

## Introduction - The Grand Turning Point of the Cause

"In this, moreover, I give you great praise, and proclaim it - you alone in preeminent distinction from all others, have entered upon the thing itself; that is, the grand turning point of the cause; and have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about popery, purgatory, indulgences, and other like baubles, rather than causes, with which all have hitherto tried to hunt me down, though in vain! You, and you alone saw, what was the grand hinge upon which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once; for which, from my heart, I thank you. For in this kind of discussion I willingly engage...<sup>1</sup>"

These are the words of Martin Luther in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, translated as "On Un-free Will" or "On the Bondage of the Will" to Desiderius Erasmus, as a response to Erasmus' "On Free Will," wherein Erasmus had defended his concept of the free will of man, particularly in faith, in salvation. Erasmus defended the idea that the human will is not subject to the sovereignty of God. For Erasmus, the will is totally free in the sense that there is no influence over it at all, by anything or anyone. This from Erasmus, "By freedom of the will we understand in this connection the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads to eternal salvation."<sup>2</sup> Note that it is the "power to apply to or turn away from that which leads into eternal salvation." To Erasmus, the will of the unregenerate man is able to turn to God, and the will of the unregenerate man is able to fully resist the gospel, whether or not we might call a person elect or non-elect.

This is the essence of the concept of what we'll call libertarian free will. This use of the word "libertarian" has no relationship to libertarianism as a political movement or party. Libertarian as it applies to the human will is the idea that human beings make decisions without any sort of determinism. Choices are absolutely free in the sense that they are not determined by anything outside of the will itself.

If people have free will in the **libertarian** sense, then God exercises no control, no influence, and is not sovereign over the decisions of human beings. Human beings would be the sovereigns - we would each be the sole determiners of our decisions. God could assert no control and no influence - even at the point of conversion.

Luther, on the other hand, argued that people have free will in a **compatibilist** sense - as far as we know, we are free to do as we please, but God works through our preferences and constrains and mind in such a way that our choices are aligned or "made compatible" with His will of decree, His will of purpose. We will always do what He has decreed in eternity past. We do it freely, without being forced or compelled by God, yet it is always directed by, governed by, caused by the sovereign hand of God. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." Likewise Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

For Luther, then, the doctrine of God's sovereignty, God's control, over the will of man, was central to the "cause," - the Reformation itself. God's sovereignty over the will, especially God's sovereignty in the salvation of man, is "the grand turning point of the cause" and the "grand hinge upon which the whole turned" and the "vital part" of the theological and practical reforms that Luther and others embarked upon. This doctrine is, in fact, essential to a consistent and orthodox understanding of the gospel and of many of the essential attributes of God.

## A Brief Outline

In this article, we're going to see the Biblical, compatibilist view of the human will and the sovereignty of God in salvation and some implications of that truth by briefly looking at 1 Peter 1:3. We'll then look at a competing view of the human will, libertarianism, as it was and is applied in Roman Catholicism, in the Arminian Remonstrance, and in the Socinian heresy. The goal is for all of us to understand the Biblical view of God's sovereignty, that we may offer Him the gratitude and the glory that is His due AND so we can avoid adding anything to grace as we realize that salvation is entirely from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, Martin, *On the Bondage of the Will*, Translated by Henry Cole, Wildside Press, LLC, 1931, p. 259

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius, *On Free Will*, Translated by E. Gordon Rupp, P. Watson, The Westminster Press, 1969, p. 35

We will be looking at 1 Peter 1:3 and the phrase "He has caused us to be born again."

This passage speaks of being born again, or what we call "regeneration." What is regeneration? It's a work of God that makes us alive spiritually, moves us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13 tell us that, before regeneration, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. This is obviously not a reference to being physically dead, but spiritually dead. What does it mean to be physically dead? What is a good definition of physical death? One good sign of physical death is an inability to respond to physical stimuli - a dead body doesn't respond to light, to sound, to being touched or poked. In the same way, a spiritually dead person is unable to respond to spiritual stimuli, like the gospel. The gospel calls to the spirit of a person, calls to repentance and faith. But the spiritually dead CANNOT respond. Spiritual death implies inability, not frail ability. We are not called spiritually comatose or spiritually sick or spiritually injured, but spiritually dead. This is what we refer to as total inability, total depravity, or radical depravity. Mankind is totally incapable of responding positively to God.

Romans 8:8 says, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

This is the state of man prior to regeneration - totally depraved, totally unable to respond to the gospel. The natural man cannot will to do anything truly good. We must first be made alive spiritually so we become able to respond to God. God graciously makes alive each and every individual whom He has chosen in eternity past to be made holy and blameless in His sight.

### **God has caused us to born again**

We can mean nothing more or less by the term "will" than the entire spiritual aspect of a human being. The human will is the human spirit, and that will, was dead in trespasses and sins, unable to respond to the gospel, unable to move Godward at all. Luther says of free will, "If we do not like to leave out this term altogether (which would be most safe, and also most religious) we may, nevertheless, with a good conscience teach, that it be used so far as to allow man a "Free-will," not in respect of those which are above him, but in respect only of those things which are below him; that is, he may be allowed to know, that he has, as to his goods and possessions the right of using, acting, and omitting, according to his "Free-will;" although, at the same time, that same "Free-will" is overruled by the Free-will of God alone, just as He pleases: but that, God-ward, or in things which pertain unto salvation or damnation, he has no "Free-will," but is a captive, slave, and servant, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan."<sup>3</sup>

John Calvin said, "When the will is enchained as the slave of sin, it cannot make a movement toward goodness, far less steadily pursue it. Every such movement is the first step in that conversion to God, which in Scripture is entirely ascribed to divine grace."<sup>4</sup>

Prior to regeneration, then, the human will is dead and helpless. It is free to do as it pleases, but subject to the sovereign hand of God and capable of doing only what is consistent with its unregenerate, reprobate sin nature. We must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. We need that first step in our rescue to come from God - His gracious quickening and awakening to the gospel. Is this a free will?

John Calvin, "In this way, then, man is said to have free will, not because he has a free choice of good and evil, but because he acts voluntarily, and not by compulsion. This is perfectly true: but why should so small a matter have been dignified with so proud a title?"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Luther, Martin, *On the Bondage of the Will*, Translated by Henry Cole, Wildside Press, LLC, 1931, pp. 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Human Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge, 2.3.5, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Human Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge, 2.2.7, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, p. 162.

The unregenerate human will is free in the sense that it does as it pleases, but not free from slavery to sin, and no man's will is ever free from the sovereign hand of God.

So that's what it means to be born again. We needed to be born again, and God caused us to be born again because we were otherwise dead in our sins and completely unable, in our own ability, to turn to Him.

### **God has caused us to be born again**

He has caused us to be born again. God has caused this - this was caused by God, not by the human will. Or do you have an Arminian Bible in your hands today - one that says, "Blessed be you who according to your own great and powerful free will caused you to be born again"? No! God worked this rescue. It is God who caused us to be born again.

And why? Because of His great mercy, because of His purpose in election, because of His foreknowledge, His foreordination, His eternal decree. In eternity past, He has chosen a people for Himself, individuals with names written in the book of life, permanently, never to be blotted out. All men are completely helpless and hopeless and need a rescue, need salvation, and He has graciously, mercifully chosen some for His family. These are His elect. In time, He effects the rescue by first regenerating His sheep, first changing the minds and hearts and affections, giving us an understanding of our sin and a righteous fear of God, that we might realize our need for a Savior and desire to commit our lives to the Savior. The thief on the cross goes from mocking Christ to defending Him and seeking His favor. Paul is changed in a moment on the road to Damascus. God has caused us to be born again. "Salvation is from the Lord." Jonah 2:9.

### **God has caused us to be born again**

He has caused us to be born again. Now, understand this - He has caused it, as He causes all things! The Scripture is explicit and unequivocal on the sovereignty of God in all things. Psalm 136:5, "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." If it happens, He does it. Here, the Holy Spirit tells us explicitly, He has caused us to be born again. He didn't encourage it, didn't make it possible, didn't permit it, didn't give some sort of spark of life, or seed of righteousness, or whatever - He caused us to be "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

He has caused all of this, all of the hope of Heaven, all of eternal life, all of it. He has caused our salvation. It doesn't say he cooperated in it, hoped for it, wanted it, suggested it - He caused it. This cannot be interpreted away as something God does partially, cooperatively, synergistically. He has caused us to be born again. 1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." He didn't come to make salvation possible for the human being to accept! He came to save. The gospel is complete - God waits for no human being to complete it. Yes, the sinner must turn from their sin and put their faith in Christ, but the turning and the faith are gifts of God. The sinner is incapable of making these moves toward God in his own power.

Our certain inheritance belongs to the One Who caused it all. He doesn't share His glory by only making possible what must then be apprehended by the sovereign free human will. He causes our salvation by doing all of the steps that are necessary, including exercising His sovereign control over the human will.

### **Regeneration and the Freedom of the Human Will**

So what does all this mean for the doctrine of the human will? Do people have free will or do they not? The testimony of Scripture is this: people have the freedom to do as they please, and God exercises absolute sovereign control of every human thought and act. Prior to regeneration, people have the ability to do as they please, and all that they can please to do is sin. Prior to regeneration, they can do nothing truly righteous and free from the stain of sin. It is not possible for the unregenerate person to do anything meritorious, anything perfectly righteous. After regeneration, the will is changed, so that it is now capable of doing things that are truly good, truly God-glorifying. But even after regeneration, the human

will is not "free" in the sense that it is now free from the sovereign hand of God. The will is never free in that sense. God is always sovereign over everything, including human decisions.

## Views of the will - implications for the doctrines of grace

Let's briefly think through some of the implications for some of the doctrines of grace of these two competing views of the human will.

1. Total depravity or total inability.
  - a. Compatibilist view: As we have seen, the Scripture teaches that the unregenerate person is dead in their sin, completely incapable of responding to God in faith. The mind of the unregenerate is ever sinful, incapable of a single purely righteous act. The human will, which is nothing more than the conscious intellectual faculty of the human spirit, is totally depraved, totally unable to choose to be righteous or repentant or to trust in Christ. We must be born again. This is the compatibilist view of the human will.
  - b. Libertarian view: If the human will is completely free, it must follow that the human will, in its natural state, is capable of choosing to turn to God in repentance and faith all on its own without any sort of assistance from God. This ability must somehow be available to every person in their natural, fallen state. Total inability would be a lie. Spiritual deadness is an exaggeration. God doesn't cause us to be born again. We don't need to be born again, to be made alive spiritually. We already are. The necessity of rebirth would either have to be a lie, or my understanding of rebirth as being made alive spiritually to receive the gospel would be a misunderstanding. Being born again would have to mean something else.
2. Unconditional election.
  - a. Compatibilist view: Simply put, God chooses a people for Himself in eternity past according to His eternal decree. In that decree are all of the elements of salvation, including the regeneration of the human heart - He has caused us to be born again. These are individuals whose names are written in the book of life, individuals whom God will, in time, regenerate, justify, glorify.
  - b. Libertarian view: Election on the part of God, whether conditional or unconditional, is impossible. Election is choosing. If God cannot choose who will be saved, but must wait for sovereign humans to choose Him by their own indomitable free will. Election is precluded. It is impossible. Any references to God's choosing in Scripture, like here in 1 Peter 1, are lies. He doesn't choose and He definitely doesn't cause anyone to be born again.
3. Irresistible grace or irresistible call.
  - a. Compatibilist view: Having elected individuals to salvation, God calls each of His elect effectually at some point in their lives, causing them to be born again and giving them repentance and faith in Christ. Grace is irresistible to the elect person at some point in their lives, as it must be, according to His decree of election. God caused us to be born again. It doesn't mean forced against one's free will; God causes the will to change. No one comes to Christ against their will. No one rejects Christ against their will.
  - b. Libertarian view: Is the call of the gospel irresistible to anyone? To the advocate of libertarianism with respect to the human will, absolutely not! If the human will is sovereign, meaning God either cannot or will not exercise influence over it, then grace, the call of the gospel, is always resistible. God kind of lucks out when some people actually turn in repentant faith and believe the gospel. Or we do our seeker-friendliness and get the coffee and the music and uplifting encouraging talk just right or whatever. Jesus has already died for everybody. Forgiveness of sins, redemption, justification - all the elements of salvation are available to everyone. All that's left is for someone to be sufficiently persuasive in sharing the gospel, without any empowerment of the Spirit in the will of the sinner, to convince someone else of the truths of the gospel.

Some of you are wondering about implications for the extent of the atonement and the perseverance of the saints. Well, there are implications, but there are also implications of making this article WAY too long. Your attention would be limited and it would require your perseverance, so I won't get into all of that here. I hope you can see the centrality of a Biblical view of the human will and the sovereignty of God in salvation for the doctrines of grace for which the Reformers stood so strongly.

## Prescience and the Freedom of the Will

One other important implication that I want to spend a little bit of time on before moving on is the implication of these opposing views of the human will on God's attribute of knowledge, of omniscience. There are implications for other attributes, but I want to point out something vital regarding the human will and the omniscience of God. One of the attributes of God that is declared very clearly in God's word is the attribute of omniscience, and, in particular, the attribute of God's prescience. God knows the future. The book of Isaiah declares strongly and with great repetition and emphasis that God knows the future. God asserts prescience as a test of divinity. According to God in Isaiah, knowing the future is an essential attribute of God. It's one of the attributes that can be ascribed only to the God of the Bible. A god that does not know the future is an idol, a worthless thing, a demon or just a worthless hunk of junk, powerless. Perfect prescience is God's standard for Himself - what it means to actually be Yahweh, the one and only true God of the universe. Here's just one example from Isaiah 41:23, "Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods." Prescience, again, is a test of divinity. If God fails that test, by His own standard He would cease to be God.

Now, let's think about the libertarian doctrine of the human will and what it means for God's prescience. Can God know the future without asserting sovereignty over the free will of moral agents, human beings and angels? If God does not assert His Lordship of control over the free will of people, can He know the future? No. It's not possible, even for God. Theologians have always recognized this fact. If God does not control, does not in some way cause, my decisions and yours, then He can't know anything about the future. If He doesn't control human decisions, He can't raise kings and depose them, He can't identify a prophet before his birth, He can't do as He pleases, it can't be said that He works all things together for good, He can't say that He has chosen anyone for anything let alone salvation, because He can't know the future if He can't or won't control it by controlling human choices that have real impacts on the future. He can't even know who will exist. Just think about all of the things that are happening today that are dependent on human choices that happened yesterday. Individual human decisions have impact on lots of other things. God can have control over none of them if He lacks control over even one single human decision. When it comes to choosing to repent of our sins and put our faith in Christ, if God is not sovereign over that, there is no way He can know the future. He can't know who will be at His wedding feast, who will be with Him in Heaven, whose name to write down in His Book of Life. He can't know who will exist, who will marry whom, who will kill whom, who will do what, who will go where...He would be utterly clueless about the future. This is precisely what is suggested by some past and modern supporters of libertarian free will and at least they are being consistent, consistent to the point of heresy, but at least they recognize the inconsistency. They deal with it the wrong way, but at least they recognize it. More on that point in a minute. Understand that this wrong view of the human will is a direct denial that God causes us to be born again, or in any way influences any of our decisions. That's what would make Him ignorant of the future.

So what has all this to do with the Reformation? This is the central point of the Reformation, defending the sovereignty of God in salvation against the sovereignty of the human will and the logical extension of the sovereignty of the human will. When we ask, "how is a man made right before God," if we answer that the reconciliation is all due to the sovereign hand of God and not due to human effort, we are protected from additions to grace that nullify grace. See, this one error is what leads to the whole heretical messed-up system of libertarianism with sacraments and works-based salvation that the Reformers reacted against and that still characterizes Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology today. I want you to quickly see how the opponents of the Reformation, Roman Catholics and the Remonstrants (Arminians and Socinians) view the human will and what the implications are for the doctrines of grace and, later, the attributes of God.

### **Roman Catholic view of the Will and Implications of that View**

What was and is the Roman Catholic doctrine of the human will and the sovereignty of God?

I want to give you the doctrine as it existed at the time of the Reformation and exists today, as declared at the Council of Trent in the mid 1500's. This Council was a reaction to the Reformation, but it served to clarify official Roman Catholic dogma which the Reformers understood to be unbiblical, launching the Reformation itself.

Here's one of the Canons from Trent "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema."<sup>6</sup>

Jim mentioned this in his first message, with a focus on the first half of the canon. I'll emphasize the second half. The claim is that it is necessary for salvation that there be a free act of the human will, that the human will must be prepared and disposed for faith in and of itself. In other words, God does not cause us to be born again, in the sense that He makes us spiritually alive so we're able to hear the gospel and respond. No. To the Roman Catholic, we are not spiritually dead in the sense of being unable to respond to the gospel in the first place. When an infant is baptized into the church, they have enough of something they call grace to enable them to have the necessary faith and do the necessary works that will make them good enough to get to Heaven, or at least into purgatory where they can work off the last of the nastiness of original sin.

This was the doctrine of free will that prevailed and still prevails officially within the Church of Rome. There are elements within the Roman Catholic church today that would attribute less to the human will and are not anathematized, but, in practice, this is the prevailing view of the human will in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. It's a libertarian view. And please understand that this view of the human will is what gives birth logically to the addition of works and ceremony and sacrament and church teaching and tradition and so on. If salvation is not ultimately all of God, but is at least in part due to some human effort of some sort, we simply begin to add more and more and more until we get the kind of mess that was and is Roman Catholic soteriology. It's a works-based salvation, and that renders it completely heretical, but our focus today is on the doctrine of the human will and the sovereignty of God.

### **Implications of the Roman Catholic view of the Human Will on the Doctrines of Grace**

So what are the implications for the doctrines of grace? Everything we talked about before in context of the libertarian view, plus the nullification of the gospel by the addition of sacraments and works. In this system, mankind is able, by grace that comes through baptism, to turn to God and perform those works that are necessary for salvation. In general, Roman Catholics would deny election as it is taught in Scripture because it requires a denial of libertarian free will. Grace is always resistible - it is never inevitably the case that an elect person will respond in repentant faith to the gospel. Response to the gospel is an act of the human will, made possible but not inevitable by the "grace" remitted at baptism.

For the Reformers, then, this was the incumbent theology against which they reacted. While they reacted against the corruption of the church, corrupt and incorrect practices of the church, they were mainly focused on recovering scriptural truth, like "God, according to his great mercy, has caused us to be born again."

And so they defended the sovereignty of God in election, against the sovereignty of the human will.

Martin Luther said, "We are people who have been born, not fashioned by man, but 'begotten.' This is not our work. As little as a child contributes to its being born, so little do we contribute to our being spiritually born."<sup>7</sup>

William Tyndale said, "Faith springs not of man's fantasy, neither is it in any man's power to obtain it; but it is altogether the pure gift of God poured into us freely, without all manner doing of us, without deserving and merits, yea, and without seeking for us; and is . . . God's gift and grace, purchased through Christ."<sup>8</sup>

John Calvin said, "We maintain, that by His providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which He has destined."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Council of Trent, *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, edited and translated by J. Waterworth, London:Dolman, 1848, Sixth Session, *On Justification*, Canon IX.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, 347.

<sup>8</sup> William Tyndale, *Works of William Tyndale*, vol. 1, 53.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Human Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1.16.8, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, p. 120.

God has caused us to be born again. Or do you have a Roman Catholic Bible translation of 1 Peter 1:3, "God caused us to be born with sufficient ability to do the works of the church, follow the traditions of the church, listen to the manmade rules of the church, so that we could please God through these activities and the merit we gain from Mary and the saints, perhaps after further centuries in the fantasy of purgatory." No. God has caused us to be born again. He did it because it was his merciful, gracious, just will that His elect would be saved, and the only way we could be saved is if we were first made spiritually alive, and the only way we could be made spiritually alive is by the hand of God. We had no means to make ourselves alive to the gospel, yet we had to be made alive in order to hear the gospel and receive the gift of repentant faith, so we could receive the gifts of justification, redemption, and glorification.

### **The Arminian Remonstrance**

That principle of absolute sovereignty of God and absolute inability of man is the principle recovered and so well defended by the Reformation saints against the hellish doctrines of Rome. J.I. Packer once summarized the doctrines of grace defended in the Reformation this way, "For to Calvinism there is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that God saves sinners."<sup>10</sup> God. Saves. Sinners. It is God who does the saving. God does all of the saving. Sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all - the human will does not turn of its own power.

While the reformers ably defended God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners, there always remain objections to the sovereignty of God in salvation. Jacob Arminius gave organization to a reaction against this doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the bondage of the human will, resulting in the Arminian Remonstrance of 1610. The Arminian objection was nothing new. As far as the doctrine of the human will, it is really no different from the Catholic view, although the Arminian Christian removes the sacramentalism and works requirements that render the Catholic view heretical. They leave the door of the freedom of the will open to additions to grace, but they don't walk through it.

The Arminian suggests that the first act of salvation is an act of the human will. The human will is totally free, in the libertarian sense, uninfluenced by God, certainly not controlled by God. For the Arminian, God willingly gives up His sovereignty, makes Himself subject to the human will, so human choices will be "real" and "voluntary." There are reasons why God would do that, in the Arminian view. God doesn't want robots, but wants "real" choices. God would never force someone to love Him or prevent someone from coming to Him in faith – someone who really wanted to. It's not fair of God to elect and regenerate and save some but not others. It's not fair of God to require people to have faith in Christ, but then only empower some to have that faith. I don't have time to interact with those objections. None of them are threatening in any way, but I'll just repeat for a moment what Jim said in a previous article, namely, we get our theology from Scripture alone. We must never come to conclusions about matters of faith according to what seems or feels right, or through our own ideas about how God ought or ought not to act. What does the Scripture say? God does what He pleases.<sup>11</sup> God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. God hardens whom He will harden.<sup>12</sup> All who are appointed to eternal life believed.<sup>13</sup> No one comes to the Son unless drawn by the Father.<sup>14</sup> God has caused us to be born again. We ought to understand our theology based solely on the Scriptures. God has caused us to be born again.

### **Implications of Arminianism on the Doctrines of Grace**

What are the implications of the Arminian view? Man is able, of his own absolutely free will to make "the first step" toward God by believing the gospel of his own strength. While the concept of the will is the same as the Roman Catholic view, the Arminian Christian maintains the essentials, the *solas* by avoiding the addition of works and sacraments. Salvation is still by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is a wrong view on the source of faith. In the Arminian scheme, faith comes from the human will, while in the Biblical scheme, faith is a gift of God. God has caused us to be born again.

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<sup>10</sup> Packer, J.I., *Introductory Essay*, in *The death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen (London: Banner of Truth, 1959) 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 115:3, Psalm 135:6

<sup>12</sup> Romans 9:18

<sup>13</sup> Acts 13:48

<sup>14</sup> John 6:44

Election is a general idea, not particular, not specific. There are no names written in the book of life until the indomitable human free will turns to God, giving Him permission to write the name in the book. But keep an eraser handy!

When the Bible speaks of the elect, it must mean a general idea that God will eventually have a people that He falsely calls elect. These are not actually people chosen by God in eternity past, as the Scripture says, but they are people who choose God of their own free will. The Arminian makes all the verses that describe God's choosing, God's electing, a lie. God does not, and cannot, choose anyone if He is unwilling to intervene, control, and cause human decisions. If He leaves the human will alone, He cannot elect, He cannot choose.

Grace is always resistible. The general call of the gospel goes out, and some respond by their own free will. God has no part in their coming to Christ - He must merely wait and see if they will respond of their own volition.

### **Arminianism and the Prescience of God**

And what about the prescience of God? What do our Arminian friends believe about the prescience of God? We saw earlier that it is logically impossible for God to be prescient if the human will is totally free. If God takes no part in human decisions, He can't know them in advance, so He can't know the future. Well, Arminians who are Christians, who have not fallen into heresy, will say that God does know the future, even though He doesn't control the future because He doesn't control human decision-making. How is this possible, you ask? It isn't. The answer is just that God "somehow" sees the future, even though He isn't sovereign over it, doesn't control it. The Christian Arminian has no real answer, as none exists. They maintain a contradiction, as they must if they are going to remain within orthodox Christianity. The Christian must maintain the prescience of God, but affirming that attribute of God implies a contradiction with libertarian freedom of the human will. If you are going to maintain both, you must maintain a contradiction.

### **The Socinian Heresy**

Now, there is a way to maintain libertarian free will and maintain consistency. It was first formulated, to my knowledge, by the Sozzinis back in the 1500's. They came out of the radical Reformation and the Italian Anabaptists. They came up with a blatantly heretical theological scheme that is known as Socinianism. We are only going to look at one part of that - their view of God's prescience and human free will. It is what is called today "Open Theism" or "openness theology" or "free will theism." They reasoned consistently that, if the human will is absolutely free in the libertarian sense, it is impossible for God to know the future. So rather than throwing out the bathwater - the false idea that the human will is free from God's sovereignty - they threw out the baby - the prescience of God. That is, they just reasoned that God can't know the future because man is free! So rather than abandon the unbiblical assumption that man is free, they abandon the biblical declaration that God is prescient.

Now, this removes the logical contradiction between human freedom and divine omniscience. Okay, man is free, so God doesn't know what's going to happen. No contradiction. The problem is clear, though. If you have a god that doesn't know the future, that is not Yahweh, that is not the God of the Bible. That is not the one true God of the universe. Remember, God has asserted that prescience is a test of divinity - if your god cannot tell the future, you worship an idol, a false god, a god that is powerless to save. The open theist would agree with the "solus." Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but they fail the ontological test. That is, they have a concept of God that is so flawed as to render their faith false - they believe in a god that doesn't exist, an idol that cannot tell the future. This leaves them outside of orthodoxy, still in a fallen state, unsaved.

God has caused us to be born again. God - the God of the Bible, the true and only God of the universe, the omniscient God, has caused us to be born again.

### **Conclusion**

I hope you see now why this doctrine of God's sovereignty is so important. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation, the doctrine of the bondage of the human will, its subjection in its unregenerate state to the power of sin and its subjection always to the sovereign will of God, was and is, indeed, the "grand hinge upon which the whole turned." It

is the doctrine that informs and implies the other doctrines of grace. It keeps us safe in the gospel. Only by understanding that God has caused us to be born again can we maintain orthodoxy and avoid contradictions in our theology. It's a shield against the addition of works or any human merit to grace. The human will is free to do as it pleases, but what it pleases to do apart from God is only sin all of the time. It has no power to do anything authentically good entirely with the right thoughts, motives, and action. Only by the regenerating power of God is the human will made alive, then irresistibly drawn to Christ. Election, regeneration, justification, glorification, and all of the gracious gifts of God on your behalf are all connected by the sovereignty of God, by the immutable eternal decree of God.

In the end, this doctrine of God's sovereignty does what all true things do. Anything true exalts the glory of God. The doctrine of God's sovereignty, the corresponding doctrines of grace and attributes of God, all of these exalt the glory of our God who saves. Behold your God, perfect in knowledge, absolute in power, waiting for nothing, dependent on no one, King of kings, Lord of lords, mighty to save, the One Who elects, the One Who regenerates, the One alone in Whom is found all of the elements of the salvation of a people for His own possession, and for His own glory, the Sovereign of the universe! Soli deo gloria!