



# **The Legendary Book of Emails**

A search for truth

by

**Billy Wendeln and Matthew Chisholm**



## Introduction (Billy)

Some of this giant email chain may not be in order, as we had multiple email chains going. We have edited this to be more readable, so you can follow it more closely.

What started the conversation Matt and I had back in 8/2015 was me explaining to Matt that I had changed on a lot of traditional beliefs in the past 2 to 3 years. He asked me what beliefs I had changed and I gave him a list.

In that list was a statement that got Matt's attention: "Free Will / Predestination and all that jazz. 100% Free Will, 100% God's Sovereignty (similar to Christ being 100% man, and 100% God); you cannot read the Bible without understanding we're here to make a choice about Christ."

Matt's reformed instincts kicked in...

## Introduction (Matt)

Naturally, as a dedicated Calvinist, I couldn't allow my friend to continue in such error. I needed to explain to Billy the goodness of the "Doctrines of Grace".

We haven't gone through and corrected any spelling or grammatical mistakes. What you get below is as much of our conversation as Billy saved, warts and all.

Be gentle with your criticisms!

## Matt

Okay I figured out why your free will/predestination thing bothered me. You cannot compare it to Christ being fully God and fully man because they are completely different categories.

How do you reconcile the two, God being sovereign, but us also making choices? I know there are plenty of verses talking about us choosing, but does choice imply FREE will, or just a will?

Which of the ordo solutis is closest to your belief now? [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordo\\_salutis](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordo_salutis)

## Billy

Comparing it to Christ is a good analogy, because how can someone be 100% of two things? Christ is fully man, and fully God; 100% of each. In logical terms, it doesn't make any sense, but that's what He is. It is difficult to accept, but many things in scripture are. But that's what the Bible teaches.

We do have free will (that is the image and likeness of God), but we only have it because it has been decreed as free; God knew how we would use our will and "made us who we really wanted to be". Without the decree, there can't be a universe, a history, the cross (upon which all things are based); without genuine free will there can't be a plan of God because the plan is all about creating an eternal universe of creatures with free will ("like God" in respect of having His image, being made according to His likeness) who have of that free will chosen to respond to Him and so as to be with Him forever.

Problems arise when it is assumed through human logic that things which seem incompatible to our minds and experience are actually that way to God. Rather than being incompatible, absolute and genuine free will is only possible because of the divine decrees, and the divine decrees have no rationale without genuine and absolute creature free will.

**Comment [s1]:** If only someone back then would have intervened and explained that God sovereignty has nothing to do with man's ability to choose. Sovereign means absolute ruler, and judge, and has nothing to do with Him determining things. They are two completely different categories. We would have saved 115 pages!

**Comment [s2]:** While using "fully man and fully God" is OK, moving it to 100% each is illogical. It is logically impossible. I should have recognized it and not used it as an argument.

**Comment [s3]:** This idea of foreseen faith is something I held onto for a long time. It wasn't taught to me. It was just the only way I knew how to explain foreknowledge and predestination. We later came to see that election (in Romans 8) is about a corporate body. This is something we both figured out on our own when going through Romans together.

Genuine free will does not in any way undermine or obviate either the Will of God or His predestination of us – to the contrary, the one is impossible without the other.

Yes, we are predestined; and, yes, we have free will. It is precisely the failure of those who refuse to use that free will in faith so as to be saved which results in their condemnation. God wants all to be saved. Christ died for the sins of all mankind in order that all might be saved. But to be saved, a person has to accept that sacrifice; we have to stand on Christ's work or else on our own.

Those who wish to overemphasize predestination over free will miss the fact that we do have to decide, for that is the basis of God's election; those who emphasize free will over predestination miss the fact that unless God had set everything down in His perfect plan ahead of time no one could be saved. Predestination empowers free will and free will is the mechanism God has employed to carry out His plan: the two go hand in hand and were "made for each other", so to speak, and can only exist together in the perfect plan of God.

As for which *ordo solutis* I hold to, Romans 8:28-30.

**Matt**

What verses say specifically that we have free will or that us being in Gods Image means we have free will? And to be clear, I'm not shirking personal responsibility. We do have to choose. We are held responsible for our actions unless we are forgiven through Christ.

**Billy**

The ability to choose our 'destiny' is what makes us different from any other creature under the sun. It's my interpretation of "image and likeness of God".

We are similar to angels, in that both species possess spirituality of a type that mirrors the image and the likeness of their Creator; we're intelligent, sentient, morally responsible, and capable of being put in a position of responsibility. But in my view, the most critical point of comparison in each case, for both Man and angels, is the ability of making a conscious choice to serve faithfully. If you don't want to call this "free will", it doesn't matter.

For the angels, the test was continued allegiance to God or defection to the devil.  
For Adam and Eve it was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But for both groups, there was a test and the corresponding ability of spirit to choose. Beyond all argument, God could have created innumerable beings to serve Him who would have been incapable of sin or rebellion. But God desires instead, creatures who will choose for Him of their own free will, who will love Him and serve Him and worship Him willingly (John.4:23).

I personally believe that man was created in response to Satan's and the angels fall. (To say response is of course incorrect, as God doesn't learn, and change His plan, etc).

Like the angels, man is a creature capable of exercising and responding to authority within the parameters laid down by God, and, like the angels, every one of us must make these essential choices for ourselves. These two essential qualities of spirit (the ability to choose for God and the individual responsibility to do so) are, in my view, referred to in the Genesis 1:26-27 description as the "image and likeness of God": Note it is the image and likeness.

God gave man sovereignty over the earth to rule. We have the ability to exercise authority (on God's behalf) over the earth and respond to authority (God's commands for us to put faith in Him). We are to

act sovereignly in God's place where He so delegates, and to be responsible to Him for our actions. I don't need to give you verses, because they all over scripture, to include the first chapters of Genesis.

Our will is not really "free" in the sense that we can choose the course of our lives without consequence. We really have only one choice: obey God. If we do, God is glorified by our obedience. If we do not, we suffer the consequences (and God still enjoys a measure of glory by dealing with us in justice, though He would have preferred to deal with us in love).

**Matt**

Romans 9 speaks to this clearly, specifically 18. God's mercy will fall on whomever he chooses. It isn't based on the will of man, His sovereignty comes first.

Now I'm not saying we don't make a choice, I just believe God motivates the choice one way or another. Also, his foreknowledge of our actions cannot precede his election because the actions of something that is designed cannot be foreknown prior to the designer deciding on the form and function of the designed. It is illogical to think he depends on our foreknowledge to decide who to elect or predestine. His design and purpose for us has to precede His knowledge of what we will do. It may be a simultaneous cause and effect such as fire and heat, but logically Gods predestination, his decision about a persons role in life happens first before He knows what we will do.

And my understanding of the above is still consistent with scripture. How do you understand Romans 9?

**Billy**

//Also, his foreknowledge of our actions cannot precede his election because the actions of something that is designed cannot be foreknown prior to the designer deciding on the form and function of the designed.//

You're saying God had to decide something? Like He had to think about it? God has not learned anything. You seem to be putting God in a box of human terms. God exists outside time. He knows. Romans 8:28 - 30 is clear on the order. I don't have to rearrange scripture.

**Matt**

He is outside of time, agreed. He is also a God of order, and his purpose for a person will precede His foreknowledge of them fulfilling the purpose.

That scripture is not necessarily laying down the ordo solutis. Paul is not necessarily stating the foreknowledge happens prior to the predestining. I would say that you place God in a box because you assume His sovereign choice to elect is dependent upon human choice. That absolutely flies in the face of Romans 9.

Look at it from my perspective and you do not violate Romans 8, but you can sensibly understand Romans 9 which is clearer on the topic.

**Billy**

//He is outside of time, agreed. He is also a God of order, and his purpose for a person will precede His foreknowledge of them fulfilling the purpose.//

Romans 8:28-30 says otherwise. He is the one that says those he foreknew he also predestined. To say that it's not in order is interpretive foolery. Sure the last four of predestined, called, justified and glorified are in order of how things happen but God messed up and put the first two backwards.

I am not putting God in a box. God, the God of order, decreed His terms in Roman 8:28-30.

I have zero problems with Romans 9. God can do whatever He desires with His mercy. We are pots to His hands. But Romans 8:28-30 God states that those He foreknew He also predestined, then called and justified, and glorified. God set His own modus operandi.

With your rearrangement of scripture, what does foreknowledge do if it's after we're predestined?

Also, another verse that talks about God's "foreknowing" before "sanctifying" (set apart, make holy) is Jeremiah 1:5: *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

**Matt**

That verse doesn't prove your point. Ephesians 1:3-6 reads that he chose and predestined us and doesn't mention his foreknowledge in the way you use the word. His election is first.

**Billy**

I honestly don't know what you're doing. In order to get your view right, you are rearranging a passage, and then deciding to use another passage and forget about what the first passage says and includes in context.

It's like if one verse says:

*They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved— (Acts 16:31)*

But another says:

*And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love (belief) will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:12-13*

So let's forget about enduring until the end, and just stick with "believe" and forget about the other part. You don't have to maintain your belief to the end to be saved. One quick little belief and you're good to go.

Just because Ephesians 1 doesn't mention foreknowledge doesn't mean it is not a part of the equation. It is there in other verses, and in clear context of when it's used.

This kind of exegesis is how one gets into serious trouble. I am actually flabbergasted at what you're doing.

**Matt**

Don't be overly dramatic. You are basing your belief on an unclear verse when other areas of the Bible are far clearer. The syntax in Romans 8 does not imply that is the order God did things.

The email I sent to Billy I also reread several times.

I reread the email BEFORE I sent it to you!

And you eisegete into that word foreknew your view of free will. God's will comes first. He must elect and predestine someone prior to foreknowing their actions.

We can end this particular topic the way we always do and just agree to disagree if we must. I find your view to be unscriptural and my view does not conflict with scripture in any way.

**Billy**

I am not sure what these two lines mean:

///"The email I sent to Billy I also reread several times. I reread the email BEFORE I sent it to you!" //

Are you sharing our email exchange with others? I hope it's not the case.

I wasn't being dramatic. I was being passionate. I am also stunned still at how you are trying to discuss this.

How is the verse unclear (it's at least two passages that discuss foreknowledge before being set apart)? It's very clear, and one only has a problem with it if you have a preconceived idea of what you think it should say; you have to eisegete to make it work.

It's not eisegesis when you take a word in scripture, in context, and compare it to the entire scripture (it's good exegesis). All throughout scripture we are given commands, and in terms of salvation, we are given a choice to believe in order to be saved. God desires all to be saved. "Whosoever believes...." It makes it simple to understand that foreknowledge, listed before predestined in multiple scriptures, is God's knowledge of our choice of choosing His Son. It's very simple, and it requires modifying your natural understanding to think it's anything different.

Explain to me in your doctrine how you reconcile that "God wants all to be saved", yet doesn't save all, but chooses some for salvation and some for damnation?

My view from scripture is that it is man's choice to believe, and by default, due to Christ's death on the Cross they are "ready" for salvation since Christ paid the price for all (re: Book of Life with all names in it at the beginning of time); it is your denial of Christ that removes you name from the Book of Life. It is your choice to go to hell by not believing. God even made it clear, setting in your heart knowledge of good and evil, eternity, seeing Him all over creation. Man has no excuse. It's in his heart, His sin has been paid for, and all he needs to do is believe to receive the adoption. It's the rejection of Christ (Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit) that sends you to hell.

Also, you never answered my question: With your rearrangement of the passages, what does foreknowledge do if it's after we're predestined? I actually want to know what you and other Calvinists believe. What is foreknowledge in your doctrine? What is it's purpose?

**Matt**

You can be a hard head you know that? It was an example.

"The email I sent you I also reread several times."

Note the order the events fall in the sentence do not necessarily mean the events occurred that way. Rereading the email would have to come before sending it.

I use the example to show you that Romans 8 doesn't necessarily mean God acted in that order. It is unclear.

Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 clearly place His will prior to ours. Therefore, His predestining, His will, happens prior to His foreknowledge of our response.

I wouldn't secretly be forwarding your emails to someone else or something silly.

**Billy**

I completely missed what you were trying to convey! Haha!!!! No idea you were trying to give an example. Seeing you write my name seemed completely out of context. Lolz! My apology!!!!

The grammar in the passages are written precisely in their order. Predestined, called, justified, glorified. That context makes it clear that the foreknowledge of predestined is also in order.

It is impossible for God not to know. All Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 state is that God's will was made. It really IS God's choice, but that choice is based upon His prior knowledge of our free will responding to Him. Our foreknown choice to receive the gift is not desire or effort as faith is not a work. So it remains consistent with Romans 9.

As it says in Romans chapter 9:18, "*God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden*". But doesn't He want all to be saved? So if some are hardened, it is not on account of God's will (for that is clearly not His will). Therefore it must be on account of their own will that they are hardened. God's choice to have mercy on some and harden others is, therefore, NOT arbitrary - every page of the Bible proclaims His justice and fairness. Instead it is based upon what every other scripture that deals with this issue says it is, namely, our attitude to Him and the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no inconsistency whatsoever with us having to exercise choice and with God having provided for that choice before the universe was made. He knew our choice and then preordained it to be by His will! Human history has been decreed!

**Matt**

///*As it says in Romans chapter 9:18, "God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden". But doesn't He want all to be saved? So if some are hardened, it is not on account of God's will (for that is clearly not His will)."*///  
//

Ahh! Totally eiseging that dude! Hard!

"Whom he wants to harden." It doesn't say whom he wants to harden after considering their feelings on the matter.

I considered what you said in one of the earlier emails. What does it change if I believe foreknowledge precedes election? Not a lot really. From a scriptural standpoint it does work okay, except for the glaring Romans 9 contradictions.

Where I have the problem is that it takes the order of the world and flips it. Just as a matter of respect, had we no scripture to go by, I would place His will before ours. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Whatever you want to credit us with, it will always be second to God's will.

Now when I say second it doesn't mean His election and foreknowledge don't happen simultaneously, but it is simply a logical order that He must decide "prior" to Him knowing it will come to pass.

Maybe this leads to the immutability of God and what exactly that means with respect to this discussion.

I encourage you to do what I did. Consider scripture in light of my view, and give Gods will the position and respect it deserves.

The verses in Romans 8 and 1 Timothy 2 can be explained with my understanding.

### **Billy**

You have a bad understanding of translating scripture. Proper exegesis takes the WHOLE scripture. It doesn't interpret a verse independently of other scripture. I am interpreting the text based on the whole of scripture.

As said, just because one passage does not mention something that is mentioned in other scripture (the entire Bible is full of God giving us choices, being just, and holding us accountable) does not mean that 'what isn't mentioned' in a particular passage is not at work. For example, in Luke 18:9-14, Christ calls the publican justified by faith; i.e. he is saved. We see no mention of regeneration, being born again, or even faith, just a fear and humble submission to the Lord for His mercy. But we know this man is saved and has been regenerated or born again, and he put faith in God.

It goes back to believe and be saved vs. believe, be saved, and endure. Just because one passage does not mention enduring, doesn't mean it's still not part of the equation in the first passage.

It says God will have mercy on whom He has mercy, and harden whom He wants to harden; that does not mean that the person's choice of faith in God (whole reason we're here) was not part of the equation. Through ALL other scripture, we see clearly how God's delivers mercy, grace, justice, etc, through giving man choice. It is the most common, logical, innate concept, and scripture shows it through its entirety.

And to rephrase my above statement: (So if some are hardened, it is not on account of God's will (for that is clearly not His will).) Obviously if it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then it was God's will. But just to use that example, on how it is easily reconciled with a just and fair Lord; God knows all who will chose Him ( Foreknowledge), and Pharaoh was never going to chose God; this was known before the world began. Pharaoh had no destiny at this time. God has every single right to raise this man into the most powerful man on the Planet, and use him to show His power and glory to the world. And then throw him into hell. That's exactly what He did. He preordained it to happen. God chose to not have mercy on Pharaoh and harden his heart, for His own glory. And He was perfectly JUST in doing so.

///*Where I have the problem is that it takes the order of the world and flips it..... but it is simply a logical order that He must decide "prior" to Him knowing it will come to pass. ///*

(I am going to use some caps here for emphasis on words. I am not shouting, but emphasizing.) :-)

Again, it is IMPOSSIBLE for God NOT to know what will come to pass. Listen to what you said... "PRIOR to Him knowing"!!! God has NEVER not known.

Before predestining and calling, God already knew who would chose Him and who wouldn't. He then predestined, be His divine WILL and decree, that our choice of would be DESTINED to happen.

Without God's divine will, human history would never have started. But since He did WILL it, it is now preordained to happen exactly as HE decreed!

Man would not have had a will without God WILLING it. Man would not be in time and history unless God WILLED it. Our Lord's WILL came first! He is sovereign, because He chose how human history would transpire. He gave us choice by HIS will. There is no flipping the order of the world, for He decreed it.

How do you not see how simple and magnificent this is and how it fits perfectly with ALL of scripture. How it shows God's love, mercy, patience, long-suffering, glory, and power?

I didn't ask you about Foreknowledge preceding Predestined; I asked you what YOUR view is; in YOUR view, you say Predestined came before Foreknowledge, so in YOUR view, what IS foreknowledge and what does it mean if it came after?

I also want to know how you reconcile that God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:1-6, 2 Cor 5:20; 1 T 4:10; 2 Pet 3:9).

**Matt**

I will answer your questions in another email.

I know the rules for hermeneutics. Interpret scripture according to scripture. There is a single narrative. I am doing that!

Take a look at the very next verse in Romans 9. It doesn't depend on human will. Paul straight up says it. We also know he means that human will isn't involved when he predicts the question "Then why does God still find fault?"

Explain that in your view while I work on explaining your verses in mine. To me Paul has laid out Gods sovereignty in such a way that His will precedes ours to the point that he even expects people to ask why God would still fault them when He is the one that decides who receives mercy. His answer is that we don't get to ask that question to almighty God.

Applying the rules of Biblical interpretation means our understanding of such a clear book as Romans 9 should influence our interpretation of other verses that could be understood in more than one way.

**Billy**

Rom 9:16 I already discussed earlier. Faith is not a work. God foreknew the choice for *faith*. His foreknowledge knew who would put *faith* in His son. Those that did so He predestined.

The word here for "will" is more akin to desire (translated that way in many versions); it conveys a desired longing *without* commitment. It is the same word here:

1 Tim 2:4  
*who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

God didn't *will* all men to be saved, but longed. If it was the "will" we've been discussing, a true commitment (where faith comes in) then all would have been saved. But is is not that word. The writer here is simply staying just because you want mercy, or do a bunch of work to try to obtain it, it's not going to happen unless God says so.

Really it is only one choice that matters; receive the Gift of God through faith in His Son. This was foreknown by God.

Ephesians 2:8

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—*

And the above verse is not saying God gave us faith. The 'not from yourselves' refers to salvation, which is the gift of God---*through* Christ.

Romans 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 5:15

*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*

This faith was foreknown, which God then predestined. Human history began. In time, you are called/elected, justified, and will be glorified in eternity.

Romans 9 comes *after* Romans 8, where the writer clearly explains to the readers that God's foreknowledge came before His predestination. The writer of Romans makes it clear that your desire and works play no part in God showing mercy to you. God *knew* you before you were made, and *knew* the choice you would make towards Him. You may not think that's fair since you weren't there. You hadn't even been born yet, or committed evil, but God already *knew* you. You cannot question Him. That's Romans 9.

**Matt**

Alright, you have convinced me (kind of). Romans 8 is the *ordo solutis* without need for funny business or odd interpretation. I was lazy to have tried to explain it another way.

However, we still differ in that I think you are interpreting it incorrectly still...

I have always accepted that "foreknow" in that verse meant he foreknew the actions of His creation, and then based on His creation's response He predestines, which put the cart squarely before the horse and conflicted with the rest of scripture. That is why I have argued with you for so long about it.

Having spent the weekend thinking about it and then digging into a number of commentaries on the subject, I have come to understand that the mention of God's foreknowledge there has nothing to do with His dependency on us to have faith.

I believe the view below said it best out of the commentaries I read.

*"Therefore His foreknowledge and decrees cannot be separated; for the one implies the other. When He decrees that a thing shall be, He foresees that it will be. There is nothing known as what will be, which is not certainly to be; and there is nothing certainly to be, unless it is ordained that it shall be. All the foreknowledge of future events, then, is founded on the decree of God; consequently He determined with Himself from eternity everything He executes in time, Acts 15:18. Nothing is contingent in the mind of God, who foresees and orders all events according to His own eternal and unchangeable will."*

**Comment [MC4]:** In my head, I was fine with understanding that foreknowledge came before predestining.

God foreknows a group, and then He decides to do something with that group.

Boom! Still Calvinistic!

He says far more eloquently what I was trying to say. There is simultaneity in the foreknowledge and predestining of God. This verse mentions nothing of man's will. God foreknows all who will be saved because he predestined them to salvation. It is not contingent on the will of man. To use my designer analogy again, a designer must foresee the thing that is to be made before determining to make it.

So, I am glad you forced me to confront that mistake in my understanding. Foreknowledge does come first.

Now, man's free will. Not in the broad sense of the term, but specifically in choosing faith in Christ or not. God foreknew and predestined those who would be saved. He has had a chosen people for the entirety of human history. He chose us in Him before the foundations of the world. Scripture is extremely clear that God chose us.

That said, scripture is also very clear that we must choose Him. 100% sovereignty, 100% human will. The question to be answered, in my mind anyway, is how these two sides work together. In [Philippians 2:12-13](#), Paul states that it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Our will comes from him. In John, Jesus says that nobody comes to Him unless the Father draws him. In [1 Corinthians](#), Paul says that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

**Comment [s5]:** Oh, it's almost like that God is witnessing and working on all people? ☺

We are saved by grace through faith, and this is not of ourselves, it is a gift. Saving faith is a gift, but from our perspective, we chose to believe. His causes us to want to be saved and so we want to be; His will precedes our own, but our will is a part of it, even if it is caused.

How else can you explain why Paul expects the question he predicts in Romans 9:19? Taking Paul's teachings together, we know that he believes God causes us to want Him, and in Romans 9 he is stating that God will extend His grace to whomever he chooses, saving grace that comes through faith. So, rightly, he predicts that people will have a problem with that, cry that it isn't fair, and ask why God could still find fault when nobody can resist his will.

Nobody can resist His will.

I believe you have eisegeted into the imago dei your idea of free will.

**Billy**

// "I have always accepted that "foreknow" in that verse meant he foreknew the actions of His creation, and then based on His creation's response He predestines, which put the cart squarely before the horse and conflicted with the rest of scripture."//

But it doesn't conflict with the rest of scripture. It may seem to conflict with your views of certain scripture, but those views can be mistaken based on your idea that He must predestine an action before the action takes place. I explained this already multiple times.

It all comes to the fairness, justice, and love of God. Scripture is clear He wants all to be saved. That is so clear and cannot be taken any other way. If He truly wants all to be saved, and He predestined without the concept of man's faith, then it breaks scripture on a loving and just God. You are taking Roman's 9 by itself, and basing the rest of scripture in this passage. I am taking the rest of scripture and interpreting Romans 9, and it makes perfect sense. I explain how an "in-time" man can think God is not fair and question Him, and how God can have mercy and harden. It all fits with the rest of scripture.

You have explain this some in your idea here, but you still are trying (I think, as you seem to go back and forth) that God predestined us before foreknowing our decision. I completely agree that they are intertwined.

Here is my best explanation to make all scripture come together. You can't find this in one verse, but must take into account all of scripture.

God is fair, loving, just, compassionate, patient. God wants all to be saved. God wants man to choose Him instead of himself. God knew every single man, woman, and child before they were ever created. God could see every single person that would come to be, and could see their decisions in every single scenario in all of time, and in every single alternate universe. If there was some scenario, some way that someone would chose Him, God knew. If there is one scenario out of a trillion where God provided a billion gospel messages to one person during their hypothetical lifetime, put them in front of miracles etc, and that person choose Him, then God accepted their faith. God then knew who would truly choose Him and who would not. God preordains all that would have chosen Him into the true human history that we are experiencing today. In fact He did, and He decreed it to be. God ensures those that would have chosen Him in that one in a billion scenario will be called, elected, justified, and glorified, because He is a loving and just God. He doesn't have to use that specific scenario; all He has to do is call. The Holy Spirit works. God can plan their lifetime to do whatever His will His, in order to show His glory.

Now the rest of humanity (and it's a lot), could never have been put in any scenario where they would have chosen God. God again can do whatever He likes with them in human history. He can give them a cush life where they have money and friends (showing mercy), or He can raise them up and make them Pharaoh and harden their heart and destroy them in power and glory. He can place them in a land that never heard of Jesus, never heard the Gospel, and that is perfectly faith and just. Man may not understand this, stating "I wasn't even born! I would have changed my mind if you would have presented me the gospel! I would have changed my mind if you would have shown me a miracle, or had a prophet come to my village!" God knows, and there is nothing that you can say or do, no desire or effort.

// "Not in the broad sense of the term, but specifically in choosing faith in Christ or not. God foreknew and predestined those who would be saved. He has had a chosen people for the entirety of human history. He chose us in Him before the foundations of the world. Scripture is extremely clear that God chose us."//

And I agree 100% with this statement. However God based all this on man's faith in Him, which He foreknew. This is in scripture. All that stuff above still applies. Every scripture still applies and does not break God's love, fairness, justice, compassion, etc, in fact it reinforces it.

// "In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul states that it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."//

I agree. When God decreed History, every action we have was preordained.

// "Jesus says that nobody comes to Him unless the Father draws him."//

And I agree.

// "Paul says that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit."//

Again, I agree. It's all been decreed. Those who God elected and called will do so based on the Holy Spirit.

//“His will causes us to want to be saved and so we want to be; His will precedes our own, but our will is a part of it, even if it is caused.”//

I disagree with part this. I agree with your first sentence. I believe our ‘free choice’ in faith was known and made before He preordained anything. However in human history, there is no Will but God’s, and yes, every action we have IS caused because it was preordained.

//“How else can you explain why Paul expects the question he predicts in Romans 9:19?”//

I already explained this in my last email. Man in time fights God and tries to say God isn’t fair. But God knew a man’s heart before that man was every created. He wrote your history as His will sees fit.

//“I believe you have eisegeted into the imago dei your idea of free will.”//

No, I have taken all of scripture, and compared man to every other creature under the sun, and determined that choosing God is the option that fits with the “image and likeness of God”.

You can ask me about any scripture that you don’t understand from my perspective. I cannot think of any scripture that doesn’t fit. You can also asked me about any philosophical question that men often bring up. Like in my previous email about God not being fair for all the people in whatever country that have never heard the gospel. I can answer that and explain Gods fairness justice and love.

But I would like to know, if you believe God did not elect man based on man’s faith, but some arbitrary unknown thing to us, then how do you reconcile that God desires all men to be saved? If man has no choice, And it was completely and totally God’s choice then how do you explain that scripture? It appears from my perspective that you have to do interpretive foolery, similar to what you were doing it with Romans 8.

## **Matt**

Regarding 1 Timothy 2

*“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man[a] Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”*

Verse 4 is the verse in question and continues the thought from verse 3. That God who wants the church to live a peaceful and quite life, godly and dignified in every way, desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. So what does he mean by “all people”?

In verses 5 and 6 Paul summarizes the gospel into a concise statement of who God is (Jewish roots showing here), Christ’s position between God and man, and what Christ did on man’s behalf. Then we see in verse 7 Paul’s declaration of his appointment as apostle to the Gentiles. He predicts the skepticism of the reader(s) who surely knew his reputation as a Pharisee, and assures them that he is in fact the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews, despite his training.

Understanding verse 7 shines new light on 4. Prior to this point in history, Israel was God's chosen people, but after Christ was established as the mediator between God and men, salvation was opened to all people. God no longer desires to just preserve Israel as His chosen people, He desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

The verse uses "all people" in the sense that God wants everyone to be saved without distinction among people groups. All people. Every tribe and tongue and nation. The verse does not mean God wants "all people" without exception, which a universalist would argue.

A point we may disagree on is God's desire. Can God desire for something to come to pass and it not? I would say no. The use of the phrase "all people" or "all men" cannot mean everyone without exception, because what God desires or wills comes to pass and we know that not everyone will be saved.

"desires" = thelei (G2309)

- 1) To will, have in mind, intend
  - a. To be resolved or determined, to purpose
  - b. To desire, to wish
  - c. To love
    - i. To like to do a thing, be fond of doing
  - d. To take delight in, have pleasure

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G2309>

Click the link and search results by book are on the right.

### Billy

Earlier, you said you were thinking about this over the weekend, and looked at some commentaries. I urge you to look at scripture, and see what it says, not seeing what other men say. God is so awesome, that in this time period we are in, where spiritual knowledge is so lacking, He has given us so many resources to read and understand His word. All you need is your mind, the Holy Spirit, and Bible Gateway and NetBible. These are my favorite and so powerful.

**Comment [MC6]:** This is pivotal in any Brodown.

It appears you are trying to fit your view into what you think scripture has to mean, instead of reading scripture to find out what it means (specifically thinking God's desire has to come to pass). You could quickly find out that the word here for "will" or "desire" is used a lot in scripture, and means exactly what it says. It's not WILL. You'd also see that God does desire, and that His desire does not always come to pass. Consider the following:

2 Peter 3:9

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

The word here for wishing is boulomai.

- to will deliberately, have a purpose, be minded

This is even a stronger version of our word in 1 Tim 2:4, which is thelo.

- thelo: to will, to wish, implying volition and purpose
- boulomai: to wish to will deliberately, expresses more strongly than thelo the deliberate exercise of the will

God desires all men to be saved and strongly yearns that none perish but come to repentance. You cannot rephrase this or think this means something else. The only reason that all men are not saved, and that all men don't repent, is because God's wants men to choose Him of their own choice.

//The verse does not mean God wants "all people" without exception, which a Universalist would argue.//

I would argue too. Scripture is clear that God does want all people to be saved, and none to perish. Just like He sent His Son to pay for the sins of the entire world, that whosoever believers will be saved. However it is man's free-choice in putting faith in Christ that saves them.

//A point we may disagree on is God's desire. Can God desire for something to come to pass and it not? I would say no. The use of the phrase "all people" or "all men" cannot mean everyone without exception, because what God desires or wills comes to pass and we know that not everyone will be saved.//

Yes, God can desire something and it not come to pass (you will see below). God's desire and strong desire fall's beneath His Will, His decree. He decreed that all men are to be saved by faith in His Son. And this verse does mean "all people". I have seen how Calvinists go through 'all' the scriptures that state "all", "all men" and "the entire world" don't really mean what it says. They try and must use interpretative foolery to make them mean something else in order for their view to work. It's ludicrous.

Consider just a few other thelo verses:

Hebrews 10:8

*When he says above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you did not desire nor did you take delight in them" (which are offered according to the law),*

God did not desire (thelo) burnt and sin-offerings. This is not "Will", this is desire. Hebrews states that God did not want them, yet they were done anyway. His WILL at the time was for men to follow the law. He decreed they follow the law, even though He desired something else. His desire did not come to pass.

Matthew 16:24

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

If you desire to follow Christ (desires is not enough), you must 'deny yourself, take up His cross, and follow Him' (refers to faith or actual will verses desire).

Matthew 26:39

*And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

Christ did not act on His own desire, but followed God. An interesting note I just learned about this verse, the last "will" in this verse is actually NOT in the Greek. It actually says "not my will but You."

We see that God does desire all men to be saved, and strongly desires that none perish, and this does apply to all men, the word, all, whosoever....etc.

So why is it that, in your view, if salvation is God-caused (without taking account of God's foreknowledge of man's faith, and thus pre-ordained in human history), that God didn't save all men? It

is obviously within God's power. He obviously strongly desires it. So why are all men not saved? The only choice that scripture provides is God has accounted for man's faith.

That's how these are true:

2 Peter 3:9

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

1 Timothy 2:3-4

*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

This also goes hand in hand with Christ paying for the sins of the entire world.

1 John 2:2

*and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

God, in His infinite love, made the way possible for all people, the entire world. The only single request He has made is to put faith in His Son and His work. This verse means Christ died for all.

People are sent to hell, not because God wants them there, but because they rejected His Son. They commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 12:31

*Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.*

How can you deny the Holy Spirit? By rejecting faith in Christ. According to Calvinism, you can't deny the Holy Spirit because it's God-caused. There are a lot of verses I don't know how you come to terms with.

Matthew 22:14

*"For many are called, but few are chosen."*

**Matt**

You know what's nice. When we debate, at least I am sure of your salvation. I'm also trying to evangelize a catholic friend and he is absolutely taken in by the RCC and he doesn't understand the gospel at all. Scares me for him.

**Billy**

Absolutely! It's nice that we are just debating this little thing and our spirits are not in jeopardy. It's also great that we can have a rational debate that doesn't result to neener neener.

Missing emails...

**Matt**

My position would be

- 1) God knew the outcome of creating Lucifer the way He did, prior to having created Lucifer.
- 2) After knowing the outcome, God chose to create Lucifer anyway.

Conclusion: God intended for Satan's fall to happen.

**Billy**

I accept that God knew Lucifer was going to fall before He created him.

I accept that God created Lucifer anyway.

In the above points, that does not make God the author of sin. However if you add that God programmed (caused) the very nature of Lucifer to sin, then it does make God the author. If God gave Lucifer a free will (in which I believe He did), then God is not the cause, but He did foreknow and predestine.

**Matt**

Where in that example did I say God caused Lucifer to sin?

You said you accept that God knew Lucifer was going to fall before God created him. Could God have made Lucifer with a nature (wrong word maybe? Character?) that would have resulted in Lucifer fearing and respecting God, preventing the first sin? Or could God have placed someone else in that position and never have made Lucifer?

If you want to convince me that your position is the correct one, reason with me on this little example. It is the crux of the rest of the argument for me.

**Billy**

You didn't say God caused Lucifer to sin; I was saying that if God programmed our character, which I believe he did not, then he would be programming us to sin. You said God gave us our character.

God created Lucifer with attributes. That means he is the one that determined Lucifer's power and abilities. He is the one that determined Lucifer's job. This was ordained. Then He determined that Lucifer was going to have free will. God knew Lucifer, after creating him, would take his will and sin and rebel. God created him anyway. Because Lucifer has free will, God is not the author of sin. Lucifer had free will and chose to sin on his own.

This is just like Pharaoh. God determined his attributes and him becoming ruler of Egypt and thus the world. He also gave Pharaoh free will and knew Pharaoh would never turn to God.

When time began, all this became ordained. It is going to happen exactly as God saw it.

Those that take the will God gave them and put it to Christ and endure to then end are the Elect. This is also ordained.

God endures with much patience these vessels that will receive destruction, because there are other vessels that will chose Him with the will He gave them.

Mercy; this is not salvation.

Mercy is receiving lenience for a punishment we deserve.

Grace; this is salvation.

By grace we have been saved....

God is patient and merciful in not sending every sinner to hell the moment we first sin. He would be just and fair for doing so. But He endures disobedience and sin in order that some heed the Word and put their faith in His Son and receive the grace of salvation He has provided through His Son.

**Matt**

So do you deny that each of us is born with a different character? I don't think we are born a blank slate and having two kids reinforces that for me. They are similar, but in some things they are drastically different. Assuming we DO have different characters when born, where does that come from if not God?

Another related question to this. Can God humble and bring to repentance anyone? I mean, if He chose to, could He change the mind of someone who is not elect. Is He capable?

**Billy**

We are born with genetics (nature) and gain additional personality through growing up (nurture). That's how Sara can act like her great grandmother yet never have been around her.

We are called to fellowship with believers, for they have spiritual gifts (all part of the holiness of God) given by God at salvation, so we can be equipped to be more like Him. It is salvation and being adopted by God that imbues us with a Godly character, but only if we resist the flesh and listen to the Spirit. Think of the fruits of the Spirit; those are the character traits we strive for through sanctification. But we still must resist our will and submit to His. Christ was our example; not my will but His will be done.

You kind of asked two questions.

Can God humble and bring to repentance anyone? I think the answer to this is absolutely, but He would circumvent their will with His power and glory. There is no doubt and scripture is clear that if God were to reveal His glory and power and righteousness to man (and kept him alive cuz he would die) that the person would instantly submit to Him and His will. In fact this will happen (Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10-11). In the end, every knee will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord and give Him glory. Of course this comes after they already made their choice in resisting God's free gift of salvation.

Could God make someone elect that was not elect from the beginning? That's a philosophical question. It's similar to the question could God create a boulder so heavy He couldn't lift it. God ordained all to happen that will happen and therefore everything that is going to happen was ordained to happen. I believe He has the power to do it (see above) but His justice, love, righteousness, and holiness would make it 'out of character'.

Love is a choice and love is sacrifice. God showed this perfectly through His Son who submitted His will to the Will of the Father out of love for the Father and for us, and did so all the way to His death. He was our example; we must submit our will, we must sacrifice our will to His Will, for that is what He desires of us. That's the love our God desires. Of course it wasn't possible without Him first loving us by giving us His Son.

Tell me if you agree with this:

It is absolutely scriptural that God elects us to salvation

- Election –Ekloge; the act of picking out, choosing

It is absolutely scriptural that God foreknew us, and predestined us to be conformed the image of His Son

- Foreknew-proginosko; to have knowledge beforehand
- Predestined-Proorizo; to predetermine, to decide beforehand

It is absolutely scriptural that one must believe in Christ in order to receive the grace of salvation

- Believe-Pisteuo; to think to be true, place confidence in

So, we have two options:

- God had prior knowledge (of what?), and decided beforehand, to choose some for salvation, and made them place confidence in His Son, and thus they were appointed to Salvation

or

- God had prior knowledge of those who would place confidence in His Son, and decided beforehand, to choose them for salvation, and thus, they are appointed to Salvation

**Matt**

I would change the last bit to this:

God had prior knowledge (of the person; as in the type of “knew” he uses when he says “depart from me, I never knew you”. He only “knows” those that will be saved. I don’t think there is a time in scripture when Jesus or God uses that language regarding a lost person), and decided beforehand, to choose some for salvation, and made them place confidence in His Son, and thus they were appointed to Salvation.

**Billy**

So we have two positions.

So, in your view, the foreknowledge God had before ‘predestining’ is: ‘knowing those that will be saved’?

So He knew beforehand who would be saved, and then predestined them to be saved? You know that’s my position as well, but we’re still missing something in the process.

How were people chosen for salvation?

You believe God caused, or chose people for salvation, and then predestined them, and then called them.

It seems that your position is thus:

- God Elected, Foreknew, Predestined, Called, ‘We believe’ Justified, Glorified.

God chose those whom would be saved; according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph.1:5)

God thus has foreknowledge of who would be saved.

God thus predestined those who would be saved.

God thus called those who would be saved.

Those called will believe and be saved.

God thus justified those who would be saved.

God thus will glorify those who would be saved.

Your position still begs the question, what is (and has always been) the good pleasure of God’s will (Eph 1:5)

**Comment [s7]:** I can’t even see individual election any more. It’s right there in the text. What was predestined is that those who love Him will be confirmed to the image of Christ at the resurrection.

**Comment [MC8]:** False dilemma.

The corporate view of election breaks this.

To note, the word in Eph.1:5 is similar to other 'wills' in the NT (same root word): It means desire or strong desire (as in God desires all men to be saved).

Was God's desire to just choose some, and not others? Does the Word give us any indication of what God's will/desire is/was?

His desire is/was/and has always been:

*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:3-4)*

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet 3:9)*

So He declares and commands:

*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30)*

*This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (1 John 3:23)*

*"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29b)*

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15b)*

*that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26:20b)*

He even does a universal invite/call of the Gospel:

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)*

*"For many are called, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:14 (see verse 9 for universal invite, those called actually listened to the invite, those who accepted the invite were chosen)*

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20)*

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:17)*

What does He require after the invitation (Gospel)?

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13)*

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

This is perfectly summed up in a passage I have already given you:

*(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is He waited on by human hands, as if He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man He created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for His is not far off from any one of us. (Acts 17:24-27)*

God made this world on purpose (v.24)

God has given us all the essentials we need to exist in it, "life and breath and everything else" (v.25)

God has given us the historical, political, and geographical contexts wherein our lives are to be lived out here on earth (v.26)

God is the One who created us for the express purpose of seeking Him (v.27a)

It is God's unalterable purpose that all who choose to search for Him "might find Him" (v.27b)

The choice is not difficult to carry through, "for He is not far off from any one of us" (v.27c).

God knew beforehand who would heed His call and command, and receive the free gift/grace of salvation. This receipt is not based on man's desire, or his work, but his belief on Christ. This is the good pleasure of His will.

**Matt**

// Was God's desire to just choose some, and not others? Does the Word give us any indication of what God's will/desire is/was?//

Ephesians 1

*9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

This seems to say that His will is a plan set forth in Christ "to unite all things in him..."

*11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee[d] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,[e] to the praise of his glory.*

Here is something interesting. In 11, he reiterates that God predestines according to His own will, but then in 12 he specifies a group, which I am guessing are the apostles, "we who were the first to hope in Christ". I say that because he switches back to the recipients of the letter being the subject in 13, "In him you also..." In both, this section seems to be saying that His will is that they/we will hope in Christ to the praise of His glory.

To answer the question about God desiring to just choose some, Ephesians 1 implies it. Unless this verse is speaking of a category? He chose this group of people who are in Christ over that group of people who are not to be transformed, etc. I am sure you will love that observation :-).

**Comment [MC9]:** First hint here at corporate election.

I was actually familiar with the position, but I thought it was nonsense at this point.

But still, that only bumps the question back one. If it is speaking of the category of people who would come to Christ, we still need to ask, who comes? John 6 says that those who come are those the Father gives. It also says "...no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." The Father in this passage seems to have the final say on who will and won't come to Christ.

*//Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30)//*

Agreed, they should! But they won't, and He knows that. Perspective. When we are confronting the world, we are to call all men to repentance.

*//This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29b) //*

And who is it in John 6 that Jesus says will come and believe? Those the Father....

*//"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15b)//*

Amen! A call to repentance to all men.

*//that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26:20b) //*

Just like you and I did. Those the Father gives will come...

We are to call all men to repentance so that Christ's sheep will hear his voice and follow him. The Father has given the sheep to him. They are the sons, but they still need to be called so that they can hear, come and believe.

John's message is consistent. Those who come and believe are the ones the Father gives, they are Christ's sheep.

*//(24) The God who made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in man-made temples, (25) nor is He waited on by human hands, as if He needed anything from us. He is the One who gives us all life and breath and everything else. (26) From one man He created all the nations of mankind – that they should come to inhabit the whole face of the earth. He fixed and determined the specific times and extent of their habitations, (27) to the end that they should seek out this God, that they might go in search of Him and so might find Him – for His is not far off from any one of us. (Acts 17:24-27)//*

This is Paul's address to the Areopagus. He is speaking to lost people. He rightfully proclaims that all should come and repent because that is our job, to declare the Gospel to the world. Again, though, only Christ's sheep will follow him, because only we know his voice.

## **Billy**

*// Ephesians 1*

*9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

This seems to say that His will is a plan set forth in Christ “to unite all things in him...” //

His plan centers on Christ, because it is Christ that all are called to put faith in, and in the end, all will bow down and give Him glory. Christ is the King of Kings. Every person’s destiny relies on their choice concerning Christ. .... “to unite all things in Him”. What you have provided is not an answer to my question. The Bible is full of God’s various desires; above references His overall plan.

I was asking, in your view, can we know what ‘the good pleasure of His will is’ in terms of election, where the phrase takes place. Ephesians says nothing of that; the verses I provided show that God desires all to be saved (which pertains to salvation and thus election. Please try and answer the question.

*// Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30) Agreed, they should! But they won’t, and He knows that. Perspective. When we are confronting the world, we are to call all men to repentance.//*

Yes, but this shows God’s character, it was an offer that was genuine.

Regarding John 6...

I have mentioned this before, and you have not responded:

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)

We are told clearly who the Father picked to give His Son; ‘everyone who has heard and learned from the Father’; this hearing and learning comes from the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing the Word. God based who He gives to His Son based on His knowing who would receive the Word.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)

Foreknowledge of who would hear and heed the call and receive the free gift of salvation.

*// We are to call all men to repentance so that Christ’s sheep will hear his voice and follow him. The Father has given the sheep to him. They are the sons, but they still need to be called so that they can hear, come and believe. //*

I agree, but the Father had foreknowledge of the people that would hear and heed the call and receive the free gift of salvation; since this was foreknown, and predestined; they are elect; they are the sheep. I agree with this, and this passage fits with both positions.

*// John’s message is consistent. Those who come and believe are the ones the Father gives, they are Christ’s sheep.//*

Right, and the Father based that on everyone that has heard and learned; in other words, who would accept His free gift of salvation.

*// This is Paul’s address to the Areopagus. He is speaking to lost people. He rightfully proclaims that all should come and repent because that is our job, to declare the Gospel to the world. Again, though, only Christ’s sheep will follow him, because only we know his voice.//*

We know His voice because we've been predestined, but before that, God foreknew who would accept His free gift of salvation. My view show that Gods purpose since before time was for man to seek Him; this fits with Him knowing beforehand who would heed that call.

**Matt**

In Ephesians 1, His will is defined as the coming together of His people under Christ to the praise of His glory. Ultimately His will is to glorify Himself for His people, through the work of the Son.

**Billy**

In your response, you said "to unite all things in Him" was why He chose some and not others, which obviously makes no sense. That's focused on Christ being the center of creation. Christ is the center, which unites all things in Him.

The question is: The verse often used by Calvinists is Eph 1:5-6; concerning God choosing us based on His pleasure and will.

*having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to His pleasure and will, to the praise of the glory of His grace*

The choice of predestining was based on His pleasure and will. We know the end purpose of why people are saved (to praise the glory of His grace), but you still are not answering if your view can know the reason, if there is one in your view, of why it's His 'pleasure and will' to predestine some for salvation, and not others.

**Matt**

I'm not sure your question makes sense then. I gave you the answer from scripture, but now you want me to explain why God has the will that He does? His ways are not our ways. I have no idea!

**Billy**

The answer you gave me was the Big Picture result; Unite all things in Christ; for the praise of His glory. Ephesians is talking about the overall reason for Creation: the mystery was to bring all things under Christ; in heaven and on earth. Christ was what the OT pointed to; it is Christ that we point to, and it is every creature in heaven and on earth that now rests under His feet--to the praise of His glory.

This does not answer my question of why it was God's desire (thelema) and pleasure (eudokia) to elect some, and not others to salvation.

Your view: Election is based on God's desire and pleasure; we cannot know why it's His desire and pleasure to choose some, and not choose others.

- Why is it His desire and pleasure to choose some and not others, yet also His desire that all men are saved?
- Why is it His desire and pleasure to choose some and not others, yet also His desire that none perish, but all come to eternal life?

From what you are saying, you don't believe God gives us an answer to these questions.

**Matt**

Yea, I guess that about sums it up, but your ability to provide an answer doesn't make it true.

Your position that God predestines/gives based on looking ahead and seeing what His creation will do still suffers philosophically and must be eisegested into scripture like John 6 and 10 and Romans 9. These scriptures are very clear IMO.

Philosophically, you have God creating everyone and knowing who will choose Christ, which I agree with, but then not giving God the Father credit for their choice despite Him having created them. John 10 calls us sheep who belong to Christ, and when we hear His voice, we come. I don't need to eisegete anything into that to understand it clearly.

Does my position have difficulty explaining some of the verses you have mentioned. Sure. There are answers out there, but they are no more satisfactory to you than your answers about my verses are to me.

**Billy**

I think you are being willingly ignorant. In other words, you make my point. No matter what truth you hear, you still have to choose to believe.

**Comment [s10]:** What a jerk face I was. 😊

John 6:45

*It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.*

The Father gives anyone that has heard the gospel and believed (learned) to the Son.

**Matt**

And only His sheep hear his voice and know it. Only they will learn and respond. You keep putting the cart before the horse.

**Billy**

You go round and round without understanding. John 10:29 it says the Father gave the sheep to the Son. It is the Father that determines who the sheep are. How did He determine who the sheep would be? John 6 says the Father determined this by those that heard and learned.

I cannot make this any simpler. It's all right there in the Word, in the same texts you are trying to use. You refuse to acknowledge these scriptures or provide an alternate explanation of what they mean.

**Matt**

You have it backwards knucklehead! God made people a certain way. A sheep? They will believe. A goat? Won't. The designed cannot act outside of its nature.

**Billy**

So now you are resting on Total Depravity to prove your point, or worse, God programming our nature to never seek Him, even though He calls us and designs us to seek Him (Acts 17:27), even though He desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:3-4), and even though He desires that none perish but come to eternal life (2 Pet 3:9).

**Comment [s11]:** This is the crux of it all.

So based on your view, God didn't just allow evil, he programmed people to be evil, and they cannot act or do otherwise. He's then going to judge them for that evil, and throw them into hell. Oh, and you can't question Him either on why He picked some for salvation and didn't pick others.

Calvin saw Pelagianism as infecting the Catholic Church, and he considered it a man centered theology (and it was). Many of his criticisms were good, but he swung the pendulum to such an extreme as to say

that salvation is entirely predetermined and carried out by God, and man does nothing because he is totally depraved and unable.

I'm not denying that we inherit from Adam a sinful nature that desires sinful things. Our sinful nature tempts us to sin, but we also have the ability to choose to resist that nature. None have! All have sinned! This puts the blame totally on us! The biblical view of depravity humbles me to the point of anguish. God wants me to be perfect, but by my own free will I chose sin. We follow our sinful nature because we're pathetic. I am to blame. How humbling is this truth! No one ever worked their way to righteousness. We are so wretched and destitute; our hearts are so desperately wicked. None seek God, but by His love, He does seek man, and His Spirit draws sinners through hearing the WORD of God, and He saves us by grace through faith.

If we cannot act contrary to our nature, then how did Adam and Eve sin, since their nature was without sin? They disobeyed God without having a sin nature. God did not give Adam an unbreakable nature that he cannot act contrary to. He gave him a spirit, a will, and an image and likeness like Him. Adam took that will and chose to disobey God. God the Father gave Adam a command, and Adam chose not to listen based on his will. He disregarded the Spirit.

This also goes to Christ, who was fully human and fully God. You may say that since He was God He did not share in our sinful nature, and I agree. Scripture says He was made like us in every respect (Heb 2:17). Christ was also tempted. Scripture says temptation comes from our own desire/longing (James 1:14). Scripture says Christ "has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15). He took our same human nature, spirit, and will, and submitted it to Father's will. He is our example. Everything rests on Him.

The way to salvation was predetermined. The Holy Spirit draws sinners to God by hearing the WORD of God. God foreknew who would heed the call of the Holy Spirit by hearing the Word of God; those are the Sheep for His Shepherd. He thus predestined them in time and space where He saw fit, and they will be called and they will hear the Shepherd's voice, and they will follow Him. He will justify them by their faith in the Shepherd, and glorify them in eternity.

//Nothing from Matt//

### **Billy**

So, in class today they were talking about depravity, and a thought occurred to me.

The one sin that condemns a person is not believing.

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)*

This goes along with Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit:

*And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (Matt 12:31).*

I am of the view that God uses the Gospel (Holy Spirit) to testify of Christ and the Gospel, and we must have faith to believe. The Holy Spirit illuminates sinful man of the Word and we must believe. I obviously believe this is our choice; we must accept (hear and believe) the Gospel.

I also believe that God invites all (Matt 22), and some deny the invitation, some deny the call, and some accept. Many are called (God sent them out to invite all), few are chosen.

Do you think the actual sin of "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" lends itself to our discussion? I mean you can't say someone is lying, denying what they say, unless you've heard them right?

**Comment [MC12]:** One of the first hints that Billy is catching on to the Universal Witness.

Would a Calvinist just say that yes, this is true, and it is the only unpardonable sin, but you can't say yes unless God makes you? So, in essence, the flesh is more powerful than the Holy Spirit's ministry (the Spirit of Truth).

**Matt**

I'm not sure I understand the question....

//Do you think the actual sin of "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" lends itself to our discussion? I mean you can't say someone is lying, denying what they say, unless you've heard them right?//

Can people blaspheme the HS without ever hearing the gospel? Is that the question of the quote above? Romans 1, if it is. His invisible attributes and glory are evident in creation, so they are without excuse. Later in Romans Paul talks about Gentiles lacking the Hebrew law, but having a moral law they live by which is also insufficient for justification.

**Comment [s13]:** Yes, Romans 1 is God, through the Spirit, witnessing to all men! The UW!

//Would a Calvinist just say that yes, this is true, and it is the only unpardonable sin, but you can't say yes unless God makes you? So, in essence, the flesh is more powerful than the Holy Spirit's ministry (the Spirit of Truth).//

Yes, the unpardonable sin is not believing. No, you cannot come to the Son unless the Father draws you (John 6:44, 65). I don't understand the next line though...do you mean in terms of total depravity? Man is incapable of choosing the Son on his own? That intervention from the Father through the HS is required?

Oh I see. You are asking if Calvinists imply that the flesh is stronger than the draw of the gospel. We are incapable of pleasing God in the flesh (Romans 8:8).

Is it your view that every time someone hears the gospel they are elevated spiritually above their flesh? If anything, it is the free will view that weakens the work of the Holy Spirit. Some people ignore him for YEARS.

The Calvinist view is that some are sheep, and will be drawn in and believe because the Father has elected them. Others will not be lifted out of their sinful desires, but God is not required to save anyone, so He is just in not saving them.

Your question got me wondering about another. What about people who never hear the gospel at all? According to your theology, are these people just out of luck? Everybody has freedom to choose God, but because they weren't born in the right place or time, too bad?

**Comment [s14]:** The question of all questions!

Reformed theology would say that God would not place His elect out of reach of the Gospel.

Oh, wait. You would say that God would foreknow the ones that will accept Him and therefore place them in circumstances that would bring them in contact with the Gospel? You would agree with my point about the elect, but base it on His foreknowledge?

**Billy**

Yes, exactly. Those who He knows will/would not accept His Son, He can do what He wishes. Like Pharaoh could be made the ruler of the entire planet, and be used for His glory.

**Matt**

Yea, I just don't see God forfeiting his sovereignty to a fallen creation.

Would God have let Jesus's sacrifice fail? Under your line of reasoning, it is possible that nobody would have chosen Him. Or do you believe God would have still set aside for himself at least some?

**Billy**

He didn't forfeit his sovereignty; his plan is perfect and everything that will take place is perfect and predestined. Sovereignty isn't about determining, it's about being the absolute ruler.

Christ's sacrifice couldn't fail because it didn't fail. God's perfect predestined plan has him in absolute control. There are no what if's in God's plan.

There is no one that could have been saved that won't be saved.

I see Calvinistic theology putting God's sovereignty over his love and justness. All of his attributes are perfect.

His love was shown in crushing his own son for our sins. It also satisfied his justness by providing a way an unrighteous person can become righteous through faith. His sovereignty is in perfect harmony by him predestining all things.

It violates his perfect love by forcing someone to love him.

**Matt**

//“It violates His perfect love by forcing someone to love Him.”//

I disagree with this completely.

God is love. The thing we call love comes from His nature. The most loving thing He could do is pull someone out of their sin and to Him. Not woo, not request, but draw, pull, drag.

The rest of what you said I agree with, but you still insist that our will can precede His. I know you would respond that it is His will that our decision should come first. The thing is, I don't doubt the ability of God to humble ANYBODY, so to say that there are some that just refuse the HS which not elect, is to say, really, that God didn't try hard enough.

Your entire view is based on the idea that God moves people from their sin up to a certain point, and then backs off and lets them choose. Some people go half their life and ignore that offer, some accept right away, and others never. But again, He can (and will) humble everyone if He chose to. He could convince absolutely everyone to choose to believe. So even under your own theology, God is choosing some. He is just choosing the ones that come easily.

**Billy**

//“God is love. The thing we call love comes from His nature. The most loving thing He could do is pull someone out of their sin and to Him. Not woo, not request, but draw, pull, drag.”//

**Comment [MC15]:** If only we had understood this at the beginning!

False, the most loving thing He did is send his son to die for our sins. (1 John 4). He sacrificed his son for us. Love is sacrifice. It is through Christ that we know love.

God is perfect and provided the perfect amount of illumination and enabling through his Holy Spirit to mankind without violating the freedom He sovereignly gave man. For it is the will of God that whoever looks on the Son and believes has eternal life.

**Matt**

//“False, the most loving thing He did is send his son to die for our sins. (1 John 4). He sacrificed his son for us. Love is sacrifice. It is through Christ that we know love.”//

Well duh. Christ is the means by which anyone can be justified and visit the holy places, Hebrews 9 or 10. That doesn't refute my point. God is love. If he draws someone to penitent faith in Christ, He has pulled them out of their sin and given them a new nature and eternal life, and they will (we do!) love Him for it. That person will no longer be in the flesh and hate the things of the spirit. They will be in the spirit, and finally and for the first time in their lives they will be able to love the things of the spirit.

//“God is perfect and provided the perfect amount of illumination and enabling through his Holy Spirit to mankind without violating the freedom He sovereignly gave man. For it is the will of God that whoever looks on the Son and believes has eternal life.”//

This is just goofy dude, and it doesn't hold to things you have said in the past. You originally said that God looks at every possible world to see who would accept him and who wouldn't, but what does that mean? If you are going to expand this into “possible worlds” instead of working with just the one we have, then we have to assume that each world would have the ideal characteristics that would lead someone to repentant faith.

However, based on your theory, God does not do everything He can to encourage every individual person in every conceivable world, because He would succeed in humbling everybody to the truth. He is capable of that.

So even under your own theory, God has obviously withheld from some people what He gave to others; He gave some sufficient circumstances and motivation to believe, but others He did not.

Bro, you basically believe exactly what I do, you just have some things backwards.

**Billy**

The example I provided of every possible world or timeframe was just a brainstorm, it wasn't scriptural theology.

**Comment [s16]:** I brainstormed and came up with Molonism! ©

In reality that doesn't work based on Christ's words; he said if they didn't believe Moses and the prophets they wouldn't believe someone being raised from the dead. That's because it's the Holy Spirit's power that speaks both for the prophets and raising the dead. To deny the prophets is to deny the Holy Spirit; to deny the raising of the dead is to deny the Holy Spirit; it is the Holy Spirit that testifies to both.

I agree that the natural man does not seek God; fortunately God gave man a spirit that can respond to His Spirit.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It's not about what God is capable of. He's obviously capable of doing anything that's not against his character and promises.

**Matt**

//“It's not about what God is capable of. He's obviously capable of doing anything that's not against his character and promises.” //

No, no! It IS about what God is capable of.

If we are working with just our world, God can/did/will place people in circumstances they themselves have no control over. If a man born in the amazon to a tribe that never hears from the outside world were actually born my big brother, would he not have had a better chance of hearing the gospel?

If we are only dealing with this world, then God knew when he placed people in the places and times that He did that many would never hear the name of Christ. Now, they are still without excuse according to Romans 1, and God is still just because His grace and mercy cannot be demanded, nor are they required.

I don't know how I can state it more clearly. Your position is no less restricted than mine. If God wanted the entire world to be saved, He is capable of doing it. Under your view, some people just got unlucky. They could have chosen God, but they may have never even heard the Gospel. That is tragic!

Under my view, the Father sets aside for the Son some that will respond to the gospel and come to the Son, believe and be reborn. Those that do not hear the gospel, were not elect. They were always headed to hell because of sin, and they will continue that course because God did not extend His grace and mercy to them, which, again, He is not required to do. We were saved because He chose us. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us.

I am incredibly moved by that fact, and humbled, and contrary to your point, I am even deeply in love with God because of it. If I chose Him, I would have something to boast about for myself, but that He alone chose me, and did the work so that I might be saved, that is incredible. It also adheres to all of scripture, particularly those that are specifically about salvation and the means of grace.

**Billy**

You're still missing my point and trying to argue for something that you're not getting about my position. God knew beforehand who would heed his Spirits call. He doesn't have to look into the future or in time or anything. He knows who will respond to his call.

God knows he's going to create Tom. God knows Tom is going to be human and spirit and created in His image and likeness. God knows Tom is going to have a sinful nature. God knows if Tom's spirit will respond to His spirits call. If Tom will respond, Tom is now chosen as a sheep for the Shepherd and will be predestined. When God starts time God can put Tom wherever He wants, just like He can put Pharaoh wherever He wants.

**Matt**

Haha, THEN YOU AGREE WITH ME!

**Comment [s17]:** This is another Brodown rule. Ask questions and really understand the persons position before you even begin to think about countering it. And instead of providing your own arguments, just ask questions to them so they can defend their position and you can get clarity on it.

Just back that whole argument up one more step, and give God credit for giving Tom a spirit that will respond. God is the one that designed Tom and made him the way he is. Why wouldn't you give God credit for the spirit in Tom that causes Tom to want redemption????

**Billy**

We already knew that we agree with 99% of each other on the process.

You believe God programs the spirit to respond.  
I believe it is our spirit that gives us the free will to respond.

I understand your view and I have for many months if not years.

The problem is comparing that 1% with scripture and God's promises and character.

You think I'm wrong and I think you're wrong. The point of this discussion I thought was to see if we can figure it out together.

**Matt**

That is the point!

I seriously want to know, why do you not give God credit for giving one person a spirit capable of responding and another one that is incapable? I mean, if God sees something in Tom that lets Him know Tom will repent, prior to Tom having done anything, then who else gets credit for that if not God? Tom shouldn't. He didn't create himself.

And I don't think you can say that God looked through time and saw how Tom would respond, because then Tom's decision is contingent on his surroundings, which is the opposite of what you said. That is what you meant with the quote below, yes? That God knows if a person will repent simply based on the spirit of the person, and not the events that will take place in the person's life? That, in fact, the person will be placed based on what God sees in that person, are they repentant or not?

//“God knew beforehand who would heed his Spirits call. He doesn't have to look into the future or in time or anything. He knows who will respond to his call.”//

I cannot make your point of view make sense in my head. It isn't that I demand you come to my side because I am right and you're a gunky head, it's just that I can't make sense completely of yours.

I guess we are right back to this question of what came first. Did God foreknow the decision someone would make prior to conceiving of that person? I don't mean prior to Tom's physical conception, and being born. I mean something more fundamental. Maybe the question can be posed like this:

Can God foreknow anything that is not contingent upon Himself?

If the answer is yes, I need you to explain that to me, because I don't see it. But, if you can reasonably explain it, then I might be able to understand how your view works.

If the answer is no, then ultimately God caused Tom to have a repentant spirit.

That is our 1% question as far as I can tell. If you don't answer any of the other questions and just want to engage on this last one, that works for me. I think it is the underlying presupposition.

**Billy**

That's a good summary and a good focal point. I'll think on it and send you something tonight or tomorrow.

**Matt**

I have been thinking about this. There is a more fundamental question, and we would both agree on the answer.

Is there anything not contingent on God? Obviously, no. He makes all things, sustains all things.

So, foreknowledge. Is there a form of this question that still applies if we agree to the obvious answer that all things are contingent upon God?

We both also accept that God knows all true facts, His omniscience. Does God willingly suppress His omniscience for the sake of a person's free will?

**Billy**

Why would he have to?

- Do you think God can't create a creature with free will? Is that outside his power?
- Do you think the reason God knows our thoughts is because he put them there? He programmed every thought that we will have?

**Matt**

Define free will.

No, I disagree with your use of the word program. It is more loose than that. We have a will, but it is contingent upon the spirit (I like that term more than nature) God gave us and our experiences. He didn't give us our thoughts. He doesn't need to.

Just brain storming. I can't conceive of a way in which He isn't responsible for our spirit, therefore He is responsible for our coming to Christ.

Everything is contingent upon Him, and He is omniscient. So I don't see how we can give our free will credit.

**Billy**

I don't know what you mean by disagreeing with my word program?

I asked those questions just brainstorming. I wasn't looking for a specific response or an answer.

And I would agree that free will is too broad in a sense of what we're talking about.

I would more likely say it's really just dependent upon one response; would our spirit accept the truth of His Spirit and believe.

All other will and choices are irrelevant.

Did God give us the capacity to respond or program us to respond?

**Matt**

So just looking at the one question, will Tom repent or not.

**Comment [MC18]:** We often credit our Romans study for bringing our views together, but we could also point to these series of emails as the start. This is when we started working together to figure out a solution.

**Comment [s19]:** Funny how we NOW ask this question, after arguing about whether man has it for 30 pages before this.

When you said that you believe God looks at Tom's spirit to see Tom will respond to the gospel, where you spit balling or is that your position? We still need to determine if Tom's will to choose can somehow not be contingent on God.

**Billy**

Right that is the crux of the question.

A thought that did pop in my head though while it's going in circles:

Foreknowledge, predestined, called, justified, glorified.

The last four in that "equation" are enormously doctrinally important. What would change in the Calvinistic position if you took out foreknowledge?

**Matt**

Your comment about our thoughts. You were raising the question, I think, about whether or not those were contingent on God.

That got me thinking about levels of contingency...

Domino 101 falling is contingent upon domino 100 hitting it. Ultimately, though, they are all contingent upon a first cause that knocks over domino 1 and starts the reaction. I don't think we can begin to count the number of causes that go into any given decision in our lives, but ultimately we can look back at God as the uncaused first cause. So, we can make a distinction between direct and ultimate causes. Domino 100 is direct, but the hand that hits 1 is the ultimate.

Looking at just the decision to repent or not, we know that ultimately that decision is contingent upon God. If you are saying that He sees that in us without considering our actions in the world, then I would argue that He is the direct cause of that repentance.

If you were to take a more Arminian (or Molonist?) approach and say that God looks into the future to foreknow our actions and then bases His election and predestination on that, then He is still the ultimate cause, but not necessarily the direct cause. It sounds like neither one of us really supports that view of His foreknowing, so we can let that rest for now.

What you think?

**Billy (10/20/2015)**

The story Christ provided about the Rich Man and Lazarus is a great story, and has a lot of application to this.

Basically the rich man, who was in Hades awaiting judgment, wanted Abraham to send someone from the dead to his brothers to warn them. Abraham said, they have Moses and the Prophets, and if they failed to listen to them, then they will not listen to someone who has been risen from the dead.

It is the Spirit that speaks through Moses and the Prophets; it is the Spirit that raises the dead. Christ makes it clear (I believe) that it's not about our circumstances, but the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't really matter what we've done, or when we were, but the simplicity of acknowledging the truth of the Holy Spirit and believing.

**Comment [s20]:** I am starting to see and provide scripture for the Universal Witness.

This goes back to the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The one sin that cannot be forgiven is slandering against, or calling the Spirit a liar; it's not believing what the Spirit is telling your spirit. That's the one sin that cannot be forgiven.

Scripture emphasizes two principles that God has designed for the unbeliever to derive from contemplating the natural world.

1. The fact of God's existence is plain from contemplating God's creation. Psalm 19:1-6 states that "the heavens tell of God's glory" (c.f. Romans 1:20)

Additionally, Paul's statement in Romans advances the argument beyond what the Psalmist had to say. In Romans 1:20, we not only see the fact of God's existence from the marvelous nature of His creation, but we also derive from studying His creation some idea of just what sort of God He is. His invisible attributes. He is just and righteous in addition to being all powerful. This concept is amplified in the second principle which men can learn from pondering nature.

2. The fact of God's existence is plain from contemplating the concept of right and wrong. In Romans (2:14-16), Paul explains that some Gentiles, who do not have God's Word to guide them, nevertheless do what is right instinctively [Greek *physei*, "by nature"]. This is because God has implanted in the conscience of all mankind the essential ideas of right and wrong.. Paul goes on to say that the conscience of these gentiles sometimes approves their actions, and sometimes condemns them (v.15), so a consciousness of sin is also part of our human heritage as descendants of Adam and Eve (cf. Prov.20:27, where evaluation of the heart is a natural function of man's spirit).

Without any direct special communication from God, without any visitation from angels, without any Bible teaching, indeed, without even a Bible, all mankind is aware of certain principles from their observation of matters plainly obvious to everyone. Whether they wish to acknowledge the fact or not, in truth, all people realize that there is a God who made the world, and who made them. All understand that He is a just and righteous God. All comprehend that there is right and wrong, good and evil. We also have eternity in our hearts. God has given our spirits the ability to seek Him, and that it was He desires. God has set natural principles down for His creatures to know. All creatures know of His glory, and it should lead to them seeking Him.

Creation was designed by Him to motivate us to seek Him: God not only exists, but He is good and will not tolerate evil; we are evil and cannot be good; without His help, therefore, death and condemnation await us. The result of these universal truths of natural revelation should be a healthy "fear of God" which is always "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps.111:10; Prov.1:7; 9:10; Eccl.12:13). And for all who respond to Him, for all who do seek after Him, God always provides the truth of the gospel so that they may be saved. After all, Jesus came into the world not to condemn it, but to die for all mankind, that all might be saved through His death (Jn.3:17).

God, who has indeed provided the solution in Jesus Christ, will always provide access to the truth necessary to be saved as well. For He is "not far from any of us" (Acts 17:24-27; cf. Deut.4:29). No one will be condemned because they were in the wrong spot, or because they lacked knowledge; God's character of perfect justness and perfect love would not allow that.

Back to the original question:

God set certain parameters, certain promises, etc, in His perfect plan.

- Man will have His image and likeness

- Man will 'fall' and have a sinful nature
- God will provide a way for men to be saved from their sin
  - God desires all to be saved
  - God desires that non perish, but come to eternal life through His Son
  - It is God's will that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes has eternal life
- Man will have natural revelation of God and His glory and attributes
  - Man's spirit is capable of seeking out God, in fact that's it's purpose
  - God will seek man, and is not far from any of us

God's foreknowledge knows a person's response to the parameters and promises He sets, and if that person will love Him.

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew....*

- to those who love God, all things will be caused to work together for good
- to those who love God, you will be called according to His purpose

For those He foreknew.... who are those? Those “who will love Him.”

In your email above, about contingencies, and actions, etc; based on the character of God, we know based on His perfect parameters who will accept and who will not. No one received special treatment, or greater illumination than another, because that would violate God's character.

#### **Matt**

You are going backwards bro. You have to answer the prepositional question, and then build your theology off of that foundation. You also contradicted you something you said a few days ago. But first, the statement below is incorrect:

//“In your email above, about contingencies, and actions, etc; based on the character of God, we know based on His perfect parameters who will accept and who will not. No one received special treatment, or greater illumination than another, because that would violate God's character.”//

What you say God's plan is, and therefore His character, is not what we see in the Bible.

<sup>20</sup> Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.” – Matthew 11

This is very clear. Works were done for some that would have humbled others. Why not for both? Because God is not required to, and because they were not His chosen people.

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?<sup>[c]</sup> And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” – Romans 10

He does go on to state that those who did not seek God found Him because He showed Himself to those who did not ask, talking about us gentiles. What about the man in Asia that died before Christ? What about those in South America? Yes, they had an entire world testifying to God, but they never had the opportunity to hear about Christ. How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

It is circular reasoning to assume God looks at what someone will do in their life to determine where to put them geographically and historically.

God makes that decision prior to knowing (He is timeless, but a God of order) their interaction with the rest of creation. He is the direct cause of them having the spirit that will respond in repentance. That makes them elect. He will then place them on a course, He will set their ways straight, so that they have the chance to hear, come and believe. We know this because all that the Father have given to the Son will come and believe. That is the will of the Father. And that the Son will not lose any that the Father has given him, but raise them up on the last day.

There is more, but that is enough for now I think. I feel like we have already established a lot of this, and then you took a big jump back into all of it. Establish the foundation first and build from there. God is the cause of our salvation. We know His character. Work through those verses starting with that, not the other way around.

#### **Billy**

*//What you say God's plan is, and therefore His character, is not what we see in the Bible.//*

You have that backwards, or you took what I said in the wrong way. God's plan is not therefore His character. His character is what makes His plan. If God is love, then His perfect plan will contain perfect love. If God is just, then His perfect plan will be perfectly just.

*//regarding Matthew 11:20-24*

This is very clear. Works were done for some that would have humbled others. Why not for both? Because God is not required to, and because they were not His chosen people.//

This passage just reaffirms what I said. They did not repent; they did not change their minds. Salvation requires repentance and belief (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1).

This is God's mercy at work. Tyre and Sidon, if they had seen the miracles, they would have repented (changed their ways). The same goes for Sodom; if God had done mighty works, the people would have stopped being as wicked as they were, and God would have relented His judgment against it, but it says nothing of their salvation. God has foreknowledge, knowing these people would have changed their ways, but it would not have led to faith and eternal life. If it would have, He would have done it, for that's what His word says. On other hand, Chorazin and Bethsaida had seen the mighty works of God, and yet did not repent, and Christ says their judgment will be worse than that of Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon. There are many passages discussing hell as having levels of judgment.

*//What about the man in Asia that died before Christ? What about those in South America? Yes, they had an entire world testifying to God, but they never had the opportunity to hear about Christ. How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?//*

It's all foreknowledge. The passage is for us to preach the gospel. All who will be saved will hear the gospel, because they are sheep to the Shepherd, which God foreknew and predestined.

**Comment [s21]:** This is a very good foundation to have. God's character directs our understanding.

//It is circular reasoning to assume God looks at what someone will do in their life to determine where to put them geographically and historically.//

I have already explained this; God set the parameters and criteria, and knew beforehand how our spirit would respond to His Spirit. This doesn't relate to time, because God doesn't exist in time. God can't look ahead in time, because He exists outside of time. He simply knows how our spirit will respond to His Spirit in His perfect plan.

God is infinite; the universe is inestimably tiny in comparison with Him. Moreover, He is not subject to time or space, and nothing that happens in time and space could have happened were it not for the fact that He decreed it. Wrapping our minds around the magnitude of Him, His power and His goodness, is nigh impossible; He is "absolutely perfect in every way".

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."* Matthew 10:29

*"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God."* Luke 12:6

God tracks the life of every small bird -- in the history of the world; and nothing happens to even one of the smallest of God's creatures without it having been reckoned into the plan of God and foreordained. God's point here surely is to let us know that every detail of life in this world has been given precise consideration in His perfect plan.

Nothing happens, ever happened, or will happen in history from the original creation to the end of time when the present heavens and earth are destroyed that has not been foreknown and entered into the divine decree of the all-comprehensive plan of God.

#### **Matt**

//"I have already explained this; God set the parameters and criteria, and knew beforehand how our spirit would respond to His Spirit. This doesn't relate to time, because God doesn't exist in time. God can't look ahead in time, because He exists outside of time. He simply knows how our spirit will respond to His Spirit in His perfect plan."//

Who gave man his spirit? Who is ultimately responsible for a man choosing Christ?

#### **Billy**

God gave man a spirit.

Man's spirit is not preprogrammed, but made in His image and likeness

God foreknew whose spirit will respond to His Spirit.

Those who will respond to His Spirit, He destined to give to His Son.

It's all absolutely perfect.

- Pre-Time - The Father selected for His Son those who He foreknew would respond to His Spirit.
- In-Time - Those predestined to hear the Shepherds voice, will hear it, be given the Spirit, and have access to the Father.

#### **Matt**

//God foreknew who's spirit will respond to His Spirit.//

I don't know how else to ask or state this.

You are stating that God, the creator and sustainer of ALL THINGS is NOT responsible for someone's spirit having an innate quality that shows God that person will repent (and believe, of course I mean both)?

**Billy**

It sounds like you are saying "if man's spirit has quality A, he will respond to God and if there is no A, then he won't." He gave certain people a spirit with quality A, and the rest He didn't. And no, I don't believe that.

It sounds like you don't believe God has the power to create a being that can make free-will decisions.

God created man "in His image and likeness". That is the quality He gave all men. I think you are depreciating what that means. God, the Alpha and Omega, the all-perfect being, all-powerful, created US in HIS image and likeness. To depreciate what He gave us, is to depreciate Him.

Ezekiel 33:11

*Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'*

1 Tim 2:4

*who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

2 Pet 3:9a

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish*

There verses are absolutely true. They are also absolutely clear.

If God is the ultimate cause of our spirits responding in His Spirit, then God would have saved everyone, and none would have perished.

There is a reason it did not happen and all are not saved.

Romans 9 does not explain this; that's His mercy in not immediately throwing those destined for destruction (re: those He foreknew would not respond to Him) straight into Hell. He shows us His patience and mercy in not doing that, for the praise of His glory. All those He foreknew would not respond to Him were predestined to destruction. Every second they are alive is His mercy.

The reason all are not saved is in scripture, all over; He wants us to accept His free offer, by our own choice. This choice is not a work, faith is not a work. Accepting a free gift is not a work.

You and me are in 100% agreement how everything works since creation began. Every single thing that happens is predestined to happen in God's perfect and absolute plan. Every hair that blows in the wind, every reflection of light, every atom that moves across space was all predestined before time began.

God is not the cause of sin; He is the definer. Sin comes from disobeying His commands. God is not the cause of evil; He is the definer. He is Holy, and anything against His Holiness is evil. God is not the cause of our choices; He is the definer. He has defined what our choices will result in.

God is not the cause of salvation; He is the definer. He defined that all men are saved through faith in His Son.

**Matt**

So, you don't believe God gave some people a specific quality that draws them to the Son. Then you believe he (yes I am going to use your word) programmed randomness into a person and then looked at the outcome?

You have said on separate occasions that God does not look at the events in someone's life, but looks at their spirit to determine if they will believe or not, but that He also depends on our free will to play out in creation to see if we will believe or not.

Those clearly contradict.

- 1) If He looks at something within a person, prior to determining where that person will be placed, then He gave that person the specific quality in them to choose Him. Quality A, as you said.
- 2) If He makes people blank slates, and then looks at the events in someone's life, then He is still responsible for where they were placed and when.

If you believe He takes into consideration both of these things, you still fall back on (1).

I think we disagree on the nature of God in the above examples. We both agree He is timeless, but I think you are saying His knowledge of us extends infinitely into the past? I would agree that He has known we would be created and the outcome of our lives, and the entire world for that matter, since He created the heavens and the earth.

That does not mean that He didn't choose to make us of His own free will. Our coming into existence was not an eventuality that is as timeless and immutable as Him. He made a decision, at some point in eternity, to make Tom.

So when I use words like prior, for us they have a time connotation, but for God they have an order one. When He decided to make Tom, He first had to determine the attributes Tom would be born with. Once God decided what Tom would be like, He immediately foreknew Tom's entire future.

This all could have happened in a fraction of a fraction of whatever an eternal second is. To us it could appear simultaneous, but we see order in our worlds, so we assume God's operations, as much as we can understand them, happen in an order.

God made Tom to be who He intended Tom to be. He foreknew the salvation of Tom because He set Tom on that course. Did Tom choose to follow Christ? Yes! Did Tom choose to sin prior to coming to Christ? Yes! Did God cause both of those things to happen? No!

We both agree God is not the author of evil. He does not cause anyone to sin. He allows it.

This argument, that Calvinists make God the author of evil, is just wrong. Every Christian ever believes God created everything and everyone, but nobody (except crazy hyper-calvinists) assigns God credit for our sin.

We can discuss HOW this all works until Christ returns, but I don't see how you can deny God credit for creating us as elect and then giving us a path, and good works, and letting us walk in them.

**Comment [s22]:** We spend so much time arguing against my (Billy's) wrong view of foreseen faith. Seriously, a LONG time. Matt was right in pointing out the flawed logic.

You have held on tight to the idea that us being the image of God implies we have free will. Define free will for me please. Also, do you believe that having a choice is the same as having free will?

One last thing, I believe 2 Peter 3:1-9 supports my side of this more than yours. Peter is addressing “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours”. In 1 Peter he is also talking to “those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion...”. He is talking to Christians and is telling the church that God is being patient to make sure that the elect reach repentance.

**Billy**

*//You have said on separate occasions that God does not look at the events in someone’s life, but looks at their spirit to determine if they will believe or not, but that He also depends on our free will to play out in creation to see if we will believe or not. Those clearly contradict.//*

No, they don’t contradict. They may not make sense in your understanding. God knows every single detail of us, and yes, He knows every detail of how we would respond in His creation. He gives us a spirit in His image and likeness, and knows how that spirit will respond in His perfect plan. He knows how our spirits will respond to the Holy Spirit, and if there would be any instance if we would accept His offer. He fits this into His perfect plan. He is just, holy, merciful, patient, and loving, and yes, sovereign. All these fit together into His all-perfect being.

*//When He decided to make Tom, He first had to determine the attributes Tom would be born with. Once God decided what Tom would be like, He immediately foreknew Tom’s entire future.//*

The attributes God gave Tom were His image and likeness. I am not implying that God knew where He would place Tom in time, and knew if in that specific scenario Tom would believe. I am saying God knew if Tom’s spirit would believe in any scenario. The passages we’ve looked at, both Matt 11, and Luke 16, show that God what our actions would be, should something be different.

*//God made Tom to be who He intended Tom to be. He foreknew the salvation of Tom because He set Tom on that course. Did Tom choose to follow Christ? Yes! Did Tom choose to sin prior to coming to Christ? Yes! Did God cause both of those things to happen? No!//*

I agree with this, but this is "in time."

*//We both agree God is not the author of evil. He does not cause anyone to sin. He allows it. This argument, that Calvinists make God the author of evil, is just wrong. Every Christian ever believes God created everything and everyone, but nobody (except crazy hyper-calvinists) assigns God credit for our sin.//*

So you believe only unbelievers have free will, those that God did not elect. And unbelievers have free will, but because of their nature, cannot and will not ever use that free will to go after God. God knew His free will creatures would fall into sin, and in order to save some of them, He overrules their free will, elected some of them to be saved, and now their will can and will accept Him. And no, I don't believe this.

//We can discuss HOW this all works until Christ returns, but I don't see how you can deny God credit for creating us as elect and then giving us a path, and good works, and letting us walk in them.//

I agree with this. When we were created, we were elect. He had foreknowledge prior to His election though.

//You have held on tight to the idea that us being the image of God implies we have free will. Define free will for me please. Also, do you believe that having a choice is the same as having free will?//

Why do you want me to define free will? It's common sense. The ability to weigh and make a decision that's not determined by prior cause.

//One last thing, I believe 2 Peter 3:1-9 supports my side of this more than yours. Peter is addressing "those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours". In 1 Peter he is also talking to "those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion...". He is talking to Christians and is telling the church that God is being patient to make sure that the elect reach repentance.//

I agree that this passage could be understood with your view. God is patient toward you (His Sheep), and does not want any to perish, and none will perish (John 10:27-29). But it absolutely applies to any and all, because He is loving and just.

The reason why God is patient toward "you" is because He is not wishing for "any" to perish but for "all" to come to repentance." "You" are part of "any" and "all."

If God is the cause of original choice, then God would be being patient with Himself. What sense would it make sense to say that God is actually waiting for Himself to implant Irresistible Grace? God is patient with individuals, giving time and opportunity to turn to Him. This is all part of His perfect plan, which He foreknew. He knows who will turn to Him, and they are His elect.

**Matt**

//Why do you want me to define free will? It's common sense. The ability to weigh and make a decision that's not determined by prior cause.//

Dude, no. No wonder we have been disagreeing! The ability to weigh and make a decision is not the definition of free will, and NOTHING we decide is independent of prior cause. Every decision we make is based on our experiences and desires up to that point.

We are not free in the least. We don't determine the character we are born with, we only slightly could determine the circumstances and interaction we grew up with, and both of those have shaped the desires we have which we always follow. When we were sinners we were slaves to the desires of the flesh and only by God's grace did He keep us from succumbing to every sinful desire we had.

As slaves to sin, we never would have chosen Christ. Only in the spirit can we please God (I can give you scriptural references, but I think you know them).

I believe your argument to that would be that there is power in hearing the gospel. That, somehow, just from hearing the message, people are elevated to this point where they can choose God or not. And this

**Comment [s23]:** This is the key point. Free will, isn't that we don't have influences; it is that those influences don't DETERMINE our choice.

can happen over and over in a person's life until they choose Christ or die having rejected Him. Something like that?

I disagree, and I believe that view is contrary to the gospel of John. It also contradicts Paul's gospel in Romans. In both of those books we have entire passages intended to instruct on the nature of God and His salvation of man. You are making these scriptures second to passing comments about God. In Timothy, Paul is talking about praying. He is instructing Christians to pray for all people because God wants all to be saved, and then he moves on. That scripture is not authoritative over Romans 9 where Paul specifically spells out God's sovereignty.

In Peter, I already explained how it can be understood according to scripture actually meant to instruct on salvation. Obviously, I disagree with your analysis of it.

You keep saying His plan is perfect, and just, and loving. The reformed view, the view of many of the great reformers, does not contradict that statement.

**Billy**

*//The ability to weigh and make a decision that's not determined by prior cause.*

Dude, no. No wonder we have been disagreeing! The ability to weigh and make a decision is not the definition of free will//

From wiki:

- Free will is the ability to choose between different possible courses of action.
- From Meriam-webster:
  - the ability to choose how to act
  - the ability to make choices that are not controlled by fate or God
- From dictionary-reference:
  - free and independent choice; voluntary decision
- From oxford dictionary:
  - The power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate; the ability to act at one's own discretion.
- It seems my definition lines up with the cited definitions.

*//... and NOTHING we decide is independent of prior cause. Every decision we make is based on our experiences and desires up to that point.//*

I wrote many different statements instead of this line I am writing now, but had to delete them because they were unloving and mean.

Comment [MC24]: hahaha

We use our experiences in weighing our choices, but they don't cause our choices. If I touch a hot stove, and burn myself, then I use that experience in order to make the choice not to touch the hot stove. However I still can chose to disregard my experiences and touch the stove anyway. No matter what I have experienced, it is still my choice to follow what my experiences have 'illuminated' to my spirit and make a decision. Seriously, I can't comprehend how you believe your above statement. It's almost pointless to even continue to discuss any of this.

//We are not free in the least. We don't determine the character we are born with, we only slightly could determine the circumstances and interaction we grew up with, and both of those have shaped the desires we have which we always follow.

As slaves to sin, we never would have chosen Christ. Only in the spirit can we please God (I can give you scriptural references, but I think you know them).//

We don't determine our physical traits and our natural tendencies, such as a propensity for anger, or a desire for greed, but we can totally disregard these traits, and go down a different path. That is why God commands us to do so. God gave us the ability, by giving us a spirit of His image and likeness that allows us to make choices. Without His influence (His Spirit) we will forever fall into our sin nature, and we will do nothing truly 'righteous'. With His calling (Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and working through the Gospel), we can choose Him, or not chose Him. He foreknew who would choose Him.

//You are making these scriptures second to passing comments about God.//

When Paul writes a statement "*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" You call that a "passing comment about God"? I am not even sure how to respond. Examine your heart.

You are making your theology fit into Romans 9, whereas I have stated time and time again how you are taking Romans 9 completely the wrong way. Romans 9 is discussing God's predestination and calling to roles in this life (His sovereignty). All this was based on God's promise "children of promise". There are two promises this refers to, and all were given to Abraham: one is the spiritual children of promise, those that have faith (like Abraham) who are the true Israel, and the other is the actual physical children of promise that went through Abraham's lineage.

Paul goes on to talk about the physical children of promise. Esau's role was to serve Jacob. Pharaoh's role was rule the world, deny God, and show the world God's power and glory. This is God's prerogative; He can have mercy on whom He has mercy without any explanation, it is His will that determines our position in this world, and what role we will have. There is no injustice in this.

We cannot change and become a physical "child of promise" through desire or work. Abraham received the child of promise through faith. The same thing applies with being a spiritual "child of promise"; it's not based on our desire or work, but upon faith.

We know His foreknowledge precedes His predestination and calling, as Paul clearly states before his Romans 9 passage. Paul sums up Romans 9 by again citing it all comes from pursuing righteousness through faith. You are so wrapped up in reformed theology, you have lost sight of being able to read this passage with clear eyes for what it is saying. Matt, I know what think this passage means, because I was raised reading it the same way and did so for many, many years, but I pray that you step back and read it for what it says.

//In Timothy, Paul is talking about praying. He is instructing Christians to pray for all people because God wants all to be saved, and then he moves on. That scripture is not authoritative over Romans 9....//

You know, we might as well just stop. When you start saying one clear passage that doesn't fit your view is someone less authoritative or clear, then the discussion is over.

**Comment [s25]:** Matt continued to go back to Romans 9, and this is what got me thinking that we needed to study Romans 9 together, but before that we needed to study Romans 1 – 8 to get the proper context.

**Matt**

Yea, let's take a break from this discussion for a while. We obviously aren't going to agree. And try to resist the snide "examine your heart" comments. You should know I have and am. Just like you have held my position, I grew up with yours. I argued and struggled with this for 5 years, and I gave in to scripture and sound reasoning.

You feel the same way, and I get it. I would rather just not talk about it anymore if it's going to cause you to get bent out of shape. Also, we aren't exactly progressing the conversation at this point.

We still bros though

**Comment [s26]:** A foreshadow of the BIBLE BRODOWN!?!?!?! ☹

**Billy**

This is why I dislike writing as a form of communication, especially when trying to discuss something. You cannot hear and see what's behind the words.

I actually had to look up the definition of "snide" in order to make sure it meant what I thought it meant (derogatory, mocking). I in no way meant "examine your heart" in a derogatory or mocking way. If it came across that way, then I am truly sorry. It was truly meant with heartfelt desire to look at what you were saying, and examine it. You are absolutely right in that I don't know what you heart is saying (the reasons you say what you say), which is why I told you to examine it. We are called to examine ourselves (Ps. 119:59; Lam 3:40; Hagg 1:5-7; 2 Cor 13:5), and look out for our brothers (Phil 2:4; Rom 12:10; 1 Thes 5:11).

As you can see from this line "I wrote many different statements instead of this line I am writing now, but had to delete them because they were unloving and mean", I was trying to be loving and avoid sounding mean. It took me like 2 hours to write that email, because I was distraught at your words, and wanted to make sure I didn't come off attacking or belittling.

After I wrote that email, I spent a good 30 minutes in prayer because of my perceived danger at what you were doing. When it seems as if you are disregarding one scripture as not authoritative as another scripture (and from my view, because it doesn't fit your view or you can't explain it), my spiritual warning bells sound off all the way to heaven.

The danger I perceive is similar to our previous discussion of Romans 8:28-30, where after like 20 emails, you finally said "Romans 8:28-30 is the ordo solutis without need for funny business or odd interpretation. I was lazy to have tried to explain it another way....So, I am glad you forced me to confront that mistake in my understanding."

I love you bro, and would drive all the way to Texas through a CAT 5 hurricane if you needed me there. This whole discussion has been a blessing to me. It has given me drive to examine God's Word, and who He is, and it has truly made my faith grow stronger, and grow in spiritual maturity. The more I study, the more I see how God's Word is perfect, and fits perfectly together. You have been the iron tool that God has used to sharpen me so I can correctly handle the Word of Truth, which is sharper than any two-edged sword.

**Comment [s27]:** The reason we bro down.

Prov 27:17

*Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.*

**Comment [s28]:** How funny that after he says Bro's, my next reply quotes this verse...

2 Tim 2:15

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

Heb 4:12

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

**Matt**

You are right, it is very hard to hear tone in text (and impossible sometimes). Sorry that I jumped to the wrong conclusion. I know you better than that.

I agree that these discussions with you are beneficial and force deeper thought and understanding. I also think that we are both intelligent men and that neither of us would give up a position we believe is sound quickly, and certainly not flippantly. We are men of conviction. **If one of us is more right than the other, the HS will ultimately convict us of that truth, whichever way it goes, and we will gain wisdom.**

But that will take time. Sometimes, anyway. There have been times when I was wrong and you pointed it out, and I had a "duh" moment.

**On this topic, let's leave it alone for a bit. The seeds of wisdom have been planted, and if/when one of us comes to a new view or understanding through scripture and the HS, we will come back to it again.**

As for your concern over me giving some scripture authority over others, I mean it in an interpretive sense, and depending on the subject. If you were discussing James with a catholic, they may point to where he says works justify, but you would counter with the rest of the NT stating it is by faith alone, and then you would explain what James means. Maybe authority isn't the right word, but you understand what I mean.

Also, I think saying Paul is making a passing comment about God is a mischaracterization. It is more than passing. He is commenting on the nature of God. However, I do stand by my point that there are other scripture specifically about sovereignty and our choosing Christ that should be considered first.

**You finish your Romans 9 write up?** I remember you saying it was about predestining to purpose years ago and I sent you my own exegesis showing that it is about salvation. At the time I thought you had agreed with me.

**Billy**

No I haven't finished it. When I told you I was writing it, we get onto our side discussion and I haven't touched it since then. **I can send you what I have so far.**

**Billy**

I added something after our talk tonight. It's Romans 1:18-21. The reason I added it is because of this idea God doesn't make Himself known to all people. He makes Himself known by His power. It is by His power and revelation that we can turn from our flesh; It is because we don't turn to Him (in faith) after He has made Himself known that His wrath comes on us.

Here is the excerpt, but it's added to the new attachment.

Romans 1:18-21

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they*

**Comment [MC29]:** Without trusting this, no brodown will ever work...

**Comment [s30]:** This is totally Matt. He will go into the trenches, but he has a shorter 'fuse' so to speak in moving along and shaking the dust on your boots.

I (Billy) on the other hand, can't leave things open like this. I keep asking, keep searching, and sometimes too much.

But it's a good thing I continued, so we could go on for another 80 pages....

**Comment [s31]:** So either in a phone or skype conversation we've had prior to this, we discussed going through Romans 9, but going through Romans 1 to 8 first. We had actually been going through Romans, but that email trail is lost.

**Comment [s32]:** At this time we had 18 pages on Romans 1 – 9.

*are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Paul here explains the power of God's natural and authoritative revelation. The first thing Paul says is that men suppress the truth because of their unrighteousness. Suppress in the Greek means to hold back. We hold back the "truth" that is revealed to us because of our wickedness. This truth is the same word that is used in verses such as:

- Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32)
- Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:17)
- all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in wickedness (2 Thes 2:12)

God's attributes; His power and divinity have been clearly seen since the creation of the world. What can be known about God is plain to everyone because God has 'shown' everyone. The Greek for shown is phaneroo, and means to make manifest, thoroughly understood. This is God's revelation to all people since creation began.

Paul says this revelation is so powerful, that everyone is 'without excuse' in their unrighteousness. This phrase, 'without excuse' is very important to understand. "Without excuse" is anapologetous, and has a judicial feel to it. It means they are without any defense against God's righteous wrath. This verse is telling us that these characteristics of God are so clear that people are left without a defense to honoring God and giving thanks to Him.

How powerful is this revelation to all people? Paul says that they "knew" God. The Greek here for "knew" is ginoko. This is a prolonged form of a primary verb meaning to "know" (absolutely). You cannot have a stronger version of this kind of knowledge.

Since creation, God has made His power and divinity thoroughly understood to all people. This revelation is so powerful and understood, that it says we absolutely know God. Our revelation and knowledge of Him is so absolute, that we are without any defense in not giving Him honor and thanks. We hold back and suppress the truth of God because of our wickedness. It is because we don't turn to Him (in faith) after He has made Himself known that His wrath comes on us.

#### **Matt**

Let's flag this email for a skype conversation. I have been thinking a lot about Romans 1. Is the natural revelation (through creation) mentioned there a salvific revelation, meaning if someone in the Amazon who has/will never hear the name Jesus recognizes that God is real and in their own way worships Him, can they be saved?

**Comment [s33]:** Such a good question!?

I would argue no, and specifically based on Romans 10:11-17.

**Comment [s34]:** Look! Look! Look where Matt stopped in Romans 10! Haha!

I think this is actually seen around the world in all of the random religions. People recognize that there is more to this world than meets the eye, and they devise all sorts of ways to worship aspects of God or the creation, but they never understand the true God because they were never told.

"...they suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

We know righteousness comes after faith. So, these people who reject the truth of God in unrighteousness (non-faith) could either be people who have actively rejected God, or people who have never heard the gospel and been given a chance to come to faith.

"And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"

I used to believe (up until like last week actually!) that Romans 1 meant that nobody has an excuse for not believing in Christ. I believe now that I understood Romans 1 like that because I was always told that the passage meant that, but if we believe that, I see it contradicting other areas of Romans.

I think the fundamental question here is:

Can understanding/faith based on natural revelation alone lead to salvation?

Like I said, I have only very recently started exploring the truth behind these verses, and after going through the first half of the book with you, I am convicted towards a different point of view.

I guess to bring this back around to the conversation we are having, I do not see this natural revelation as an argument for God equally loving and equally revealing Himself (in a manner leading to salvation) to everyone in the world.

### **Billy**

We can discuss this. I am glad you bring it up, because I think it's fairly easier to understand, and I realized I need to continue on with the following verses after Romans 1:18-21. I just did so, and added it to the study (now 20 pages, woohoo). As I said, I am glad you brought it up, because it makes us look into the Word even more, to make sure what we think we know, is really what God is saying in His Word.

Here is what I added to Romans 1:22-32.

Romans 1:22-25

*Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

Paul continues his discussion of everyone who holds back the Truth that God has made known to them. Remember that this knowledge He makes known to all is so absolute, that it shows His fairness in judging them. They have no legal defense. This shows God's love for all, as He has made Himself known to all (He made it evident, absolute knowledge). The knowledge He gives is also so absolute that if accepted, it leads people to search for God, which is our purpose on earth (Acts 17:22-27). Should they accept that Truth and seek Him, they will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13, Hebrews 11:6, Isaiah 6:6-7). He will get His testimony to them (faith in Him is what saves you). He is not far from any of us.

Paul points out in these verses that it is their holding back and rejection of the Truth that makes God "give them up" in the lusts of their hearts. The Greek phrase "Gave them up" is paradidomi and literally means, 'to give into the hands over another' or 'to deliver'. God makes absolutely known who He is, and they hold back the Truth, and God takes them and hands them over, or delivers them to their impure hearts.

They reject the Truth which is there to lead them to Him, the one true God, and instead create false religions and idols. God handed them over to their own wicked hearts after holding back the Truth He made known. They exchange the Truth for a 'lie'. Looking again at the Greek definition here for 'lie', it means a conscious and intentional falsehood. They exchange the Truth for a conscious and intentional lie.

Romans 1:26-31

**Comment [MC35]:** Looks like we had a jump in time here?

**Comment [s36]:** Another Brodown rule. Conform your trust to His truth. Don't conform His truth to what you think the truth is.

*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*

Paul here shows the result of what happens after God hands them over to their sinful flesh. They fully follow the wicked desires of the flesh. Paul emphasizes multiple times that God takes them and hands them over, all because they rejected the Truth He made known and created a lie. Another phrase that shed's light is "they did not". The Greek verb here is dokimazo, and means to examine, to see whether a thing is genuine or not. They held back the Truth, and did not seek to examine the Truth. They did not take the Truth they knew and they did not examine and "see fit". The Greek here is the verb echo, and means to hold. They did not examine the Truth God made known to them and hold onto it and acknowledge God. God gives them up to their sinful flesh.

Romans 1:32

*Although they fully know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them*

People do all sorts of wickedness and sin after they reject the Truth God has made known to them. Even in their sin, Paul says, they "fully know" by God's "righteous decree" that in doing these things they deserve to die. Even in their sin, they have the absolute knowledge (full know) that what they are doing has been deemed by force of law (righteous decree) to be deserved of death. Even with that, they continue to do them, and approve others who do them.

End notes...

Your last statement about Natural Revelation leading to salvation. This natural revelation is God's power and His voice working on every single person since creation. As the verses states, it leaves no legal defense for you against God's wrath, because He has made Himself absolutely known. It is your holding back of this Truth that results in God letting you succumb to your sinful desires. If you were to acknowledge the Truth, God would absolutely reveal the next step leading to salvation (this is how you reconcile that God loves the world, and wants all to be saved, and gives all opportunity). If you reject what He has made absolutely known, and hold back the Truth, there is no just reason God has to reveal anymore of Himself to you.

It's something that I did not fully understand. It's a concept I 'believe' but I really didn't have all the verses to back it up. This totally and absolutely confirms it.

**Matt**

We know the truth is suppressed in unrighteousness. Is it fair to say that their unrighteousness, much like the verses about being in the flesh, causes them to suppress the truth? They are unrighteous, without faith, in the flesh, slaves to sin, and cannot please God. Does that state of being cause someone to suppress the truth?

**Billy**

I don't think it causes. He says it's because they suppress the truth that He delivers them over to their wicked and debased minds.

**Comment [s37]:** Billy, at this time, is 100% on board with the Universal Witness. I just hadn't figured out how it worked with election and all that yet.

It's actually showing His sovereignty in that He makes them know. They can either accept or suppress, and then He sovereignly delivers them to their flesh.

**Comment [s38]:** I have yet to find or grasp Deut.30:11-14. Sure would have been helpful.

I am not sure what you are thinking but it seems fair to say He gives them a choice.

He makes Himself known. They know God. They know His power and His glory and divinity. Instead of accepting the Truth which He makes them know and giving Him glory and praise and searching for Him, they would rather hold back the Truth and lie to themselves. They would rather live in their unrighteousness and believe their own lies than go after Him.

The knowledge He makes them know is so absolute, that resisting it leaves them without any legal defense against His wrath.

#### **Matt**

Cool deal. I didn't really have a point, was just seeing what you thought.

Similar question. If Melchizedek, I'm going to call him Milk because I can't spell his name...if he had people following Him, is it possible they believed the promise to Abraham, or the one to Adam? Is it possible they received salvation outside of the narrative of the Bible based on their expectation and faith in Christ?

**Comment [MC39]:** We still do for this very reason!

Doesn't say, so who can know for sure, just something I thought of today.

#### **Billy**

So I have been looking into Milk:

There are three main areas he is discussed: in Gen, Ps. 110, and Hebrews.

It appears, based on Heb 7:1-3, that Milk was a real person, and not Christ. He was definitely a type of Christ, like Moses and many others. It says Milk was "made like".

This is a circumstantial participle in the Greek (aphomoiomenos), translated often as [made like]. Melchizedek "continues" only in the sense of this comparison made by Paul. Paul is not saying that Melchizedek is still alive, or that he is Christ or that Melchizedek was a Christophany. Rather, Paul is using a comparison between this special priesthood and the Levitical priesthood which it predates.

Based on the proof of Psalm 110:4, Paul is trying to explain to Jewish believers that the priesthood of the Messiah is superior to the priesthood that comes from the Mosaic Law (just as he has explained how the Messiah is superior to angels and to Moses and will later explain that the Messiah's new covenant is superior to the old one).

In company with the Messiah, Melchizedek's order has two points of superiority over the Aaronic priesthood:

- 1) instead of receiving his office by birth, he was directly appointed by God (Heb.5:5; cf. Ps.110:4; Heb.7:3);
- 2) instead of holding his office for a limited time, he holds it for an undefined period (Ps.110:4; Heb.7:3).

On the second point, it is true that the "unlimited" duration of Melchizedek's priesthood is due to the fact that scripture does not mention his birth, death or genealogy, but that is sufficient for Paul to draw the comparison and teach his audience the principle: Christ's priesthood is superior because it never comes to an end, and that is exactly the point made in the Messianic Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek".

The essence of Paul's point here (Hebrews chapter five) is therefore that the Messiah's priesthood is superior both because it never comes to an end and also because it is not based upon genealogical considerations. Contemporary Jews would find both things a stumbling block. Jesus lives forever, and this means His priesthood will never come to an end, and that fact that He came from the tribe of Judah means that human birthright had nothing to do with his selection as priest by God Himself.

To explain to his audience how these things can be, Paul uses a comparison already established by the prophecy of scripture (Ps.110:4). David had already compared the Messiah to Melchizedek, proclaiming the priesthood of the coming King. Like the Messiah, Melchizedek was both a priest and a king.

Scripture does not record anything about the genealogy of Melchizedek, neither does it record his death, so in this respect too Melchizedek is an excellent point of comparison because it is not Jesus' genealogy which qualifies Him to be a priest, and through His resurrection His priesthood will never end (analogous to the lack of any recorded end to Melchizedek's life).

Both of these things mark Christ's priesthood out as superior to what Paul's audience are preferring, namely, the Levitical priesthood. Paul continues this analogy throughout the chapter, making it overwhelmingly clear that Jesus' priesthood, being declared by David as a Melchizedek-type priesthood rather than a Levitical one, is superior in every way.

The kingship of Melchizedek and the etymology of his name also make it clear that this has not been an accident in the plan of God, but that the significance of the name ("king of righteousness" and "king of peace") was always meant to mark Melchizedek out as a type of Christ, and Abraham's submission to him also sends a clear message that there was always meant to be a priesthood which would be superior to the Levitical one.

The Levitical priesthood was symbolic, hereditary, and temporary. The order of Melchizedek is neither. God established His way before the Jews. Before the law, righteousness came through faith. Before the law, we knew good and evil. Before the law (and Levitical priesthood), we had the priesthood of Melchizedek.

#### **Matt**

Romans 1 is kind of blowing my mind at the moment. This whole study actually.

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer..."

Thinking about kids and the mentally ill.

#### **Billy**

Yes, that's what it has done for me.

Rom 1:28 does not say 'any longer'. In looking at the Greek, 'any longer' doesn't match to a Greek word. I assume they are using it for the 'retain', but it doesn't link in the Greek. I had to study this verse a lot, to make sure I understood what was being said, as the translations are all quite different in the words they

**Comment [s40]:** Matt is getting the Universal Witness.

use. This translation below has all the Greek words, and I think it helps. The links are to Biblehub greek concordance.

Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,

In this verse we learn that because they 'did not examine' (did not think it worthwhile) the Truth the Spirit made known and 'hold onto' (retain) the 'precise and correct knowledge' (knowledge) of God, that God delivered them... he handed them over to their flesh.

They did not examine and hold onto the precise and correct knowledge of God, so God therefore handed them over to the desires of their sinful flesh.

What do you mean by your comment....kids and mentally ill?

**MATT** 10/6/2015

The retention of knowledge of Him as it relates to kids. If a child dies, I had to just hope they were elect. According to this, there is a point at which someone goes from knowing God to not knowing Him. A flesh fueled ignorance, so to speak.

I still have questions about this new way of viewing the gospel. I used to believe someone had to know of Jesus specifically in order to be saved. Now I am wondering just how much knowledge is required. [Is it faith in Christ that saves, or faith in God?](#)

I want to say Christ, but Romans 10 says the earth declares the word of Christ.

Epiphany....

Romans 7:9-10. I read this last night and found myself wondering if it was literal or figurative. Is he saying that he was not dead in sin until the law was given to him, i.e. at an age when he understood the law? I hesitate to believe that because it may contradict original sin.....which has me rethinking what original sin means....

**Billy**

So after my study these past two days on this, I have had this thought in the back of my head directly about kids/mentally ill ,etc. That's why I asked you what you meant about it.

I've always spiritually felt that kids and the mentally ill are under God's grace, because they don't have the knowledge to understand sin and are not, in a sense, mentally capable of grasping it. Basically I explained it that kids/mentally ill are covered by Christ, because He died for all sins (except Blasphemy of the Spirit). They never had the opportunity/understanding to call the Spirit a liar (Blasphemy); it was beyond their mental understanding; thus they were automatically under God's grace. This seemed to align with certain scriptures, like David saying he would see his child in heaven.

But I have had this nagging just the past few days, because the scripture was telling me that the Spirit, through creation, let's everyone unquestionably know Him. So I was subconsciously distraught, because my spirit tells me it would be unrighteous or unjust to throw kids and the mentally ill into hell.

But what you are saying has lifted my spirit. Let's look at this:

**Comment [s41]:** SEEING ROMANS 10 DECLARES THE WORD OF CHRIST, THE GOSPEL

**Comment [s42]:** Matt is questioning the specifics of the gospel.

*What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law*

That word for 'know' is the same word we've discussed before; to know unquestionably. It is the same description of the knowledge that we receive from the Spirit.

"Except" means 'if not'; and "through" is once again 'dia'; meaning on account of.

So Paul is saying:

*What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary I would not have come to unquestionably know what sin is, if not on account of the Law.*

*for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."*

The phrase "not have known" is different here; it is a little less than 'ginosko'. From reading the concordance, it is more like perceive through a physical sense; or understand through a sense; to ascertain what must be done about it.

It seems to say: you unquestionably know what sin is, when you have the sense to know, or the sense to ascertain what must be done about it. So through the sense of understanding the Law, you unquestionably know what sin is, and what must be done about it. The Law brought about the consciousness of sin, and what it leads to, and what must be done about it. You can either follow the Law to the letter and seek to obtain righteousness yourself, or listen to the Spirit, and put faith in God for your righteousness.

Sin obviously existed before the Law (from Adam to the Law was like 1500 years?). We also inherently know good and evil, since God imparted that knowledge to us when Adam ate the fruit. But Paul says:

Romans 5:13

*for until the Law (was given) sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

In other words, before the law, sin is not charged against you. But we also have this:

Romans 2:14-16

*For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, these who do not have the law are a law to themselves. They show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, as their conscience bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or else defend them, on the day when God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.*

This seems to say that the knowledge of good and evil (which is written in our hearts), when fully understood (our conscience bears witness), becomes a law unto itself. It is when we have that understanding of good and evil (a mental consciousness of what it means) that we are judged.

So, from what these verses seem to say: Kids and the mental incapable, who don't have a physical/mental understanding of good and evil (i.e. what sin is, and what must be done about it), don't have their sin counted against them (and even so, Christ atoned for all sin, except Blasphemy). When you become mentally capable, and understand sin (either through the written law, or the law written on your heart), you are then held accountable and your sin is counted against you. Once you have this understanding of sin, that it is wrong, and that you are accountable, you hear another 'voice'. This 'voice' has been there you entire life. God, through the greatest miracle ever has made you unquestionable know Him (through the Spirit's power). This knowledge, this 'legal testimony' He provides, is so perfect that the reaction should be to seek Him and give Him honor and glory. He is your creator, and He is the only one that can

redeem you from your sin. This knowledge you have of Him is the legal slam dunk against all mankind; for it is your 'holding back' and denial of the Spirit's Truth that condemns you, for you have committed Blasphemy of the Spirit.

Of course, as you said in your email, this knowledge that God gives us seems to be constant, and kids of course would know God. I don't know of any kid who denies God, when you explain it to them (talking small kids). Its wicked parents and the world that corrupts them, and get them to believe a lie. It's when they get older, and in essence start suppressing the Truth of God, that He delivers them over to their sinful flesh. We always see kids, when they get into the tween/teen age group not only suppress the Truth of God, but the Truth of their parents, and jump headlong into the desires of their flesh.

Am I reading/interpreting this right? Has our Lord once again answered my unspoken heartache that I had about this unquestionable knowledge of Him given to all mankind and how it relates to children and the mentally incapable? Help me to know that this isn't just what I want it to say, but what it seems to really say.

*I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

Paul seems to say the exact same thing; that before he knew the law (which for him being a Jew would have been as a child), he was 'alive'. It was when he understood the law that sin became credited against him and he was spiritually dead. The law was to bring life (or so he thought as a Jew), but resulted in him being spiritually dead. In trying to follow the law he walked by the flesh in order to obtain self-righteousness. His flesh deceived him in thinking he could do it on his own. He suppressed the Truth and walked by his flesh to do it himself.

//I still have questions about this new way of viewing the gospel. I used to believe someone had to know of Jesus specifically in order to be saved. Now I am wondering just how much knowledge is required. Is it faith in Christ that saves, or faith in God.//

So there is a misunderstanding on many today. The Gospel saves. The good news is that God has provided reconciliation to mankind through the atoning work of His Son. As Paul says "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes".

The 'Law' is meant to reconcile us to God. The requirement of the Law is that our sin is paid for, and that we are righteous. If the law is met, we are reconciled to God. Christ's work fulfilled the law.

His work *actually* paid for all sin (except one), and it is *faith* that credits us His righteousness (by grace). Many people think that if Christ actually paid for all sin, then everyone is saved, but the requirement of the law is that sin is paid for *and* we are righteous. Christ paid for all sin, except the one.

The only way to be saved is to 'believe'. What do you believe? You believe what the Spirit testifies. The Spirit testifies the Truth. The only way to believe in Jesus, or to believe in God, is to accept the testimony of the Spirit. You have to be righteous in order to be reconciled to God, and the only way to be credited righteousness is to believe. It is the sin of denying the testimony of the Spirit (and calling Him a liar) that condemns you, not only because you now have a sin that's not been forgiven, but because you are not covered by Christ's righteousness. Our faith credits us with Christ's righteousness.

Salvation has always come been the same way; grace on the account of faith. We cannot have faith in the Truth without the Spirit making it known. The Spirit testifies of the Truth, we put faith in what the Spirit says, and we walk according to what the Spirit says. Salvation is only possible through the work of Christ.

For the OT, they had faith in God that there would be a coming Messiah. Some of them may not have had very much understanding of what that really meant and who Jesus would really be. They only learned of this through the testimony of the Spirit.

For us, we have faith in the actual work of the Messiah. We only learn this through the testimony of the Spirit.

Proverbs 3:5-7

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

This is salvation. Trust (is faith). Don't lean on your own understanding (you may not understand how He will save you, but you don't have to understand). Just acknowledge Him, give Him honor, and He will make your path straight. He will cover you in His righteousness through your faith.

Don't be wise in your own eyes; don't think you can obtain righteousness your own way. Fear Him and turn away from the desires of your flesh.

Is that not what we're talking about? Those in the OT may not have understood how God was going to do it all, but they did not lean on their own understanding, but just put faith in God, and gave Him honor. Christ's work is still what saves them. It still rests on Christ's work. He is the center of it all. He is the mediator that reconciles men to God, on account of faith.

**Matt**

I'm in a quandary.

I made some notes about Romans 9, like I did for the other chapters, mostly about who are children of Abraham by flesh, spirit, etc. that I can send you if you want, but I also have some presuppositional issues we will have to hash out.

**Comment [s43]:** We've been going through Romans 9, and we go through it soooo many times.

Overall, I found your treatment of the chapter to be very consistent. The problem is I see what I still believe is a flaw in your understanding of God's foreknowledge and predestining. So, it is a consistent way of viewing those verses, but based on a faulty foundation.

**Comment [s44]:** He's right.

Do you want it all at the same time, just the notes first, or just my attempt to explain how I think you are foundation is off?

**Billy**

Well, why don't you start with the verse that you think takes a wrong turn?

**Matt**

//Romans 9:11-13

Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Before time began (before they were born), God had a purpose in His election that Jacob would rule over Esau. This wasn’t based on their works, but by Him who calls. We have seen these exact words Paul uses here (before they were born, purpose, election, and call, and loved).

Paul here is referencing something just 22 verses earlier. He uses the same language:

Romans 8:28-30

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

Those that have faith are the children of promise, Abraham’s physical descendants. Those that have faith love God. Those that have faith were foreknown. Those that have faith are predestined (thus elected).//

There are a few times in your write up, most of which I thought was really good, where you still fall back on the idea that God looks forward to see who will have faith, and then predestines them to their role that they will carry out.

The problem is, it is their role that they carry out that leads the person to the gospel.

This is circular reasoning to say that God depends on the will/decision of the person prior to determining where and when God will place that person. His foreknowledge cannot mean that He knows who will freely choose Him in a world that He establishes after foreknowing. Don’t think temporally, think logically. He works according to an order, which is what Romans 8 lays out, so it is not unreasonable to understand His decisions based on the order He gave us.

His foreknowledge is of those that will be saved. He foreknows the sheep, the ones who will hear Christ and come and believe in Him, the ones the Father gives to the son. This is not based on their they will have in life. This is based on His will, and then they are predestined to faith.

Like I said, your interpretation of 9 is consistent, but it is built on faulty logic. God cannot foreknow that Tom is an American middle class guy who comes to Christ at a youth rally until He predestines Tom to that place and time. If foreknowledge comes first, which Romans 8 says it does, it MUST be based simply on His will.

You call it arbitrary, I call it perfection. For no other reason than that God almighty made the decision based on His will alone, it is perfection, and He does not owe us an explanation for why.

**Comment [MC45]:** Despite the change in tone, I was still a Calvinist

**Billy**

//The problem is, it is their role that they carry out that leads the person to the gospel.

This is circular reasoning to say that God depends on the will/decision of the person prior to determining where and when God will place that person.//

I am actually very surprised you still hold this view, despite this detailed study through Romans.

God's plan involves providing reconciliation between Himself and His creatures made in His image and His likeness that would fall into sin. This will be done through His Son. It is Christ's work that our faith must be on.

God's plan is perfectly just, fair, and righteous. His plan involves showing His creatures that He is righteous and just in administering His righteousness and wrath. God does not show favoritism in administering His righteousness and wrath. The same parameters apply to all; faith results in righteousness (by His grace), and lack of faith results in wrath.

And this is the new understanding I gained from this study:

God's plan involves making His creatures KNOW Him. Every creature KNOWS Him, because He made them KNOW Him. It is their willful suppression of the Truth that He has made known that condemns them, leaving them no legal defense. Those who don't suppress the Truth but instead acknowledge God and give Him honor and thanks, and seek Him, will find Him (for He is not far from any of us), and the gospel will be provided. Again, those who accept the Truth of Gospel and put faith in Him receive righteousness by His grace. Those who deny the Truth of The Gospel are condemned.

None of this requires a place and time in history for God to know. None of this is affected by 'circumstances' of life, which actually makes His plan THAT perfect and THAT just. God does not have to put you in a various time and place to know how you would respond, when He is the one that makes everyone KNOW Him, despite where they are, and when they are. It's not about the excellence of an argument made by man to know God (as Paul states), but about God making Himself known. God makes Himself known to all, because He loves all.

God knew His plan of reconciliation before time began.

God knew every creature He would create.

God knew, when He made Himself known to His creature, whether His creature would choose Him, or their flesh.

Those that God foreknew would choose Him; He predestined them to His purpose, wherever He decided in time, to whatever role He decided for them.

I find this so absolutely amazing; I am not sure how you don't see how amazing it is. It reconciles all of scripture to me. How He loves everyone. How He died for everyone. How He wants everyone to be saved. How administering His righteousness and wrath are perfectly just, and without partiality.

We are made in His image and His likeness.

He calls us little gods (Psalm 82:6; Matt 10:34).

He gave us the ability to choose Him or choose ourselves, and He holds us accountable for that choice.

Every single creature has the option, because every single creature He makes Himself known.

You go to hell because you suppress the Truth.

You go to glory because you put faith in Him, and He provides you grace.

//His foreknowledge is of those that will be saved. He foreknows the sheep, the ones who will hear Christ and come and believe in Him, the ones the Father gives to the son. This is not based on their they will have in life. This is based on His will, and then they are predestined to faith.//

This shows partiality in administering His wrath and His righteousness.  
This shows a lack of love to all those that were not predestined, or called.  
This shows God is confused on desiring all to be saved, when He is the one that makes them saved.

//Like I said, your interpretation of 9 is consistent, but it is built on faulty logic. God cannot foreknow that Tom is an American middle class guy who comes to Christ at a youth rally until He predestines Tom to that place and time. If foreknowledge comes first, which Romans 8 says it does, it MUST be based simply on His will.//

God didn't foreknow Tom is an American middle class guy; He predestined Tom as an American middle class guy.

God foreknew Tom (provided with a unique spirit made in His image and His likeness, and a sinful flesh) and when He made Himself known to Tom, whether Tom would choose Him, or his flesh.

### **Matt**

His foreknowledge is simple. He knows who will come to saving faith. This does NOT mean/imply:

- Man's will is involved – “So then it depends not on human will (desire, longing, want) or exertion, but on God...”
  - You say he looks at our free will, but our will is what we desire to do, and this verse clearly states it is not based on our desire to do anything. I am not saying faith is a work, but you have to desire it before you choose it. Part of the discussion we still have to have about “free will” and choice, and what those both imply.
- He presents a person, prior to their life on earth, the Gospel so He can determine whether they will choose Him or not before predestining them.
  - This pre-birth choice just isn't present in the Bible.

God has set aside for Himself some whom He will save. If His foreknowledge does not include our will, then it is based solely on His. It cannot mean His will is to base it on our will, that contradicts scripture. With scripture and reason being clear on this point, we should be looking at HOW it works that His nature is not violated by this, or ours. We can't do that, however, until you A) Give God credit for our salvation (beginning to end, you know what I mean) or B) Present an equally plausible argument that is not a non sequitur, which I still find your view to be.

I am not trying to be obstinate, but part of discernment is using reason. In my reasoning, I see a conflict between what you are saying and scripture, and until I can reconcile that, I can't be moved to your position. I am taking the *ordo solutis* in Romans 8 at face value. If His foreknowledge comes first (what a switch in sides from 4 months ago!), and then His predestining to role and purpose, then our salvation is either based on a quality innate to us that He gave us (like a potter giving clay a shape), or He places us in a time and place where the call will be sufficient for His individual elect to repent and believe. (Everyone is different, after all. I just had to hear “Jesus loves you and died for you so you could live forever with Him” and I believed. Others have to be broken.) Either way, He gets credit for our salvation.

Is there a flaw in my logic. I know you want to give me a bunch of verses explaining why I am wrong, and that you think God's perfect plan is explained differently. Resist the urge for now. Just help me understand if my reasoning is wrong in the above paragraph. Have I committed some fallacy I am not recognizing? Do I have my facts wrong in my understanding of foreknowledge or predestining? Also, know that I too believe God's plan is perfect, despite our subtle disagreeing about how it was/is/will play out.

Things I learned while I was typing this (I think you will like):

I was wrong about Romans 1 not leading to salvation. Natural revelation can lead to repentance and faith. Whether it has or not, who can know but God, but I say that based on Romans 10 and Psalms 19.

**Comment [s46]:** Matt realizes Natural Revelation can lead to salvation, i.e. that there is Universal Witness to all

<sup>14</sup> *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?<sup>[c]</sup> And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

Most people, myself included, stop (stopped) here. No faith unless they hear the actual name of Christ and the Gospel that is laid out in Matthew - John. Bam! But...

**Comment [s47]:** Yay! Context!

<sup>18</sup> *But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."*

This is a reference back to Psalm 19.

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

Everyone has heard the word of Christ through the testimony of nature.

This does still leave some questions. Has anyone ever actually had faith in God based simply on observing nature, or is he stating here and in Romans 1 that the testimony of nature is sufficient for God to be just in punishing everyone who does not believe?

This kind of goes into that free will/choice discussion we need to have. Through the testimony of nature, all people can see, come and believe, but is the natural revelation enough that they will? I want to talk to you about the difference (or lack thereof) between what we *can* do and what we *will* do.

I don't find Paul to be making the case that all revelation (natural, prophetic, preaching, miracles) carry with them the same draw on a person. I don't mean to be disrespectful by calling the testimony of nature passive, as opposed to the others which seem to be more active in that they are directed at people, but it does seem that way.

### **Billy**

I understand that we continue to go back-and-forth. I also understand that your "understanding" is different than mine.

When looking at the order of salvation, every single one of those is enormous and would require a lot to explain it. Unless we use your view in which foreknowledge is a simple one sentence description that He knows who He is going to elect.

His foreknowledge explains His omniscience. His predestination explains His sovereignty. His calling explains His Divine purpose. His justification explains His righteousness. And Glorification explains His grace.

You are implying that His foreknowledge cannot include His omniscience and knowing outcomes, which limits Him.

The logic/flip I see with your view is that it does go against scripture and what Paul explains in Romans 1-8. It goes against His love for all and His impartial administering of His righteousness and wrath. Also His desire of all to be saved and Christ dying for all.

It seems that you believe His sovereign choice of salvation trumps His love and impartiality.

Because God absolutely makes known who He is (power, glory, divinity) to all, it is by His power we can have the choice of salvation. Because He crushed His Son, it is His work that we can be justified.

He in essence He takes us and makes us know Him. Imagine we are in His hand and He reveals this to us. All we need to do is accept. Acceptance requires no desire and no effort. You accept what "is". If you refuse to accept by suppressing this truth, it says He delivers you over. He takes you out of His hand. His power and sovereignty is shown.

**Matt**

What do you think of my Romans 10 epiphany? Close to what you have?

**Billy**

Yes if you go back a few emails, you can see I was stating that as well. It's amazing right?

It's because He makes everyone know Him, it shows His love and His fairness. I believe it goes with the rest of scripture that if you accept what is, what He makes you know, then He absolutely will reveal more; i.e. He will get the gospel of faith in Him for righteousness. I believe this goes with the scriptures about Him not being far from any of us and if we seek Him we will find Him.

The ability to know Him is by His power and all know Him; if they suppress the truth then He delivers them over from His hand. If they accept what He has made known by His power, you have the ability by His power to seek Him. He will reveal the next step (gospel). It is the first step that shows He has loved all and wants all to be saved. It is the first step that, if rejected, leaves you know legal defense against His wrath.

It's all by His power (even to have an option, which I know you disagree with).

- None seek God; so God makes Himself known to all.
- Seek God after He makes Himself known and you will find Him, again by His power.

A question I had for you: the OT saints did not have the indwelling of the Spirit like us. I believe this shows that you don't need to be 'born again' to have the ability to believe. His power (exercised by the Spirit) makes us know Him. Suppressing the truth of His Spirit and in essence calling Him a liar and believing a lie is what condemns you. This again matches with Christ's word that the sin that condemns us is blasphemy of the Spirit. Do you agree?

**Matt**

//It's all by His power (even to have an option, which I know you disagree with)//

It isn't that I disagree with the fact that we have options. I have all sorts of options every day. I disagree with some people's view of how able we are to actually pick those options.

**Comment [MC48]:** Despite starting to see the Universal Witness, it didn't contradict Calvinism because God could use it to elect people who didn't hear about Jesus.

So, I was hanging on to Calvinism still.

We will act according to our nature, which is to say, we will act according to our desires. I COULD wake up tomorrow, drive to a casino in Lake Charles and piss away all of our money. It is an option that is open to me. But I wouldn't. I would be far to convicted, plus I have absolutely 0 desire to gamble. I work hard for the money we have! God made me risk averse.

So while we may look around and say that we have a free will because we can choose all of these options, the fact is that we are far more restricted than the options we see around us.

So when the Bible says someone in the flesh cannot please God, it doesn't mean they don't have the option to. It just means they will not because it is contrary to their fallen nature, which means they cannot.

HMMMMM....

*//A question I had for you: the OT saints did not have the indwelling of the Spirit like us. I believe this shows that you don't need to be 'born again' to have the ability to believe. His power (exercised by the Spirit) makes us know Him. Suppressing the truth of His Spirit and in essence calling Him a liar and believing a lie is what condemns you. This again matches with Christ's word that the sin that condemns us is blasphemy of the Spirit. Do you agree?//*

You say they did not have the indwelling of the Spirit, but they did at times. Not consistently like we do, but Daniel talks about having the Spirit with him in the Psalms, and there are other examples in the OT. But then you say His power is exercised in us by the HS to make us know Him....

So wait, are you saying they did or did not having the active presence of the HS in their lives?

To be clear, do you equate being born again with being rejuvenate? I do, I just want to make sure we are on the same page.

Let me think about this...while I do some work I keep putting off

### **Billy**

*//The identity of those He foreknew are the elect. He foreknew the history of the world that was in line with His nature and will, and then He predestined it, thereby electing those He foreknew to salvation. Of all the possible ways the world could have turned out, this is the one He chose, and so the foreknown people in the world were also chosen by Him.//*

I agree with all of your description, except this last statement needs clarification.

*//If He had chosen a different unfolding of the world, would others have been elected? Tyre and Sidon would have repented in sackcloth and ashes?//*

This shows they would have stopped being wicked; it doesn't say they would embraced God in faith. Repented (to change one's mind). Repentance is not automatically associated with salvation. There are numerous scriptures of people repenting, only in order to withhold the wrath of God falling on them. Even as believers who are saved, we are still called to repent and change our ways. A simplistic example of this: You steal over and over from me. I finally catch you, and tell you to stop. You say no. I pull out a gun, and say if you don't stop, I am going to shoot you. You start crying like a baby and whimpering and change your mind and say you'll stop. You have just repented. It doesn't mean your

heart is changed, and that from now on you're going to be a good person. All it means is that changed your mind.

//Even if we assume some sort of freedom of choice for people, He chose a world in which some would be saved, but not all. If He could have changed things a bit which would have resulted in a change in the elect, should we not ascribe to Him credit for our salvation? When He could have just as easily changed things resulting in, perhaps, our hardening, but the salvation of someone else who is not elect in our actual world?//

I don't believe there is a world that would/could have been created that would have saved more. The power of God is the power of God, despite our circumstances of life or time (re: Abraham's bosom, they had Moses and the prophets, and if they didn't believe them, then they won't believe someone rising from the dead; all is the same power of God; if they rejected men speaking with the power of God, they would also reject a man coming back from the dead by the power of God). God makes Himself absolutely known to all. No one gets special treatment, and no one gets left out. It is irrelevant on whether you like fishing or gambling, or are poor or rich, or are smart or dumb. It doesn't matter if you like chocolate or ice cream, or if you are a feeler or a thinker. God takes you in His hand, makes Himself known to you, and you either accept the Truth, or suppress and follow your flesh. To me, it shows the true magnificence of His plan, because He takes everything else out of it. There is no better way, or circumstance for you to be saved than the Creator of the universe absolutely making Himself known to you.

//It's all by His power (even to have an option, which I know you disagree with).

It isn't that I disagree with the fact that we have options. I have all sorts of options every day. I disagree with some people's view of how able we are to actually pick those options.//

The only option that matters is the option I speak of above. God takes us, makes Himself absolutely known by His power, and gives us the 'option' to accept Him. All these other 'options' are irrelevant.

**Matt**

//The only option that matters is the option I speak of above. God takes us, makes Himself absolutely known by His power, and gives us the 'option' to accept Him. All these other 'options' are irrelevant.//

You are saying you believe the call to me, who heard about God in a church, and actually heard the full gospel, is the same as what God gives to the man in the jungle who only has nature testifying to a god that he doesn't know? A man who makes up a religion because he doesn't fully grasp what he sees?

I don't believe for a second that those two calls are the same. Or do you believe that man can be saved by his faith, even though he practices a different religion?

**Billy (11/3/2015)**

Yes, I equate being "born again" with being rejuvenated/regenerated/baptized/circumcised/adopted, etc.

The OT saints had a much different 'experience' with the Holy Spirit than we do. First, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, and is constantly at work in the world, from the beginning to the end. It was the Holy Spirit working upon people in the OT, just like He works upon people in the NT.

You have some special empowerments/fillings in the OT.

- the artisans in Exodus for the purpose of constructing the tabernacle and its regalia

- the empowering of the Jewish elders to help Moses (Num.11:17; cf. also Num.27:18)
- the empowering of king Saul for the initial establishment of the Jewish kingdom (1Sam.10:6)
- the temporary empowerment of the disciples in John 20:22

Individuals who are used of the Spirit in this way are said to be "filled with the Spirit", indicating the Spirit's empowering and directing of said persons in their carrying out of the specific and needful tasks God has assigned them.

Those who are called by the Lord to prophesy are also said to be "filled" in this way (Mic.3:8; Lk.1:47; 1:67), and that is certainly understandable inasmuch as we know from Peter that "prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2Pet.1:21 NIV).

As the example of Saul makes clear, even though the Spirit took control to a great degree, nevertheless Saul's "free will" was not removed, and in the end he asserted that will for evil rather than for good with the result that "the Spirit of the Lord" departed from Saul.

The Spirit was "with" Old Testament believers; the Spirit is actually "in" all who belong to Jesus Christ today

That is a tremendous advantage because it means that the distance between our desire to be empowered and the Spirit's empowerment has been significantly reduced and made universally available at all believers at all times. He is actually in us, guiding us and empowering every correct thought, word and deed in a way in which the average Old Testament believer never experienced. So now we are all like David in this regard (1Sam.16:13)

//You are saying you believe the call to me, who heard about God in a church, and actually heard the full gospel, is the same as what God gives to the man in the jungle who only has nature testifying to a god that he doesn't know? A man who makes up a religion because he doesn't fully grasp what he sees?

I don't believe for a second that those two calls are the same. Or do you believe that man can be saved by his faith, even though he practices a different religion?//

You're not understanding. It seems as if you are diminishing God's omniscience, and His power in making Himself known. You might not be, and maybe I am not understanding you.

**Comment [s49]:** God is impartial, and brings His absolute witness to all people.

The foreknowledge/omniscience of God knows how you respond (take time out of it). You are not predestined to anything yet; before time and before creation, you are were known as a unique little spirit made in His image and His likeness, destined to be in a physical body that drives you to sin. God knows that you will respond to Him and accept Truth when He makes Himself known to you. He knows that when He reveals the Gospel to you, that you will accept Him. The method is completely irrelevant, because it His power, not the 'excellence of speech'. With His foreknowing, He predestines you in His plan. He determines that you will be in church and hear the gospel.

**Comment [s50]:** Ugh, still on foreseen faith.

God foreknows that another unique creature with a little spirit made in His image and His likeness, destined to be in a physical body that drives him to sin, will reject Him, and instead suppress the truth and will never come back to Him. God predestines the person to be a native American, in 1335.

**Billy**

After a little more studying, I have added this to the Romans study:

In combining Paul's and Christ's words here with something else we've learned brings great revelation.

Paul tells us that God makes Himself absolutely known to us by use of creation (Romans 1:18-21). We also see this in the book of Psalms (Ps. 19:1-6). The Holy Spirit was involved with creation (as was the Father and Son):

Genesis 1:1-2

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*

Psalms 33:2

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath (lit. Spirit) of His mouth all their host.*

Job 26:13

*By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*

Creation was and is made by the power of the Spirit of God (along with the Father and Son). It is creation that is God's voice and how He makes us absolutely know Him; His power, glory, and divinity. The Spirit of God is behind the power of creation, and makes us know Him. As we learned in Romans 1:18-21, it is man's suppression of the Truth, and belief in a lie that condemns him. Christ tells us (in Matt 12:31-32) that it is the Blasphemy of the Spirit that cannot be forgiven. These two things are exactly the same. The Spirit speaks through creation to man, making Him know God. Man suppresses the Spirit, and embraces a lie; this in essence is calling the Spirit a liar (blasphemy). If man accepts the Truth of the Spirit, and seeks God, the Spirit then will ensure the Gospel is provided. If man rejects the Truth of the Spirit in the Gospel, and does not put faith in Christ, they are committing Blasphemy of the Spirit.

**Matt**

What do you mean by "absolutely"?

I would say He makes Himself known unquestioningly through nature. I would not agree that He makes Himself known completely through nature.

**Billy**

I mean unquestionably: that's absolutely a better word than mine. The reason I used absolutely was from the Greek definition. Here is the quote: "*a prolonged form of a primary verb; to "know" (absolutely) in a great variety of applications and with many implications*"

Do you believe God has the power (omnipotence) to create a being like him, a 'little god' that has a spirit with free-will (the ability to think and act at one's own discretion)? Obviously this being's actions are limited to what powers/ability God gives it.

For now this being does not know God.

If God can create this being, do you believe God has the knowledge (omniscience) to know that being's thoughts and actions?

**Matt**

Sure, God can do a lot of things

**Billy**

Ok, at least I know that you think God is capable, and that's the jist of these other questions:

This being, based on its own actions, corrupts its physical body. This corruption now influences the free-will of this being to desire only to relish in the desires of its physical body. This being knows that relishing in the desires of its corrupted body will cause it to die. This being has offspring, and those offspring inherit all the qualities above.

God makes Himself known to these offspring; these offspring unquestionably know God's power, and His glory, and his divinity. They know good and evil, and know God is good and what they are doing is evil. The offspring know God created them, and that God deserves honor and thanks.

Does God have the power to allow these offspring to accept these Truths (which they normally could not do because of the influence of their physical body) and have the ability to give Him glory and thanks and seek Him, without overwriting their free-will in making them accept these truths? Basically God gives them the power/ability to weigh their choice (original free will), and resist the flesh and accept and seek Him. Is God capable of this?

I am not asking if you believe this happened, but if you think it's within God's power.

**Matt**

Clarify something before I answer fully.

- 1) Is He allowing them to choose absent of outside influence?
- 2) Define free will for me one more time.

**Billy**

1. The influence is two-fold; but not causal;
  - a. immediate and continuing self-gratification from the flesh with an unknown future ultimately resulting death
  - b. immediate and continuing resistance of self-gratification to honor God with an unknown future date that will bring eternal life with untold joy
- 2) (a sorta similar example of this is smoking, or drugs; immediate self gratification, with a future ultimately resulting in death; or resistance to self-gratification resulting with a longer and better life)
- 3) the ability to think and act at one's own discretion; the ability to weigh options and decide for oneself

**Matt**

Okay...

I am torn on which way to go on this, so I am just going to give you both of my answers

- 1) Yes, if there is support for God offering us anything prior to our physical birth, He could allow us to choose one way or the other. However, if we know that in the end everyone will drop to their knees and declare that Jesus is Lord, lost and saved alike, and they do this based on the presence of God in all of His glory, I see no reason to believe a person wouldn't choose Him prior to being in the flesh, which is what restricts them. And it wouldn't be a matter of seeking Him if we are with Him before our physical form is made, because we would be with Him.

They would still have the option to not choose Him, of course, but they wouldn't choose disbelief and death over the God in their presence.

- a. I don't see that restricting their free will either. If I wanted to get you to sit in one seat over another at dinner, and I put a bowl of dog food and a T-bone steak down, I know which one you will pick. You were free to pick either, but I influenced you based on your desires. How much more could God do that if we are made in His image and are not yet slaves to sin and flesh?
- 2) Is there support in the Bible for this pre-flesh decision? I mean, are the verses you can point to, or is this scenario the product of your theology and understanding up to this point?

### **Billy**

You are confused with my analogy/hypothetical. I'll try to restate it to make it clearer:

You believe God has the power (omnipotence) to create a creature like him, a 'little god' that has a spirit with free-will (the ability to think and act at one's own discretion, the ability to weigh options and decide for oneself). This creature also has a fleshly body that's not corrupted.

You believe God has the knowledge (omniscience) to know this creature's thoughts and actions.

This being is on earth, and has never 'seen' God.

This creature, based on its own actions, corrupts its physical body. This corruption now influences the free-will of this creature. While it has the ability to think and act at its discretion, or to weigh options, its corrupted flesh is so strong/influential that it will always choose to desire only to relish in the desires of its physical body. This creature has offspring, and those offspring inherit all the qualities above.

So now we have creatures with free-will (the ability to think and act at one's own discretion), but corrupted bodies that influence them so much, that their free-will only desires to relish the desires of the flesh.

God makes Himself known to these creatures. This 'knowledge' isn't Him manifesting His physical presence to them (because that would bend their will so much, that they cower and would do nothing but bow down and worship Him and call Him Lord. This would be overwriting/causing their choice because of His power and glory. Think about angels visiting man; nearly every instance, men immediately bowed down because of their power/glory. Their influence was so great that we bended our will to their manifested power. This is also like me wanting you to say "uncle" and you say no; I then start twisting your wrist causing you pain until you say "uncle". I override your choice because of my 'power'.

This 'knowledge' comes by His power, but it is simply imparting 'spiritual knowledge and understanding' to them. This 'spiritual knowledge and understanding' makes these creatures know God's power, and His glory, and His divinity. They know good and evil, and know God is good and what they are doing is evil. The offspring know God created them, and that as God, He deserves honor and thanks.

These offspring now know the Truth because God made them know it supernaturally.

So now you have:

- Creatures with free-will, but still in corrupted bodies that influence them so much, they always choose their flesh
- Creatures with spiritual knowledge and understanding of God; His power, glory, divinity, etc.

Does God have the power to, in essence, counter the desires of flesh and allow these creatures to have free-will again: They can now weigh the options and decide for themselves to either:

- Accept the Truth He made them know and give Him glory
- Don't accept the Truth He made them know, and choose the desires of their flesh

Basically, do you think God has the power to stop the influence of the flesh (but not remove the knowledge of its desires) and provide an option to accept Him?

**Matt**

// Basically, do you think God has the power to stop the influence of the flesh (but not remove the knowledge of its desires) and provide an option to accept Him?//

Yes....

**Billy**

Thank you; at least I know you think God is capable. This wasn't to get you to change your mind on what your view is, just see if you think God is capable.

Now, I believe this is how it happens (based on all the scripture we've went over many times). I believe God's foreknowledge includes knowing how his creatures will respond. It doesn't matter where they are, or when they are; it's irrelevant because it's really about faith in His truth, or lack of faith and going after the desires of your corrupted flesh. Based on His foreknowing; He predestines exactly when, where, and for what purpose. Again, not here to change your mind.

**Matt**

I don't see it happening like that.

Based on what Paul says about those who are in the flesh, which he clearly contrasts with those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I do not believe anyone can choose God without being indwelt. Per our conversation the other day, there is a clear difference between God's revelation and the work of the HS on someone vs His indwelling and working in someone.

**Billy, 11/5/2015** – this is a rewrite of chapter 8

//Based on what Paul says about those who are in the flesh, which he clearly contrasts with those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I do not believe anyone can choose God without being indwelt. Per our conversation the other day, there is a clear difference between God's revelation and the work of the HS on someone vs His indwelling and working in someone.//

Our conversation and discussion has made me learn so much more about His Word. These above statements have done it again. I started going through Romans 8 again, and got blown away by what we missed. I *think* it will blow you away too.

Romans 8:1

*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Faith in the Lord results in God graciously covering us with His righteousness, and now we are under no condemnation.

Romans 8:2-3

**Comment [s51]:** Starting to realize corporate election in Romans 8:28-30, and not foreseen faith. Just the glimpses. I still hold on to foreseen faith a long time....

*For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, He condemned sin in the flesh*

The 'Law' was not meant to reconcile us to God. The Jews tried to obtain self-righteousness by following the commandments of the Law. They could not follow the commandments because they were weakened by their flesh. What God was showing them was that it's impossible, and it was to point them faith and to the work of Christ. God achieved what the commandments could not do (reconcile us to Him) through His Son. His Son paid the penalty for sin, and provided reconciliation so that we could receive righteousness through faith.

Romans 8: 4

*so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

The requirement of the Law is that sin must be paid for, and that we must be righteous in order to be reconciled to God. There are two options for this:

- 1) Obtain it ourselves without God, which is walking according to our flesh
- 2) Obtain it through faith and receive His grace, which is walking according to the Spirit

The Jews tried to obtain it on their own by walking in the flesh, by following the commandments in sacrifices, and by doing good works. They failed because of the weakness of their flesh.

The only way to meet the requirement of the Law is to walk by faith, in accordance with the Spirit's direction. By faith you receive righteousness through grace.

Paul already says earlier (in Romans 1) that God, through His power (the Holy Spirit) makes us unquestionably know Him in order that we can honor Him. It is through accepting His Truth that we are able to walk in accordance with the Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives us this knowledge of God, so accepting that Truth is walking in accordance with the Spirit. Denying what the Spirit has made know is Blasphemy of the Spirit.

Is this unquestionable knowledge that God has made us know (by His Spirit through Creation) really empowering enough to let us honor God and seek Him? Paul says it's so strong and empowering that to not follow the option the Spirit makes know leaves us no legal defense against God's wrath.

Romans 8:5

*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

If you follow option 1 and walk according to the flesh to obtain righteousness, you 'have your mind set' on the desires of the flesh.

If you suppress the Truth of God (made known by the Spirit), and instead walk in accordance with the flesh, you will set your mind on the desires of the flesh. The flesh is weak, and when we rely on our own 'good works' from the flesh, we will fail. Instead of following after God to receive righteousness, they try to do it on their own and end up following after their own desires. This coincides directly with what Paul already spoke of in Romans 1:21-31. You suppress the Truth and end up falling into the evil and wicked desires of your flesh.

If you follow option 2 (by faith), you have now set your mind according to what the Spirit has made known, and can do what the Spirit desires. You are walking by the Spirit.

Romans 8:6

*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.*

Following the option of self-righteousness, using your fleshly works, will lead to death. Following what the Spirit has made known, and walking according to the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:7

*because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,*

If you follow option 1, and set your desires on your flesh, you are hostile towards God. By following the desires of your flesh, you cannot subject or subordinate yourself to God's law, because it's impossible. There is no way to follow the law and obtain self-righteousness, because of your flesh. When you dispose your will to your flesh, you cannot do good.

Romans 8:8

*Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Those who try to obtain self-righteousness end up setting their desires on the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:9

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him.*

'if indeed' is a conditional particle. This means "if indeed" or "if so".

Those of you who are walking according to the Spirit are not setting your desires on your flesh, *if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.* You can know for certain that you are walking according to the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

All throughout the NT, we see that it is faith that that results in God indwelling us with the Spirit, making us His child (John 7:39; Acts 5:32; Eph 1:13; Gal 3:26-27; 1 Cor 12:13). Paul gives them a proof test to know they are walking according to the Spirit--If the Spirit of God lives in you. This is the same 'test' we've been given before in scripture. Continue reading in Romans 8, and Paul even makes this unquestionably clear just a few verses later:

Romans 8:16

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

As a child of God, we are walking according to the Spirit. We don't receive the Spirit that makes us a child of God until we believe and have faith:

Eph 1:13

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,*

Gal 3:26-27

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

John even says that we know we are in Christ, and walking according to the Spirit if we have His Spirit:

1 John 4:13-15

*This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God*

So what Paul says (in Romans 8:9) must also be looked at in terms of the OT saints.

*But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, He does not belong to Him.*

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is new. It started after Christ was resurrected and glorified (John 7:39). For those of us after Christ who receive the new gift of the *indwelling* Holy Spirit, we know we are walking according to the Spirit, because we have the Holy Spirit to testify to us. This is a blessing that the OT saints did not have.

But what about the OT saints who did not get indwelt with the Holy Spirit? The Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) still testified to them of God. It was able to do this because of Christ's foreordained work. It still made them know the Truth. They could still walk according to what the Spirit made known to them. They could hold onto the Truth of the Spirit (of Christ), and God would enable them to walk according to the Spirit. There is no scripture that says the Spirit must be indwelling you for you to hear and walk in accordance the Spirit. If this were the case, the OT saints would not have been saved. The worldly man, or man relishing in his flesh, cannot take hold of the Truth, and he doesn't understand the Truth. But the Spirit is more powerful. The Spirit, the words of Christ, and the Word of God are all synonymous (Christ says my words are spirit and life; the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God). The Spirit can cut between our soul and spirit and enable us to hold onto the Truth.

Salvation has always come the same way. The Spirit testifies of the Truth, we put faith in that Truth, and we walk according to the Spirit's Truth. It is all possible through the work of Christ. So when Paul says:

*But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, He does not belong to Him.*

Is Paul saying that the OT saints, who did not receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit do not belong to Christ? I don't believe so. The Greek here for "have" is the same used earlier by Paul, '*echo*'. It means to have; equivalent to hold.

Paul says in Romans 1:28

*Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind*

What we learned in this verse was that because they 'did not examine' (did not think it worthwhile) the Truth the Spirit made known and 'hold onto' (retain) the 'precise and correct knowledge' (knowledge) of God, that God gave them over to their flesh.

*But if anyone does not have (hold onto) the Spirit of Christ, He does not belong to Him*

The OT saints hold onto the Truth (testified by the Holy Spirit/Spirit of Christ), and belong to Christ. It is Christ's work on the cross that enables our faith to save us (by His grace). It is the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) that testifies to the world of the Truth. Anyone who holds onto the Truth testified by the Spirit through faith will be saved, and belong to Christ.

**Comment [s52]:** This is the Universal Witness. God, through the work of the Spirit in a variety of witnesses, ensures all know Him and His word and His command.

Romans 8:10

*If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness*

Christ is in you after you believe and have faith. You receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are no longer a slave to the law leading to sin and death, but are alive and covered with His righteousness.

Romans 8:12-14-17

*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

If you are being led by the Spirit of God, you are a son of God.

Romans 8:15-17

*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

//Based on what Paul says about those who are in the flesh, which he clearly contrasts with those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I do not believe anyone can choose God without being indwelt. Per our conversation the other day, there is a clear difference between God's revelation and the work of the HS on someone vs His indwelling and working in someone.//

According to what you are saying above, the OT saints, whom did not get indwelt with the Holy Spirit like we do today were not saved. The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is new to us. That's a scriptural fact. There are OT saints, and they did not get indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit testified the Truth to them, and enabled them to walk according to the Spirit, but it did not indwell them. Their faith saved them, just like it does us. We are blessed in that we now receive the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling us after faith.

This is a good study, because now we are looking at salvation on a scale of OT and NT. God's method has always been the same. The Spirit testifies of the Truth, we put faith in that Truth (and receive grace through faith), and we walk according to the Spirit's Truth. It is all possible through Christ's atoning work on the Cross.

**Matt - 11/6/2015**

Okay, I read your emails in the order you recommended, and you came to the same conclusion I did. Paul is stating that sin entered his life when he understood the law.

You didn't really address original sin in your email, so let me hazard a guess. I haven't had a chance to research this guess, I am going strictly off of what I remember from scripture and tradition, though I think the traditional view is wrong.

Here it goes.

Original sin is the curse of Adam and Eve. They sinned, and because of that they were subject to death, and that curse of death was passed along to all of their children, their entire genealogy which is everybody on earth.

**Comment [s53]:** Matt is starting to see original sin different, and thus Total Depravity.

Because of them, each and every person on earth is born destined for death. Furthermore, they brought sin into the world. Thinking about scripture, it is amazing how sentient sin is described as being. As if it is alive.

Sin came into the world, and according to Paul, it actively compels us to break the rules. Is that original sin? The curse that as soon as we are told to do something, sin comes alive and struggles to do the opposite?

I used to say that kids were sinners because they disobeyed. You're a parent. I don't have to explain that to you. But sin is not what sends them to hell, generally speaking. It is a very specific sin that sends someone to hell, and that is the sin of unbelief. When Jesus said we had to be childlike in our faith, he was making a point I now believe. Children don't question God's existence. It is as you said, the world corrupts them, and sin, hearing a law once they learn they should believe in God, rebels as hard as it can.

I still have questions about those outside of the Hebrew people of the OT and those who have never heard the gospel of faith in the church era. For instance, a Chinese man in 600BC or a man in the Amazon 200 years ago. I'm mulling it over and have no solid stance on them as of yet.

### **Billy**

*//Paul is stating that sin entered his life when he understood the law.//*

I think he is more saying that the consequence of sin (being held accountable to God) entered his life when he understood the law. Sin existed before; it was just not imputed before understood. And as we discussed, this understanding of the law can come from the actual written law (like the Jews, or even us today), or by the law in our hearts. In either case, it's that mental understanding of the 'law of sin'.

*//Original sin is the curse of Adam and Eve. They sinned, and because of that they were subject to death, and that curse of death was passed along to all of their children, their entire genealogy which is everybody on earth. Because of them, each and every person on earth is born destined for death. Furthermore, they brought sin into the world. Thinking about scripture, it is amazing how sentient sin is described as being. As if it is alive. Sin came into the world, and according to Paul, it actively compels us to break the rules. Is that original sin?//*

I think there are many bad views of what 'original sin' means. I think you have it right here. Here is my off-the-cuff view. Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and in doing so, fell out of the favor of God. God said they would surely die, and their sin now results in physical death, and without reconciliation, spiritual death. Their sin has to be paid for, and in order to be reconciled with God (receive His favor/grace) they must be righteous.

I think what happened with the first man, is that his one sin corrupted the flesh of humanity. Biologically our flesh is now corrupted and tainted (leading to physical death). That corrupted flesh compels our spirit to its desires and breaking God's rules, and we all oblige (all sin and fall short of the glory of God). This corruption of our spirit leads to spiritual death. So when you say sin is 'almost alive', I see that too, because it's in our corrupted biology. We are dual-natured – body and spirit. I think the way it was intended, was that our spirit is the ruler and compels our bodies. But now with a body corrupted by sin, it is our bodies that compel our spirit. We're broken, and our spirit is a slave to our flesh.

God has intervened and shown our spirit the Truth of what we're doing, and where it leads, and that He is the answer. If we believe the Spirit's testimony, our spirits are renewed. We are no longer slaves to our

flesh. Now we are told to walk according to His Spirit; walk by faith in what the Spirit is testifying to our spirits.

//I used to say that kids were sinners because they disobeyed. You're a parent. I don't have to explain that to you. But sin is not what sends them to hell, generally speaking. It is a very specific sin that sends someone to hell, and that is the sin of unbelief. When Jesus said we had to be childlike in our faith, he was making a point I now believe. Children don't question God's existence. It is as you said, the world corrupts them, and sin, hearing a law once they learn they should believe in God, rebels as hard as it can.//

I absolutely agree! Children trust in God (and many other things) with very little understanding (childlike faith). They don't have to know all the in's and out's. They know God exists, and that He's good, and that He deserves honor. It's simplistic for them. It's the darn world that starts feeding them lies, which their corrupted bodies latch on to, that they often start suppressing the truth.

//I still have questions about those outside of the Hebrew people of the OT and those who have never heard the gospel of faith in the church era. For instance, a Chinese man in 600BC or a man in the Amazon 200 years ago. I'm mulling it over and have no solid stance on them as of yet.//

First off, based on God's love, and His fairness, and His impartiality, I believe anyone that could be saved, will be saved. I also believe that He will not 'overwrite' the will of man. If a man is going to reject His offer, the same 'exact' offer He gives all mankind, God is not going to overwrite the free-will choice of man. I believe our Lord wants His creation to freely choose Him. I absolutely believe He could overwrite our will, but I don't believe He does. He wants us to love Him. Love is sacrifice, and He wants us to sacrifice the desires of our corrupted flesh, for Him. He gives us the ability and offer to do this.

That's where the whole foreknowledge comes in. God knew His plan before He implemented it. The salvation parameters are the same for everyone; no one is unique in the parameters:

- He testifies of Himself to a creature made in His image/likeness (every creature is the same)
- Every creature has a corrupted nature
- Will they choose to love Him in sacrificing the desires of their corrupted nature

This is an analogy, and is not meant to be literal, but meant to help provide an explanation.

God knew He was going to create 10 billion people, all with the ability to be saved from their corrupted flesh. He is fair, and just, and no outside circumstances (besides His two parameters) are going to affect this choice people have. Before I was Billy from Lincoln Nebraska, I was a 'pot' in the 'potters' mind. I did not yet exist, but that doesn't mean God didn't know how I would respond. I was a spirit in His image and likeness that was going to inhabit a corrupted flesh. I wasn't yet short, or a conservative, or athletic, or an American. He knew if this unique 'pot', when He made known who He was and what He wanted, would either love Him, or reject Him. He also knew, in my opinion, how this 'pot' would exercise its will based on this decision. Would the 'pot' be of strong faith, or weak faith, or soft rejection, or strong rejection?

God foreknew that this unique spirit is going to be extremely obstinate against the Truth, and exercise its will to forcibly reject Him and follow himself.... God was like, I will use this creature to show my power and glory... He's going to be Pharaoh! He will never accept me of his own choice. I am going to exercise my power against him, and he will not submit his will. I will exercise even more power against him (which would overpower and bend his will), so I will harden his heart in order to show my power and glory.

The spiritual purpose of every 'pot' is to freely love God and give Him glory. That's why God made us. God foreknew the spiritual decision of His 'pot's and predestined the implementation of their spiritual decision. He also predestined the worldly purpose of His 'pots'.

I see this as magnifying God's love for all, magnifying His omniscience, magnifying His sovereignty, magnifying His justness, magnifying His righteousness, and magnifying His glory.

I am not saying this is without a doubt how it all works; but it seems from my understanding of the scriptures, this is how it seems to be set up. If there is another explanation that give us comprehension while following scripture, I have yet to learn of it.

I think of it this way:

I don't believe that people who are mind controlled, and have no ability or capability to resist this control, and then commit crimes, are liable for their crimes.

in a similar scenario: I don't believe people who are demon-possessed and commit murder; and have no control over their actions and don't have the ability to stop, are liable for their crime.

In a similar scenario. I don't believe a that a person that is mentally ill (without question), and because of their mental illness, commits murder, is liable for their crime. My spirit tells me it is not just to condemn them gas chamber.

Did their bodies commit the crimes? Absolutely, but they are not liable, because they did not know another way or have the ability to go any other way.

However, if any of these people made a conscience choice knowing it's wrong, and having the ability to stop, yet still commit crimes, then they are liable for their crimes. I believe God gives every one of us the ability to know our sin and to stop our sin. It is when we have the knowledge and ability to stop and don't, that we have no legal defense against His wrath.

This seems to fit with children and mentally ill; they commit sin, yet have no knowledge of the 'law of sin' and have no ability to do anything different. It is when they gain understanding of 'the law of sin' and have the ability to choose differently that they are held accountable.

Does this seem to make sense? Is there something that I am missing?

**Matt - 1/9/2015**

//God knew He was going to create 10 billion people, all with the ability to be saved from their corrupted flesh. He is fair, and just, and no outside circumstances (besides His two parameters) are going to affect this choice people have. Before I was Billy from Lincoln Nebraska, I was a 'pot' in the 'potters' mind. I did not yet exist, but that doesn't mean God didn't know how I would respond. I was a spirit in His image and likeness that was going to inhabit a corrupted flesh. I wasn't yet short, or a conservative, or athletic, or an American. He knew if this unique 'pot', when He made known who He was and what He wanted, would either love Him, or reject Him. He also knew, in my opinion, how this 'pot' would exercise its will based on this decision. Would the 'pot' be of strong faith, or weak faith, or soft rejection, or strong rejection?//

**Comment [s54]:** Matt is still sticking to his guns on election.

It's funny. I have learned a lot from everything we have gone through, but it hasn't changed my position on this. I still hold to the fact that God elected some based solely on His will alone and not our desires one way or another.

I have some questions about your analogy, and I get that it is just that and they only parallel the truth up to a point:

What makes one pot different from another if we are looking at a testimony from God to that person prior to them being in a sinful body?

Who would have given the POTs different qualities?

If the people, prior to their bodies, are making this decision using their free will, then how can they choose anything other than God without experiencing sin through flesh and understanding there is another option? Adam and Eve in the garden, for example. Satan had to tempt them for them to act outside of their unfallen nature.

- I ask that under the assumption that every choice is based on desire. Ultimately, every choice is a yes or no question that is made based on your experiences up to that point which shape your desires. If we are taking those experiences and desires off the table, and looking strictly at the person's nature which is not fallen at this point of preconception in God's mind, then why/how could they choose anything other than God?

Do you believe Faith is absent of desire? I don't mean the state of having faith, I am talking the initial decision to place our faith in God.

- Do you believe free will can be separated from desire? Can a person choose anything freely and not do it based on what they want?

I am very thankful to have a brother to talk about these things with. The people at my church just seem uninterested or too busy. It is kind of depressing...

### **Billy**

Thank you for asking these questions. It made me think, and God used it to give me some good revelations.

//It's funny. I have learned a lot from everything we have gone through, but it hasn't changed my position on this. I still hold to the fact that God elected some based solely on His will alone and not our desires one way or another.//

Yeah, and I am starting to think your 'acting' obstinate or obtuse just to make me shake my head in bewilderment. I know it's because you don't 'get it', and these are all good questions.

// What makes one pot different from another if we are looking at a testimony from God to that person prior to them being in a sinful body? Who would have given the POTs different qualities?//

First off, God knows everything. God knows what choice you are going to make with your free-will, when confronted with His Truth vs the desires of your flesh. God's knowledge isn't dependent of you existing with a spirit or body yet.

If you look at the potter and pot analogy of the Bible, it makes clear that it is our choice that makes the potter determined our purpose. It is our choice that causes us to be spoiled or corrupt. Go back and read Jeremiah 18:1-12.

*But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. (verse 4)*

The word here for 'making' (as well as remade) according to the concordance basically means forming as to accomplish or appoint. The word for spoiled means corrupted, or be ruined.

The potter was 'forming to accomplish or appoint' the clay and it was spoiled in His hands. I don't believe God, in His 'forming' of us messed up, and we somehow got ruined because He didn't do it right. That would mean God is not a very good potter.

The only logical view, and my view I see based on scripture is that everything is dependent on us listening to God's voice. "*if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice*" (verse 10)... It becomes corrupt. This analogy was written this way for us to understand. He was forming us for glory, and because we rejected His voice, we became ruined. He then reformed us to something not glorious. This was all foreknown.

The default of all of us is 'salvation'. Again, I go back to the Book of Life, which ties with all the things we've been learning. Your sins are not held against you because of Christ; before understanding the 'law of sin', your sins are not against you. Because of Christ, we all are in the Book of Life, and it is through our Blasphemy of the Spirit (and taking the mark of the beast which is also blasphemy of the Spirit) that we are removed. God wants all to be saved but it is our willingness to reject Him that spoils us and causes us to be reformed for a different purpose. God knew it all before we were created.

*//If the people, prior to their bodies, are making this decision using their free will, then how can they choose anything other than God without experiencing sin through flesh and understanding there is another option? Adam and Eve in the garden, for example. Satan had to tempt them for them to act outside of their unfallen nature. //*

You are confusing some things. None of us were created before we were created 'in time', but God still foreknew us, and knew how we would exercise our free-will when confronted with the option of going with the desires of our flesh vs. listening to Him. Adam and Eve exercised their spirits made in the image and likeness of Him to disobey Him. They chose not listen to the voice of God.

*//I ask that under the assumption that every choice is based on desire. Ultimately, every choice is a yes or no question that is made based on your experiences up to that point which shape your desires. If we are taking those experiences and desires off the table, and looking strictly at the person's nature which is not fallen at this point of preconception in God's mind, then why/how could they choose anything other than God?//*

I might desire a piece of chocolate cake, but at the same time desire that I didn't desire it. Humans have the capacity to transcend the weighing off of desires in decision making. This is what makes us different than the animals.

I already answered that I don't believe we pre-existed before we existed. I don't believe God just foreknew if we would choose Him when only confronted with Him. He foreknew if we would choose Him when confronted with Him or our flesh.

//Do you believe Faith is absent of desire? I don't mean the state of having faith, I am talking the initial decision to place our faith in God.//

Faith is not desire. Faith is trust. God's mercy is not distributed because of your wants or desires, or how hard you try to obtain it. God's mercy and compassion is sovereignly administered by His sovereign terms. His terms are that mercy is received through faith. You don't receive God's favor because you really, really wanted it, or because you are doing a lot of good things. You receive it because you listen to the Spirit's voice, and put faith (trust) in what the Spirit says.

We are confronted with two choices:

- Reject the Spirit, and indulge in the desires of our flesh
- Listen to the Spirit, and put Faith in what He says

You are condemned for rejecting the Spirit, calling Him a liar. You are saved by faith in what the Spirit testifies.

With these two choices, we have two competing desires:

- I desire to do all these things to indulge my flesh. I reject what God says, and lie to myself... I'll just say God isn't going to judge me; I'm really not that bad. Look, everyone else is doing it too. They approve of what I'm doing, so it can't be that bad.
  - I desire to receive this promise the Spirit is telling me. I can't 'see' or actually 'here' the Spirit, but it seems to be true.

Most people desire both. Just because I desire both, doesn't mean I am going to receive God's mercy. Most people believe in God, and believe in what Christ did, but they choose not to put their faith in Him. I can desire to be saved all day long, but that doesn't save me. What saves me is my faith. The only person that receives God's mercy is the person that puts faith in what the Spirit says. I can indulge in my flesh, and still desire or work to be saved all day long, but it's only faith that saves me, not my desire.

//Do you believe free will can be separated from desire? Can a person choose anything freely and not do it based on what they want?//

That would be randomness. Can I make a random choice? Yes. Pick a number between 1 and 100. But again, desiring salvation doesn't save you, or desiring to sin doesn't condemn you. Faith in the Spirit's testimony is what saves you. Denial of the Spirit is what condemns you.

//I am very thankful to have a brother to talk about these things with. The people at my church just seem uninterested or too busy. It is kind of depressing...//

Yes, you're a blessing. The questions you asked got me thinking about desires and faith, and that wouldn't have happened with you. You helped me put clarification on this.

**Matt**

//I might desire a piece of chocolate cake, but at the same time desire that I didn't desire it. Humans have the capacity to transcend the weighing off of desires in decision making. This is what makes us different than the animals.//

It is statements like this that lead me to believe you do not understand what I am saying. Let's use your example. A man desires cake, (we will assume it is available) but he is on a diet and knows he should not eat it.

Depending on which desire is stronger, his desire to eat it or his desire to stick to his diet and abstain, will determine his decision in the moment he makes it.

That is true of every decision in our lives. It comes down to "do" or "do not", and our desires are what determine how we will decide. Right now, your option is to either accept what I say and comment back or not, or you can deny what I say and comment back or not. Several do's and do not's involved in one decision, but all based on your desires.

That is why Paul says a man who has set his mind on the flesh cannot please God. The man is obsessed with himself, he desires only himself and his personal gain. Of course he cannot please God because he does not desire it! And to make matters worse, God gives the man over to the desires of his heart. God will stop intervening on behalf of that person and allow them to wallow in their sinful putrid lives because that is what that person desires.

//Faith is not desire. Faith is trust.//

I anticipated this, which is why I stated "I don't mean the state of having faith, I am talking the initial decision to place our faith in God." I know what faith is, and I am not disagreeing with you. Faith is belief in things not seen, it is our hope in a man who was also God, who came and died so that we might live. I know what the state of having faith is.

**Comment [MC55]:** We didn't understand faith until a year and a half after this.

To make my point more clearer:

- 1) You believe that our faith is based on free will.
- 2) You believe faith is NOT based on our desires.
- 3) I present as fact that: Free will = desires. Our free will is the exercise of choosing based on desire.

Conclusion? Faith is not based on free will according to your beliefs. It cannot be.

Understand, I am not arguing that we act without internal conflict. Every time you sin, you choose to do so because in that moment, it is what you most want to do. Likewise, every time you abstain from sin, you do so because it is what you most want to do in that moment (thank you Holy Spirit for the renewal of our minds). There is a terrible conflict in us between flesh and spirit, and we are convicted to following the urgings of the spirit, to be holy as He is holy, but when we choose not to listen, when we choose to follow the flesh, it is because we want to, we desire it. It may come with regrets, and maybe those are instant, but it is still based on desire.

//That would be randomness. Can I make a random choice? Yes. Pick a number between 1 and 100. //

Good point, but desire is still present. Play along and choose a number, adhere to the rules and stay within the limits, etc. But when do we ever operate on randomness? In the context of this conversation, though, randomly choosing something really has no place.

//But again, desiring salvation doesn't save you, or desiring to sin doesn't condemn you. Faith in the Spirit's testimony is what saves you. Denial of the Spirit is what condemns you.//

I know faith is what saves you, but if you are really going to stick with the thought that desire plays no part, then free will plays no part. You must give credit solely to God for your decision because you were not the one to desire or will it, to which I would agree. This complies perfectly with Romans 9:16.

It is almost as if we are pre-shaped vessels that act according to our nature....

Look forward to hearing your thoughts. I think this discussion is one that would be great over skype because we could actively question each point together instead of both of us throwing blocks of text through the intertubes .

### **Billy**

//It is statements like this that lead me to believe you do not understand what I am saying. Let's use your example. A man desires cake, (we will assume it is available) but he is on a diet and knows he should not eat it. Depending on which desire is stronger, his desire to eat it or his desire to stick to his diet and abstain, will determine his decision in the moment he makes it.

That is true of every decision in our lives. It comes down to "do" or "do not", and our desires are what determine how we will decide. Right now, your option is to either accept what I say and comment back or not, or you can deny what I say and comment back or not. Several do's and do not's involved in one decision, but all based on your desires.

That is why Paul says a man who has set his mind on the flesh cannot please God. The man is obsessed with himself, he desires only himself and his personal gain. Of course he cannot please God because he does not desire it! And to make matters worse, God gives the man over to the desires of his heart. God will stop intervening on behalf of that person and allow them to wallow in their sinful putrid lives because that is what that person desires.//

I agree with all this. I understand your point. Our *decision to put faith in God* stems from which we desire more; the promise of God or the indulgences of our flesh.

//Faith is not desire. Faith is trust.

I anticipated this, which is why I stated "I don't mean the state of having faith, I am talking the initial decision to place our faith in God." I know what faith is, and I am not disagreeing with you. Faith is belief in things not seen, it is our hope in a man who was also God, who came and died so that we might live. I know what the state of having faith is.

To make my point more clear:

- 1) You believe that our faith is based on free will.//

Yes; and our free will stems from two competing desires.

//2) You believe faith is NOT based on our desires.//

No; it's based on two competing desires that we *all* have. But our desires don't save us.

//3) I present as fact that: Free will = desires. Our free will is the exercise of choosing based on desire.//

As we've discussed and defined, free will is the power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate; the ability to act at one's own discretion. God gave me the ability to act at my discretion. That doesn't mean it's not based on desire. Desire doesn't save me. The desire to be saved doesn't save me.

//Conclusion? Faith is not based on free will according to your beliefs. It cannot be.//

Yes, you missed the entire point in my email. I am not sure how that wasn't clear. When I said you asked good questions, I meant it. Your questions made me realize that yes, we choose to have faith based on our desire, but it is not our desire that saved us, it's what we choose to do with that desire. Do we put faith in God, or not. God knows, based on us having the flesh to contend with, and with Him making us know Him, how we will exercise our free-will. Every human being has these two things to contend. Will we put faith in Him or not. Those are the two factors, and only two factors that matter. This is how it doesn't matter what your circumstance are in life, because those two factors are what every human will have to contend with.

//Understand, I am not arguing that we act without internal conflict. Every time you sin, you choose to do so because in that moment, it is what you most want to do. Likewise, every time you abstain from sin, you do so because it is what you most want to do in that moment (thank you Holy Spirit for the renewal of our minds). There is a terrible conflict in us between flesh and spirit, and we are convicted to following the urgings of the spirit, to be holy as He is holy, but when we choose not to listen, when we choose to follow the flesh, it is because we want to, we desire it. It may come with regrets, and maybe those are instant, but it is still based on desire.//

I agree with all this too. Every day you and me sin, and the second we do, we hate it and are just like Paul in saying 'oh wretched man that I am!' Those who reject God have to continually, because God still calls. Israel rejected God, and He still called to them. He told them if they would go back to Him, He would accept them. But the more you harden your heart against His call (the more you suppress His Truth), the harder it is for you to even hear it. People who have continually rejected God don't have that instant sorrow when they sin like a born-again believer, because sin has a cumulative and desensitizing effect on our spirits, our God-given conscience, making it difficult for them to even distinguish right from wrong. There will come a time when God will give us over to our "debased mind" and let us have it our way.

//That would be randomness. Can I make a random choice? Yes. Pick a number between 1 and 100.

Good point, but desire is still present. Play along and choose a number, adhere to the rules and stay within the limits, etc. But when do we ever operate on randomness? In the context of this conversation, though, randomly choosing something really has no place.//

I agree; I made the point you can make random decisions, but I agree it has no place in this discussion, which is why I didn't talk about it anymore. I was just stating that yes, you can make completely random decisions.

//I know faith is what saves you, but if you are really going to stick with the thought that desire plays no part, then free will plays no part. You must give credit solely to God for your decision because you were not the one to desire or will it, to which I would agree. This complies perfectly with Romans 9:16.//

No, I am not saying desire plays no part. I am saying God foreknows what we are going to do: are we going to put faith in the promise or not. We all have the same two desires; we want the promise and we want the desires of our flesh. Everyone desires to be saved, EVERYONE. And everyone desires to indulge in their flesh. He foreknows who is going exercise their free will and act on faith. I have said this to so many people, and I have heard it in so many sermons, everyone wants to go to heaven, but everyone doesn't want to have faith in God to get there. The desire doesn't save you; it's putting faith in the promise.

I see no contradiction of any scripture. God doesn't save you just because you desire to be saved; He saves you for having faith. Again, think of the rich young man who went to Christ and *wanted* eternal life. Christ didn't say, well, you desire it, so you're good. He told him to sell his possessions and follow Him, and the dude wanted to follow his flesh, and not put faith in the testimony of Christ (my words are Spirit and life). It's about our faith, which He foreknew.

//It is almost as if we are pre-shaped vessels that act according to our nature....//

We are totally predestined vessels according to our foreknown nature. Every human has a God-given free-will nature made in His image and His likeness to act at our own discretion. Our nature contends with a sinful flesh and the voice of God. God wanted to make us all for glory, because He desires all to be saved, and none to perish, but He foreknew those who would exercise their nature and reject Him and become ruined, and remade them for wrath. Ultimately, God predestined everyone according to their nature.

**Matt**

Yep, I totally missed that you were agreeing with me! It's all good though :-)

**Billy**

We still have a difference of opinion though. As my email said, I believe we have two desires to contend with, but it's our faith that saves us, which God foreknew. Were you going to respond to that?

I was looking into these scriptures today about there are none righteous, none that seek God, all have sinned, etc, and came to some good understanding. Read and tell me what you think:

Ecc 7:19

*Wisdom gives a wise person more protection than ten rulers in a city.*

This is obviously spiritual wisdom because man's wisdom is called foolish. Spiritual wisdom, in that of seeking the Lord and turning to Him.

Ecc 7:20

*Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins*

The 'indeed' is explaining the need for wisdom in v. 19. I checked the Hebrew on this 'continually does', and it is in the form of a verb that denotes a process, which is why most translations denote a word like "continually". It's also the same verb and tense for 'never', which is why they translate it as 'never' sins. This goes with what Solomon's dad said in Psalms:

Psalm 14:1-3

*Fools say to themselves, "There is no God." They sin and commit evil deeds; none of them does what is right.*

Fools (the word always used for those who reject what God says) say there is no God. God makes them unquestionably know Him, and they are called fools for rejecting what the Spirit was told them. It would be 'wise' to listen to the Lord. They fall into their flesh and commit evil deeds, thinking they don't need God to do what's right, but none of them do what's right.

Psalm 14:2-3

*The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one*

Some translations say the Lord 'looks down' while others say 'looked down'. I checked the Hebrew on this and it's in the Hebrew perfect tense (which I learned is different than the Greek perfect). The perfect in Hebrew emphasizes a condition which has come into "complete existence" and realization. Obviously this cannot be a 'continuous action', as in 'looks', because God looks upon those with faith as righteous because we have faith, and are covered by the righteousness of His Son. So somewhere in 'time' it appears God looked down and said there were none who understood and sought after Him. To me this seems to say that all people had rejected His Spirit's testimony of Him (rejected wisdom and became fools) and went after the desires of their flesh. None of them heeded the Spirit and sought after Him. They all turned aside the Spirit's testimony and became corrupt in their flesh and did nothing good (because you cannot without listening to the Spirit). This makes me think of the time of Noah; in that passage of Gen 6, it says God looked upon the earth and it was wicked, and all living creatures were sinful (except Noah, who found grace through faith).

Psalm 53:1-3

*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looked down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

Here we have the same kind of words from Ecclesiastes 7 and Psalm 14. Fools reject God's testimony. They follow their corrupted flesh and don't and can't do anything good. God looked down (again in Hebrew perfect tense) and saw that none have heeded the testimony of His Spirit and understand, and seek after Him. They have 'turned aside', which is the same verb we see many times, in which they turn away from, or hold back, or reject the Truth. Together they have become corrupt (they approve of their evil deeds and approve of others who do them).

This explains Paul, in Romans 3:10-18

*As it is written:*

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

*"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Paul in Romans 3 here is making a case against the Jews who may think that they are righteous, having obtained it through the Law. He quotes David and Solomon who stated that God had looked down upon them (and the world) and said none of them were righteous; they had turned aside from God, and had not sought after God. Jews and Gentiles were both doing no good. How many times have people read this and believe that this 'not seeking God' applies to all people at all times and means no one is capable of seeking God (even when He tells us to seek Him and that He is not far from any of us).

Paul sums up how everyone is now saved through Christ, by faith, apart from the law.

Romans 3:21-23

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

You cannot be saved through the law. All have sinned, both Jew and Gentile, and all are saved apart from the law; righteousness is through faith, by the work done by Jesus Christ.

**Matt - 11/8/2015**

Yea, in rereading Romans 3, it is clear that when Paul says none are righteous and none seek God, he is meaning under the law alone. Just looking at what can be done under the law, nobody gets it right, and nobody achieves righteousness through it. It's impossible.

Then, he clearly lays out the new covenant. Righteousness through faith.

So, this verse cannot be used to support total depravity. It just does not make that point.

**Billy**

So our spirits are given to us by God. We don't create them ourselves; two people can't create a spirit.

The God who created the world and everything in it, this is He who as Lord of heaven and earth does not dwell in temples made by human hands nor is He tended to by the hands of men – as if He were in need of anything – He it is who gives life and breath (spirit) and everything else to all (Acts 17:24-25)

Thus says God the Lord, who creates the skies and stretches them out, who fashions the earth and its produce, who gives breath to the people upon it, a spirit to those who walk upon it. Isaiah 42:5

Many question when this 'breathe of life' actually occurs. Does God breathe a spirit into us when we are conceived, or when we are born? Scripture always seems to indicate that it occurs at birth. Adam had a body, was not 'alive' until God breathed a spirit into him. Christ's birth was heralded, This does not mean that God does not care for an unborn child (Ex.21:22; Job 10:8-12; Ps.139:13-16; Is.44:24; 49:4-5) and that we are not to care for an unborn child. It is definitely against God's will to kill an unborn child. I am not 100% on when it occurs, just stating what seems to be what scripture states.

It is the flesh that is corrupt, and it is the flesh that leads our spirits to sin. Adam had no corrupt flesh, but had a spirit given to him by God. He disobeyed God without corrupt flesh by his willing choice. Thus he corrupted his flesh and his spirit. Christ was very similar. His body was not corrupt. He was like Adam, in the sense that He had to obey God's will. He obeyed God's will. That's the contrast always made in the Bible.

We are 'born' when our spirit's are given to us by God, and we are in a corrupted flesh because of Adam. When we come to 'know the law of sin' we are held accountable, and we all sin. We all take our choice and fall into the sin influenced by the corrupted flesh. He knows we will all sin, and He knows that none can obtain self-righteousness, which is why He sent His Son to atone. His plan makes the entire creation's reconciliation only possible through the work of His Son.

For the word of God is living (because it's the Spirit) and active (He is constantly working on us) and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of body and spirit (giving us power

**Comment [s56]:** After going through Romans 3 together, Matt is realizing Romans 3 doesn't teach Total Depravity.

to resist the flesh by our spirit), of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

Through faith in Him, and through the work of Christ, we can now be 'reborn', or 'born from above'. He renews our mind and calls us to walk according to His Spirit, and indwells us with His Spirit, regenerating (rebirth) our spirits to be uncorrupted, and not under the spiritual death caused by our flesh.

God doesn't look at our sin (as believers) now at all; I mean the scripture says He forgives and forgets. He has 'set apart' the deeds of our flesh from our spirits. That is not to say, as Paul says, we are to sin at-will. He still desires us not to sin. Now we are called to sanctification and growth in the Lord. Be Holy, for I am Holy. Be conformed to the image of His Son. Grow more like Christ by walking by the Spirit. Show Christ to the world by becoming more like Him. Bear fruit of the Spirit. Our sin is not judged anymore, now it's about working (out of love) to please the Lord. We store up treasure in heaven because of our loving acts we do for Him.

#### **Matt**

//Adam had no corrupt flesh, but had a spirit given to him by God. He disobeyed God without corrupt flesh by his willing choice. Thus he corrupted his flesh and his spirit.//

Do you think Adam would have sinned without Satan's influence? Our flesh tempts us to sin, to disobey, so while Adam wasn't in a fallen body, he did have temptation present to make known to him the option to disobey.

Given the fact that he was literally communing with God, and his nature was not corrupt, I'm inclined to think he would not have. You think that is why God deals more harshly with the angels? Ultimately the "why" always boils down to God's will/ordinance, but from our perspective. The rebellion of the Angels seems stranger to me than that of man. More disrespectful in a way?

#### **Billy**

We know that the angels that rebelled and joined Satan don't get any chance for reconciliation. They did it by their own choice. They had no tempter. They were with God, and decided to go against Him without anyone to 'tempt' them, thus God has dealt more harshly with them; they get no chance for redemption.

I agree with you that I don't believe Adam would have sinned without Satan's temptation (but it was all part of God's perfect plan). I think that's why Christ was tempted by Satan as well, to prove that even with that, Christ still followed the will of God. God has chosen to unite everything through Christ. He shows righteousness in dealing judgment against the angels, He shows righteousness in dealing with us as well.

I really think this potter analogy that is used in Jeremiah gives us the picture of free-will and how God foreknew and chose us.

Look at the potter and pot analogy of the Bible, it makes clear that it is how we responded in the Potter's hands that determines His purpose. It is our response that causes us to be spoiled or corrupt. See Jeremiah 18:1-12.

Jeremiah 18:4

*But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.*

The potter was 'forming' the clay and it was spoiled in His hands. I don't believe God, in His 'forming' of us messed up, and we somehow got ruined because He didn't do it right.

If you look at netbible on the notes on the Hebrew of these verses in Jeremiah, it says:  
The verbs here denote repeated action. They are the Hebrew perfect with the vav (ו) consecutive. The text then reads somewhat literally, "Whenever the vessel he was molding...was ruined, he would remold..."

Something was wrong with the clay – either there was a lump in it, or it was too moist or not moist enough, or it had some other imperfection. In any case the vessel was "ruined" or "spoiled" or defective in the eyes of the potter. This same verb has been used of the linen shorts that were "ruined" and hence were "good for nothing" in Jer 13:7. The nature of the clay and how it responded to the potter's hand determined the kind of vessel that he made of it.

The only logical view, and my view I see based on scripture is that everything is dependent on us responding to His hands. Do we listen to God's voice? "if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice" (verse 10)... It becomes corrupt. He forms us with His hands and as we learned in Romans 1, He makes us know Him, we suppress the Truth, and He 'hands us over' to the desires of our flesh.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.

The Greek phrase "Gave them up" is paradidomi and means, 'to give into the hands of another' or 'to deliver'. We are formed in His hands, and through rejecting Him, He hands us over to another, the lust of our flesh.

This analogy was written this way for us to understand. He was forming us for glory, and because we responded by rejecting His voice, we became ruined. He then reformed us.

I believe God 'formed' us all the same, and based on our response to His hands, God continues to form us according to our response of His terms. God knows all, and we don't have to 'experience this' for Him to know how we are going to respond.

We are a spirit made in His image and His likeness; this is ultimately who we are; it is our ability to respond at our own discretion to His sovereign terms. The terms set for all are:

- Respond to our flesh
- Respond to His Spirit

The more you respond to one, the more it molds you into what you become.

This is exactly how everything is 'just' with God, because we all share the same image and likeness of Him, and all respond to His Spirit or our flesh. He shapes us (predestines us) according to His foreknowledge of our response to His sovereign terms. He shapes our eternal destiny, and our earthly destiny.

The more I think about the potter and pot analogy that God gave us, the more I understand why He used it. He sets us down on His wheel, and starts molding us for the purpose of glory. He desires to make a masterpiece (made in the image and likeness of His Son, to receive glory). He will take us from the wheel and put us on His mantle of glory. But if while He is forming us we become spoiled (because of our response), He then reshapes us for a different purpose. Now the vessel will still result in the Potter's glory, but when done, the vessel will be thrown into the fire. I think it's beautiful. It shows the intimacy God had in creating us, how He loved us and wanted all to be saved, and it is our response to Him that determines our purpose.

## **Matt**

//Every human being has these two things to contend. Will we put faith in Him or not. Those are the two factors, and only two factors that matter.//

When I read this, the first thing that came to mind was the parable of the sower in Mark 4. In thinking about it, I have a question:

1. Are all people created the same?
  - a. I have rewritten this question about 8 times trying to think of the best way to clarify it. Do you believe that when we are born we are all equal lumps of clay, and that we are then shaped by our decisions, or do you believe we all have different shapes when we are born, but still continually shaped by our decisions?

## **Billy**

Good question; led to some deep thought.

//Every human being has these two things to contend. Will we put faith in Him or not. Those are the two factors, and only two factors that matter.

When I read this, the first thing that came to mind was the parable of the sower in Mark 4. In thinking about it, I have a question: Are all people created the same?

I have rewritten this question about 8 times trying to think of the best way to clarify it. Do you believe that when we are born we are all equal lumps of clay, and that we are then shaped by our decisions, or do you believe we all have different shapes when we are born, but still continually shaped by our decisions?//

I believe God 'formed' us all the same, and based on our response to His hands, God continues to form us according to our response of His terms. God knows all, and we don't have to 'experience this' for Him to know how we are going to respond.

· We are a spirit made in His image and His likeness; this is ultimately who we are; it is our ability to respond at our own discretion to His sovereign terms. The terms set for all are:

- Respond to our flesh
- Respond to His Spirit

The more you respond to one, the more it molds you into what you become.

This is exactly how everything is 'just' with God, because we all share the same image and likeness of Him, and all respond to His Spirit or our flesh. He shapes us (predestines us) according to His foreknowledge of our response to His sovereign terms. He shapes our eternal destiny, and our earthly destiny.

The more I think about the potter and pot analogy that God gave us, the more I understand why He used it. He sets us down on His wheel, and starts molding us for the purpose of glory. He desires to make a masterpiece (made in the image and likeness of His Son, to receive glory). He will take us from the wheel and put us on His mantle of glory. But if while He is forming us we become spoiled (because of our response), He then reshapes us for a different purpose. Now the vessel will still result in the Potter's glory, but when done, the vessel will be thrown into the fire. I think it's beautiful. It shows the intimacy God had in creating us, how He loved us and wanted all to be saved, and it is our response to Him that determines our purpose.

So I sent this info to Sara, and she brought up a good point. She's detail oriented like me, and said people that know pottery might ask about the fire, because all pots in pottery go into the fire to be refined. That of course made it instantly click and I saw even more application to God's analogy of the Potter and pot.

As believers, we are also refined through the fire, just like a clay pot; God uses our trouble and tribulation and suffering to refine us:

Isaiah 48:10

*"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*

1 Peter 1:7

*so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

1 Peter 4:12

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;*

**Matt**

Yep, I have heard that same thing when talking about Christian sanctification.

//I believe God 'formed' us all the same, and based on our response to His hands, God continues to form us according to our response of His terms. God knows all, and we don't have to 'experience this' for Him to know how we are going to respond.

- o We are a spirit made in His image and His likeness; this is ultimately who we are; it is our ability to respond at our own discretion to His sovereign terms. The terms set for all are:
  - o Respond to our flesh
  - o Respond to His Spirit//

According to the parable of the sower, some are snatched up by the devil, some are choked out by the worries of the world, some have shallow roots and do not survive persecution, and finally some are on good soil and take root. We are the soil in the parable, the seeds are the gospel and the plant that grows from the seeds is faith.

If God is looking at how we will respond to Him in time, then the circumstances we find ourselves in are absolutely relevant. I can see how we could eisegete into this parable the free will of the person causing these things, but I don't see it just from exegeting.

Again, take the person that grows up in a part of the world that hasn't received the gospel. Is the testimony of nature sufficient for God to justly punish that person for non-belief? Yes. Will that natural revelation lead that person to believe in the true God and place their faith in that God they know nothing about? If history is any indication, no, it won't. From the beginning of the world, people have recognized there is a God, but they get it wrong and they worship idols and do other deplorable things in the name of the gods they have constructed to explain what they are seeing.

So, if God is looking at all the available options for the world, and He foreknows one from beginning to end, and predestines that one to take place, He is choosing to allow some people to go to hell, Justly!, when He could have predestined a different plan for the world that may have lead that person to faith.

1. The choice to place our faith in God is determined by our free will.
2. Our free will is based on our desires.
3. Our desires are based on our nature at birth and all subsequent interactions we have the rest of our lives.
  - a. I believe people are made differently. Think about the different personalities of your kids.

Conclusion: Our circumstances, the personality we are born with and the situations we find ourselves in, cannot be separated from our faith in God. A child born to a Christian family has a much better chance of coming and believing in the Son than the person who is born in a tribe somewhere and never hears a word about our faith.

### Billy

//According to the parable of the sower, some are snatched up by the devil, some are choked out by the worries of the world, some have shallow roots and do not survive persecution, and finally some are on good soil and take root. We are the soil in the parable, the seeds are the gospel and the plant that grows from the seeds is faith. If God is looking at how we will respond to Him in time, then the circumstances we find ourselves in are absolutely relevant.//

I think if you understood the picture, you would get this. What you are doing is trying to put our real-life circumstances as part of His foreknowledge, and I am saying that's not the case. (Don't immediately think YES IT IS, read the rest of this to get understanding). God is not looking at how we will respond to Him "in time". He does not need to. He is not limited to that. Our circumstances are a result of His forming and predestining, based on our response to desires.

**Comment [s57]:** Seriously, we spend so much time on foreknowledge and election. Matt was right to keep fighting me on this, because I was WRONG!

God 'formed' us all the same, and based on our response to His hands, He continued to form (predestine) us according to our response. God knows all, and He doesn't have to look ahead to see us 'experience this' for Him to know how we are going to respond.

God has His 'clay' in His hands, and wants to form (predestine) us for glory. God knows His terms of how this glory is received (obey the Spirit by faith). He knows the two desires each person must choose between (flesh or Spirit).

His 'hands' mold the clay with these opposing 'desires', and based on how the clay responds, continues to mold. The more you respond to one, the more it molds you into what you become. If you respond too much to the desires of the flesh, you become spoiled and remade for a different purpose.

God does not have to look ahead in time for this. He knows every creature He will make with His image and His likeness. He knows every creature will have two opposing desires. He knows how each creature will respond to these desires. These desires are not our circumstances; our circumstances are how God, "in time" applies our response to these desires. This is critical in understanding; the sinful desire of sexual lust is the same basic desire, whether it comes from lust of the opposite sex, animals, or whatever else you want. The sinful desire of envy is the same basic desire, whether it comes from envying your neighbor's car, your friend's success, or your brother's good looks. God shapes us and knows how we will respond to the desires of our flesh and His Spirit. Our circumstances that cause these desires are predestined from His foreknowledge of our response to these desires.

(This is an analogy, I don't think God actually had a wheel, and clay, and hands, but it gives us a human understanding of how God did it). He foreknows and molds us based on our response to His hands.

Consider this one unique spirit that God 'formed' and foreknew. God foreknew that when this creature was given the ability to respond between Truth and flesh, that it would choose the desires of its flesh. So God continues molding with His Truth (His power, love, etc) and the flesh (envy, lust, pride, greed), and the creature continued over and over to deny the Truth, and choose the desires of its flesh. This creature really latched on to the desires of pride and arrogance above all else. It spoiled itself, it became ruined. It was remolded for a different purpose. Now God predestined the circumstances of how these desires are played out, based on His foreknowledge of the creature's response. God makes this creature Pharaoh in Egypt. Pharaoh latches on to his own pride and arrogance in response to the Truth; he denies God.

Consider this one unique spirit that God 'formed' and foreknew. God foreknew that when this creature was given the ability to respond between Truth and flesh, that it put faith in the Spirit's testimony. So God continues molding with His Truth and the desires of the flesh, and the creature occasionally follows the desire of its flesh, mostly the desire of fear, but as God's forming continues, the creature denies the desire of fear and puts major faith in God. This creature is destined for glory, and God applies His foreknowledge in predestining this creature to become Peter. Peter hears the Truth, and Christ calls him the "rock" before Peter even says one word to Him. Peter later denies Christ out of fear, but then continues to listen to the Spirit, and his faith grows stronger and he becomes a rock of faith.

You can do this over and over, providing examples of how God forms us and shapes us based on our response to His hands. The sower parable works perfectly with this. There are some people that hear the Spirit, but Satan immediately tells them lies that they choose to believe instead of the Spirit. There are others that hear the Spirit and have faith, but then stop listening to the Spirit, go succumb to the desires from persecution and affliction. Then you have those that hear and put faith in the Spirit, but the worry of the world, and the seductiveness of wealth constricts the Truth they know, and their faith becomes void and unfruitful. Finally you have the person that hears, understands, and puts faith in the Spirit, and their faith is shown to be real by the fruit they produce.

This parable fits perfectly with the Potter and pot. This actually think further emphasizes it:

- Everyone is given the Truth; (because God wants all to be saved and starts His forming them for glory)
- Some immediately deny the Truth, turn to their flesh, and never go back to the Truth; Satan swoops in to give them lies to believe instead of the Truth
  - All those who have been placed throughout the world that received nothing more than the Natural Revelation from the Spirit; they instead create lies and new religions inspired by Satan
- Some accept the Truth, but during the refining process and forming from His hands, they fall away; they put their fleshly pain over their faith
- Some accept the Truth, but turn from it because of their fleshly worldly cares and fleshly greed.
- Some accept the Truth, and keep it, and it grows and produces fruit according to how much they respond to the Spirit

As this parable explains, it is two opposing desires; the flesh and the Spirit. It's our response to flesh vs the Spirit that God used to form us into who we are and what we become.

//Again, take the person that grows up in a part of the world that hasn't received the gospel. Is the testimony of nature sufficient for God to justly punish that person for non-belief? Yes. Will that natural revelation lead that person to believe in the true God and place their faith in that God they know nothing about? If history is any indication, no, it won't. From the beginning of the world,

people have recognized there is a God, but they get it wrong and they worship idols and do other deplorable things in the name of the gods they have constructed to explain what they are seeing.//

All explained by God's analogy of the potter and pot.

//So, if God is looking at all the available options for the world.//

He's not looking at all the available options for the world; I may have said when we first started this conversation 4 months ago, but changed my view a while ago and have stated it many times. I think I have explained this above where you will understand. Every creature has two opposing desires that they have the discretion to respond to; salvation comes to those who respond to the Truth and put faith in the truth.

- //1) The choice to place our faith in God is determined by our free will.
- 2) Our free will is based on our desires.//

True; but we all have two opposing desires; the Spirit or flesh.

//3) Our desires are based on our nature at birth and all subsequent interactions we have the rest of our lives.//

False; as explained above, God does not need physical circumstances in order to know how you respond to desires. God foreknew the type of person you would be, before putting you anywhere. Your physical circumstances are the implementation of His omniscient knowledge of your response to desires.

//Conclusion: Our circumstances, the personality we are born with and the situations we find ourselves in, cannot be separated from our faith in God.//

As explained above, scripture has revealed to us more than this indicates. It's God's foreknowledge and molding, and our response that predestines us into our circumstances.

**\*\*Skype call\*\***

**Billy (11/11/2015)**

So good skype chat today. I was thinking about it through dinner.

First, we do believe in "Sola Scripture", at least according to this definition: Sola scriptura (Latin ablative, "by Scripture alone") is the Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. That doesn't contradict anything that we believe.

I don't think we have any issues at all with the Five solae at least at face value; but this article does say that 'by grace alone' implies much more than I believe.

Christ alone, I agree with too. But you have to clarify what that means; it doesn't mean faith in "Christ alone", it means that our sins are only atoned for because of Christ, and that we can only be covered by His righteousness. All are saved through the work of Christ. Nothing is possible without Christ and His work on the cross. Our faith wouldn't matter, and we could not receive the gift of grace.

**Matt (11/14/2015)**

Been thinking about what we talked about, and there are still some rough spots that need to be grinded out. The issues I still see us disagreeing on (maybe not?) are:

**Comment [MC58]:** During these Skype calls, I remember trying to point out to Billy my confusion with his position.

He was claiming that God was forming us before time, and based on our response, He would predestine us to be elect or not.

The problem I saw was that in God's hands, there is no temptation. In God's hands, apart from being in time and in the flesh, nobody would reject Him.

It was part of his lingering "Foreknown Faith" position that was causing the problem for me. It just didn't make sense.

I called it circular reasoning that God had to find out how we would respond before He could place us in a situation where we would respond the way He knew.

1) The equality of the call people receive.

2) "As you go into all the world, make disciples..." If the call of natural revelation...okay, just realized this is basically the same question from a different angle. It's late!

**Comment [s59]:** If God doesn't show favoritism in regards to justice in wrath and righteousness.

In thinking about this one question (from more than one direction apparently) I have considered both the macro and micro views of history (that's just what I call God's perspective vs ours in my head), and I have considered God's role as molder, and our ability to work with or struggle against Him in that molding. Keeping in mind that his Foreknowledge and Predestining are outside of time, and his molding is in time.

So just thinking about Moses, God foreknew the circumstances that would lead his people to be in Egypt and be enslaved which would allow Him to eventually show His glory and power through releasing them from their masters in a divine way. Moses was born in that roll, and God intervened in his life so that he would fulfill the purpose God had for him. I have to assume God did that based simply on the fact that He had decided to do it prior to the world being created, because if I assume Moses's desire, will, faith, etc. had anything to do with it I commit that circular reasoning we talked about.

Likewise, the Chinese man before Christ has natural revelation. He could respond in faith to the God who is always close at hand, and he may, or he may not. The man has sufficient knowledge of God that God is just in punishing that man if he does not, of his own free will, choose God. That said, God had not determined prior to the foundation of the world to supernaturally intervene in that man's life as he had with Moses because that man did not play a role that required it. The man still has the opportunity for salvation, and the ability to choose God, but his call was not equal to Moses's.

I feel like we get a lot more figured out when we talk it through on a call, but I also like writing the questions out.

### **Billy**

So basically your question relates to the power or effectiveness of the call of God? You believe some might get a more "powerful" call?

One thing I don't believe is 'accurate' in your assessment; you say foreknowledge and predestined are outside of time but His molding is in time.... I don't think this is 100%. I was thinking about this too after we spoke and there are still some things hard to grasp, but that's because:

- God knows and predestines history before it happens, to include His own actions in History. Now nothing can cause God to do anything right? The only thing that can cause God to do anything has to be God Himself, meaning His own character and parameters. If God says He will give grace to anyone with faith, He is causing and predestining His own actions. So while it does look like we are molded in time, it was all foreknow on based on our response. I see molded and predestined almost as synonyms. He knows how we will response to His hands and molds our life and purpose.

So I understand that you are looking at this from a human and in-time perspective. But let's just use our God given ability to reason:

- If God in essence, calls harder to someone than another, doesn't that show favoritism? It may look like it from our view that some got more opportunity than others but based on God's character given in scripture, we are all under the exact same influences (Spirit and flesh) and all have an equal ability to respond. If you hear His voice and listen and search for it, He's going to be right there to help you along.

When I was driving yesterday I was thinking about this too and thought about the many verses that says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

The legal defense of our damnation comes from God providing all the evidence and ability to know Him; likewise it provides the legal defense of Gods character; His impartiality and perfect justness Ned righteousness.

I'll write more maybe later as I'm driving. It's 5:30 AM and I'm getting ready to take off again.

**Billy**

So I'm driving now. I just reread your email after a cup of coffee. I missed a few things you said. You said "God did not supernaturally intervene himself to the Chinese man because his purpose/role didn't require it".

Does God intervene or show you more of himself so you will respond? Or does God intervene or show himself because he knows you will respond?

I think it's the latter. Scripture seems to indicate that if you seek after the God that has made himself known to you, he will show more of himself to you. He's not far from any of us. So this is in terms of salvation only. I think it is all fair and just, and everyone has the same call and ability to receive salvation.

It does raise the question, does God take your response to him that you made of your own choice, and then enhance your will for his purpose? For example, I know this guy Peter is going to put faith in me, so I'm going to use him as an apostle and give him more power for my purpose?

Likewise this guy pharaoh is going to be stubborn and prideful and not put faith in me so I'm going to use him and enhance his stubbornness in order to show my glory?

My only issue with those two examples: God rewards us for our good works for him. That seems to indicate that it is still our choice to do those good works, otherwise those rewards are pointless.

But at the same time I've always believed that in times of suffering or tribulation, such as getting captured by a Satanist who wants me to renounce Christ, I believe God enables or gives me a boost to my faith.

From looking at the big picture of Scripture, I think God knows how people are going to respond and uses his knowledge of their response for his glory.

What do you think?

So in the Gospels, we have doubting Thomas. Jesus shows himself to Thomas, his holes in his hands. He tells Thomas "you believe after you've seen, blessed are those who believe and have not seen."

What do you think this means? It seems to indicate that physical manifestations of God and his power make you more responsible? I believe they are scriptures that seemed indicate that. The more you know and the more you've seen the more you are accountable?

It still seems to indicate our choice. I was thinking about spiritual gifts; God gives you, God gives everyone, spiritual gifts and it is our responsibility and choice to use it. God desires you to be a teacher,

and gives you the power to be a teacher, but it's still your choice and taking hold of that power and actually teaching. And if you do take that power to teach, you are held accountable to what you teach.

Moses took the power and used it wrongly, and was held accountable and not let into the physical promised land.

As a side note, I've been going through Hebrews, and even before Hebrews 6 there is a lot to indicate you can have faith and lose it. I was thinking about this in terms of believers after Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Something that I've always wondered is if you can lose faith and your faith made you born-again does the spirit leave you? If you are one of the first seeds from the parable of the sower, where they actually born again? I've held the view that they were not saved for many years, but I'm starting to go the other way on this.

I think about Saul, who is said to of had the Spirit of God in him. Even with the Spirit of God in him, Saul exercised his will in opposition to God. He did not heed the spirit, but he did his own flesh. It got to a point where God departed his spirit from Saul.

Now I haven't gotten to Hebrews 6 yet in my "new" study but from what I remember it has strong words to show this person as being saved. It says they are enlightened, which seems to indicate a renewal of the mind by the Spirit. It says they tasted the heavenly gift, which seems to indicate they received the gift of grace through faith. And it says they've partaken of the Holy Spirit, which seems to indicate they were indwelt. We will get to this together, but I just wanted to write about it as it popped in my head as I was thinking about spiritual gifts.

So thinking about predestining and things that are occurring in time, and they seem circular to us but it doesn't have to be. I am sure you are familiar with the idea of a wormhole. If you are on Mars and I am on earth, it only seems logical that it's gonna take a really long time for me to see what you're doing and effect what you are doing. It's like 1,000,000 miles away. Of course if I open up a wormhole, and bend time and space, you can be right next to me.

It's like the paper example. But a piece of paper down and put one dot on the left side of the paper and 1.on the right side of the paper. You can either draw an 8 inch line between the two, or bend the paper in half and the two dots are exactly next to each other.

The whole point of this is to say that God is outside of time and yet affecting time, and it may seem circular to us, but it doesn't have to be.

If the dot on the left side of the paper is pre time and the dot on the right side of the paper is in time, God doesn't have to take his pencil and go to the in time dot and then come back to the pre-time dot (Circular).

Basically every point in history exists with God outside of time. Well I just blew my mind.

#### **Matt**

I think your examples of Peter and Pharaoh are again circular reasoning. God doesn't look ahead at someone will respond to his role to then decide his role.

I don't believe belief is the type of work Paul was talking about. Obviously there is some effort involved. Also, John 6:29 "Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

That is a work of faith, simply believing.

It does raise the question. How does the Chinese man "believe in him who [the father] has sent"? We would assume by some special revelation from God that would allow the man to believe in the promise of redemption?

That also makes me wonder if any group has ever believed and been saved outside of the narrative of the Bible after Abraham, or especially after Christ. I feel like we would be able to google that group at this point.

**Billy**

//I think your examples of Peter and Pharaoh are again circular reasoning. God doesn't look ahead at someone will respond to his role to then decide his role.//

I think you're confusing what I'm saying.

**Matt**

That depends on the theory of time you believe.

The A theory would say that God knows all that will occur because He is omniscient, but that those things don't yet exist. Likewise, the things in the past no longer exist. Time is like a ball rolling down a piece of paper that is the timeline of our universe. Only the point where the ball touches the paper is in existence.

You seem to agree more with B theory. All times exist at the same time, the entire timeline on the piece of paper. That would mean baby Billy, current Billy and glorified Billy all exist simultaneously in their respective places on the timeline.

Obviously in both God is outside of time and knows all true things that will happen. The question is, does He know they will happen because He knows the future, or does He know they will happen because they have already happened.

I personally don't believe the events of future me impact the events of current me because it then changes future me. It really actually cancels free will imo.

**Billy**

I would say that I agree with A theory in terms of humans and our perspective. The only reality is the one that we are living in currently. But God is not limited to that, and exists outside of that.

That's why am saying what seems circular for us is not circular for God.

**Matt (12/3/2015)**

I'm sure the subject line gave away the question I am raising.

Macro - God foreknew the world, our actions and His interactions, and then predestined it all to take place the way He chose.

Micro - God calls, sanctifies, glorifies, and generally molds the righteous and unrighteous.

You said you believe we are all born equal lumps of clay, so then the difference between who chooses and who doesn't is based solely on the desire of each person?

If it is based on the desire of each person, and our desires are shaped by a lifetime of interactions with people and the HS, do you agree or disagree that some people have a stronger call than others? I think of Tyre and Sidon when I ask that. I also think of the Great Commission. Why send us, unless our going and making disciples is a greater calling than natural revelation?

I recognize the universal call of creation pointing to the creator, and it's sufficiency for a person to unquestionably know God exists. It is by this that He is just in condemning all who don't believe. They had the option to trust in Him, but they chose disbelief.

**Billy** (Variety of Calls document)

//Macro - God foreknew the world, our actions and His interactions, and then predestined it all to take place the way He chose.//

This occurred before God started time. This was the foreknown and predestined. I think we are perfect on this.

//Micro - God calls, sanctifies, glorifies, and generally molds the righteous and unrighteous.//

This occurs in time; however the molding was foreknown, and in essence, the molding took place before we were created. It seems you are still seeing this as circular; But God does not exist in time, and therefore did not 'look ahead'. For us it appears He looks ahead, or knows the future, but really it's just that "He knows". Putting a clause on what He knows is limiting Him.

//You said you believe we are all born equal lumps of clay, so then the difference between who chooses and who doesn't is based solely on the desire of each person?//

The lumps of clay analogy the Bible uses shows that the molding occurred before time began. However we still 'live out' that molding within time. For instance God knew Pharaoh was going to suppress the Holy Spirit and be a person who followed the desire of pride before He was put 'in time'.

//If it is based on the desire of each person, and our desires are shaped by a lifetime of interactions with people and the HS....//

(I know some of this below might seem repetitive, but bear with me)

This is where we are crossing wires. I don't believe that our 'salvation desires' are based on where/when we are or our lifetime of interactions. God didn't look ahead at these interactions. I think He predestined them based on knowing how we will use our free-will. It goes back to the two competing desires; flesh vs. Spirit.

Consider this formula:

- Fleshly Desires > Man's Spirit < Holy Spirit

Every person's spirit competes with the flesh and the Spirit. Which desire will win out? I believe that our spirits have the free-will to make that choice. I think it's also possible to 'overwrite' that free-will choice by increasing the influence so much that the free-will is taken out. It's not really your free-will at that point, but direct cause.

A human example of this is the “Uncle game”. I don’t want to say uncle, and you want to make me. My will is not to say uncle, and to win. Your will is to make me say uncle and win. You do various things to influence me, mostly involving pain and suffering. Eventually, if the level of pain is too high, I relinquish my free-will and say uncle. You directly caused my choice.

I think this concept also applies to the above formula:

- Fleshly Desires > Man’s Spirit < Holy Spirit

Ok, try to follow me here, as this is just a mathematical analogy to explain a theological idea. I want you to read this, and help me make it better as well. I just explained it to Sara and she liked it, but you’re a different thinker than her. ☺

Man’s spirit is capable of maintaining free-will all the way to Level 6 influence.

So, for example, I still have my free-will if I have:

- Level 6 fleshly desire > Man’s Spirit < Level 6 Holy Spirit

No desire is overwriting my free-will. But I also believe that the Bible shows instances where this does get ‘overwritten’.

For example with Pharaoh: For five miracles, Pharaoh denied God’s demands and said no. God knew the remaining miracles would overwrite Pharaoh’s free-will. God displayed His power in order to influence Pharaoh in fear. Pharaoh continued to hold onto his own pride. God knew the remaining display of His power in the next 5 miracles would cause Level 7 fear, thus overwriting Pharaoh’s Level 6 pride.

Thus, God supernaturally hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Level 7 pride) in order to show His own power.

Another example is when angels have appeared before man, and man fell on their knees out of fear of the power (Level 7 fleshly desire).

And finally at the end of time when every knee will bow and give God glory (Level 7 Holy Spirit)

//... do you agree or disagree that some people have a stronger call than others? I think of Tyre and Sidon when I ask that. I also think of the Great Commission. Why send us, unless our going and making disciples is a greater calling than natural revelation?//

No; I think people have different calls, but the ‘power’ behind the call is always the same: the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:14-18

*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."*

In looking at this, it does make you wonder about the need of a ‘preacher’. But lo and behold, this is a poor translation of the Greek. This isn’t a person per se, but a Greek verb meaning to be heralded or proclaimed. Paul tells us that the proclamation of the “Gospel” has gone out into “all the earth” and the ‘words’ to the “ends of the world”. Paul here shows that the proclaiming of the “Good News” from a

human herald (with feet) is just as equal to the heavenly “voices” proclaiming around the earth. We know from Romans 1 that the supernatural revelation of Truth is given to all of us.

What we can conclude is that the Spirit proclaims the good news. Human vessels are in no way more powerful than the heavenly voice. They are just another way.

1 Cor 2:1

*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.*

Paul was used as a vessel to proclaim the testimony “witness, evidence” of God. This is no more than creation itself.

1 Cor 2:4

*My conversation and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power*

A simple and basic analogy; a masterpiece painting is in front of you. You know that because there is a painting in front of you, that there was a painter. You can learn about the painter from the painting itself. A man comes along and says to you; look at this painting... did you know that a painter made this? This is a simple analogy, but gets the point across. Creation and the heavens display God’s glory and power, and even our own creation displays His power and glory. He has supernaturally revealed to us by the Spirit of Truth who He is and what He wills.

Do we respond to His Truthful testimony by faith, or deny it and indulge our flesh?

Something that just occurred to me that we need to discuss: Flesh vs. Holy Spirit.

The flesh is purely physical & emotional (Gal 5:19-21). Fear, lust, envy, wrath, pride, selfishness, hatred, etc. All these are desires of the flesh. These desires can influence our spirit.

The Spirit is pure supernatural revelatory Truth (1 John 5:6, 1 Cor 2:10, John 16:13). God gives us supernatural revelatory Truth of Himself. This Truth is made known to us and our spirit can respond to Him. It’s the blasphemy of the Spirit that condemns us.

We are saved by Faith. Faith is trusting in the Lord. Trusting in what He says. Trusting in the promise. The promise has been made known to us.

The Truth revealed by the Spirit is always the same Truth, and it comes in a variety of ways: The Truth is revealed through the creation around us, our own creation, our own spirits, our internal knowledge, other’s speaking Truth, and even miracles. But it’s the same power (Spirit) behind the Truth.

I believe God knew before time how we would exercise our free-will with all these factors (add in all the various lusts of the flesh.

He is perfectly fair and just in His righteousness, justice, love, and wrath, all have the same ‘parameters’ in terms of salvation. I believe every person ever created had/has the same equal chance to know and put faith in the God.

**Matt**

I agree with a lot of what you said, but what I disagree with still comes from the circular reasoning I am seeing.

//This occurs in time; however the molding was foreknown, and in essence, the molding took place before we were created. It seems you are still seeing this as circular; But God does not exist in time, and therefore did not 'look ahead'. For us it appears He looks ahead, or knows the future, but really it's just that "He knows". Putting a clause on what He knows is limiting Him. //

God foreknew and predestined His interaction with His creation in time. He foreknew when and where and how He would intervene, hardened, speak directly to, etc, his creation.

His molding had to take place in time. Of course, He knew from beginning to end how He would mold, and what shape He intended for each person and people group, and even how that person would respond.

//The lumps of clay analogy the Bible uses shows that the molding occurred before time began. However we still 'live out' that molding within time. //

You sure you aren't a Calvinist...? ;-)

//I think He predestined them based on knowing how we will use our free-will. //

If you are saying our decisions are involved, then we are talking about something that is in time, micro level, and therefore our circumstances must be considered. If it truly happens before time, not just Him knowing, but the actual molding, then we are all born different and inclined to different desires.

I read through your lvl 6 free will example a couple times. Made me think of pH. We are water at 7 and flesh is acid and the HS is bass. Nerds FTW!

//No desire is overwriting my free-will. But I also believe that the Bible shows instances where this does get 'overwritten'.//

I assume you mean nobody else's desire? Our will = our desire, so that sentence doesn't make sense if you mean our desire is messing with our free will.

//What we can conclude is that the Spirit proclaims the good news. Human vessels are in no way more powerful than the heavenly voice. They are just another way.//

So why go and make disciples? Aside from Christ telling us to, which is obviously enough to answer the question, but why would he have us make disciples?

Found the perfect example in scripture, Acts 10, the whole chapter, but specifically 34 on.

I don't know if I am reading this correctly, but it sounds to me like we are to go and make disciples so that the ones who hear will receive in themselves the HS? I need to research this more. It almost sounds like people can be saved (vs 35) from any nation through faith without knowing Christ, but that faith doesn't necessarily mean the indwelling of the HS. Basically, the man in the Amazon now who never hears of Christ, but fears God and does what is right in God's eyes, is saved exactly like someone from the OT, without the indwelling of the HS, but still by faith?...???

Comment [MC60]: I was seeing it, but in denial.

This particular falling of the HS could be a special situation, similar to Pentecost, and anyone now who has faith in God is indwelt by His spirit, but not in this special way.

**Billy**

//I agree with a lot of what you said, but what I disagree with still comes from the circular reasoning I am seeing.//

I am still not sure where you see circular reasoning. Consider that God does not need to have physical circumstances, or even a physical and spiritual "YOU" in order to know how your free-will would respond to desires of flesh and faith in the Truth. He only needs to know He is going to 'create' Matt, and give you a free-will that can respond to His Truth and desires of flesh. He knows immediately how you would respond to both those influences. Based on Him knowing, He predestines you in history.

//God foreknew and predestined His interaction with His creation in time. He foreknew when and where and how He would intervene, hardened, speak directly to, etc, his creation.//

I agree He had to know this. He knew it beforehand (literal definition of foreknown).

//His molding had to take place in time. Of course, He knew from beginning to end how He would mold, and what shape He intended for each person and people group, and even how that person would respond.//

Let's talk about this; we have two options:

- 1) The molding of what we are or will become takes place before time
- 2) The molding of what we are or will become takes place in time

We know according to the Bible, that those who 'will be saved' and 'will believe' was known before time began. Those God knew are the sheep for His Son. This appears to point to option 1.

**Comment [s61]:** This is true, but it is not how God determined who He would save. Circular.

The potter analogy says the "vessel he was making was spoiled" in His hands and He "remade" the vessel. Some were made for honor, some dishonor.

Technically, we were not 'made' before we were actually made. But God could "know" how we would respond before we were made. I think the 'clay' represents the human spirit. God gives us our spirits when we are born.

God molds us in time; He calls and tries to 'work us' into vessels of honor.

I think you are right in what you said above; our molding must take place in time. God knew our responses to His molding, and if we would 'become spoiled' by suppressing the Truth. He knows how we will use our free-will, and molds us (shapes our lives; how He will use us; how He will interact with us) into either vessels of honor or dishonor, based on our own free-will response.

//I think He predestined them based on knowing how we will use our free-will. //

I am getting mentally fatigued thinking about this, lol. I think I just said what you said here. Scripture says we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. We are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works (based on our free-will response to the Spirit) that God prepared beforehand (God knew our response to the molding, and set up our life to do good works).

//No desire is overwriting my free-will. But I also believe that the Bible shows instances where this does get 'overwritten'.

I assume you mean nobody else's desire? Our will = our desire, so that sentence doesn't make sense if you mean our desire is messing with our free will.//

Ok, our desire does not equal our free-will

- Desire: strongly wish for or want (something).
- Will: used to express desire, choice, willingness, consent
- Freewill: the ability to act at one's own discretion.
- Choice: an act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities.

I think I said this before, but most people desire to indulge their flesh, and desire not to burn in hell. As Christians, we desire not to sin and desire to sin.

We have competing desires. Our will *expresses* our desire or choice.

Basically, we have the ability to act at our own discretion in selecting how we express our choice between indulging our flesh or trusting in the Spirit.

I have freewill.

My desire is to win the game of "uncle".

My will expresses my desire in not saying "uncle".

You come along and twist my finger causing lots o' pain.

My desire is to win the game.

You overwrite and infringe upon my freewill (ability to act at my own discretion) by an outside force.

I still desire to win, but the desire to stop the pain becomes greater.

I express my will by saying "uncle".

I lost my freewill based upon coercion and compulsion.

I don't believe God, based on what we know of Him and His character and what we are taught in the scripture, violates our freewill in terms of salvation.

//So why go and make disciples? Aside from Christ telling us to, which is obviously enough to answer the question, but why would he have us make disciples?//

I think this is a tricky question. First, what is a 'disciple', but a follower of Christ.

How does one become a follower of Christ? By hearing the Spirit's testimony (which comes in a variety of ways) and being put into the family of God... through baptism of the Spirit/regeneration/adoption.

This is the great commission given to the Apostles. Christ commanded *them* to 'Go'. In their going, they were to proclaim the good news (just like it is declared across the whole entire earth, as well as by the prophets of old). Those who hear the good news and believe/trust in the Testimony of the Spirit (that is coming through the Apostles) are spiritually baptized *into* the family of God. They become disciples based on the work of God, who uses all who proclaim the 'good news' as vessels of His good work.

//When we "go" and proclaim the good news, and people believe and become disciples, we now have fellowship with another member of the body of Christ. Each member of the body of Christ has a specific purpose, and edifies other members of the body. Our going helps us grow

spiritually. Our going helps us be around more members of the body of Christ and become edified, and edify others.

Found the perfect example in scripture, Acts 10, the whole chapter, but specifically 34 on.

I don't know if I am reading this correctly, but it sounds to me like we are to go and make disciples so that the ones who hear will receive in themselves the HS? //

The great commission was given to the eleven Apostles. Peter himself even states that Christ commanded "us" (the eleven Apostles who ate and drank with Christ after He rose from the dead) to preach in Acts 10.

I think verse 35, Peter is now starting to understand that God doesn't show partiality just because you are a Jew. Peter was very hard headed and is only starting to understand what Christ meant in some of the things He said. When Christ said go to all nations, He didn't just mean go and find Jews in all nations, but preach to everyone one. That's why Peter goes on after this to proclaim the good news to the gentiles, whom after hearing believed and received (were baptized) the Holy Spirit.

//I need to research this more. It almost sounds like people can be saved (vs 35) from any nation through faith without knowing Christ, but that faith doesn't necessarily mean the indwelling of the HS. Basically, the man in the Amazon now who never hears of Christ, but fears God and does what is right in God's eyes, is saved exactly like someone from the OT, without the indwelling of the HS, but still by faith. ....???

This particular falling of the HS could be a special situation, similar to Pentecost, and anyone now who has faith in God is indwelt by His spirit, but not in this special way.//

I don't think this is saying that. I think Peter realizes he should proclaim the good news to all, and does so, and they receive the promised Holy Spirit after believing, because that's the method of now.

**\*\*Skype Call\*\***

**Matt**

Your distinction between "will" and "desire" is correct. They aren't the same thing.

However, without a desire, can our will act? If our will is the thing that carries out our desires, can someone use their will without wanting something?

**Billy (12/11/2015)**

//Your distinction between "will" and "desire" is correct. They aren't the same thing.  
However, without a desire, can our will act? If our will is the thing that carries out our desires, can someone use their will without wanting something?//

I don't even remember what this pertained to, so I had to go back and check. I am still not sure what the point of this is... what's the question behind the question?

I was saying that God doesn't overwrite our "freewill". And this in turn was about God knowing beforehand, before we were created and put into the 'story of life', how we would use our freewill when confronted choosing God or not (Flesh vs Truth, or Ourselves vs God).

Here is how it seems to work:

Outside influence appeals to our desires which can affect our will.

The world and all the things in it (to include the things Satan and his cohorts do) attempt to influence our fleshly desires in hopes it will cause us to use our will in indulging those desires (and turn our backs on God).

The Spirit of God on the other hand provides us Spiritual Truth (true knowledge of Him and His will, the antithesis of emotion and flesh); this is to influence us to desire Him; the rewards of His promises and to be in His presence. God wants us to use our image of God and chose Him vs. chose ourselves and our flesh.

So it goes back to:

Worldly Influence -> Fleshly Desires -> Man's Spirit (Free Will) <- Spiritual Truth <- Holy Spirit Influence

Back to our definitions:

- Influence: The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior.
- Desire: strongly wish for or want (something).
- Will: used to express desire, choice, willingness, consent.
- Freewill: the ability to act at one's own discretion.
- Choice: an act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities.

So your question: Without desire can our will act?

Well, on simple terms, yes. Remember will is used to express desire, as well as choice.

Take, for example, a multiple choice test, or anything really based on purely facts. You can provide a factual answer without any desire; it is simply based on a response to a question.

What is 5 + 5? Not sure what this pertains to though, I just wanted to say it seems possible.

So I guess I would have to rephrase something: I don't believe God, based on everything we know about Him and His character and what the scriptures teach, that any one person has outside influence that overwrites their freewill in terms of salvation.

For God to call someone with a greater Spiritual 'influence' than someone else would go against His character. Likewise, for God to allow a greater worldly 'influence' on one person vs. another, without an equal spiritual influence would also go against His character. He desires all to be saved. He wants none to perish. He had His Son die for everyone. The Bible indicates that God is perfectly fair, just, righteous, loving, and impartial, etc, and while there are a variety of worldly influences as well as a variety of ways God influences us Spiritually, they are all perfectly just and fair.

God simply uses us 'going' out to spread the Gospel as another way to spread His influence. God knows who out in the middle of nowhere would believe in Him if some 'missionary' came and told them about the gospel. Jesus Himself said that God goes after lost sheep. There isn't one person that could have been saved (a lost sheep) that won't be saved. God knows those who will respond to the Spirit. God knows those that won't. There isn't anyone in history that missed an opportunity to be saved because of a lack of influence or calling by God.

God knows who will respond, and how they will respond, and puts us exactly in a place in time where that will occur. We know this because we know God and His character.

Going back to Tyre and Sidon; having miracles conducted in front of them would have caused them to repent from their behavior. All we know is that they would have stopped being as evil as they were, and God would have withheld His immediate judgment against them. It says nothing of their salvation. His hypothetical miracles would have displayed His power, putting the fear of God into them only so much that they would have stopped doing what they were doing. This is similar to an angel appearing which causes us fear enough prostrate ourselves (it doesn't change our will to worship God necessarily).

From our earthly perspective, there seems to be people that never had an opportunity, but the scriptures teach us otherwise. We think that we're lucky or blessed because we had someone tell us the Gospel, and someone else never had the opportunity. It appears that way to us, but God knows that the person that never had someone physically tell them the Gospel would never have believed anyway. I believe all will be revealed in the judgment, and we will truly see how just, fair, righteous, and loving God is.

#### **Matt**

//For God to call someone with a greater Spiritual 'influence' than someone else would go against His character. //

Isn't this a demonstration of Grace? Unmerited favor? I don't agree that this is against His character.

//Take, for example, a multiple choice test, or anything really based on purely facts. You can provide a factual answer without any desire; it is simply based on a response to a question. What is 5 + 5? Not sure what this pertains to though, I just wanted to say it seems possible.//

The desire is wanting to answer the question in the first place. Do or do not. The answer itself is fact based, sure, but you have to choose to answer which implies a desire to answer for whatever reason.

The reason this is important is that it is at the heart of my problem with your explanation about God looking at our will outside of the context of our life and circumstances. IF we are all equally blank slates when born, then we have to have input from outside ourselves to cause us to desire. Once we desire, we can make a choice based on our will to follow that desire.

If God looks at a person outside of their worldly circumstances and knows whether or not that person will respond in faith, then people are made differently. Some are children of God and some are children of Satan. Some are sheep, some are goats.

Option 3 I guess would be that we are all made the same, blank slates, but that God decides to help some overcome the desires of the flesh by being a stronger influence in their lives than others. He can still desire for all to be saved, but at the same time know he cannot do that because if he did save everyone THAT would contradict his character. The only thing that complies with his character is that he, through mercy, draw some to grace, and, through his justness, allow others to choose their flesh.

I say all that still agreeing with what we talked through. He foreknew and predestined prior to time, etc.

#### **Billy**

//For God to call someone with a greater Spiritual 'influence' than someone else would go against His character.

Isn't this a demonstration of Grace? Unmerited favor? I don't agree that this is against His character.//

For God to call someone with a "greater" influence does not demonstrate grace, it demonstrates favoritism. As you yourself said, Grace is unmerited "favor". Romans states that grace is given to us because of our faith, and that is only possible through Christ (Eph 1:7; Acts 20:24; Rom 5:15-17; Titus 2:11; Eph 2:8-9)....

- *Through Him we received grace*
- *justified freely by his grace*
- *we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*

It is by faith, in accordance with grace. Grace comes from faith. Romans 2 states God's judgment (trouble and distress) and His grace (glory, honor and peace) all come about because of faith or lack of faith, and God doesn't show favoritism in distributing either.

*The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." (Ezra 8:22)*

//Take, for example, a multiple choice test, or anything really based on purely facts. You can provide a factual answer without any desire; it is simply based on a response to a question. What is 5 + 5? Not sure what this pertains to though, I just wanted to say it seems possible.

The desire is wanting to answer the question in the first place. Do or do not. The answer itself is fact based, sure, but you have to choose to answer which implies a desire to answer for whatever reason. //

You are right, and I knew you'd go to this, in that we could possibly need a desire to answer the question to begin with. However there are actions and choices we make that are responsive or reflexive, not based on desire. It's irrelevant to this discussion however.

Looking at this from a spiritual perspective, there isn't an option of staying out of the 'God or not God' choice. Choosing not to respond to the God-mandated response is not an option. God has given the option, and provided the parameters for everyone. Everyone has the fundamental knowledge that is great enough to save them and condemn them. God reveals Himself to all men. God stated anyone who seeks Him, will find Him. That's a promise. That tells us that anyone anywhere who hasn't received 'greater revelation' or 'greater influence' or a 'greater call' didn't want it. If they wanted it, God would have provided it, because He said He would.

God makes everyone know Him and makes everyone know the outcomes of their response to Him. You know what faith in Him brings, and you know what no faith in Him brings. You are either for Him or against Him; no in-between or spectators.

//The reason this is important is that it is at the heart of my problem with your explanation about God looking at our will outside of the context of our life and circumstances.

IF we are all equally blank slates when born, then we have to have input from outside ourselves to cause us to desire. Once we desire, we can make a choice based on our will to follow that desire.//

First, it appears you don't think God is capable of knowing how we will use our freewill and respond to an influence (from the world or from Him) without putting us in the world first? I can know how something is going to play out before it actually plays out. Maybe explain how you don't think this is possible?

Second, we are not blank slates. We all have the image and likeness of God. We all have inherent knowledge of good and evil. We all come to know the law. We all know eternity, and sin, and that God exists, and that our sin results in damnation, etc. Every person is given the same set parameters. No one is a blank slate.

Here is how I see it:

- God foreknows us and 'who we are' and unique individuals made in His image and likeness.
- God foreknows the parameters of our being, to include the knowledge we have.
- God foreknows our response to influences and desires of the flesh and Spirit.
- God foreknows who, and by what influence, we will exercise our will to trust in Him.
- God predestines those that would/could trust in Him to a life made up of influences to cause us to Trust in Him.
- God also predestines those that would never trust in Him to a life made up to show His glory

What part causes you confusion, because I am still lost at that point.

*//If God looks at a person outside of their worldly circumstances and knows whether or not that person will respond in faith, then people are made differently.//*

God is not looking at how we respond in faith outside of our desires. He is looking at how we will respond in every combination of desire (the influence of the world, and the influence of the Spirit). He knows if there is anyway way we could be saved. God knows how we will respond and exercise our freewill in every influence and combination of influence.

I think that's exactly what you said before just a few emails ago here:

*//He predestined us knowing **how we will use** our free-will. //*

God knows exactly how we will use/exercise our freewill, and then predestines our life into being. He ensures we get the right experiences in our life that will cause us to come to put faith in Him. For those that would never put their faith in Him, He still predestines their life to show His glory.

*//Option 3 I guess would be that we are all made the same, blank slates, but that God decides to help some overcome the desires of the flesh by being a stronger influence in their lives than others. He can still desire for all to be saved, but at the same time know he cannot do that because if he did save everyone THAT would contradict his character. The only thing that complies with his character is that he, through mercy, draw some to grace, and, through his justness, allow others to choose their flesh.//*

I don't believe scripture goes with this Option 3 at all. But what is your option 1 or option 2?

**Matt**

*//First, it appears you don't think God is capable of knowing how we will use our freewill and respond to an influence (from the world or from Him) without putting us in the world first? I can*

know how something is going to play out before it actually plays out. Maybe explain how you don't think this is possible?//

You didn't understand my point apparently. Of course I believe God can foreknow how something will play out, and you should know that I believe that at this point. A human example of what I am saying is let's say you have this gift of foresight that lets you see everything that could happen one minute into the future, kind of like that movie Next, but not sucky.

You are on the Price is Right holding a Plinko token and you are above the board ready to drop it. You know that depending on where you drop it, with what kind of spin, etc, that it will fall a certain way. It will plinko its way off the pegs until it reaches the little winning bucket you knew it would.

Now, hold that Plinko token in your hand and tell me what it will do outside of the board. If you drop it, will it act any differently than 1,000 other Plinko tokens dropped outside of the board? Nope! It will drop directly to the ground. What makes each Plinko token different is where you intend to put it on the board. You foreknow the outcome of the token based on the possible routes it can take on the board, and every possible route is, to tie it back, a different person. Outside of the context of the board, the world, every person falls straight to the ground.

His foreknowledge is of how we bounce around within the world, imo. To move things one way or another, He intervenes. It is our will that reacts to situations and bounces us from one peg to another, but it is God's foreknowledge and predestining that set us on that route.

//I think that's exactly what you said before just a few emails ago here:  
He predestined us knowing how we will use our free-will.//

Did you actually read that email? I really wonder if you did or not because that line about predestining us knowing how we will use our free will is something you typed. I copied and pasted it and then commented on it. Go back and check. 40 is messing with your memory I think ;-)

//God is not looking at how we respond in faith outside of our desires. He is looking at how we will respond in every combination of desire (the influence of the world, and the influence of the Spirit). He knows if there is anyway way we could be saved. God knows how we will respond and exercise our freewill in every influence and combination of influence.//

So God ran simulations? He foreknew a person, ran a bunch of simulations, and then placed that person to walk in whatever works God decides based on how He knows that person will turn out, faith or no faith?

If everyone receives the same set of parameters, what separates them? I don't disagree that God makes Himself unquestionably known. I don't disagree that everyone is without excuse. I don't disagree that everyone receives a sufficient call to salvation through faith. I don't disagree that everyone has dueling natures within them, flesh versus spirit. The only way I can agree with your view is if God made people to be distinct, to be different; He gave them different characters, different personalities. There has to be something defining between people that causes one person to choose one way in this simulation and another person to choose another way.

**Billy** (12/11/2015)

//You didn't understand my point apparently. Of course I believe God can foreknow how something will play out, and you should know that I believe that at this point.//

At this point I am not sure what it is we are trying to figure out. We need a summary or something. But in moving on down your response here, I think I have figured it out.

//A human example of what I am saying is let's say you have this gift of foresight that lets you see everything that could happen one minute into the future, kind of like that movie Next, but not sucky.

You are on the Price is Right holding a Plinko token and you are above the board ready to drop it. You know that depending on where you drop it, with what kind of spin, etc, that it will fall a certain way. It will plinko its way off the pegs until it reaches the little winning bucket you knew it would.

Now, hold that Plinko token in your hand and tell me what it will do outside of the board. If you drop it, will it act any differently than 1,000 other Plinko tokens dropped outside of the board? Nope!!

But God knows how a Plinko will fall on every plinko board, from every spot dropped, with every possible method. He knows every board that could ever be.

//It will drop directly to the ground. What makes each Plinko token different is where you intend to put it on the board.

You foreknow the outcome of the token based on the possible routes it can take on the board, and every possible route is, to tie it back, a different person. Outside of the context of the board, the world, every person falls straight to the ground.//

But Plinko's don't have choices or a will. It sounds like what you are saying is our choices don't matter. We are not simply causal beings. An animal is a causal being, but we are not. Our circumstances are not like gravity and spin (like a Plinko falling). We have individual free-will to determine which way we want to go from where we are. It sounds like what you are saying is that every person is a product of exactly where they are in time, and if someone else was put in your 'body' and in your life, they would make the same decisions as you. I don't agree with that at all. We are unique miraculous creatures with His image, the ability to choose. I will explain this below.

//His foreknowledge is of how we bounce around within the world, imo. To move things one way or another, He intervenes. It is our will that reacts to situations and bounces us from one peg to another, but it is God's foreknowledge and predestining that set us on that route.//

Still confused with what you believe. God predestined Matt Chisolm to be born 30 years ago, etc. And foreknew how you would respond in that life? That puts predestined first.

//I think that's exactly what you said before just a few emails ago here:  
He predestined us knowing **how we will use** our free-will.

Did you actually read that email? I really wonder if you did or not because that line about predestining us knowing how we will use our free will is something you typed. I copied and pasted it and then commented on it. Go back and check. 40 is messing with your memory I think.//

I went back, and of course you are right. I think it's because you separated the one line, and the fact that you have all sorts of different fonts and colors and sometimes mess up on changing one color vs the next, and don't have good spacing between our thoughts. It's all your fault, and that's what I am sticking too.

Comment [MC62]: Typical! ☺

//So God ran simulations? He foreknew a person, ran a bunch of simulations, and then placed that person to walk in whatever works God decides based on how He knows that person will turn out, faith or no faith?//

No simulations were needed. God knew. I wrote it before as 'looking at how we will respond' as an explanation of God on our terms. As soon as He knew the parameters of human 'life' (Choose Him or our flesh, God-given knowledge, etc), and knew He was going to create you, He knew exactly what choices you would make when confronted with influences in every combination.

//If everyone receives the same set of parameters, what separates them?//

What makes us different is our spirit's made in His image and likeness. God calls us 'little gods' because of the unique nature of Himself He made us with. The Father not only says this, but Christ quotes Him. We are marvelous and miraculous beings with the ability to make choices based on our *own* discretion. He gave us dominion over the earth, and over our eternal destiny.

We are not simply a product made up of our past events (although they provide an influence). We are not a product of our circumstances and 'nature' like an animal. A dog is a dog because of its nature, and because of its circumstances. We are so much more than that. We, as special creatures with His image and likeness *are a product of how we chose to respond to outside influences*. We are our choices.

We can act and chose at our own discretion for our eternal fate. Of course God is the big G, and He knows how we will chose to respond in every situation.

//I don't disagree that God makes Himself unquestionably known. I don't disagree that everyone is without excuse. I don't disagree that everyone receives a sufficient call to salvation through faith. I don't disagree that everyone has dueling natures within them, flesh versus spirit.//

Ok, this is good. I thought you agreed with all of this and it's good to know at least I got that right.

//The only way I can agree with your view is if God made people to be distinct, to be different; He gave them different characters, different personalities. There has to be something defining between people that causes one person to choose one way in this simulation and another person to choose another way.//

Ok, now I understand your dilemma. You are, in essence, using psychology in looking at man and his behavior. But as I stated above, we are not a product of our environment and circumstances (I am not saying it does not have influence on us, but it does not make us who we are).

I am not sure if you have heard of Stephen R. Covey. He is an author of the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People". He's one of the 25 most influential Americans and leadership authorities. Anyway, he says it really well in one of his books:

"I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions." Another way of saying that "You are a product of your choices, not a victim of your circumstances."

This is exactly what makes humans 'above' all creatures on earth.

Unsaved souls may try to 'fight' against God at their judgment and say that they were who they were because of their circumstances, but that holds no weight because it's not true. God will show that they would make the same choices, because that's who they are and have chosen to be by their own will. All will be revealed at their judgment. God will show all what is truly in their 'hearts' and 'minds' (Jer 17:10).

I think we are getting somewhere. Try to summarize what we agree, and what we need to 'figure out' together. I don't feel we are debating right now, I think we're trying to figure out how to make sense of some things.

God Blinding and Hardening??? These are good questions, and lead to a healthy discussion.

Concerning Romans 11:2-8: I discussed this in my Romans study.

We have to take all of this in context. Paul continues with Romans in showing that God has not rejected all of Israel. Like Paul, there are still those that are not stubborn and disobedient, but have instead have taken God's outstretched hand and trusted in Him. These are those that He foreknew. Recall from Romans 8:28-30, God has foreknown and predestined His creation and plan. Those whom He foreknew, He predestined them into His perfect plan, exactly in the place and position in time that He willed.

Paul shows how all throughout the history of the Israelites, there has always been those that have not been stubborn and disobedient (by their own choice). Paul cites that during the rebellious time of Israel during Elijah, there were 7,000 Israelites that did not bow down to the knee of Baal. Let's look at Paul's cited passage in context:

1 Kings 19:15-18

*The Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. Yet I **will leave** 7,000 in Israel, **all the knees that have not bowed to Baal** and every mouth that has not kissed him."*

Elijah has just escaped from Jezebel, who was trying to kill him. Elijah ran for his life into the wilderness. He then tells God to take his life, because he is no better than his fathers. Elijah falls asleep, and is awoken by an angel of the Lord who gives him bread. This bread enables him to travel 40 days and nights, just on the bread given to him by God. Elijah runs all the way to Mount Horeb. While there in a cave, Elijah tells God that Israel has forsaken God's covenant, and torn down His altars, killed His prophets, and Elijah felt he alone was left. This passage above is how God responds.

God tells Elijah that He will leave 7,000 in Israel, *all those that did not bow to Baal and kiss him*. This passage is not referring to those that God just forced to believe, but those that remained faithful to Him. They were faithful to God, receiving His grace. Reading the passage from Kings in context, we see that those did not bow down to Baal are those that maintained their faith in God.

It says in Romans 11:4 that that "I have reserved". The most used (in the Bible) and most common meaning for this Greek verb is "left behind", the exact definition of the Hebrew word used in 1 Kings. Those "left behind" remained faithful to God; God foreknew and predestined, and there has always been a remnant in the history of Israel. Paul says even to the present day (of his writing) that there are still those in Israel that have remained faithful, and have received God's grace.

*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (verse 5)*

The word here for remnant is only used once in the New Testament. It's from the root word, *leipo*, which also means to leave behind, citing us back to 1 Kings and the previous verse of those that are left behind. Is Paul stating that those back in the time of Elijah, and those Israelites, like him, who have put faith in God, were chosen and then received grace? Absolutely not. That would mean God has shown favoritism in His righteousness. They were chosen *according to grace*, which always is *received by faith*. Paul has made the case over and over throughout his letter to the Romans that *grace is received through faith*.

Moses had God's favor (literal meaning of grace), because of His faith. The 7,000 like Elijah had God's grace because of their faith. Paul and the remnant of his day had grace because of their faith.

Going back to 1 Kings we see they made the choice to remain faithful to God. Now from God's perspective, having foreknown all of this, and then predestined His plan, He has 'reserved' this remnant in His perfect plan. They received grace because of their faith, they are where they are in history because God predestined them and reserved or left them exactly where He wanted them to be in His perfect plan.

Election and predestination are God "reserving"; all come *after* God's foreknowledge of who would have faith in Him. Paul even cited in verse 2 God's foreknowledge with Israel. This takes us back to Paul's original discourse on foreknowledge, predestination, called, justified, and glorified. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. His plan predestined that there would always be those with faith within His people. God can, and has arranged His plan perfectly. When His plan started, every single person He knew would believe are His elect.

We know this "reservation" of people were reserved because of their faith. Paul even emphasizes this is grace by saying it's not "based on works", which is the antithesis to faith.

Just like then, God has a remnant from among Israel that he has elected to save.

Foreknowledge of those who have faith → predestined/elected where He wants them in His perfect plan.

Unlike then, however, God is not looking at their works. He is not considering what they did or did not do. Paul contrasts the "work" of the Israelites, who refused to worship Baal, with grace, which has nothing to do with the works of the one receiving it.

God absolutely was NOT looking at the 7,000 Israelites *works*, God never gives grace based on works. They refused to worship Baal and kiss him because they kept their *faith*. Their works were a product of their *faith* just like all who have true genuine faith today.

Romans 11:7-10

*What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written:*

*"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day."*

*And David says:*

*"May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."*

The elect, the ones chosen by grace, were given the promise of Abraham. Others were actively hardened so they could not see or understand the gospel. This is absolutely an infringement on their free will, but it does not diminish God in any way.

The elect are chosen because of their faith, and based on the work of Christ's death, we receive the Grace of God. You are reading this out of context. Paul has shown us all throughout Romans thus far that because YOU are stubborn and reject the Truth of God, which He has made known to you, that God delivers you over to your own desires. The people of Israel rejected God, even though He saved them from Egypt, and provided signs and wonders among them for 40 years. They rejected His words and turned to false idols. They honored Him with their lips, but not with their hearts. Because of their evil and rejection of the Truth, God gave them a spirit of stupor. This was prophesied through the Psalmist, who said that:

Psalm 69:26

*For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten*

The Jews persecuted Christ, and denied the Truth that God made known to them. Because of their evil, their eyes have been darkened.

Romans 11:23

*And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.*

And this stupor, this hardening, is NOT overwriting their freewill to go back to God for salvation. As Paul tells us just a few verses later concerning Israel and their 'stupor', God still has His hands outstretched to the people of Israel. If they turn back to God, and put their trust in Him, He will accept them, grafting them back into being a child of promise. Their freewill to choose God is still in-tact.

And to John:

John 12:37-40

*When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*

*Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah 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."*

This is a hardening not based on the will of the Israelites, but based on God fulfilling prophecy. He actively kept some of them from understanding. In Matthew 13 and Mark 4 Jesus explains that he spoke in parables so that the ones who were not supposed to understand would not. Again it is a fulfillment of prophecy by Isaiah.

Prophecy is the same as predestination. The plan has been laid out by God before time began. Just because it references something being fulfilled doesn't mean any 'will' was violated in the process. It is the same with foreknown and predestined; man's will wasn't violated, but works perfectly with God's predestination.

If we were to interpret John 12:40 the way that you seem to be doing, God had to intervene so these people *wouldn't* believe. That does not fit with God's love, justice, and righteousness. I don't believe

you think it is within His character either. Now it IS within His power, but it's not within His character. He desires all to be saved.

As a side note; for a Calvinist, this verse is a rough one: These totally depraved sinners were going to repent and believe (without God's regeneration first) and then God had to step in to make sure they wouldn't. Obviously that makes no sense. In Calvinism, there is no way for men to repent and believe unless God miraculously makes them, but then God wouldn't have needed to blind their eyes and harden their hearts.

Essentially, your interpretation of this passage blames God for the impenitence and unbelief of man. Yet God *always* blames men for their stubbornness and unbelief. Jesus rebuked entire cities for not repenting and even marveled at their unbelief. This implies that men could have repented and could have believed, as God wanted them to, but they chose not to contrary to the desire of God.

Furthermore, rather than blaming God for the unbelief of men, the Bible blames the devil (2 Cor 4:4; Luke 8:12).

God tries to save men, and the devil works to destroy them. They are not on the same team. God doesn't violate the freewill of anyone that would genuinely want to trust in Him. To interpret John 12 to mean that it was God's will for these men not to believe because God doesn't want them to be saved, is accuse God of doing that which the Bible elsewhere blames the devil for. It is the devil that exerts energy and influence to keep men from salvation, not God. God is the one who is exerting His energy and influence to save as many as He possibly can, in consistency with the freedom He has granted to the universe.

The context of verse 38-39 is how men have not believed the Lords report (by the miracles Christ performed directly in their midst). God prophesied to these men and the result was that these men closed their eyes and hardened their hearts.

They closed their eyes and they hardened their hearts ***in response to the message God gave to them.***

The Jews knew of God; they knew the Truth, but they refused to trust in God. They did not want to trust and obey God, and instead they suppressed the Truth of Christ's miracles before them. God knew their hearts, and still presented the gospel message to them knowing full well they would blind themselves to the Truth and harden their own hearts to what they saw and what they knew to be the Truth. Christ, in performing the miracles before them was causing them to harden their own hearts. God blinded them and hardened them only by presenting the truth to their hearts and minds, the truth which they choose to close their eyes and harden their hearts to.

I would suggest pulling up Isaiah 6:10 in [nebtible](#) and look at the notes on the bottom about this passage:

The reason that they could not believe was simply because they would not believe.

Notice how this passage is stated in Matthew 13:14-15

*In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,*

*You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;*

*You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;*

*For the heart of this people has become dull,*

*With their ears they scarcely hear,*

*And **they have closed their eyes,***

***Otherwise** they would see with their eyes,*

*Hear with their ears,*

*And understand with their heart and return,  
And I would heal them.'*

The people closed their own eyes, OTHERWISE they would see with their own eyes. God still sent His voice to them, and still have them signs they could see, but they chose to close their eyes.

And here we have the passage in Acts 28:27:

*For the heart of this people has become dull,  
And with their ears they scarcely hear,  
And **they have closed their eyes**;  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
And hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart and return,  
And I would heal them."*

We have the exact same phrase; they closed their eyes and hardened their hearts when God provided His voice and His signs to them. In giving signs and wonders to a group already denying the Truth, you have a chance to cause them to harden their hearts even more to the Truth. You and I see this every day!

Whether or not a person hardens their heart to the voice of God is a matter of their own free choice, hence the scriptures command men not to harden their hearts when they hear His voice (Ps 95:8; Heb 3:8; Heb 3:15; Heb 4:7)

Simple analogy: You preach the Truth to Catholics who are ingrained into their own way of thinking. They know the Truth, but have blinded themselves to it, and hardened their heart to it. They are not at a place (and may never be) where they can hear the truth and repent and believe.... If you were to go and present further Truth to them, you would be indirectly turning them off to the Truth; you would be indirectly hardening their heart every time you tried to 'persuade' them to the Truth.

In reading Isaiah, you have God telling what He wants the preacher to do. That is, go and proclaim truth to them truth that will result in blinding their eyes. Go and proclaim the law and the will of God, and the effect will be, owing to the hardness of their heart, that their eyes will be blinded and their hearts hardened.

God knew that this would be the result – as it was to be the effect of the message, His commanding Isaiah to go and proclaim it was the same in effect, or in the result, as if He had commanded him to blind their eyes and harden their hearts. John reflects that God in effect did the hardening, whereas the other scriptures show that it still is our freewill choice in rejecting the Truth.

God sends us to proclaim the Truth, even though He knows it will cause many to just harden their own hearts even more. But to some, and the offer is *always* there, they will repent and accept the Truth, and put Trust in God. This is what God says of Israel right now; they are hardened, but some will accept the Truth, and He will graft them back into the tree. It all makes perfect sense when you take it with the whole of scripture and in context.

[There are additional missing emails between here and the next where I come to the conclusion, based on us discussing Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 over and over and us coming to see corporate election. Corporate election is something I came to see on my own. I had never heard of it taught before. Matt had heard of it, but never put stock in it because it didn't fit with his views of Calvinism].

**Billy** (Discussing Romans 8:28-30)

Let's list what we agree on; these fundamental foundations. These can help assist us in interpretation.

#### **BEFORE TIME**

- **God predestined**
  - This is God's perfect plan laid out exactly as He set into motion. All things will happen for God's glory, even those who have rejected God will be used to show God's glory.

#### **WITHIN TIME**

- **God Calls**
  - Universal Call to all people everywhere by the power of the Holy Spirit through the miracle of Creation
    - Makes us unquestionable know God exists, His power, His glory, His righteousness, the consequence of sin and rebellion, and that God deserves our praise, honor, and we should seek Him. If we seek Him, we will find Him. To deny Him is to deny the Truth of the Holy Spirit and commit Blasphemy of the Spirit. This call makes all fully capable of receiving salvation, and denying this call leaves everyone no legal defense against God's wrath.
- **God Justifies**
  - Those that have faith in God receive the gift of grace to salvation, which is only possible by the atoning work of Christ who is the Savior of all men, having paid the penalty for their sins. It is by faith that we are covered by Christ's righteousness and our minds our renewed and our spirits are regenerated. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit, and are adopted into the family of God. We are circumcised (or separated) from being slaves of the flesh (that is death) and instead are slaves to the Spirit (that is eternal life). We are set-apart (sanctified) by our faith, and are to seek further earthly sanctification (that is, following and becoming more like Christ). We are re-created and empowered for good works, which comes as a product of our faith and love of God.

#### **IN ETERNITY**

- **God will Glorify**
  - At the resurrection, we will receive new glorified bodies that will not die, incorruptible, glorified, powerful, and without a sin nature.

#### **GOD'S CHARACTER**

- God is Just, Holy, Righteous, Merciful, Loving, All-Knowing, All-Powerful
  - God acts according to His nature
    - God's nature and examples of His nature are given to us in scripture
  - God desires all to be saved / God does not wish for any to perish and all to come to eternal life
    - All are not saved, therefore there must be a reason that God's desire is not fulfilled
  - God gives His grace (unmerited favor) to those that have faith; this is His set promise
    - Grace does not come from any work, as then it becomes an obligation
  - God does not show any impartiality or favoritism in administering His wrath, or His grace/righteousness
    - Everyone has the ability and parameters to covered by God's wrath or covered by His righteousness

## MAN'S CHARACTER

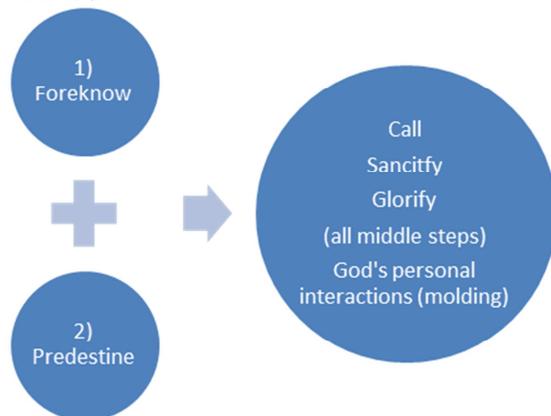
- All are created in God's image and likeness
  - We are spiritual beings who are housed in a physical body (our tent)
  - We all have the knowledge of good and evil
  - We all have eternity written on our hearts
- Because of Adam, all men have bodies corrupted by sin
  - Man uses his spirit to make freewill decisions; our decisions determine who we are
    - We can respond to the desires of our corrupted body (in which Satan's uses to persuade us)
    - We can respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to faith and then obedience

### Matt

What we agree on...

Before time, God first foreknew and then predestined the world. He saw how the world would play out after allowing the fall, determined to intervene in different times and places, and then set it all in motion.

Within that plan He set in motion is everything we know and experience. See fancy shmancy chart below J. This is Romans 8.



What we disagree on is whether God would frustrate the will of man. Essentially, that is what our discussion back and forth comes down to. You say no.

I believe He can, has, does and will.

Romans 11

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? <sup>3</sup>“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” <sup>4</sup>But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

Back in Elijah's time, he detested the wickedness of Israel and asked God to punish them all, but God did not because 7k had not worshiped Baal.

<sup>5</sup> So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Just like then, God has a remnant from among Israel that he has elected to save. Unlike then, however, God is not looking at their works. He is not considering what they did or did not do. Paul contrasts the “work” of the Israelites, who refused to worship Baal, with grace, which has nothing to do with the works of the one receiving it.

<sup>7</sup> What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, <sup>8</sup> as it is written,

“God gave them a spirit of stupor,  
eyes that would not see  
and ears that would not hear,  
down to this very day.”

The elect, the ones chosen by grace, were given the promise of Abraham. Others were actively hardened so they could not see or understand the gospel. This is absolutely an infringement on their free will, but it does not diminish God in any way.

And in John:

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. <sup>37</sup> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, <sup>38</sup> so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

<sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

<sup>40</sup> “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.”

This is a hardening not based on the will of the Israelites, but based on God fulfilling prophesy. He actively kept some of them from understanding. In Matthew 13 and Mark 4 Jesus explains that he spoke in parables so that the ones who were not supposed to understand would not. Again it is a fulfillment of prophecy by Isaiah.

In your text you mentioned the blinding or hardening being based on the actions of the people, after their rejection. You could look at these prophecies as punishment for what the people were doing back in Isaiah’s time, but salvation is on an individual basis, so you have God punishing and hardening people based on the decision of their ancestors. This is still a frustration of their will.

**Comment [MC63]:** Unfortunately, the Book of Texts was lost to time. We only have mentions of it here and there within the remains of the Book of Emails.

I don’t want to go super long, so I am not going dive into the foreknowledge, molding, circular reasoning discussion. The way I see it, if you come to the conclusion that God does override the will of man, then that other discussion is moot.

**Matt**

I think I have narrowed the argument down to three main factors

1. Everyone is created equal
2. Everyone receives an equal call

3. Circumstances (time and place) are not a factor in their decision

The way I see it, if all three of these statements are true, everyone will choose the same way. What makes us different is that at least one of these, possibly more, is false.

**//GOD'S CHARACTER**

God is Just, Holy, Righteous, Merciful, Loving, All-Knowing, All-Powerful  
God acts according to His nature  
God's nature and examples of His nature are given to us in scripture  
God desires all to be saved / God does not wish for any to perish and all to come to eternal life  
All are not saved, therefore there must be a reason that God's desire is not fulfilled  
God gives His grace (unmerited favor) to those that have faith; this is His set promise  
Grace does not come from any work, as then it becomes an obligation  
God does not show any impartiality or favoritism in administering His wrath, or His grace/righteousness  
Everyone has the ability and parameters to be covered by God's wrath or covered by His righteousness//

Here is a point that has stuck out to me. When it speaks of God's impartiality, I still think, in Romans 2, that Paul is saying God is not partial to one people group over another. He doesn't distinguish between Jews and Greeks.

I think this point you have is wrong the way it is worded, because God does indeed show partiality. He is partial to those who have faith. He shows favoritism and loves those who have faith.

Maybe reword: "God does not show favoritism in His calling to all mankind, having made Himself unquestionably known to all, but in administering His wrath and His grace, He is partial to those who have faith,"

**//MAN'S CHARACTER**

All are created in God's image and likeness  
We are spiritual beings who are housed in a physical body (our tent)  
We all have the knowledge of good and evil  
We all have eternity written on our hearts//

Last point is vague. Not sure I know what that means.

We are all capable of displaying His characteristics. Love, justice, mercy, creativity, self-reflection, etc. The *imago dei* is something we ARE, not something we possess.

//Because of Adam, all men have bodies corrupted by sin  
Man uses his spirit to make freewill decisions; our decisions determine who we are//

"our decisions determine who we are"...yea, not sure about that. It shapes us, but initially I believe we are all different, and then our decisions build upon that.

**Billy**

//Here is a point that has stuck out to me. When it speaks of God's impartiality, I still think, in Romans 2, that Paul is saying God is not partial to one people group over another. He doesn't distinguish between Jews and Greeks. //

I agree, but what Paul is saying is that God's wrath and grace is not determined by your race, or any other factor (later Paul talks about gender, wealth, intelligence, etc); it's all about whether or not you have faith. The salvation result is open and fair to all. He gives all the ability to know Him and come to Him by the calling of the Holy Spirit.

//I think this point you have is wrong the way it is worded, because God does indeed show partiality. He is partial to those who have faith. He shows favoritism and loves those who have faith.//

Yes, God does show favor to those of faith. I understand what you are saying, but I think you are misunderstanding what I am saying. I am saying the HOW is impartial. If you don't have faith, you will receive His wrath (in the end). If you have faith, you will receive His grace. He does not show favoritism in dispensing wrath and grace. I am talking about dispensing. God gives us His parameters for how His wrath and grace is dispensed. He doesn't give anyone bonus points or whatever by their circumstances; it all comes to whether they have faith. All have life and death before them, the blessing and the curse. .

//Maybe reword: "God does not show favoritism in His calling to all mankind, having made Himself unquestionably known to all, but in administering His wrath and His grace, He is partial to those who have faith," //

This is still not what Romans says. The showing no favoritism is the administration of His wrath and grace. He set the parameters, and these are known by all, and thus He shows no impartial judgment.

But I see where you might want clarification in what I said. How about: "God does not show favoritism in His calling to all mankind, having made Himself unquestionably known to all. Everyone knows exactly what God requires to be covered by His grace, or to be on the end of His wrath: that is Faith. There is no favoritism based on your race, your gender, your personality, your works, or your circumstances in life. It all rests on His one parameter: Faith in Him. Those who have put faith in Him will receive His grace. Those who deny Him will be on the end of His wrath."

#### **Matt**

//Everyone is created equal; Equal in the sense of having the ability to choose God or not, competing with the flesh and the Spirit//

I am going to spend the day going through arguments for total depravity to see if they have merit anymore. Gotta iron out the wrinkles in my mind ☺

//Everyone receives an equal call ; Equal in the sense of the Holy Spirit making God known, knowing what He wants, and to seek Him//

I am still working through this one also.

I believe there is a minimum He makes known through creation that makes all people responsible.

I think there are cases where He provided additional stimuli towards the truth that, had it been withheld, would have resulted in the people not believing (at least as far as we can tell with our limited view on time).

According to this, 100% of all hardening has occurred because of the will of the people, which is verifiable.

//Ecc 3:11; I have always seen, and I think most interpreters agree, that we all know we are 'going to live forever'; that we will continue after our mortal death; it's all about where we will be based on our choice in relation to God.//

Church boy here ☺. I don't remember not being in church, so I guess I assumed the eternity thing was in my head because I grew up with it. Thank you God.

**Billy**

Alright, per our skype call and messages on election and Romans 8 and Ephesians 1.

Romans 8:28-30

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Paul is providing hope for believers under suffering and persecution. He has just discussed the glory that will be revealed at the resurrection, when we receive our glorified bodies and our revealing as children of God. Now he provides more encouragement by explaining that in the end, it all works out for those who love God.

Many people have completely taken Romans 8:28-30 out of context, and taken it to mean much more than it does. Here is a paraphrase of what these verses are saying:

For those **who love God**, it all works together when you receive your inheritance at the resurrection. You are presently called/invited according to His purpose (which He is about to state). He knew beforehand that those who love Him will be chosen to be transformed to the image of His Son. Christ is the firstborn among many children of God. Those that God decided beforehand to transform to the image of His Son, He also called through His Son, justified through His Son, and will glorify through His Son.

God knows who love Him (this is written in the present tense), and everything works out at the end for those who love Him. Those who love God are presently "the invited" according to His purpose. This word "called" or "invited" is not a verb here, but an adjective describing the current status of those whom love God. The previous linking verb "are" is written in the present tense. So the correct reading is "are presently the invited according to His purpose".

The purpose is not hidden, as well shall soon see. God knew beforehand (past tense) those who would love Him. God did not determine who loves Him or who will love Him. God determined that all those that love Him will be transformed to the image of His Son at the resurrection. They will not only receive a glorified heavenly body like Christ, but the most holy and blessed state-of-mind, like Christ. They will receive their full adoption and inheritance as sons of God.

This is exactly the same purpose from other passages:

Philippians 3:20-21

**Comment [s64]:** We had a lot of discussions on Romans 8 and foreknowledge and election, and after going back and forth studying it together, we came to view what many call "corporate election" on our own. I had never heard of it, but came to this conclusion. I remember about 6 months after this, I asked Matt what do we call our view of election, and he said he has heard it called corporate election.

*But our citizenship is in heaven—and we also eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of His glorious body by means of that power by which He is able to subject all things to Himself.*

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.*

God prepared us (those who love Him) for this very purpose, the purpose of receiving a glorified, eternal body at the resurrection, and inheriting all the promises of being a fully transformed and adopted son of God. This was His eternal plan since before the foundation of the world. God has prepared the future glorification of those that love Him in advance. God gives those who put faith in Him a deposit, a promise of our future inheritance.

Ephesians 1:13-14

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

After hearing the gospel and believing it, you were indwelt with the Holy Spirit. You are placed and counted as a child of God, but have not received the inheritance. The Spirit is a pledge of our future inheritance (Rom.8:23).

Remember that Paul points out that we have some of the blessings associated with our inheritance, but we are still awaiting our full adoption where we will be made into glorified sons of God.

So, with the ending of Rom8:29, we are looking ahead at our future glorification which occurs at the resurrection. We are then told that those who presently love God were not only decided beforehand to be transformed like Christ at the resurrection, but were also called through Christ, justified through Christ, and glorified through Christ.

Many confuse the tenses of the last three verbs; called, justified, and glorified. All are considered past tense (aorist indicative). The reason this makes sense is because the passage is focused at the future resurrection. At the resurrection, anyone that will be glorified by Christ was also justified by Christ, and anyone justified by Christ was also called by Christ.

There is nothing in Romans 8:28-30 to indicate that God determined or predestined salvation.

What Romans 8:28-30 does NOT say:

God hand-picked the individuals who would be saved at the expense of everyone else.  
That the rest of mankind was not called to salvation.

What about foreknowledge?

What can be said of God's foreknowledge (really His knowledge) is that He is omniscient. He knows all true things; every fact and every possible causal outcome. He knows everything that will happen before it

happens. He also knows everything that would have happened if something had changed or been different. He knows every intention of your heart and every word before you speak it.

The Scripture never states or even implies that God knows everything that is going to happen because He has caused it to happen. The Scripture does state that God knows everything, He has plans and purposes, and that despite our own plans, His will is going to be accomplished (Job 42:2; Prov.19:21; Ps.33:10-11; Is.14:24, 27, 46:9-11).

God's foreknowledge doesn't cause things happen. To know something before it happens is not the same as predetermining that it will happen. Likewise, God doesn't need to predetermine something to happen in order to know it will happen. If God was limited by this, then He would not be God.

Does this effect God's Sovereignty?

Many people have mistaken sovereignty with absolute control; unless God absolutely controls everything, He is not completely sovereign. This is a twisted definition, and tends to define God as a celestial puppet master.

Sovereign definition:

- having supreme rank, power, or authority.
- being above all others in character, importance, excellence, etc.

Job 42:2

*"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted."*

Psalms 103:19

*The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.*

These two verses sum up what it means for God to be sovereign. Everything under Creation falls under God's power, influence, and authority. God rules it all. There is no one that can thwart His purpose.

God is not part of the universe (which He created out of nothing), He is separate from it. Perhaps He observes the universe from the outside, including past, present, and future time, seeing it all at once. It is not necessary for us to know how God knows the future, but we know He must and does.

**Matt**

Yea, you right. 😊

### Conclusion by Matt

Unfortunately, we didn't (and honestly couldn't) preserve our full conversation because at least half of it was through phone/skype/text messages.

What happens after that last email where I admitted that Billy was right, at least more right than I was at the time, was that we went on to refine our understanding. We continued to email each other, and have multiple skype calls and phone calls. We finally saw that God has not left Himself without a witness in the world (Acts 14:16-17, Rom 1:16-22, Rom 10:14-18, Psalm 19, etc). Everyone may be born a little different, but God has witnessed to everyone sufficiently for them to honor Him and give Him glory.

He does not elect based on foreknown faith.

**Comment [s65]:** Matt finally agrees!

**Comment [MC66]:** At this point, my response was not an unconditional, "You are right about everything." But as far as Calvinism was concerned, Billy was more right than I was, so I dropped that systematic and started searching out scripture with fresh eyes.

He does not elect individuals arbitrarily while leaving the rest of humanity with the ability to want to believe.

He has elected a group, a tribe of people. This group that He chose before the world is all those who love Him, who humble themselves to Him. Everyone has the opportunity to be in this group, but narrow is the way, and few there are that find it. He has, like a good gardener, prepared the vineyard of the world in every possible way for us to produce His fruit. What we must do is submit in faithfulness, repent of our sins, and honor Him.

What we hope you take away from this is questions worth thinking through, a thirst for scripture (which DOES answer those questions), and a good example of how two people can Brodown, sharpen one another, and rightly divide the word of God.

#### **Conclusion by Billy**

Matt and I continue to brodown, and delve into the scriptures. We decided that we wanted to share our understanding, as to us it answered a lot of “tough” questions, and magnified God, His love, His grace, His impartiality, and His genuine call and provision for all people. We started our website at <http://biblebrodown.com/> around 1/2016, and within a year we had about 100 studies and over 800 pages. After a year we decided to expand our ministry into podcasting, and that’s where you find us today.