mentality that they are dead to sin;"[614] "Only by

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[611] Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 215.

[612] Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 208.

[613] Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 270.

[614] Fitzmyer, *Romans,* 438.

constantly . . . looking at ourselves as people who really have died to sin and been made alive in Christ will we be able to live out the new status God has given us;"[615] and "The mind of faith—the mind that trusts in Christ—recognizes a new identity, in which the past is forgiven and one's bodily impulses do not set one's agenda."[616]

Longenecker notes that the key to 6:11 is that believers live in two ages simultaneously.[617] Once again, the concept of two ages or two realms shows up as an important part of the equation. Jewett recognizes this issue in 6:2, where "in it" means "in the realm of sin."[618] Dunn concurs, but adds that having died to sin "puts the individual beyond the power of sin . . . and so unable (because dead!) to live "in" it, that is, in its realm, under its authority."[619] Dunn's comment does not appear to be quite correct though. While it certainly does put the individual beyond the power of sin that comes with its former authority, it does not make the person *unable* to live in it and under its authority. Rather it *empowers* the person with the option not to live in it. Unfortunately, as argued in this paper, some Christians do not consistently take advantage of this empowerment and freedom.

Interestingly, while Dunn's rationale for his position is that the person has already died in the past when they became a Christian,[620] he acknowledges that "the death is not complete," since one must have a "settled determination to live in the light of Christ's death and in the

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[615] Moo, *Romans,* 199.

[616] Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 52.

[617] Longenecker, *Epistle to the Romans*, 615-16.

[618] Jewett, *Romans*, 396.

[619] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 307.

[620] See also, Jewett, *Romans*, 395.

strength of a power which has already defeated sin's reign in death."[621] Moo says it slightly more

strongly, saying, "While 'living in sin' is incompatible with Christian existence and impossible

for the Christian as a constant condition, it remains a real threat."[622] That is exactly the point.

Continuing to live in sin will ultimately result in apostasy, and the way to avoid this is to set

one's mind on the things above.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live,

but Christ who lives in me." Christians certainly continue to sin, and it is certainly not Christ

living in them who is doing the sinning, which shows that when people died with Christ, they did

not die completely. Their sinful nature still exists, and they do not always allow Christ to reign in

them, but instead allow sin to reign, despite it no longer having dominion over them.

Paul also said in Colossians 2:20–22: "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of

the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations . . . according

to human precepts and teachings?"[623] This passage is perhaps the place where Paul treated this

particular point most clearly. Some scholars submit that the syntax suggests that "since" is a

better interpretation of εἰ in this verse than "if."[624] Either way, the assumption is that the people

have died with Christ, and Paul asked why they *do* submit to regulations. He clearly made the

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[621] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 324.

[622] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 358. Moo considers whether the phrase should be taken as a theological assertion that indicates that it is no longer possible to live in sin or as a moral appeal not to live in sin. He takes it as the latter, i.e., that for the Christian, living in sin is a real threat.

[623] Most scholars interpret the elemental spirits as the powers that rule the world outside of Christ, that Christ defeated on the cross, but who still fight against God's work (Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 189; Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 215). G. K. Beale broadens the concept to include "the entirety of the old, fallen, and sinful world" (Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 242).

[624] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 280.

point that those who have died continue to do what they should not do, or at least are beginning

to do so.[625] They are submitting to *human* precepts and teachings, i.e., things that are of the earth.

Just prior to this, Paul also spoke of the elemental spirits of the world, and then discussed

the combination of dying *and* rising with Christ, who has defeated the enemy (Col. 2:8–15). Here

in 2:20–23, he wrote only of dying and what is of no value in stopping the indulgence of the

flesh (human/earthly things). Then he immediately turned to the corollary of dying—having been

raised with Christ—and he exhorted his readers to seek the things above and set their minds on

the things above (3:1–3). Focusing on earthly things will not work in stopping the deeds of the

flesh. One must instead focus on the things above. They have died to the things that do not work,

and must now live to the things that do.

One's Mindset Solidifies Over Time

Like the proverbial frog in boiling water, the more people set their minds on earthly

things, the more accepting they become of ever greater depravity, until eventually they reach a

state of complete alienation from God. The classic text of James 1:14–16 does not follow this

line of thought exactly, but is consistent with it.

Consider the steps that James laid out in the path to death. First, it starts with people's

own inappropriate desires. The initial key is to not even desire the wrong things. No matter how

attractive these things may appear, people should have no desire to take part, but instead should

flee what has the potential to turn into a disastrous situation. Second, if instead they think

longingly of inappropriate desires and set their minds on what these desires would be like, those

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[625] Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 247.

desires, left unchecked, then lure and entice the people into temptation to act on them.[626] Third, if

desire and the associated temptation continue on unchecked, it will eventually lead to acting on

those desires and committing sin.[627] Once people are in a place they should not be, perhaps with

people they should not be with, the newly born sin will naturally grow.[628] At this point, the

people still have the opportunity to come to their senses and appeal to God for help out of the

situation, but their minds are now almost fully set on the things of the flesh. They have become

so comfortable in their life of sin that they are now on a direct path to James' fourth step: "Sin

when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Looking at this passage from a different angle, the Venerable Bede focused on

temptation, saying that it took place in three stages: suggestion, experiment/delight, and consent.

Conceptually this gets to the same point, as he says, "If in fact at the enemy's suggestion we

begin gradually to be drawn from the right intention and lured into vice," and evil action follows

with one's full consent, then we are deserving of death.[629]

Blomberg and Kamell define desire in this context as "any intense longing for an

improper object, that is, anything that gets in the way of our pursuit of God."[630] Further, this

includes not only major lapses, but also all of the minor indiscretions that people choose to do on

a regular basis that shape who they ultimately become.[631] Nystrom adds that such desire is "born

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[626] One could either see temptation as being a separate step or a subset of the first step of desire.

[627] Of course, reaching the point of sin can occur even before one takes action, as Jesus pointed out in his comments on adultery in Matthew 5:28.

[628] The individual may simply shrug off the growing sin, as alluded to a few verses later (1:22–24).

[629] Bede the Venerable, "Commentary on James," in *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 15.

[630] Blomberg and Kamell, *James,* 71.

[631] Ibid.*,* 72.

of self-interest that renders us susceptible to the evil inclination."[632] It is typically not about

actively seeking out temptation, but rather dwelling on improper thoughts[633] and then willingly

consenting to commit the sin associated with them.[634] Continuing to think about and dwell on

impure thoughts leads to death.[635] What one sets his or her mind on produces "a fixity of

character that has inevitable consequences: it leads either to 'death' . . . or to holy living, which

is a goal set in 1:4."[636]

The idea of one's mindset solidifying over time is also hinted at when Jesus said, "Truly,

truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). While not

impossible, it is generally difficult to extract oneself from slavery. Barrett suggests further that

committing sin while already a slave makes one even more of a slave.[637] Citing Hebrews 7:25,

Shank says, "The best safeguard against the development of a habitual pattern of deliberate

sinning is a firm repudiation of every sin of which we become conscious, in humble contrition

and confession before our High Priest who 'is able to continue saving to the uttermost those who

are ever drawing near to God through him.'"[638] In other words, one should both deliberately set

one's mind on the things above, but at the same time this entails ruthlessly guarding against

getting lured into spending any time thinking of the things of the earth.

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[632] David P. Nystrom, *James,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 73.

[633] Blomberg and Kamell, *James,* 72.

[634] Augustine, *Against Julian*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 35, trans. Matthew A. Schumacher (1957, first paperback repr., Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 356 (6.15.47).

[635] Augustine, "Sermon 77A," in *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century: Sermons*, vol. III, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 329 (77.A.3).

[636] Martin, *James*, 37.

[637] Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 345.

[638] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 136.

An earlier chapter discussed Romans 1:18–32, but it also relates closely to this issue as well. Those who rebelled against God and clearly had their minds set on the flesh, became futile in their thinking, their hearts were darkened, they became fools, and God gave them up to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies, to dishonorable passions, and to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. Notice that this list does not describe what they were, but what they became and what God gave them up to. It shows that such people went from bad to worse. Wright explains that unfit decisions lead to an unfit mind;[639] Keener says, "Because they refused the truth they had, they became incapable of discerning truth;"[640] and Moo adds, "God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin."[641]

Paul repeated this theme in Romans 6:19, saying that before people became Christians, they presented their members "as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness." Such behavior becomes self-perpetuating.[642] Likewise, Romans 7:17, 20 are classic verses in which Paul said that since he does what he does not want to do, it is no longer he that does it, but sin that dwells within him, which, as noted earlier, is because Paul was trying to do it on his own (fleshly) power rather than submitting his will to the Spirit. Unless believers set their minds on the Spirit and submit to God, they will also do what they do not want to do, since they still live in the flesh. [643]

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul stated something similar to what he said in Romans 1, speaking of unbelievers and how they walk in "the futility of their minds. They are darkened in

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[639] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1122.

[640] Keener, *Mind of the Spirit*, 12.

[641] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 111.

[642] Sherwood, *Romans*, 362.

[643] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God*, 290.

their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" (Eph. 4:17–19). All of this starts in their minds and their futile (fleshly) thinking. Yet once again, one sees the progression in their depravity, how their darkened understanding and alienation from God is due to their hardness of heart and how they have *become* callous and have *given themselves up* to sin.

Paul wrote to Timothy that "in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). An earlier chapter of this paper discussed this verse in connection with apostasy, but for the current purposes, the focus is on *how* someone could move from one's position as a believer to one who apostatizes and does the things mentioned here. Clearly, people who consistently set their minds on the things of the Spirit would never come close to entertaining the thought of, let alone *devoting* themselves to, deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. Most likely, consistent with the passage from James discussed at the beginning of this section, such evil thoughts entered their minds at some point, and instead of immediately dismissing them, they let them fester, and over time, they entertained the idea more and more, to the point where they fell from the faith and consistently set their minds on demonic things and other things of the flesh. If one continues to resist the Spirit's admonitions, they may deliberately apostatize, but more likely this point will be "arrived at imperceptibly and that the Spirit should quietly abandon His striving without the man's being aware of His departure. Samson 'knew not that the Lord was departed from him' (Judges 16:20)."[644]

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[644] Shank, *Life in the Son*, 200.

Temptations will naturally arise in the course of life, but believers have an ally in the Holy Spirit encouraging them to quickly refocus on the things above and not dwell on the temptation and allow it to move to the next step. Without this ally, unbelievers have a higher probability of entertaining the thought for longer and progressing to the next step. Yet as this passage suggests, even believers can succumb to this if they resist the Holy Spirit and turn their minds from the things above to the things below. Over time, both believers and unbelievers accept and even embrace temptation more readily, as they harden themselves against God's calling and encouragement. Steven Harper describes this process very well:

> If, however, we yield in degrees to the temptation, it will begin to be more pleasing to us. The Spirit will be grieved. Our faith will be weakened. Our love for God will cool. The Spirit will warn us more sharply, but we may persist in the downward spiral, turning further away to the point that we essentially resume a life of rebellion akin to that which we knew before we were born again. In that state, we may properly be said to have "fallen from grace." It is essential, however, to see that even when we fall *from* grace, we do not fall *beyond* grace. The seed of faith remains planted. The Spirit remains active. The seed may yet be revitalized by repentance and faith.[645]

Paul briefly addressed the progression of sinfulness again in 2 Timothy 3:13, in which he explained, "Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Because of sin, this is the natural situation for people who do not set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Not only do their own situations worsen as they fall into a state of greater and greater deception, but by deceiving others, they bring such people along with them. In the Romans passage discussed earlier, Paul said something similar: "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32).

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[645] Steven J. Harper, "A Wesleyan Arminian View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 241.

Paul's point reinforces a separate but related theme in the Bible—that of the company one keeps. The opening to the very first Psalm says it well: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:1–2). This short passage contrasts closely associating with unbelievers to setting one's mind on the things above. Doing the former will have a tendency to keep one from doing the latter. David prayed, "Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies! Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds" (Ps. 141:4–5). The book of Proverbs also notes how one's company influences oneself, both positively—"Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise" (Prov. 13:20), and negatively—"Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (Prov. 22:24–25). Paul clearly concurred: "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Instead, one should embrace fellowship with believers. While the people discussed in the 1 Timothy passage devoted themselves to demons, note what the early church did: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Paul encouraged the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, . . . submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:18–21). Similarly, he exhorted the Colossians to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). Also, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11). The author of

Hebrews exhorted, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25). The key in all of these passages is not simply that one associates with other believers, but the activity that should naturally go along with it: the apostles' teaching, prayers, singing praise, being filled with the Spirit, submitting to one another, teaching one another, being thankful, encouraging and building up one another, and stirring one another up to love and good works. People who are doing these things with other believers will naturally have their minds set on the things of the Spirit and grow closer to God.

The author of Hebrews also encouraged his readers to "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Heb. 3:13–14). All of these passages together in this paragraph and the last suggest that if people are not moving forward and closer to God or at least actively holding onto what they have, they are moving backward, or away from God. In other words, they are to exhort one another so that they will persevere in their faith until the end.

Some of the passages examined in this chapter have included the concept of hardening, so now will be a good time to analyze that concept in more depth. Sometimes it is assumed that when God hardens someone's heart, it means that God determines what an individual will do and/or makes one's heart unresponsive to change. However, there is evidence that neither of these is what "hardens" means. The three Hebrew words used for hardening (חָזַק and ,כָּבַד ,קָשָׁה) "generally mean 'to make something strong or heavy or to encourage (reinforce) someone,'" and elsewhere in the Old Testament are not used in a deterministic sense.[646] In other words, when

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[646] Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 56.

God hardens someone's heart, he is strengthening or reinforcing a person's already freely formed will."[647]

It is instructive to note that of the forty times in the ESV Bible where hardening is used in this sense, fifteen times God does the hardening, twelve times humans harden their own hearts, and thirteen times the Bible simply notes that hearts were hardened, without specifically attributing it to either God or humans. Almost half (nineteen of the forty) of the uses of the term occur in the book of Exodus in relation to Pharaoh. The timeline and details of its usage in Exodus are revealing. Before the word is even used, God noted that Pharaoh afflicted the Hebrew people in slavery (3:7) and God knew "that the king of Egypt will not let [them] go unless compelled by a mighty hand" (3:19).

The first time the word is used, God first told Moses to do all the miracles that he gave him the power to do, and then said, "But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go" (4:21). After this, when Moses asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, Pharaoh questioned who Yahweh was, refused to let the people go, ordered that straw no longer be provided for them, and had the Hebrew foremen beaten (5:1–14). The second time the word is used (7:3), God again said that he *will* harden Pharaoh's heart, but notice at this point that the Bible has said neither that God *has* hardened Pharaoh's heart nor even that Pharaoh's heart had been hardened at all. At this point, Pharaoh has simply been portrayed as a harsh, evil, unrelenting taskmaster, which appears to be due to the natural state of Pharaoh's heart at this time.

The next three instances of the word (7:13; 14; 22) only say that Pharaoh's heart was or remained hardened. It is not until the sixth time the word is used, after God relented from the plague of frogs, that the Bible indicates who does the hardening, and it is Pharoah who hardened

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[647] Abasciano, "Romans 9 and Calvinism," 325.

his own heart (8:15). This instance is followed by a "was hardened" (8:19), another "Pharaoh hardened" (8:32), and another "was hardened" (9:7). It is not until 9:12 that the Bible says for the first time that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This first occurrence happens after the sixth plague.

After the seventh plague, Pharaoh again hardened his own heart. It is not until the eighth plague that God became the hardener from then on. Interestingly, at the beginning of the eighth plague, God hardened the hearts of both Pharoah and his servants. Then God again hardened Pharaoh's heart after the eighth plague, after the ninth plague, after the threat of the tenth plague, and after Pharaoh learned that the Hebrews had left Egypt. Three key points about hardening should be learned from this narrative. First, Pharaoh had a hard, stubborn heart from the beginning and further hardened his own heart multiple times before God expressly hardened Pharaoh's heart. Second, God hardened Pharaoh's heart multiple times, including after Pharaoh relented and let the people go, showing that the hardening that God does is not permanent (at least in the case of Pharaoh). Third, just after God said that he had hardened the servants' hearts (10:1), the servants changed course and pleaded with Pharaoh to let the people go (10:7), showing that the hardening there did not last long at all. All of this is consistent with God simply strengthening the resolve in the moment of what someone had already planned to do. It does not remove one's ability to make decisions nor to change the course they are on.[648]

Turning from Exodus to other examples, John quoted from Isaiah when he said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them" (John 12:40), though the actual wording in the Hebrew Old Testament is "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts,

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[648] Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 57.

and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:10). This verse is based on yet another Hebrew word (שָׁמֵן), for which the Greek translation can be either "dull" or "hardened." The Isaiah passage is preceded by a scathing rebuke of Israel along with an account of some repercussions of their actions that shows that the people's hearts were already hardened.[649] However, the corresponding Old and New Testament passages take the concept a step further and give the reasoning for the hardening as lest they see and understand and be healed. This reasoning is generally explained as God telling Isaiah to continue to preach the same message over and over again, which will be spurned by those who resist the message and harden them further, but accepted by those who are willing to hear.[650] Once again, the hardening essentially strengthens the person's resolve to stay on the path he or she was already on.

Moving on from hardening and those who set their minds on the flesh, a person whose mind is consistently set on the things of the Spirit eventually becomes one with God in some sense, as will be shown below. The vicious downward circle of the wrong mindset is replaced with a virtuous upward cycle of the right mindset. The process of transformation and sanctification brings a believer closer and closer to God over time, which, of course, all starts with becoming a believer and receiving the Holy Spirit.[651] Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15–17). As noted earlier, the Spirit helps Christians put to death the deeds of the body, leads them as sons of God, bears witness with their

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[649] John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 128.

[650] Oswalt, *Isaiah,*128; Alec J. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 79; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 102.

[651] The overall process of transformation may be seen as a series of separate transformations, whereby the person is transformed at the point of conversion, further transformed as per 2 Corinthians 3:18 (discussed below), and finally transformed into a final state at one's glorification.

spirits, helps them in their weakness, and intercedes for them according to the will of God.

Regarding this passage, Keener says, "Those who obey (14:15) receive greater power for obedience (14:16–17), moving in a cycle of ever deeper spiritual maturation."[652]

Paul stated, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). A first observation from this verse is that beholding and being transformed are both present tense, so the transforming takes place as Christians focus on the Lord.[653] Such transformation takes place primarily in the renewing of the mind.[654] Second, the transformation happens progressively, from one stage of glory to a yet higher stage,[655] creating a greater and greater amount of freedom to obey God.[656] Such transformation culminates in one's final glorification when Jesus comes again.[657] Murray Harris asserts that this resulting transformation will be "a body suffused with the divine glory and perfectly adapted to the ecology of heaven."[658]

In Ephesians 4:22–24, Paul told his readers to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self." Snodgrass sees the old self as "in a state of

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[652] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 952.

[653] Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 207.

[654] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 316.

[655] Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 215.

[656] Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians,* The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 161.

[657] Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 316-17.

[658] Ibid., 317.

ever-deepening corruption, . . . deluded and deceived into a downward spiral by fleshly desires."[659] While there is debate about how best to translate what the ESV has as "to be renewed in the spirit of your minds," Arnold says, "The preferred solution is to take the Holy Spirit as the agent of renewal and the mind as the object of its renewing work."[660] In addition, the verb tense and voice used suggests that the renewal of the mind means that believers should allow the Spirit to renew their minds continually and develop their perceptions.[661]

As noted above, becoming a Christian is key to renewing one's mind, and Paul frequently described believers as being "in Christ." Some of the key aspects of being in Christ include having life in Christ (Rom. 6:11, 23; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Tim 1:1), experiencing love in Christ (Rom. 8:39; 1 Cor. 16:24; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13), having freedom in Christ (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 2:4), being seated in heaven in Christ (Eph. 2:6), being sons of God in Christ (Gal. 3:26), and being sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2). On the other hand, Paul also speaks of Christ being in believers (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27) and both John and Paul speak of the Spirit being in believers (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20; Eph. 5:18). John also mentions God being in believers (1 John 4:16), as does Paul (Eph. 2:22). What does this mean that the believer is in Christ and at the same time Christ/the Spirit/God is in the believer?

While one must be careful to discern what may simply be analogies rather than actual descriptions, some passages suggest at least some sort of union between the believer and God. Jesus pulled much of the prior material together in John 17:20–23, where he declared (1) the Father is in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Father (17:21); (2) believers are in the Father and Jesus

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[659] Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* 235.

[660] Arnold, *Ephesians,* 288.

[661] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 287.

(17:21); (3) the believers are one just as Jesus and the Father are one, with Jesus in believers and the Father in Jesus (17:22–23). That can be a bit confusing, but consider the parallels: (a) both the Father and believers are in Jesus; (b) both Jesus and believers are in the Father; and (c) Jesus is in both the Father and in believers. The primary point of the passage is the unity of believers being akin to the unity of the Father and the Son, but one cannot escape how closely believers are compared to Jesus, with both in the Father and Jesus in both believers and the Father. This conclusion could certainly be seen as reading too much into the passage, except for the existence of other passages that seem to take it even further.

John 15:1–6 was discussed earlier, but the key point in this discussion is that in the analogy of the vine, believers and Jesus are both part of the same organic entity, whereas this is not true for unbelievers. Paul gave a similar message when he said, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27), Christ is the head of this body (Eph. 4:15–16), and Christians have been reconciled in his body (Col. 1:21–23). These, of course, are simply analogies, but the point is a very close connection between believers and Christ, such that without that connection, believers lose their source of life and will die.

However, Paul also asserted, "he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). What, exactly, Paul meant by this is a bit of a conundrum. Unlike the previous few verses, Paul did not present this as an analogy. He spoke of people who are truly joined to Christ in some sense, noting that such people become one spirit with him. Fitzmyer describes this as an intimate union with Christ,[662] which is consistent with Paul's marriage analogy (Eph. 5:32). Richard Batey also emphasizes the intensely personal nature of the union, saying it results in

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[662] Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians,* 268.

conforming to a common personality based upon surrender to God.[663] Other scholars add that the Spirit becomes "the command center for the body,"[664] the believer's spirit is "joined indissolubly with Christ,"[665] and in place of two spirits—that of the believer and of Christ—the believer now only has Christ's Spirit.[666] E. P. Sanders acknowledges that fully understanding this concept is challenging, but one should take Paul's words at face value.[667]

Paul made an even stronger statement when he said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Both the "no longer I" and the "but Christ" need to be considered. Commentators seem generally in agreement about "I," but differ in important nuances. Schreiner says, "What Paul means is that the old 'I,' who he was in Adam, no longer lives."[668] Longenecker says, "The 'I' here is the 'flesh' (σάρξ) of 5:13–24, which is antagonistic to the Spirit's jurisdiction. So . . ., both the law and the human ego have ceased to be controlling factors for the direction of the Christian life."[669] Martyn's take is that this "does not mean that there is no longer an I. The I has been crucified and re-created by forces other than the self."[670] DeSilva seems to describe it best, though, saying, "The 'I' no longer drives what is lived in the body," but rather it is "Christ participating in us, changing us to the point that we are not 'ourselves'

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[663] Richard A. Batey, "The Μια Σαρξ Union of Christ and the Church," *New Testament Studies* 13, no. 3 (April 1967): 279–80.

[664] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

[665] Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 287.

[666] James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2010), 124.

[667] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 522.

[668] Schreiner, *Galatians,* 172.

[669] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 92.

[670] J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 258.

anymore."[671] DeSilva's important nuance shows that the process is ongoing. While the Christian no longer lives under the dominion of sin, the old self is not completely dead, as it continues to take control from time to time and allow sin to rule. Martyn and Longenecker are not wrong, but neglect to note DeSilva's important point.

When Paul wrote of the old self and the new self, he exhorted his readers to put off the old, be *renewed in the spirit of one's mind*, and put on the new (Eph. 4:22–24), and Christians have put off the old and put on the new "*which is being renewed in knowledge* after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:9–10). Both of these passages are encompassed by exhortations to his Christian readers, indicating the ongoing process of putting off the old and putting on the new, and both passages emphasize the importance of one's mindset in this process.

Interestingly, in Galatians 2:20, Paul did *not* say that it is no longer the old self, but the *new self* who lives; he said it is *Christ* who lives. As noted earlier, people are either slaves to sin or slaves to God. They are either ruled by sin or ruled by God. The person's libertarian free will choice, while nominally directing specific actions, is ultimately directing whether sin or God rules as their master. When Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," he was effectively saying that he was no longer calling the shots, but rather, had completely surrendered his power to Christ.[672] However, this is the ideal state, and Christians must make this choice of surrender continually. They can only do this by setting their minds on the things of the Spirit.

The last verse from Paul to consider is his statement, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Many commentators do not

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[671] DeSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 248-50.

[672] Ibid., 248; Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 144; Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1967), 59.

directly address what exactly Paul meant by Christ being one's life, but when they do, they often

describe it as "identification" with Christ. In other words, a Christian is not simply "with"

Christ,[673] nor that one only "shares" Christ,[674] but in some sense actually "is" Christ. "They have

no life apart from their identification with him,"[675] and this only happens by Christians

submitting themselves completely to Christ.[676] G. B. Caird notes this verse strongly echoes the

immediately preceding verse, saying, "The Christian life is a process in which, through constant

fellowship with the risen Christ and through the operation of the Holy Spirit, the believer is

transformed into his likeness."[677] Perhaps the best overall interpretation is a combination of

identifying with Christ and Christ being the source of the Christian's life.

Peter also contributed to this discussion when he stated, "You may become partakers of

the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Sharing in divine nature was a common concept in both the

Greek and Jewish cultures of this time. Consistent with much of this thought, current

commentators generally agree that what Peter meant here is not fully becoming divine, but

sharing in certain aspects of the divine. Views range from Christians' new ability to resist sin,[678]

to the process of becoming morally perfected in an "already but not yet" sense,[679] plus the

attainment of immortality.[680] While some scholars see becoming partakers of the divine nature

happening when Christ returns, the current partial attainment with full attainment at the end is

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[673] Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 215.

[674] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 167.

[675] Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 270.

[676] Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 208.

[677] G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (1976, repr., Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202.

[678] Moo, *2 Peter, Jude,* 44.

[679] Green, *Jude & 2 Peter,* 187; Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 294-95.

[680] Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, 181; Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 158; Davids, *The Letters*, 173-76.

probably the better interpretation given the content given beginning in the immediately following verse.

Mathias Nygaard takes it further, saying that believers share in God's righteousness, become part of a divine family through sonship, share in God's glory, obtain immortality, share in God's power over evil, and are united to God in love.[681] Wright calls out the human requirement to continually put to death the flesh and live to the Spirit.[682] Michael Austin echoes this thought, calling this *theosis*, which he says, "can be thought of as a *progressively transformational union with Christ*," where "both God and the individual human have roles to play."[683] Ultimately, believers "need to develop *the psychological states and dispositions*" of Jesus.[684] He sees *theosis* summarized well by the "Greek term *nepsis*, i.e., intensity, zeal, watchfulness, spiritual wariness, and vigilance."[685] All of this hearkens back to the idea of setting one's mind on the Spirit rather than the flesh. Believers simply cannot achieve the *nepsis* needed to take part in the divine nature without setting their minds on the Spirit.

In summary, both mindset options generally remain open one's entire life, but due to the solidification of the mindset, the probability of change becomes less and less likely. Consider the proverb, "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity" (Prov. 28:14). Note the "always" of fearing the Lord and the Hiphil (causative) usage of קָשָׁה (*qāšâ*; hardens). Persistence in fearing God leads to blessedness, but persistence in

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[681] Matthias Nygaard, "Romans 8—Interchange Leading to Deification," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 39, no. 2 (2017): 167-72.

[682] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1023.

[683] Michael W. Austin, "The Doctrine of Theosis: A Transformational Union with Christ," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 174, 176.

[684] Ibid., 183.

[685] Ibid., 184.

hardening one's heart will lead to one's fall, which is a metaphor often used to denote defeat or destruction.[686] The sinful mindset eventually becomes irreparably hardened. Alternatively, sanctification eventually leads to becoming one with God in some sense. God will never give up on drawing people to him, but also not give up on allowing humans to have free will. As a result, while unlikely, a late-stage sinner could still repent and come to the Lord, and perhaps even more unlikely, a late-stage Christian could still lapse and turn away from God. Therefore, understanding both the criticalness of mindset and how it progresses is key to a solid understanding of one's eternal destiny.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the importance of one's mindset to his or her eternal destiny by reiterating that one's choice of mindset is binary—set on either the Spirit or the flesh—and that this is only possible due to God's calling and enablement. An analysis of several Bible passages showed that this dichotomy of mindset does not correlate one hundred percent with believers versus unbelievers. While unbelievers can only set their minds on the flesh, believers have the ability to set their minds on either because Christians live in the "already but not yet" time when two ages or realms overlap. They have died to sin (that is, they are free from the power of sin), but they still need to continually die to sin at the same time (that is, act on their freedom from the power of sin and not give in to it), and they can do this by setting their minds on the Spirit.

One's mindset, whether on the Spirit or on the flesh, tends to be self-reinforcing. The more people think about something, the more likely they are to act on it. Once they act on it, they are more likely to think about it even more. A spiritual battle occurs such that the forces of Satan

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[686] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 419.

entice people to think fleshly thoughts, but the Spirit encourages Christians to keep their minds on the things that are above. When Christians deliberately and continually set their minds on the things above, through the power of the Spirit, they are progressively less likely to give in to Satan's temptations to dwell on things of the flesh. They become an integral part of the body of Christ, supporting and supported by other parts of the body.

On the other hand, when people regularly set their minds on the things of the flesh, they become more and more susceptible to Satan's wiles, and eventually harden their own hearts so much that they close their ears to God's calling. They effectively join forces with Satan, whether they realize it or not. While God never gives up on them, eventually their choices will lead them to a point of no return.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This dissertation has shown that sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer. For this to be true, it must also be true that people have libertarian free will. Otherwise, they would not have the ability to choose what to set their minds upon, and there would be no synergism involved. In addition, it must be true that Christians must actively persevere to the end in order to be granted eternal salvation. If instead, eternal security was granted upon first becoming a believer, one's thoughts and actions after this point would have no bearing on one's sanctification, and again, no synergism would be involved.

This paper first showed that people do indeed have libertarian free will, starting by considering passages that supporters of the libertarian position put forward. The passages span from Genesis through Revelation. God gave Adam and Eve free will in the Garden of Eden, and their wrong choice was the original sin that has plagued humankind ever since. Yet God also made enough of himself known to humans that they could respond to his universal drawing. As part of the analysis, objections to this view were considered and answered. The Gospel of John contains many of the key passages, and understanding clearly just what John said is key. One can easily and unintentionally let one's presuppositions get in the way of an accurate interpretation of a passage. Once stripped of presuppositions, the evidence seems to support the notion that the actual language much more strongly supports a libertarian over a compatibilist position.

In addition, the Bible is full of examples of people being exhorted to choose to believe. Passages reviewed included Moses' call to choose life, Joshua's call to choose this day whom you will serve, and Jesus exhorting people to follow him. Some from the compatibilist camp object that some passages, such as Romans 9, indicate that God does not give humans libertarian free will, since he hardens whomever he wills and has compassion on whomever he wills.

However, that position ignores the fact that God may will to have compassion on those who freely choose to believe and will to harden those who already have their hearts set against him. God having compassion on those who freely choose to believe was shown in the passages just mentioned, where, for example, God sets before the Israelites the choice between life and death (Deut. 30:1–10, 16), and where Jesus tells the crowd that if they want to be a follower of his, they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him (Mark 8:34).

The argument in favor of libertarian free will is further advanced by multiple passages that indicate that God desires all people to be saved, which appears to be inconsistent with compatibilism, under which God only chooses certain people to be saved and excludes all others. Despite the protestations of some compatibilists, the overall weight of these passages seems to support libertarian free will.

However, compatibilists offer up a number of passages that they claim support their view. The two primary passages relate to predestination, but a close analysis shows that these passages do not speak to whether or not such predestination is conditional or unconditional. The same holds true for key passages that relate to God's choosing of people, though in other passages in which God chooses, a number of them are clearly conditional, whereas none of them are clearly unconditional. Also, libertarians typically believe that God predestines to eternal life those whom he foreknew would believe. Some people claim that foreknowledge is incompatible with libertarian free will, but evidence was presented that this notion is false. One additional area that needs to be clarified in several passages is whether God chooses people for salvation or for service. Understanding that God's choice is for service in some passages that compatibilists put forward negates what might otherwise support their position. In total, the Bible much more strongly supports libertarian free will than compatibilism.

This dissertation then examined several passages that clearly show that believers can apostatize from their faith. A close analysis of these passages show that they are speaking of true Christians and that these Christians have fallen and turned away from faith in Jesus. Matthew, Paul, and the author of Hebrews all provide strong accounts of this. In addition, several passages indicate that believers who have fallen away can also return to the faith, with key passages from both the Old and the New Testaments. Support for the possibility of apostasy also comes from passages that exhort believers to persevere in their faith, as well as statements to the effect that those who persevere to the end will be saved. Once again, a close examination shows that these passages speak of true believers and of eternal salvation. If salvation was guaranteed the moment one believed, there would be no need for exhortation to persevere. All of this shows that while God keeps his promises, those promises avail to those who persevere in their faith until the end.

While these passages alone make the case for the possibility of apostasy and the necessity of perseverance, it is important to consider those passages put forth by those who affirm the security of the believer as well. The analysis showed that several of the passages do not relate to eternal security at all, and the others require a presupposition that the people spoken of are those who have believed at any time as opposed to those who believe until the end. Yet the passages do not indicate either way which is meant. As a result, none of these passages give clear support for the eternal security of the believer. When combined with the previous analysis, the strong preponderance of the evidence supports the position that believers can apostatize and must persevere to avoid this.

This paper then showed that the way Christians can persevere is by continually setting their minds on the Spirit (or the things above). Consistent with libertarian free will and the need to persevere, Christians can set their minds on either the Spirit or the flesh. The Spirit encourages

in one direction, while the flesh pulls in the other. The Spirit brings life, while the flesh brings death. Christians should set their mind on the things above *because* they have died to sin. Yet because believers live in an "already but not yet" time when the two ages or realms overlap, they are susceptible to succumbing to the draw of sin and allowing their minds to settle on fleshly thoughts. Whichever choice believers choose to set their minds on, that choice becomes self-reinforcing, and over time, it becomes more and more difficult to move in the other direction. Ultimately, sanctification occurs synergistically in the life and mind of the believer.

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