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# The Compatibility of “Divine Sovereignty & Free Will” from a Moderate Calvinistic Perspective:

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.”

~ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 69.

# I. Outline:

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- I. Consider the Problem:
- II. Consider two Extreme Solutions:
  - A. Fatalism: human action is purposively determined, compelled, or prescribed.
  - B. Universalism: All people, regardless, will be saved.
- III. Consider a solution: Moderate Calvinism:
- IV. A Proper Starting Point: Actuality/Simplicity of the Essence of God:
- V. Additional Considerations:
- VI. Conclusion

# I. Consider the Problem:

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- If God is all-powerful, then He could save all persons.
- If God is all-loving, then He would save all persons.
- Not all people are saved.
- He must not be all-loving or all-powerful, or both.

## II: Extreme Solutions:

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Though well-meaning both fatalists & universalists fail to heed the actuality/simplicity of God as their starting point for salvation:

*If an all-powerful God can save all, but He will not save all, then God is not all-loving. For a God who is all-loving would save all, if He could save all. On the other hand, if God is all-loving and all-powerful, then all will be saved.*

# A. Extreme Solution: Fatalism?

Human action is purposively determined, compelled, or prescribed by God.

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- God is all-powerful;
  - God will not save all persons (Predestination; Double Predestination; Preterition; Fatalism);
  - Therefore, God is not all-loving.
1. If an all-powerful God can save all, but He will not save all, then God is not all-loving. For a God who is all-loving would save all, if He could save all.
  2. Fatalists are faced with the problem that God does not love everybody because He only died for the elect [They tend to interpret to “world” as “elect” who live throughout the world (John 3:16)]. Hence, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistibility, & perseverance of the saints.
  3. It becomes even more problematic if they affirm double predestination over preterition (passing over the non-elect).

## B. Extreme Solution: Universalism?

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- God is all-powerful; thus He can save all.
- God is all-loving; He would save all.
- Therefore, God will save everyone.

## B. Four Basic Types of Universalism:

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1. **Universal Reconciliation:** This view contends that Christ's death accomplished its purpose of reconciling all mankind to God. Whatever separation exists between man & the benefits of God's grace is subjective in nature, existing only in man's mind. Reconciliation is an accomplished fact
2. **Universal Pardon:** This view contends that God, being loving, will not hold unswervingly to the conditions he has laid down. Though threatening eternal punishment he will in the end relent & forgive everyone. God will treat all persons if they had believed.

## B. Four Basic Types of Universalism:

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3. **Universal Restoration:** This view contends that at some point in the future all things will be restored to their original and intended state. Full salvation may be preceded by cycles of reincarnation or by some purgatorial period at the beginning of the life hereafter.
4. **The Doctrine of a Second Chance:** The work of Christ is sufficient to secure the salvation of the elect, but salvation is effectually secured by the means of faith (Rom. 10:10-13). All people, even those who have heard and rejected, will be confronted with the claims of Christ in the life to come. Everyone given such an opportunity will of course accept.

## B. Extreme Solution: Universalism?

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- God is all-powerful; thus He can save all.
- God is all-loving; He would save all.
- Therefore, God will save everyone.

### Response:

1. We know clearly from Scripture that this is not the case for some humans (body and soul), Satan, the beast, false prophet, and evil angels, will be cast into everlasting punishment (Matthew 5:30; 10:28; 18:9; Rev. 20:15).
2. Those people who will face eternal punishment are there for their rejection of Jesus Christ (John 3:16) as Savior.
3. The effects of eternal punishment, which is both a place and state, include everlasting separation from God and His glory (2 Thess. 1:9), different degrees of punishment (Matt. 11:21-24; Luke 12:47-48), and that this punishment will be eternal.
4. There will be no second chance for redemption (Isa. 66:24; Mark 9:44-48; Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9).

### III. Resolution to the Problem: Moderate Calvinism:

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- One way to avoid this “*dilemma*” is to say the following:
  1. God is a simple indivisible Being (He is not compartmentalized), the sum-total of His infinite perfections. These perfections include the following:
    - a. God is all-powerful.
    - b. God is all-loving.
    - c. God is all-just.
    - d. God is all-good, etc.
  4. God gave free will to His creatures.
  5. It is impossible to force free creatures to act contrary to their freedom (otherwise it is not free will).
  6. The sole human condition for salvation is to receive or believe. (Romans 5:1; John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Heb. 11:6).
  7. Divine election is unconditional from God’s standpoint (Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13).

*Salvation is an unconditional gift from God that is conditioned on act of faith on our part.*

# IV. God is a Simple Being:

We must first consider the Person of God before we proceed to examine the activities of God:

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1. Whatever God fore-chooses cannot be based on what He fore-knows.
2. Nor can what He foreknows be based on what He fore-chose.
3. Both must be simultaneous, eternal, and coordinate acts of God (pure actuality/divine simplicity; God cannot be compartmentalized nor divided).
4. Therefore, our actions are truly free, and God determined that they would be such.

God is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs, and yet every person is completely free and responsible for what he or she chooses.

## IV. God is a Simple Being:

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1 Peter 1:2 states:

*“elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”*

*As Drs. Chafer and Walvoord comment:*

*“... teaches not the logical order of election in relation to foreknowledge but the fact that they are coextensive.”*

*~ Major Bible Themes, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 233.*

## IV. God is a Simple Being:

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Therefore:

1. All aspects of the eternal purpose of God are equally timeless for God is a simple Being whose perfections/attributes are one with His indivisible essence.

Thus, foreknowledge and predetermination are one in God. Whatever God knows, He determines. And whatever He determines, He knows. God knowingly determining and determinately knowing from all eternity everything that happens, including all free acts. For if God is an eternal and simple Being, then His thoughts must be eternally coordinate and unified.

## IV. God is a Simple Being:

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1. Whatever God fore-chooses cannot be based on what He foreknows.
2. Nor can what He foreknows be based on what He fore-chose.
3. Both must be simultaneous, eternal, and coordinate acts of God.
4. Therefore, our actions are truly free, and God determined that they would be such.

*God is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs, and yet every person is completely free and responsible for what he or she chooses.*

# V. Additional Considerations:

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1. God's election is not based on the foreknowledge of man's free choice.
2. God's election is not forced (in spite of man's free choice) otherwise salvation is not based upon the human condition of belief:
  - A. It is not very loving to "*force*" someone to believe.
  - B. Certainly God's omniscience has the capacity to decree salvation that would not infringe upon free choice; He doesn't have to resort to dragging people to salvation apart from their will.
3. What God foreknew that "*motivated*" Him to elect us is never specifically nor clearly stated in Scripture. However, we can eliminate any idea that says God needed to learn something because that would mean that there is something potential about God; it denies omniscience.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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4. Though every person since Adam and Eve are born totally depraved, they still possess the image of God (holistic involving personality, dominion, community, and representation) though that image is totally, extensively effaced by sin (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6-7; Romans 1-2; Acts 10-11):
  - A. In their depravity, following their original sin, Adam and Eve *perceived* God as He entered into the garden of Eden; they heard the sound of the Lord and hid themselves among the trees, and conversed with God; Pagans in Romans 1 “clearly perceive”, and “stand unexcused”, “suppressing the truth”, and Cornelius in Acts 10 desired to please God, praying to God who heard his prayers (Acts 10:4; 35). Thus, God sent Peter to Cornelius’ house to preach the Good News of salvation.
  - B. For if people are no longer made in the image of God, why would humans be more highly valued than any other animal life (Genesis 9:1-18)? God also created them.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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5. A balanced and theologically coherent/harmonious perspective must include both sovereignty and free will since both are clearly stated in Scripture.
6. There is no chronological or logical priority of election and foreknowledge otherwise it diminishes God's simplicity/actuality.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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7. God's foreknowledge and His fore-determination cannot be separated for God is one indivisible Being. In Him knowledge and fore-determination are identical. Hence, He had to predetermine in accordance with His foreknowledge. And He must have foreknown in accordance with His predetermination.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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8. Those who insist that God's will cannot be resisted confuse what God wills unconditionally with what He wills conditionally. God wills the salvation of all persons conditionally-conditioned on their belief (2 Peter 3:9):
  - A. God's will in this sense can be resisted by an unrepentant heart.
  - B. God's will to save those who believe (i.e., elect) is unconditional.

*Election is unconditional from the standpoint of the Giver (God), but is conditional from the standpoint of the receiver. And since God foreknows for sure who will receive it, the result is certain. Thus, in this sense God's grace on the elect is irresistible.*

## V. Additional Considerations:

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### 9. Let's consider resistibility:

Those who claim that God's will cannot be resisted confuse what God wills unconditionally with what He wills conditionally. In other words we have to affirm two truths:

A. God wills the salvation of all persons conditionally- conditioned on faith.

As 2 Peter 3:9 states:

*“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

# V. Additional Considerations:

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9. Let's consider resistibility:

B. God's will to save those who believe (i.e., the elect) is unconditional for election is unconditional from the standpoint of God (Giver), but is conditioned from the standpoint of the (receiver).

Summary: It is God's ultimate & sovereign will that we have free will to resist His will that all be saved.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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9. Let's consider resistibility on the unwilling:

C. **Luke 3:70:** *“The Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose [will] for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.”*

D. **Acts 7:51:** *“You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised ears and ears! You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit!”*

1. On this passage John Calvin says that Luke is speaking of their *“desperate inflexibility”* when *“they are said to be “resisting the Spirit” [Acts of the Apostles, 1:313].*

## V. Additional Considerations:

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9. Let's consider resistibility on the unwilling:

E. Matthew 23:37: Jesus cried, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*

The verb “**willing**” [θέλω, *thelō*] means: **1. purpose**, will, decide (Col 1:27) or could be **2. desire**, want to (Gal 4:9; Col 1:27; Mt 21:30); **3. enjoy**, take pleasure in something ( Mk 12:38); **4. θέλει εἶναι** (*thelei einai*), it means (Ac 2:12 ; 17:20; Lk 15:26); **5. be of an opinion**, think something to be so (2Pe 3:5).

God's grace is not irresistible on those who are unwilling.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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10. It is possible to defy the will of God:

- A. Matthew 12:50: unbelievers
- B. Matthew 7:20: unbelievers
- C. John 7:17: unbelievers
- D. 1 John 2:17: believers.
- E. 1 Thess. 4:3: believers.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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11. Most Calvinists distinguish at least three dimensions of God's will:
  - A. God's prescriptive will (e.g., Be perfect because He is perfect);
  - B. God's permissive will (which allows sin);
  - C. God's providential or over-ruling will (which brings good out of evil).

God's (B) permissive and (C) providential wills cannot be resisted, for He never allows more than what He permits, and He always accomplishes His ultimate purposes (Isa. 55:11). The command (or call) to be saved is a command He allowed to be resisted (2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 23:37).

## V. Additional Considerations:

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12. Moderate Calvinists may disagree on their definition of irresistibility upon the willing. Notwithstanding,
  - A. I use the term to mean **persuasion**, like that of a courtship. God will “*woo*” and “*court*” so persuasively that those willing to respond will be overwhelmed by His love.
  - B. God often persuades through various factors such as natural revelation, conscience, situational setting and/or personal life experiences in view of “where I am, who I am, who I know, why I am here, and “where I am going.”

*As Millard Erickson states, “The position taken herein is not that those who are called must respond, but that God makes his offer so appealing that they will respond affirmatively.” Christian Theology, 927.*

## V. Additional Considerations:

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12. In other words, God works congruously with the will of the individual whereby God works in such a persuasive way with the individual that he freely makes the choice that God intends [B.B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 90-91].

As Erickson states:

“This means that God does not begin by regenerating those he has chosen, transforming their souls so that they believe; rather, he works in an appealing, persuading fashion so that they freely choose to believe, and then regenerates them. What we are adding to this position is the idea that God is operative in the life of the individual long before his work of suasion and regeneration: God has from eternity decided that the potential individual who comes into actual existence is the one who will respond to this set of circumstances precisely as God intends” [*Christian Theology*, 359].

## V. Additional Considerations:

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13. Consider the alternative to irresistibility per persuasion upon the willing:

R.C. Sproul, a defender of irresistibility, states:

“The sinner in hell must be asking, ‘God, if you really loved me, why didn’t you coerce me to believe? I would rather have had my free will violated than to be here in this eternal place of torment.’” He adds, “If we grant that God can save men by violating their wills, why then does he not violate everybody’s will and bring them all to salvation?” Then, Sproul confesses, “The only answer I can give to this question is that I don’t know. I have no idea why God saves some but not all.” He then adds, “I don’t doubt for a moment that God has the power to save all.” *Chosen by God*, 36-37.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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13. Consider the alternative to irresistibility per persuasion upon the willing:

Fatalists believe that God uses irresistible force to change a person from not loving Christ to loving Christ. Thus, irresistible love is forced love. And forced “love” is not very loving.

1. Everyone who believes God is all-powerful admits that God could, if He wished, force people to do things against their will.
2. The real question is not could but would-that is, would an all-loving God force free creatures to do things against their will?

# V. Additional Considerations:

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As C. S. Lewis wrote:

“The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His [God’s] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will...would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.”

~ *Screwtape Letters*, 128.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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14. Therefore, faith is synergistic, not monergistic. In other words, faith is prompted and persuaded by grace with the act of faith as an act of the believer, not a gift from God only given to the elect. Therefore, let's consider God's role and man's role in view of faith (two sides of one coin):

**A. Consider God's role.**

**B. Consider Man's role.**

*Both aspects are biblical truths that must be affirmed:*

# V. Additional Considerations:

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15. Faith is synergistic, not monergistic.

A. **Consider God's role:** John 6:37, 44. Jesus said that the precise ones whom the Father has given Him will come to Him; moreover, they do not come of themselves. They cannot come unless the Father supernaturally draws them to Christ. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, brings all the sheep to Himself; none are left out ( John 10:16 ). Paul also affirms that the ones Christ elected He also justified and will ultimately glorify (Rom. 8:28–30). None are lost in the process.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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15. Faith is synergistic, not monergistic.

**B. Consider man's role:** It is man's one responsibility to believe. Each person must heed the call, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved*" ( Acts 16:31 ). If the person goes to hell it is by his own choosing; God does not want anyone to perish. Therefore, God does not send the person to hell. Rather, the person chooses hell by not choosing God.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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### 16. Total Depravity.

#### A. Total Depravity means the following:

1. Corruption *extends* to every facet of man's nature and faculties; hence *total* depravity.
2. There is nothing that can commend him to a righteous God.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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## 16. Definition of Sin:

Sin is an active state of rebellion against God within humanity which produces a transgression of the law, failure to conform to His standards, ultimately resulting in wrongful acts [willful and non-willful] toward both God and man, physical death, and eternal damnation.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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16. Every facet of man's being is affected by this sin nature:
  - a. His intellect is blinded (2 Cor. 4:4): "*tuphloo*" in the NT is used as metaphor: to blunt the mental discernment, darken the mind.
  - b. His mind is degenerate or disapproved (Rom. 1:28).
  - c. His understanding is darkened, separated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18).
  - d. His emotions are degraded and defiled (Rom. 1:21, 24, 26; Titus 1:15).
  - e. His will is enslaved to sin and therefore, stands in opposition to God (Rom. 6:20; 7:20).

## V. Additional Considerations:

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16. Total Depravity does not mean that the image of God in man is obliterated for the natural man can perceive God though his understanding is darkened by sin. Consider the following:
  - A. Adam & Eve following their disobedience in view of both their fearful hiding in the shrubs when God entered into the garden and in their conversation with God (Romans 3).
  - B. Natural Man can “*clearly*” perceive God’s existence via natural revelation and thus suppress the truth (Romans 1:20-21):

## V. Additional Considerations:

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Romans 1:20-21: “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are **without excuse**.*”

**SEEN:** The term, “seen” “*νοεω*” [to perceive, think: present, passive participle, neuter] means to **consider well**, understand, reflect on with insight ( Mt 15:17 ; 16:9 , 11 ; 24:15 ; Mk 7:18 ; 8:17 ; 13:14 ; Jn 12:40 ; Ro 1:20 ; Eph 3:4 , 20 ; 1Ti 1:7 ; 2Ti 2:7 ; Heb 11:3). It is also used in Eph. 3:20 to mean, **imagine**, i.e., be able to form an idea.

**CLEARLY:** The term “discern clearly” “*kathorao*” [verb, third person, singular, present, passive, indicative] means as a verb to “learn about, be learned about, clearly seen, perceived.”

## V. Additional Considerations:

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Romans 1:20-21: “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are **without excuse**.*”

### **WITHOUT EXCUSE:**

The term **ἀναπολόγητος** [ *anapologetos* / an·ap·ol·og·ay·tos /] occurs twice in N.T. and is an adjective (as a negative particle) which translates as “*without excuse*” in Rom. 1:20. This term means without defense or excuse. This term is also used in Romans 2:1 and means that which cannot be defended, inexcusable.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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- C. Cornelius was considered a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and who prayed to God always...his prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:1-8). Consider:
1. Cornelius desired to please God. How and why would an unregenerate man desire to please God?
  2. God “listened” to the prayers of an unregenerate man.
  3. The fact that he Cornelius readily obeyed the angel is a sign of how much he desired the truth.
  4. An angel communicated with Cornelius.
  5. God sends Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10:24-48).
  6. Peter explains to those in Jerusalem how God’s grace was extended to the gentiles by giving the chronological account of Cornelius’ salvation and that of his household.

# V. Additional Considerations:

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- D. Psalm 19:1-4: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech no language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”
- E. The power of revelation in nature: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to the all earth, and their words to the end of the world’” (Romans 10:17-18). Here Paul quotes Psalm 19:4.
- F. God holds humanity responsible for the light of revelation through their conscience because they “show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Romans 2:15).

# V. Additional Considerations:

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## **17. Summary:**

- A. God does not regenerate the elect apart nor against their will to believe.
- B. It is not very loving to work against someone's will and coercion is not very loving. Even "implanting" a desire to love is still forced love.
- C. God is not impersonal or removed from the process of salvation.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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- D. Rather, the Holy Spirit *works with* or in *cooperation with their free will*, lovingly persuading those who respond positively to general revelation (Romans 1-2), conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:9-10).

As Robert P. Lightner states, “God grants to those who respond positively to the revelation of God in themselves and in nature the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Sovereignly He sees to it that the message of God’s gift of salvation through Christ comes to them so they can believe and become children of God” [*Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, 177].

- E. Thus, God’s election is unconditional to the willing and conditional upon the unwilling.

## V. Additional Considerations:

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As Charles C. Ryrie states:

“To be sure, election assures that those chosen will be saved, but it alone does not save them. People are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. And, of course, they must learn about the death of Christ somehow in order to have content to their faith. Thus, election, the death of Christ, testimony of His death, and personal faith are all necessary in the salvation of an individual. Election alone does not save.”

~ *Basic Theology*, 363.

# VI. Conclusion:

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1. The sovereignty and the free will of man co-exist by divine decree. God sovereignly chose to enable us to choose. God sovereignly created us as moral free agents in view of the image of God.
  
2. There is no contradiction in God knowingly pre-determining and pre-determinately knowing from all eternity precisely what we would do with our free acts.
  - A. God determined that moral creatures would do things freely.
  
  - B. God did not determine that people would be forced to perform free acts. In other words, what is forced is not free, and what is free is not forced.

## VI. Conclusion:

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3. *God's predestination and human free choice are a mystery, but not a contradiction. They go beyond reason, but not against reason. That is, they are not incongruous, but neither can we see exactly how they are complementary. We apprehend each as true, but we do not comprehend how both are true.*
4. *There is no contradiction in God knowingly predetermining and pre-determinately knowing from all eternity precisely what he would do without our free acts.*
5. *God determined that moral creatures would do things freely. For God determined that they would be forced to perform free choice.*

## VI. Conclusion:

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The sovereignty and the free will of man co-exists by divine decree. God sovereignly chose to enable us to choose. God sovereignly created us as moral free agents in view of the image of God.

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