

Question # 8: The Fairness of God: God's Sovereignty vs Man's Responsibility

Question # 8 deals with God's Sovereignty vs Man's Responsibility, and asks ...

If God is sovereign and ordains and decrees all things that come to pass and if unregenerate fallen man is bound by his own fallen and corrupt nature to always sin, then how can a "fair" God hold them morally responsible and send them to hell for actions which He Himself has ordained and decreed and which they are bound by their own corrupt nature to perform? Do natural unregenerate men have any "free-will" at all in the matter?

We will use the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter III, Sections 1-3 as a framework discussion-guide to set forth God's sovereignty and what it entails. We will, of course, provide confirming Bible verses throughout our discussion.

In WCF, Chapter III, Sections 1-3, we are told that ...

- 1. God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy council of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of secondary causes taken away, but rather established.*
- 2. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.*
- 3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.*

In Sections 1-3, we are told, concerning God's sovereignty that ...

God freely predestines and ordains all that comes to pass, but does so in such a way that – He is not the Author or Originator of sin; He does not in any way override or interfere with the free-will of men; He does not interfere with the contingency of secondary causes, but rather establishes them.

God preordains everything that comes to pass by the *free counsel* of His own will, and by that only, and not because of anything foreseen by Him.

God, for the increase of His own glory, chose and predestined some men and angels to everlasting life (displaying the glory of His grace, mercy, and love), and leaves others foreordained to everlasting death (displaying the glory of His holiness, wrath against sin, and justice).

[Note: God's justice is also displayed in His election of some to eternal life, as their sins were fully paid for by Christ on the cross.]

So, again ... Question # 8 asks ...

If God is sovereign and ordains and decrees all things that come to pass and if unregenerate fallen man is bound by his own fallen and corrupt nature to always sin, then how can a “fair” God hold them morally responsible and send them to hell for actions which He Himself has ordained and decreed and which they are bound by their own nature to perform? Do natural unregenerate men have any “*free-will*” at all in the matter?

**We may break Question # 8 into Five Discussion Parts
and One Very Important Question...**

The “Five Discussion Parts” are ...

Part I: Is God sovereign and does He ordain all things that come to pass?

Part II: Is natural unregenerate man bound by his own nature to always sin?

Part III. If Parts I and II are true, then how can a fair God hold men morally responsible for actions that He Himself foreordained and decreed, especially when men act in accord with the only nature that they have?

Part IV. Does unregenerate man have any “free-will” at all in the matter.

Part V. Is it fair for God to just save some and not all?

Note: We will answer Part V very briefly in this Paper and refer you to Question # 10 for a much fuller discussion of the issue.

Our discussion of these Parts will necessarily overlap and intermingle with each other.

Our “One Very Important Question” to be discussed at the end of our Paper is ...

“Is our knowing about God’s sovereignty in the salvation of men important to Him?”

We hold that not only is God’s sovereignty in the salvation of man “important” to Him, but is, by His own admission, one of the, if not the, most important things that He wants to be known about Himself.

So, let’s start answering Question # 8:

Part I: Is God sovereign and does He ordain all things that come to pass?

One of the clearest teachings in the Bible is that God is sovereign over and “predestines” or predetermines all things that come to pass. Note that “predestines” can also be referred to as “foreordains” or “elects” all things.

In fact, if you just think about it, future events can only be said to be “certain” if they are predestined and decreed by God to be so.

G. I. Williamson, in his book *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, page 40, gives us a good explanation as to why this must be the case ...

“It is not, then, a question of predestination *or* foreknowledge. It is, and can be, only a question of predestination *and* foreknowledge.

This we may indicate by asking two simple questions: (a) Does God know for certain what will happen before it happens? All Christians would no doubt say yes. (b) But if God knows that a thing is certain to happen before it happens, we may then ask, what makes it certain? There can be but one answer: God makes it certain. We are unable to escape the conclusion that God foresees with certainty only because he guarantees the certainty he foresees. Things are “predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). God foresees that the elect will be “holy and without blame before Him” (Ephesians 1:4), and that they will experience “sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). But this is foreseeable only because he “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). His predestination is the

cause of the holiness which he foresees. He does not choose us because he foresees that we will believe, but he foresees that we will believe because he has chosen us. Only thus are works wholly excluded (Ephesians 2:8-10).”

And so, our actions are predetermined by God. But, as we will later see, our actions are also “free” actions in that we do them because we internally, by nature, want to do them and not because we are compelled to do them by any outside force.

In this paper, we are particularly concerned with that aspect of predestination which holds that it is God that chooses those who will be saved. By that, we mean that God did by the alone counsel of His own will, in mercy and grace, most righteously, justly and eternally *decree, predestine, foreordain*, and *elect* certain men to eternal life (salvation), leaving all others in their unregenerate state (that of damnation). This decree was set in eternity past and is unalterable.

That God Himself determines who is saved and not saved is clearly set forth by God Himself in Exodus and expounded upon by Paul in Romans ...

In Exodus ...

“Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’” (Exodus 33:19)

In Romans ...

“What shall we say then? Is their unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” (Romans 9:14-18)

Clearly, people are saved because God elects, decides, and chooses to save them. Those that He does not so elect, choose, or decide to save remain in their lost condition and are destined to hell.

These verses by Paul and the ones immediately preceding them also prove that God's decision as to whom He would elect to salvation was conditioned on nothing found in the redeemed or upon any act of their will, but was solely determined by His own holy will and decree ...

“And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good and evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’

What shall we say then? Is their unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy ... Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” (Romans 9:10-18)

And so, we clearly see that ...

God Himself is sovereign in the salvation of man and of His own free will decrees who is saved and who is not saved.

But and this is a very crucial point; God's does not indiscriminately decree or assign any *innocent* person or persons to hell. God did not just create men and then arbitrarily and indiscriminately decide to throw some of them into hell.

No, all men have, “in Adam”, undergone a fair judicial process and trial and stand guilty before God.

Indeed, those that God left under condemnation have already been twice condemned by two just and fair judicial processes:

First, they stand condemned “in Adam”, their federal head and representative, for the sin nature they inherited from Adam at conception, a nature that is wholly inclined to evil (more on this later), and ...

Second, they stand condemned for their own sins that they have committed since conception.

Please refer to Appendix 1 “Biblical Proofs of The Sovereignty of God over all Things”
at the end of our Paper.

Let’s turn now to ...

Part II: Is natural unregenerate man bound by his own nature to always sin?

**Before digging into the specifics of Part II,
we need to first address the topics of ...**

**Original Sin and Total Depravity, the Mind of Unregenerate Man
and the Bondage of His Will**

“Original sin” is defined in Britannica as ...

original sin, in Christian doctrine, the condition or state of sin into which each human being is born; also, the origin (i.e., the cause, or source) of this state. Traditionally, the origin has been ascribed to the sin of the first man, Adam, who disobeyed God in eating the forbidden fruit (of knowledge of good and evil) and, in consequence, transmitted his sin and guilt by heredity to his descendants.

“Total Depravity” is one of the Tenets of the Reformed Faith. The “Total” in Total Depravity means that every faculty of unregenerate man – his mind, will, emotions, etc. – was affected by Adam’s fall. No part of man’s nature was left unaffected by Adam’s sin and fall. As a result of our corrupt and fallen nature, inherited at conception, everything that we think, say, think, or do, is tainted and defiled by sin.

Again, it is very important to understand that the “*Total*” in “Total Depravity” stands for the *extent* of the depravity and not the *depth* of it. “Total” Depravity does not mean that all unregenerate are as bad as they can be.

All Christians would hold to the Doctrine of Original Sin and to the effects of Adam’s fall upon all of future humanity to come from him by natural generation, save the Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians would agree that the descendants of Adam inherit a corrupt, sinful nature at conception and that God’s “grace” is necessary to overcome it. How this specifically happens is thoroughly discussed in *Question # 10* ...

Does “Man Choose God” or Does “God Choose Man”?

There was a time in ancient Biblical history when all unregenerate men actually were as bad as they could be ...

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)

And the flood swept them away.

Today, the depth of most men’s depravity is restrained by God’s common grace in general and by His restraining grace in particular. In addition to His common and restraining grace, God also gives unregenerate men the light of “*conscience*”, which he often rejects and “*sears*” (*I Timothy 4:2*), and the light of the truth of God revealed in the “*creation*”, which he “*suppresses*” (*Romans 1:18-32*).

Due to God’s common and restraining grace, the light of conscience and the light of creation, and His “*gifts*” given to all men by virtue of their having been made in His image – even unregenerate men can do much “*civic*” good, be model citizens, be great philanthropists, artists, musicians, authors, scientists, and so on.

But, this said, unregenerate man’s “*depravity*” is still “*Total*” in its extent, even if not in its depth, and his mind and nature are still wholly corrupt, defiled, and prone to sin.

We invite you to go to our *Question # 10, Page 10*, for seventeen pages of Biblical proofs that this is so – six of which “*proofs*” follow below ...

Witness Jeremiah ...

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)*

Witness Isaiah ...

*“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there*

is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You” (Isaiah 64:6-7)

Witness Paul ...

“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written:

*‘There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.’
‘Their throat is an open tomb;
with their tongues they have practiced deceit’;
‘The poison of asps is under their lips’;
‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways;
and the way of peace they have not known.’
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’” (Romans 3:9-18)*

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Witness John ...

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34)

“... and men loved darkness rather than the light” (John 3:19)

Returning now to the “specifics” of Part II

“Is natural unregenerate man bound by his own nature to always sin?”

In answering this we want to keep in mind that since the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, there is no such thing as an “*innocent*” person.

Human beings are not born with a morally neutral “blank state” mind. No, as the Bible teaches, and as both history and current events witness and confirm, people are not basically good, but are, from conception, wholly disposed and inclined to evil.

It is important to remember how this state of affairs come about ...

Again, God created our original parents, Adam and Eve, upright and holy, with no inclination whatsoever toward sin.

After their creation, God and our first parents entered into a legal, “*covenantal*” relationship, with binding obligations on each side.

A “*covenant*” is ...

A formal agreement or treaty between two parties that establishes a relationship and in which obligations and mutual responsibilities may be enacted. Many Biblical covenants are found, some providing only divine promises while others entail obligations.

From *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Donald K. McKim, Page 64

Adam not only represented himself in his “*covenant*” relationship with God, but was appointed by God to be the “*Federal Head*” or “*Representative*” for all of humanity (including each of us) that were to come forth from him by natural generation.

Note: Many will say that they don’t like being represented by other people (i.e., by Adam and Eve). They should consider two things ...

First, it was God’s right, by virtue of creation, to stipulate the terms of His covenant with men

Second, that no person born by natural generation after Adam, including themselves, could have been a better, more suitable, or more desirable Federal Head or Representative than Adam

At any rate, Adam knowingly and willingly sinned in the Garden of Eden and broke the covenant that he had made with God. When Adam did this, his whole being and nature fell from being righteous, holy and pure to being corrupt, defiled and wholly prone to evil. As the Federal Head or Representative of all of future humanity to come from him by natural generation, all men, including each of us, also sinned “*in Adam*” and fell with him, inheriting a defiled and corrupt nature at conception that is prone only to evil.

[We urge you again to go to Question # 10, Page 10, to see seventeen pages of undisputable Biblical proofs that all men are born “dead” in sin and trespasses and have an evil nature, which they received at conception, a nature that is prone to disobey and rebel against God, a nature that would never come to seek out God on its own.]

Again, all men are justly condemned twice, first by the guilt of their fall “*in Adam*” and second by and for their own individual sins.

Thus does G. I. Williamson write concerning the matter ...

“If we can but remember that no man deserves anything but wrath and damnation, if we can but face this solemn and awful reality, if we can but keep this truth ever before us, we will then be in a position to accept what Scripture so clearly says. And Scripture clearly says this: that God gives to some men what they most assuredly and richly deserve (namely, damnation) while to others he gives the wholly unmerited gift of salvation (which they in no way deserve).”

From, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, page 44

So, again, very importantly, God does not condemn any innocent persons, but makes His choices of whom He shall save from among a pool of people, all of whom are already condemned and lost.

Parts III and IV are so intertwined that they must be considered together ...

Part III: If Parts I and II are true, then how can a fair God hold men morally responsible for actions that He Himself foreordained and decreed, especially when men act in accord with the only nature that they have?

Part IV: Does unregenerate man have any “free-will” at all in the matter.

Basically, in Parts III and IV we are asking ...

“Does the fact that God sovereignly decrees whatsoever comes to pass and the fact that unregenerate man acts according to the only nature that he has release him from any moral responsibility for his actions since God Himself decreed them and he is acting in line with the only nature that he has (corrupt though it may be)?”

Part IV plays very heavily into our answer to Part III (which is sequenced where it is because it flows naturally out of our discussions of Parts I and II) ...

So we will start our discussion of Parts III and IV, by asserting, concerning Part IV ...

“Yes, unregenerate men most assuredly do have ‘free-will’ in the matter.”

How so?

We would define “*freedom*” as G. I. Williamson does – “*Freedom*” is the “*absence of external coercion*” to sin. If a man is not forced or compelled by any power outside of himself to do something against his will, and can do what he wants or desires to do, then his actions should most certainly be held to be “*free*”.

But though unregenerate man is “*free*” to follow his own desires and wishes, unregenerate man is still bound by the fallen and sinful nature that he inherited from Adam at conception. Though unregenerate man is *free* to do what he wants to do, he will, given his fallen, sinful nature, want and desire to do only evil.

[Note that we are talking of “evil” here in the theological sense, as “that which opposes the will of God”, for, as stated earlier, even an unregenerate man may do “civic” good, though even that is attributed to God’s common grace given to all men.]

We turn again to Dr. G. I. Williamson’s *Study Guide* for a clear and concise description of the very important difference between the “*freedom*” to do something and the “*liberty*” to do something ...

“Freedom may be defined as ‘the absence of external coercion.’ If a man is not forced by any power outside himself to do that which is contrary to what he wants to do, then we may properly say that he is ‘free.’ The wonder of God’s predestination is that God does leave men free in this sense, even though he predestines everything that every man will ever do. Some people use the word ‘freedom’ in another sense, however, which is false in the extreme. They mean, by the ‘freedom of man,’ that man has the *power* or ability to do good or evil at any moment of time. To say that a man is able to do good or evil is very different from saying that a man is at *liberty* to do what he desires. We believe that the natural man has liberty but not ability to do what is right. For the truth is that man, while free from coercion from the outside, *is not free from the control of his own nature*. He who is evil by nature must of necessity do evil (just as a corrupt tree must of necessity produce corrupt fruit, Matthew 7:17-19). Just as we may say that God is good and therefore cannot do evil, so we can say that man (by nature) is evil and cannot (of himself) do good.”

“In the case of the unconverted who are not elect, the very fact that they are never regenerated by God makes it inevitable that they will do evil for the simple reason that that is the one thing that they want to do (Genesis 6:5, Psalms 14:53). In the case of the elect, God regenerates, effectually calls, and sustains in grace, and then – because these are made new creatures (with new desires, new natures) – they will do the good that God has predestined for the simple reason that they want to. In either case there is entire absence of external coercion, and yet the will of God is surely done. Even where internal power is exerted (in the case of the converted), it does not force man to do what he does not want to do, but rather creates a new will which is in accord with the will of God.”

From *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, page 41

And so we see that man is not goaded into sin by God or by any other being. No, man sins because it is his fallen nature to do so and, most importantly, because he wants and desires to do so – and thereby bears moral responsibility for it.

That man receives an evil will at conception and is internally bound to do only evil is a just, judicial, and fair result of his fall in Adam.

Again, unregenerate man by nature wants to do evil and relishes doing it. He is therefore morally responsible for doing it.

Perhaps the following explanation by Dr. R. C. Sproul on God's sovereignty and the free will of man will be of help in sorting things out ...

“The first [focus] has to do with the relationship between man's will and God's will with respect to predestination and divine providence. Here, most agree (at least certainly Calvinists) that in the mystery of concurrence, or the point at which the human will intersects the divine will, man's freedom is neither violated nor destroyed. That is, the human will does not fall victim to coercion; God works out His divine will in and through the choices made by the human will. At no time does He reduce humans to the level of impersonal or non-volitional puppets who can move and act only as their strings are pulled externally. We are free but not autonomous.

The second focus of theological concern regarding free will has to do with the degree to which our liberty has been impaired by the fall. This is the issue I chronicled historically in my book *Willing to Believe ...* the British monk Pelagius [debated] against St. Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century. In that debate, Pelagius argued that man not only was created free but that his nature was created immutable. He denied the reality of the fall, arguing that Adam's sin affected Adam and only Adam. There was no fall into a state of moral corruption called original sin, which was transmitted to the entire human race.

Against Pelagius, Augustine argued that the fall produced dire consequences for humanity that involved the loss of original liberty. He distinguished between "free will" and "liberty." He argued that since the fall man still has a free will — that is, he retains the faculty of choosing. He still can act intentionally, according to his desires. What he lost was any desire for the things of God. Thus, he never will choose God precisely because he doesn't want to choose God. This is freedom without liberty. This state of affairs is rooted in man's bondage to sin. The sinner is both free and enslaved at the same time, but not in the same relationship. He is free to do what he wants, but what he wants to do is sin. Therein is his bondage.

And so, returning to Point III ...

... we see that God is “fair” in choosing [or predestinating or electing] certain men for salvation and leaving the others in their current estate of damnation, because, again, God did not just create men and then indiscriminately damn some of them.

No, God chose his “elect” from among a group of men that were all already condemned. He simply left the “non-elect” in their already existing state of condemnation. Thus, and this is very important, the act of Predestination or Election of some to salvation has nothing to do with the reprobation or lostness of men, as all “non-elect” men were already lost to begin with.

Again, every man, whether predestined to life or death (and that would include each of us) was already lost at the time of his predestination because of his inherited sin nature and because of his own sins, not because God decreed his election or non-election to salvation. God’s predestination does include all things, but the blame of any man’s damnation should be laid nowhere but upon himself, and not upon God or His predestinating choice or non-choice.

Confirm G. I. Williamson ...

... God’s withholding of grace does not make the sinner guilty and liable to punishment; it merely leaves him in that condition. “The wrath of God abides [or, remains] on him” (John 3: 36). The reason for the horrible punishment of the reprobate person is not God’s act of passing him by, but his own wickedness and sin.

[Taken from *The Westminster Confession of Faith: for Study Classes*, Page 51.]

Men are damned for their own sin and sin nature and not because God did not choose them for salvation.

It is as Charles Spurgeon says ...

“I do know that the appointment of God extendeth to all things; but I stand not in this pulpit, nor in any other, to lay the damnation of any man anywhere but upon himself. If he be lost, damnation is all of men; but, if he be saved, still salvation is all of God.”

(Charles Spurgeon, *Sermons on Sovereignty*, page 19)

We also want to reiterate and make clear that God does not decree anything on the basis of looking ahead to see what will happen and then decreeing it –

Many hold that God predestines men to heaven or hell by “*looking down the corridors of time*” to see which decision men will make on their own regarding salvation and then

ratifying that decision as His own “eternal” decree. That idea is completely untenable as it totally destroys any concept of God’s omniscience and sovereignty over all that is. It also presents God as some kind of a “cosmic cheat” whose decretive will is held captive to the future choices and decisions that unregenerate men make on their own, choices which He has to “peek ahead” to see so He can ratify them in His decrees.

We hold that God is not some kind of a rather pathetic Personage who sits on the sidelines wringing His hands and hoping that men will make a choice “for” Him that will *allow* Him to “save” them. No! God is not a “cosmic cheat” who has to look ahead to see what unregenerate man will choose or decide on his own before He can make up His own mind on a matter. Rather, God Himself tells us in Isaiah ...

*“Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9-10)*

We will now briefly take up the Question ...

Part V: Is it fair for God to just save some and not all?

Though we have a much fuller discussion of the issue in *Question # 10*, we will briefly say here that ...

As stated earlier, God’s choice or election of some for salvation in no way lessens or mitigates the sin guilt of those He did not choose for salvation.

So, the non-elect, the lost, the reprobate are simply left exactly where they were all along – damned for their own sin, wickedness, and disobedience. That God did not extend His mercy or grace to them, nor elect them to salvation, does not in any way lessen or mitigate their guilt one iota.

Thus does Charles Spurgeon tell us, commenting on Romans 9:15 ...

“For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” — Romans 9:15

“IN these words the Lord in the plainest manner claims the right to give or to withhold His mercy according to His own sovereign will. As the prerogative of life and death is vested in the monarch, so the Judge of all the earth has a right to spare or condemn the guilty, as may seem best in His sight. Men by their sins have forfeited all claim upon God; they deserve to perish for their sins — and if they all do so, they have no ground for complaint.”

From Charles Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, November 25 Evening

Lastly, we take up ...

Our “One Very Important Question”, which is ...

**“Is our knowing about God’s sovereignty in the salvation of men
important to Him?”**

We stated earlier that *“it not only is important to Him, but is, by His own admission, one of the, if not the, most important things to Him.”*

In fact, we would submit that our recognition of God’s sovereignty in the salvation of man is an extremely important matter to all three Persons of the Trinity.

Let us start with God the Father.

God the Father

In Exodus 33:18, sometime after the incident with the golden calf, Moses makes a request to God the Father to *“Please, show me Your glory”*.

God the Father’s response to Moses’ request is quite instructive. We are told in Exodus 33:19-23 ...

“Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ But He said, ‘You cannot see My

face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’ And the LORD said, ‘Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see my back; but My face shall not be seen.’” (Exodus 33:19-23)

We need to grasp the significance of just what God the Father has said here. When God the Father condescended to show Moses a veiled glimpse of “*all My goodness*” and to “*proclaim the name of the LORD before you*”, of all the things that God might have chosen to say He specifically choose to proclaim His total and utter sovereignty in the salvation of man, i.e.,

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Exodus 33:19).

Lest there be any question at all about what God actually did say or mean here, Paul, in Romans 9:14-18, quotes the Exodus 33:19 passage, and beyond all doubt shows that God is most certainly speaking of His total sovereignty in the salvation of man ...

“What shall we say then? Is their unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” (Romans 9:14-18)

So, beyond a shadow of a doubt, according to Paul, when God stated to Moses

“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion”,

God proclaimed nothing less than His total sovereignty in and over the salvation of man and His right to give and withhold mercy as He sees fit, the conclusion of the matter being, according to Paul,

“So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” ... and ... “Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Romans 9:16, 18).

Confirm Romans 9:19-21 and Matthew 20:15-16

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” (Romans 9:19-21)

“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.” (Matthew 20:15-16)

Note well that this is not an obscure or unclear point. That the one, and, mind you, only, thing that God chose to disclose about Himself when He consented to show *“His goodness”* and to *“proclaim the name of the LORD”* before Moses was His total sovereignty in the salvation of man shows that it is an extremely and singularly important matter to Him and thereby should also be an exceedingly serious matter for our consideration as well.

God the Son

That the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man is also very important to God the Son is evident in the fact that our Lord lays so much stress on it. For instance, in Chapter 6 of John alone, following His declaration that *“All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me”* (itself a declaration that we are sovereignly “given” to Him by the Father), Jesus declares the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man no less than four times ...

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44)

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:45)

“It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.” (John 6:63)

“Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to Him by my Father.” (John 6:65).

When our Lord Jesus Christ clearly states something four times over in one chapter of Scripture (not even counting His original declaration), we may rightly conclude that it is subject of great importance to Him.

God the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Author of our Bible and the Regenerator of all Christian hearts, likewise shows us the importance to Himself of the doctrine of God's total sovereignty in the salvation of man.

We note that the Holy Spirit Himself is mentioned very little in the Bible, as His chief work is to point us to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and not to Himself. Therefore, it is very significant that in one of the few times in the Bible that the Holy Spirit records information concerning Himself and the nature of His work, it is to describe His own sovereign and mysterious work in the regeneration of a man's heart. The passage to which we refer comes from our Lord Jesus Christ, who tells us in John 6:3-8 ...

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:6-8)

Thus does our Lord Himself instruct us that the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a man is sovereign, mysterious and unpredictable. He comes like *"the wind"* which *"blows where it wishes ... and you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes"* to perform His work. He most certainly does not come in response to man's summons or in response to anything that man does or has done, which would make His coming predictable. No, He instead comes like *"the wind"* which *"blows where it wishes ... and you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes"*. It is the same for all Christians, for *"So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

Let us note that we are not only told that only *"the Spirit"* can give birth to things of *"the spirit"*, but we are also specifically told that natural unregenerate man can never choose or decide for Christ on his own, for *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."* Thus we see that *"the flesh"* can only beget more *"flesh"*, and cannot beget matters of *"the Spirit"*.

We saw our Lord affirm this teaching above when He said ...

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63)

Confirm also the Apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, also telling us ...

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14. See also John 14:16-18.)

“There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.” (Romans 3:11)

And so, given that the Holy Spirit always shines light of Scripture, of which He is the Author, away from the Himself and onto Christ, when, in one of the rare Scriptural glimpses that the Holy Spirit gives us of the office and nature of His work, He very strongly and clearly asserts the sovereign nature of His regenerative work in the hearts of men, we may rightly conclude that the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man is very important to Him also.

Clearly, God’s sovereignty in the salvation of man is extremely important to all three Members of the Holy Trinity, and should, therefore, also be extremely important to us as well.

God, in Ephesians, again lays great stress on our knowing that His “*grace*” is sovereign in our salvation, and that our “*works*” (i.e., our actions, decisions, etc.) had absolutely nothing to do with our salvation, “*lest anyone should boast*” ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Lastly, we asked, “Is it ‘fair’ for God to save only ‘some’ and not ‘all’?”

Again, we must always keep in mind that God sovereignly chose his “*elect*” from among a group of men that were already all condemned. The Decrees of Predestination or Election had nothing to do with their existing guilt, reprobation, or lostness.

Every man starts life as “lost” (and that would include each of us) because of his inherited sin nature and because of his own sins, not because of God’s election or non-election. God’s predestination does include all things, but the blame of any man’s damnation should be laid nowhere but upon himself, and not upon God or His predestinating choice.

Again, men are damned for their own sin and sin nature and not because God did not choose or predestine them for salvation.

A “Wrap-up” Summary on Question # 8, concerning ...

The Fairness of God: God’s Sovereignty vs Man’s Responsibility

Again, our Question was ...

If God is sovereign and ordains and decrees all things that come to pass and if fallen unregenerate man is bound by his own fallen and corrupt nature to always sin, then how can a “fair” God hold them morally responsible and send them to hell for actions which He Himself has ordained and decreed and which they are bound by their own corrupt nature to perform? Do natural unregenerate men have any “*free-will*” at all in the matter?

We divided Question # 8 into two Questions concerning the “fairness” of God ...

Is it “fair” for God to hold individual unregenerate men responsible for acts which He Himself has sovereignly decreed, especially when man’s fallen nature is wholly corrupt and inclined only to evil?

Is it “fair” for God to just predestine “some” to salvation and leave the rest for hell?

We answered “Yes, it is ‘Fair’” to both Questions,

for the following reasons ...

God is “fair” in that He does not indiscriminately decree or assign any *innocent* person or persons to hell – i.e., God did not just create men and then arbitrarily and indiscriminately decide to throw some of them into hell.

God is “fair” because all men have, “*in Adam*”, undergone a fair judicial trial and process and justly stand condemned before God. Adam was appointed by God to be humankind’s Federal Head or Representative, and was the best possible representative that they could have had.

When Adam “fell”, all mankind that he represented also “fell” with him and now inherit from him, at conception, a corrupt nature that is wholly inclined to evil.

In truth, all men are justly condemned twice, first by the guilt of their fall “*in Adam*” and second by and for their own individual sins.

And so, God is “fair” in that there are no “*innocent*” persons

God is “fair” in that even though unregenerate man has a corrupted nature, he also has “*free will*” in that he is not compelled by any outside force to do what he does. No, unregenerate man sins because it is his fallen nature to do so. He freely and willingly sins because he wants and desires to do so – and thereby bears moral responsibility for it.

God is “fair” because unregenerate man freely, willingly, and deliberately sins against both the *light of conscience* and the *light of creation* provided by God to him, and, again, is therefore morally responsible for doing it. Again, God does not condemn any “*innocent*” persons.

God is “fair” because the sins of the ones He “elected” or “predestined” to salvation were in no way dismissed or overlooked, but were fully paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross. Either way, Elect or Non-Elect, the ends of justice are fully served.

God is “fair” because His choice or election of some condemned men for salvation in no way lessens or mitigates the sin guilt of those He did not choose or elect for salvation. No, the non-elect, the lost, the reprobate are left exactly where they were all along – damned for their own sin, wickedness, and disobedience. That God did not extend His mercy or grace to them, nor elect them to salvation, does not in any way lessen or mitigate their guilt one iota.

*In sum, men are damned for their own sin and sin nature and
not because God did not choose them for salvation.*

We would close out our discussion of Question # 10 with ...

**A good example of God’s sovereignty over and foreordination of an event
and man’s responsibility for it found in *Acts*, where Peter addresses
a crowd in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost**

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:22-23)

In these verses the Apostle Luke tells us that Jesus was “*delivered by the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God*” to be crucified ...

In other words, a sovereign God decreed and foreordained the act.

But Luke also tells us that Jesus was put to death “*by lawless hands*” ...

In other words, the men that crucified Christ did so because they freely and willingly wanted and chose to do so ... and were not forced to do what they did by God or by any other external force.

Thus we see that while a *sovereign* God foreordained and decreed the crucifixion of Christ, the actual deed itself was still done “*by lawless hands*” that justly bear the responsibility for it. So, even though God Himself foreordained and decreed Christ’s crucifixion, both the sin and moral responsibility for the crucifixion itself attaches to and remains with the “*lawless hands*” that crucified Him ... and not with God.

Thus, it is perfectly reasonable, fair and just for a sovereign God to foreordain and decree the occurrence of sinful events, with no blame or moral responsibility whatsoever attaching to Himself for the occurrence of the sinful event, and still hold the men perpetrating the event to be morally responsible for carrying it out. Again, the men acted *freely and willingly* in *choosing* to call for and perform the crucifixion. They were morally responsible for it even though God Himself decreed and foreordained it. There is NO real conflict here between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility because man is perfectly free to act within the limits of his fallen nature and is not externally forced or compelled to do anything that he does.

Soli Deo Gloria

(To God Alone be all the Glory)

Appendix 1: “*Biblical Proofs of The Sovereignty of God over all Things*” follows ...

Appendix 1: Biblical Proofs of the Sovereignty of God over all Things

God is sovereign over all that happens (Old Testament)

“Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,’
Calling a bird of prey from the east,
The man who executes My counsel, from a far country.
Indeed I have spoken it;
I will also bring it to pass.
I have purposed it;
I will also do it.” (Isaiah 46:9-11)

“But God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.” (Psalm 115:3)

“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:35)

“The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying,
‘Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass,
And as I have purposed, so it shall stand’ (Isaiah 14:24)

“The LORD has established His throne in heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.” (Psalm 103:19)

“Then Job answered the LORD and said:
‘I know that you can do everything,
And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.” (Job 42:1-2)

God is sovereign over all that happens (New Testament)

“Known to God from eternity are all His works.” (Acts 15:18)

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”
(Romans 11:36)

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will ...” (Ephesians 1:11)

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1:16)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (John 1:1-3)

“... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:4-5)

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs on your head are all numbered.” (Matthew 10:29-32)

“And we know that all good things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30)

“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)

God is sovereign even over all afflictions and disasters

“So the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD?’” (Exodus 4:11)

“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (Amos 3:6)

“I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the LORD, do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7)

“Now see that I, even I, am He,
And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive,
I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.” (Deuteronomy 22:39)
