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- John M. Frame

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WHO IS THE GOD WHOSE IMAGE WE BEAR?

Any attempt to develop an inductive theology of salvation must start with the character and attributes of the God who saves sinners. This is foundational. The main themes of the Bible all focus on God, mankind, sin, and salvation. Just a few verses into Genesis, God is described as creating humanity in His own image. An accurate biblical picture of God's character and in what ways humanity resembles God and in what ways mankind is different is essential to salvation truth. How Adam and Eve's fall into disobedience and depravity affects the image of God in humanity is another essential element. Our goal is to understand who God is, who we were created to be, and our own fallen human plight, as a sound basis for a balanced view of God's wonderful salvation.

Careful study of Scripture will show that none of the polarized views described in Chapter 1 gives a true picture. The key question then is: what is meant by the sovereignty of God and the depravity of mankind? All sorts of questions are raised by this diversity of viewpoints. Years ago, Doris Day used to sing, "Que Sera, Sera (What will be, will be)." Is this true? Is God the author of sin? Does God actually change His mind? Is God responsible for atrocities, such as the holocaust or nature's calamities? Has God really decreed before creation all that transpires on earth? Is life really a stacked deck? Does God really answer prayer, or does it just seem that way? If God doesn't control everything, how can the future be certain? Can *anybody* really get saved, or has God already decided the issue? Who is responsible to live the Christian life, God or me? And so the questions go. The ultimate question is: what kind of a god is God, and in what sense does humanity

bear His image? Answering this first will help answer all the other questions.

It is imperative that sovereignty and depravity be defined biblically, using an inductive approach, drawing concepts *directly* from Scripture. This approach must begin in the first chapters of Genesis to get the whole picture of who God is in His relationship to mankind.

God Before the Foundation of the World

The earliest verses of Genesis imply that the God who created the heavens and the earth is not a solitary singleness, but an interpersonal Being. The word for God in the Hebrew is *ELOHIM*, which is a plural noun (3 or more) with a singular verb. Plural nouns and pronouns are frequently used to refer to God. Moses described the Spirit of God as involved in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2) and in striving with sinful humanity (Gen. 6:3). There are later references to a divine Messiah, who is called God's Son (Psalm 2:7; Isa. 9:6; 48:16; Micah 5:2). In the New Testament the Lord Jesus is depicted as the prophesied Messiah. He and His Apostles frequently explain His integral relationship to the Holy Spirit sent from the Father. The New Testament is more explicit in revealing that God is a Tri-Unity, that is, one God existing eternally in three persons. The Hebrew Scriptures emphasized the oneness of God because of humanity's early lapse into polytheism. However, all Scripture is consistent in affirming the Tri-unity of God.

This Tri-unity is an eternal reality, since in referring to the Lord Jesus, John wrote: "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was Himself deity. He was in the beginning with God.**" (Jn. 1:1-2, CGO). The grammar of this verse emphasizes that the Lord Jesus had the essential quality of deity in the pre-creation eternity.^A This also comes out in His prayer: "**Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was**" (Jn. 17:5). The Scripture is also very clear that an essential attribute of God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). This is a glimpse into the eternal counsels of God from Christ's high-priestly prayer: "**...for You loved Me before the foundation of the world**" (Jn. 17:24). Augustine wrote: "If God is love, then there must be in Him a Lover, a Beloved, and a Spirit of love; for no love is conceivable without a Lover and a Beloved... Where love is, there is a trinity."¹

The New Testament gives other indications as to what God did before the foundation of the world. The Apostle Paul was chosen:

... to make clear how is to be carried out the trusteeship of this secret which has for ages been hidden in God, the Creator of all things, so that the many phases of God's wisdom may now through the church be made known to

A. Only the Williams translation comes close to bringing out the full meaning of the Greek: "The Word was God Himself," based upon the fact that the word *theos* is in the emphatic position at the beginning of the clause. Being without an article *theos*, connotes the quality of deity. However, Christ is not the only divine person, as Williams' rendering implies, thus my modification (cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 269).

the rulers and authorities in heaven, in accordance with the eternal purpose which God executed in the gift of Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9-11, WILL).

Before creation God made a plan for the salvation of the world to be made known through Israel and the church. Paul, writing about the church, also revealed that “...**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love**” (Eph. 1:4). The future for all His saints is to participate in His future kingdom: “**Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’**” (Mt. 25:34). The only way God could prepare His church and His kingdom was to send His Son into the world:

...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Pet. 1:18-21).

God’s eternal decrees. Unfortunately, theologians of past centuries developed elaborate notions of a comprehensive decree or decrees of God in the past eternity, by which He determined all that was to take place in the whole world throughout time. In letting their imaginations run, they got involved in sometimes bitter debate about the order of these supposed decrees of God. The New Testament is absolutely silent about any decrees of God, and there is only one reference to such decrees in the Old: “**I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’**” (Ps. 2:7)^B This is the unique event of human history upon which all of God’s eternal plans were founded! Therefore, God was careful to implement His decree by raising Christ Jesus from the dead. There are five other references to God’s decrees relating to His creation and judgments (Job 28:26; 38:10; Ps. 148:6; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22).

God’s Awesome Creation

Scientists are abandoning the idea of a steady-state universe, with matter and energy being eternal. A recent theory is the “big bang,” which says that there was an incredibly massive explosion of matter and energy billions of years ago, resulting in our present rapidly expanding universe. Not only are scientists having to admit that the universe had a beginning, but increasingly many are recognizing an intelligence behind it all.² Although the Genesis account does not affirm a “big bang,” it does indicate that scientists

B. Some cultists imagine that this speaks of the origin of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, but the Apostle Paul made it clear that it speaks of His resurrection from the dead. Cf. Acts 13:33; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5.

are getting closer to the truth. It is clear that matter is not eternal, and the Bible clearly teaches that God created the universe out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. There is strong evidence that Genesis 1:1 is an absolute sentence affirming the creation of the heavens and earth in the beginning.³

The earth. There is considerable debate about the formation of the earth, plants, animals, and human beings in the six days spelled out in the rest of the chapter. What is clear is that the sovereign God wrought an incredible work of fiat creation. Erich Sauer affirms:

Christ and the New Testament guarantee the historicity and literality of the opening chapters of the Bible. Everywhere the Lord and His apostles treat them as accounts of actual events; indeed they even draw from them dogmatic conclusions. Matt. 19:4-9; Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:21, 22; I Tim 2:13, 14; Jas. 3:9; 1 Jn.3:12; Rev. 20:2.⁴

Astronomers focus on God's macrocosm, and mind-boggling new discoveries about the vastness and complexity of our universe occur almost daily. There is a hint of the vastness of the expanding universe in Genesis 1:6-8, which speaks of the "expanse" of the heavens, a word which could well imply an expanding universe. Atomic physicists focus on the microcosm, and again knowledge of the incredible complexity of the building blocks of our universe is escalating. The universe almost seems infinite to us creatures, but we know that it is not infinite, nor could it be. But the majesty of this time-space universe is a growing testimony to the majesty of the infinite God Who created it all.

As we marvel at the immensity of the universe, the question arises: how could an insignificant planet like earth be the focus of God's cosmic plan of redemption? Geographically and spatially our planet is just one insignificant planet in the solar system of an insignificant star in an insignificant galaxy in an immense and expanding universe. Furthermore, human beings on this tiny earth seem to be an insignificant part of its biomass. This question arises out of a confusion between spatial significance and spiritual significance. God, the Creator of all things, has invested our earth with a unique significance by creating man in His own image, setting man upon it, and sending His eternal Son to become incarnate among humans so that He might die and rise again to procure eternal life for them. The carrying out of this divine drama on earth makes it the most significant place in the universe. Waterloo is an insignificant village in Flanders, but the battle fought there to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte gave it incredible historical significance. Secular humanists are expending billions of dollars vainly searching for life on other planets because they do not believe in God and the centrality of His eternal plan for the earth. However, God has chosen to make human beings on earth the central focus of His eternal plan.

Angelic beings. Scripture tells us that God not only created the material universe, but also the angels, the first pair of human beings, and the

animal and plant kingdoms. Scripture says very little explicitly about the creation of angelic beings. But there is a connection between the stars and these angels. Sauer observes this connection:

The Word of God knows of thrones and lordships, of principalities and authorities (Col. 1:16), of sons of God and morning stars (Job 38:7), of the host of the high in the height (Isa. 24:21), of cherubim and seraphim (Rev. 4:6-8; Isa. 6:2, 3), of archangels and angels (Jude 9; Rev. 5:11; 12:7). And all these it describes by the same term, "host of heaven", as *it uses for the stars*.⁵

Probably the connection is best understood by identifying the universe as the dwelling place of these heavenly beings. In any case, there are indications that the angels take part in the history of human salvation.

Although little is said about the creation of angels in general, Ezekiel wrote about Lucifer's (Satan's) original created beauty and status in God's presence, symbolized in language addressed to the "king of Tyre" (Ez. 28:11-19). The language transcends that of any earthly prince (28:1-10).

You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering:... On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you *there*, you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you.... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor (Ez. 28:12-15, 17).

Similarly Isaiah prophesied about the "star of the morning, son of the dawn" under the rubric of the king of Babylon, another grossly idolatrous city (Isa. 14:12-14). Satan's revolt here described will be discussed later.

Humanity's Created Nobility

A unique creation

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen 1:26-7).

Moses, in the usual Hebrew way, then gives a parallel explanation: "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (*ruach hayyim*); and man became a living being (*nephesh hayah*)" (Gen.2:7). Since the animals had been described in Genesis 1:30 as having *nephesh*, it is clear that *nephesh hayah* refers to physical life. However, since *hayyim* is the plural for 'lives' and since *ruach* can refer to 'breath' or 'spirit,' this expression could well indicate the unique spiritual qualities of

mankind implied in the image of God emphasized in 1:26-7. What then is the meaning of that image?

The meaning of God's image in man

In the very act of creating human beings in His own image, God voluntarily limited the exercise of His own sovereignty. Christians have struggled to understand the meaning of that image of God in man. Some cults wrongly assume that it implies a physical image, but it is clear from the rest of Scripture that it involves the moral image of God. There are three common explanations. Some emphasize that the image of God enabled mankind to relate to God. Others focus on the rule over the animal, vegetable, and mineral domains of the earth which connects with that image. Others reject these ideas and focus on the constitutional nature of man as unique from the animals. There is probably truth in all three: What man does (relate to God and other people) and is able to do (exercise rule over nature) is dependent upon who he is (the substantive reality).

What is this substantive reality of the image of God? It should be self-evident that the major difference between man and the animals is in the eternality of man. God created mankind with an everlasting spirit, which animals do not possess. Since the Genesis context emphasizes humanity's distinctiveness from the animal creation over which he was given rule, immortality is clearly a major part of mankind's uniqueness.

God's moral attributes reflected in His image. Since Genesis does not explain the meaning of the image of God, we must derive its characteristics from three New Testament allusions, where this imagery is found in passages related to the restoration of the image through salvation in Christ. Paul referred to the knowledge of God being restored in the believer in Christ: "... and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—" (Col. 3:10). The context here makes it clear that Paul's focus goes beyond man's intelligence to his knowledge of God's revealed truth, which needs to be restored in fallen man through the new birth and the ongoing renewal process of the mind of the believer (Rom. 12:1-2).

In the same way the parallel passage in Ephesians 4:24 indicates that the moral qualities of righteousness and holiness are also part of the image of God: "... and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*" It is widely understood that Adam was created in innocence with the possibility of attaining righteousness and holiness by continued fellowship with and obedience to God. Thus man was created as a moral being faced with moral choices, which animals are incapable of making.

Another clue comes from 2 Corinthians 3:18: "**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.**" Can we infer from

this that a certain aspect of God's glory was reflected in the highest example of His earthly creation, mankind? We see a pattern emerging from these references. Here is the basis for seeing *all* of the moral attributes of God are part of His image in man, even if a specific attribute is not explicitly referred to in Scripture. God's love, holiness, and spirit nature must have been a part of the original image (Isa. 6:3; Jn. 4:24; 1 Jn. 4:8). Thus, just as God is a personal God with intellect, emotions, and will, the image of God in man must involve intellect, emotions, and will. Seeing the many aspects of His image in man, the full spectrum of God's moral attributes should be included in our understanding.

God delegates limited autonomy. God is an autonomous being, totally sovereign over His creation. By creating Adam and Eve in His image, they became autonomous beings, with only one limitation to their autonomy, just one fruit which they could not eat. They were created to reflect His glorious attributes of holiness, love, righteousness, mercy, and justice and to remain in fellowship with Him. God created Adam with a human spirit, distinct from the soul. The spirit is the God-conscious part of man; the soul, the self-conscious part; and the body, the world-conscious part. The animals were created with only *nephesh*, which means soul-life (Gen. 1:30), but man was distinct in having a spirit (*ruach*) as well.

What is the evidence for distinguishing the human spirit from the soul? Those who don't make this distinction base it upon the interchangeable use of soul and spirit in describing fallen humanity. However, the nature of unfallen Adam and Eve is quite another question, and the nature of fallen man is not really direct evidence for the original condition of Adam and Eve or of regenerate believers.^C Although the human spirit died in the fall, when we trust in Christ our spirit is actually made alive and functional again, so that we can relate to God personally. Before we look more into the implications of the fall, we should seek to understand Adam's created autonomy.

The creation account connects God's delegation to Adam of rule over the animal, vegetable, and mineral creation with his uniqueness as being in God's image, twice in Genesis 1:26-28. This delegated rule or dominion is in itself a further self-limitation of the exercise of God's sovereignty. Adam was to be God's regent over the earth. Although God was the ultimate authority,

C. The explicit evidence for the human spirit being distinct from the soul is found explicitly in two New Testament passages: "**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit [pneuma] and soul [psuchē] and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1 Thess. 5:23); "**For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart**" (Heb. 4:12). Even though the last passage does not speak of separating soul and spirit, it does imply a real distinction, just as we must distinguish joints and marrow. In addition, in 1 Cor. 2:11, 14-15 and 15:44-46 there is a contrast between the Greek adjectives *psuchikos* [natural=soulish] and *pneumatikos* [spiritual]. The connection of James 3:15 with Jude 19 is also supportive. (See Olson, *BCAA*, pp. 88, 456.)

Adam was given a trusteeship of the world, further evidenced in that God told Adam to name the animals (Gen. 2:18-20). When we give a pet to a child, we usually allow the child to name the pet. Adam had free will in this and everything else, with the one exception of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In these delegated areas God was no longer exercising His sovereignty. So when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, did they really exercise free will, or had God already decided what they would do, thus determining the outcome? Some Christians under the influence of Augustine's determinism would even deny that Adam and Eve had free will, thus making God the author of sin. Let us investigate the actual biblical teaching about God's sovereignty.

The Meaning of God's Sovereignty

The idea that God's eternal decrees dictate all that transpires in the universe, which Augustine and the Reformers developed, lacks any explicit biblical support. Reformed theologian John Frame has issued a warning:

Evidently we must use greater care in formulating our concept of divine sovereignty than has sometimes been shown among theologians.... The moral seems to be that "sovereignty" is a more complex concept than we often imagine. Use of it requires some careful thinking rather than jumping to conclusions that seem intuitive. What seems intuitive for one theologian will be counterintuitive for another. Intuition misleads us, because generally intuition does not make fine distinctions. Intuitively, we tend to formulate divine sovereignty by excluding anything that looks like it might be a "imitation" on God.⁶

What explicit evidence is there for this decretal* view of God's sovereignty? A number of word studies and inductive investigation of the biblical data will help clarify the concept of God's sovereignty.

Key word studies

Although one modern translation renders *YHWH-ELOHIM* as "Sovereign LORD," there is no word for sovereignty in either the Old or New Testaments. Since sovereignty relates to political relationships of governance, the terms most directly related to it in the Old Testament are king, kingdom, decrees, and counsel, and in the New, counsel (*boulē*), purpose (*prothēsis*), and will (*thelēma*). Understanding in what sense God's governance over mankind is spelled out in the Scriptures is critical in defining sovereignty.

Kingdom. Four Hebrew terms for kingdom come from the same root (*melek*).⁷ Usage concerning divine activity falls into three major categories: the Davidic Covenant promises, prophecies of the Messianic kingdom, and a few references to the general rulership of Yahweh over the nations of the earth (Ps. 103:19; Ps. 145). There are many more instructive references in the Psalms and prophets in which Yahweh is addressed as King. Some are references to the Messiah as King (Ps. 2 & 24), but most stress God's mighty

acts as ruler of Israel and the nations, as manifested in His works of creation, judgment, deliverance, protection, and cleansing of sin (Ps. 2:7; 5:2; 9:10; 10:16; 20:9; 24:7-10; 44:4; 47:2,6,7; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 89:18; 95:3; 98:6; 145:1; Isa. 6:5; 33:22; Jer. 8:19; 10:7, 10). However, *there is not a hint in any of these passages of any exhaustive sovereignty* by which Yahweh decreed every event to transpire in the universe.

Indeed, the imagery of king and kingdom could not possibly communicate such an idea to ancient middle-eastern peoples, unless it were spelled out explicitly. These terms were not only used for the rulers of great empires, but also for the heads of small cities, and thus do not support such an idea.⁸ Not even the greatest human kings' powers involved direct control of all events in their domain. Their decrees were carried out *indirectly* by their government functionaries. Therefore, there is no way that direct control of all events by a sovereign could be indicated by the cultural usage of the words 'king' or 'kingdom.' This is an exaggeration of the analogy of human kingly sovereignty: a notion which Calvinists imposed upon these words.

Counsel in the Hebrew ('etsah). The next word which relates to God's sovereignty is 'counsel,' for which there are frequent references in both testaments. The Hebrew '*etsah*' is widely used on the human level for counsel or advice. On the divine level, there are a score of usages. In Psalm 33:11, in emphasizing the eternity of God's counsel in contrast to that of the nations, it is set in parallelism with "the plans of His heart." God has an eternal plan. Then the Psalmist looks for guidance from God's counsel (73:24) and rebukes Israel for not waiting for but rather spurning His counsel (106:13; 107:11). In Proverbs, 'Wisdom' gives her counsel (1:25; 8:14), and the permanence of God's counsel is highlighted (19:21).

The prophets speak of the Messiah's wise, Spirit-given counsel (Isa. 11:2) and of the greatness of Yahweh in His counsel and deeds, which are wonderful, omniscient, and abiding (Isa. 28:29; 46:10-11; Jer. 32:19). In Isaiah 46:10 the establishment of His counsel is linked with the accomplishment of His pleasure. However, there is not a hint that this involves any exhaustive efficacious decree in eternity past such as is held by Calvinists. The translators render it as "plan" in contexts which have to do with God's plans of bringing judgment (Isa. 25:1; 46:11; Jer. 49:20; 50:45). Therefore, the most that can be said about the revelation of Yahweh's sovereignty directly revealed in the Old Testament and warranted by inductive word studies of usage is that *an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God sovereignly intervenes in human affairs according to His wise plan as He implements His general rule over the nations and His plan of redemption.*

Counsel in the Greek (boulē). It is even more astounding that the New Testament makes *absolutely no reference* to any of God's decrees. The Greek word which comes closest to 'decree' is *boulēma*, which is only used once. In Romans 9:19 Paul puts it in the mouth of an objector to what he says about God's sovereign dealings with the nation Israel. The weaker,

related word *boulē* means ‘counsel’ or ‘purpose’ and has a secondary meaning, ‘resolution’ or ‘decision.’ Luke uses it five times of the divine counsel. In His affirmation of John the Baptizer and rebuke of Israel’s leadership, the Lord Jesus stated that “**the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose (*boulē*) for themselves, not having been baptized by John**” (Lk.7:30). Is it not ironic that the very first (and only) connection of this term with God in the Gospels, not only does not imply some exhaustively efficacious implementation of God’s eternal plan, *but quite the opposite brings out men’s ability to frustrate God’s plan for themselves?* Apparently God had a plan for the nation Israel, but over the centuries they failed to conform to that plan, and now their leaders outright rejected that plan for themselves and the nation.

The Book of Acts. First we find Peter’s extremely relevant charge in his Pentecost sermon: “... **this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan (*boulē*) and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death**” (Acts 2:23). Peter (as quoted by Luke) used the strongest possible language to communicate divine sovereignty in the outworking of God’s plan for the crucifixion. He used a participial form of *horizein* (ordain, appoint) to modify *boulē* (counsel). Peter, while acknowledging the outworking of God’s pre-temporal plan by foreknowledge, placed full responsibility for the crucifixion upon the evil men who did it. There is no hint of implication that God forced the will of the Jewish leaders, Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, King Herod Antipas, or the Roman soldiers. They were doing their own thing in their own sinful way.

For example, Harold Hoehner has shown how the political situation in AD 33 better explains Pilate’s motivation than the situation in AD 30.⁹ It would be no problem for an omniscient God to orchestrate events by His intensive knowledge of each of the players and circumstances. Indeed, Peter explicitly included God’s prescience in the implementation of His plan (Acts 2:23). Since the cross is at the very center of God’s plan, it is easy to understand God’s most directive involvement in this event. However, the force of Peter’s words must not be extended to other less central events.

In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch Paul stated that David served the *boulē* (purpose) of God in his own generation (Acts 13:36) and reminded the Ephesian elders that he had declared to them the whole counsel (*boulē*) of God (20:27). If the *boulē* of God were all encompassing, how could Paul possibly have declared the whole of it to the Ephesian church in under three years? The writer of Hebrews argued that God showed the unchangeableness of his *boulē* by making an oath (6:17). So far there is no hint that this purpose, plan, or counsel of God exhaustively includes every event in the universe, including all the worst eruption of Satan’s and mankind’s evil over the centuries. This leaves just the one verse so crucial to the Calvinists.

The main proof-text. Ephesians 1:9-12 contains the last usage of *boulē* in reference to God’s eternal plan and is the crucial proof-text used by

Augustine's Calvinistic followers to support their concept of sovereignty¹⁰:

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all thing in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel (boulē) of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:9-12).

At this point, a reminder is needed concerning the *extreme cruciality of context in interpretation*. Has Paul been discussing anything relating to all-encompassing decrees of God in this context? Quite the contrary, Paul is focusing on God's glorious plan of salvation. The word 'decree' is not found here, or for that matter anywhere in the New Testament of God's decrees. In Ephesians 1:3-6 Paul is focusing on the Father's eternal plan of salvation, and then in 1:7-12 he surveys the Son's past work of redemption and the inheritance He purposes for us in the consummation ("the fulness of the times"). Verse 12 is a segue into vv. 12-13 in which the Spirit's work of applying salvation is described. Thus the total context before and after verse 11 is salvation oriented.

The grammar of this clause warrants closer examination. Note that the article *ta* with *panta* (all) probably has a demonstrative force, that is, "**He works all these things.**"^D This would make it clear that the "all things" of 1:11 has to do with 'all these things' of the redemptive plan of God just alluded to, not with all human events. Any universalizing of the outworking of God's sovereignty to all 'secular' events is totally absent from the context.

In sum, the weight of usage of this clause in Ephesians 1:11 militates for the demonstrative force, referring back to the outworking of the Father's eternal plan (1:3-6) as implemented by the Beloved Son through the blood-redemption of the cross (1:7-11).^E All uses of this verse as a proof-text for the exhaustive sovereignty of God is crass Scripture twisting. If there were some

D. "The Greek article was originally derived from the demonstrative pronoun *ho, hē, to*, and is clearly akin to the relative pronoun *hos, hē, ho*. It always retained some of the demonstrative force. This fact is evidenced by its frequent use in the papyri purely as a demonstrative pronoun" (Dana and Mantey, p. 136). "The article was originally derived from the demonstrative pronoun. That is, its original force was to *point out* something. It has largely kept the force of drawing attention to something" (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 208). He states that the article intrinsically *conceptualizes*, also *identifies* an object, and at times *definitizes* (pp. 209-10). Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Short Grammar*, p. 68.

E. In order to verify this interpretation of Ephesians 1:11 it is vital to do a study of the use of the article with the Greek word 'all' (*pas*), found 45 times in the New Testament, usually in the neuter plural (*ta panta*). A careful examination of the context of these usages shows that about 25 times the article has the demonstrative force mentioned by the grammarians, which restricts its meaning to some referent in the context. About 14 times the demonstrative force is absent, giving a more universal meaning to the expression. (The remaining five are ambiguous or have a textual problem.)

antecedent development of such a notion in the usage of the terms, such proof-texting might be doubtfully justifiable, but there is not a shred of such development in either the Old or New Testaments!

While noting the importance of context, the same expression is used in the preceding verse (Eph. 1:10), where it is clear that Christ is to head up “**all these things**,” that is, all believers in the Church (1:22), whether now in heaven or on earth. If its demonstrative force is ignored, universalism results. Thus, on what basis do Calvinists universalize it in verse 11?

It is also very important to note that Paul is referring to the objective work of the Son of God two millenniums ago as the antecedent of “all these things,” and that he begins to make reference to the present subjective work of the Holy Spirit in applying salvation *after this* in verses 12-13. The cross was an eternally determined work of God; the same cannot be said about the application phase of the Spirit’s work in the life of the individual, at least as far as this passage goes.

Thus the heavy weight which Augustine’s followers put upon this one verse, after careful scrutiny leaves their viewpoint in serious doubt. Although it only takes one verse of Scripture to be a basis for truth, the correct interpretation of that verse is absolutely crucial, otherwise serious error results. Butler put it so well: “*We hold a few texts so near the eyes that they hide the rest of the Bible.*”¹¹ In this case, it is just one text!

The verb ‘to will’. The verb *boulomai* (‘to purpose,’ ‘to will’) is used three times with God as the subject. In James 1:18 the participle *boulētheis* is used adverbially to describe the new birth. Although the translators tend to render it, “Of His own will,” more literally it is, “purposefully” or “intentionally” that God gave us new birth. Does this verse clarify whether the new birth is implemented according to an unconditional or a conditional plan of God? Not at all! It is not explicit in this regard.

“**The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing (*boulomai*) for any to perish but for all to come to repentance**” (2 Pet. 3:9). This verse has proved to be a major problem for the Calvinistic view. Indeed, it is in harmony with the whole tenor of Scripture concerning the eternal plan of God, which is, that the gospel of Christ be made available to every last human being before Christ returns.¹² This purpose of God, that all should come to repentance, makes the offer of the gospel a legitimate, bona fide offer. God’s motivation is not ambivalent in this regard, lest He be accused of insincerity. God is in no way double-minded. (The third reference in Hebrews 6:17 is not relevant to the current investigation.)

Purpose (*prothēsis*). The word *prothēsis* occurs five times in reference to God’s plan. The BAG lexicon gives: “plan, purpose, resolve, will,... design” as meanings.¹³ Three usages have to do with God’s plan of salvation (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9) and two with His plan for the transition from national Israel to the Church in the general outworking of His plan of redemption. (Rom. 9:11; Eph. 3:11). There is no reference to a comprehen-

sive plan for every event in human history. The question is how individuals come to be included in this salvation plan. In Romans 8:28 Paul first mentions “those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose (*prothēsis*).” Here God’s salvation plan or design is seen as including those who love God. Paul makes it clear throughout the epistle that their calling to love God involves repentant faith. Their calling and justification are by faith. Faith must also be a prominent factor in his reference to foreknowledge and foreordination, since this is part of an unbroken sequence of five steps in Romans 8:29-30. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul confirms that salvation and calling are according to His own gracious plan or design (*prothēsis*). Whether this is worked out conditionally or unconditionally is not stipulated. (Rom. 9:11 will be discussed on pp. 298-303 as part of a broader discussion of Rom. 9-11.) Thus there is no explicit support for the Calvinistic view here either.

Will (THELĒMA). A study of the usage of *thelēma* is mostly marginal to the concerns of this investigation. It is used about eighteen times of the moral will of God in some regard, five times of God’s salvation plan in some form, twice of God’s guidance of a believer’s walk, numerous times of Christ’s own desire to fulfill the will of the Father, and a number of other general references. Again there is no revelation of a comprehensive determinative decree for the universe which is all-encompassing. However, determinists* take it that “God’s decree is synonymous with God’s will.” This is based upon Theodor Beza’s statement: “Nothing falls outside of the divine willing, even when certain events are clearly contrary to God’s will.”¹⁴ Again the inductive data in the use of *thelēma* does not support this notion.

A Mediate Theological View

The solution to the serious polarization concerning who our God really is and how He relates to humans is found in a mediate view. Both extreme positions are in serious error, and the truth is in the middle (as it frequently is). These extreme positions in our understanding of God lead to extreme positions on His plan of salvation also, since all of the divisions of theology are interrelated. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative to develop a correct definition of God’s sovereignty in order to grapple with the one-sided theology of salvation proposed by extreme Calvinists and open theists.* Likewise, the biblical teaching of God’s absolute foreknowledge exposes the errors of open theism. A mediate position resolves the tension in a most satisfying way.

Even though J. O. Buswell, Jr. was a five-point Calvinist, he took issue with some of the concepts of God’s attributes traditionally held by Augustine and the Reformers. His theology sensitized me to some of the problems with what has been called the “classic concept of God.” He also alerted me to a *fundamental philosophical error in what I had been taught, which is, that God cannot foreknow that which He has not determined*. In reacting to such a notion held by extreme Calvinist Loraine Boettner, Buswell stated:

But it is presumptuous for man to claim to know what kind of things God could or could not know. There is a mystery in knowledge which will probably never be resolved for us.... For men to declare that God could not know a free event in the future seems to me sheer dogmatism.¹⁵

Buswell's most perceptive statement is a double-edged sword, since it also cuts off the head of open theism as well. The biblical evidence for God's infinite omniscience should be clear enough, without twisting its meaning.

There is another closely related error which is evident in the writings of both opposing viewpoints. *A number of writers have confused the certainty of a future event with the determination of that event by God.*¹⁶ God knows all future events as certain, whether He has determined them or not. His omniscience is unlimited. Both Calvinists and open theists* err in making the certainty of the future contingent upon God's determining it, but with differing outcomes—the Calvinistic future being certain; the open theist's future, partially open and uncertain. Both views are in error because God's acts (decrees) must flow from His attributes (omniscience), not the reverse.

The mediate view affirms the essentials of the classic concept of God, as modified by Buswell. The absolute foreknowledge of God is affirmed as part of His omniscience, His absolute omnipresence, and His absolute omnipotence, the exercise of which He has chosen to limit in significant ways. The sovereignty of God is affirmed, but it must be defined in the light of that self-limitation. The Greek philosophical concept of the simpleness of God is rejected outright, since God reveals Himself as a Tri-unity, and His works of creation are incredibly complex. The concept of a single all-embracing decree of God must also be rejected, since it derives from the notion of the simpleness of God and is totally without biblical support. Likewise, the impassibility of God (no passions) must be rejected as incompatible with the biblical narrative and is obviously derived from Greek philosophy. God certainly has revealed Himself as emotionally moved by the human condition. Lastly, while affirming the immutability of God, we must recognize His genuine dynamic interaction with humanity, which is not a frozen immutability. His attributes are unchanging, but His relationships with mankind are dynamic and changing.

Conclusions

God is the omnipotent Creator of the universe, who can do what He pleases consistent with His attributes. In creating autonomous beings, namely, Lucifer, the angels, and the human race, He has intentionally limited the exercise of His own sovereignty. Like human sovereigns, God exercises His sovereignty by punishing disobedience to His will at what times and what ways suit His eternal plans. He further limits the exercise of His sovereignty by delegating to mankind dominion over the earth, which is intrinsic in the image of God with which He created man. Man was intended to reflect all of God's moral attributes in his relation to Himself and

to one another. There is no direct biblical evidence for the idea that in eternity past God decreed all that would transpire on the earth or that He irresistibly brings about the outworking of His will. Indeed, such a notion is contradictory to the creation of autonomous creatures who had free will. This notion is heavily derived from a misinterpretation of just one clause in Ephesians 1:11. There is absolutely no reference to God's decrees in the New Testament, and the Old Testament references are totally devoid of such a concept. But to get the whole picture, the impact of angelic revolt and human disobedience to God must be investigated in the next chapter.

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 2. Michael Denton, *Earth's Destiny and Evolution a Theory in Crisis*.
 3. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing*.
 4. Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, p. 38.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
 6. John M. Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, pp. 223-4.
 7. Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 574-5.
 8. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., & Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), I:507-9.
 9. Harold Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ: Part V," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 524 (Oct. '74) pp. 340-8 (Also published in book form).
 10. John S. Feinberg is typical in the weight he puts on Eph. 1:11 in David and Randall Basinger, eds. *Predestination and Free Will*, pp. 29-32. Also in Feinberg's, *No One Like Him*, pp. 680-693.
 11. William F. Butler, cited by Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ*, p. 66.
 12. C. Gordon Olson, *What in the World Is God Doing?* 5th ed. (2003), pp. 21-80.
 13. Arndt and Gingrich, p. 713.
 14. Patrick H. Mell, *A Southern Baptist Looks at Predestination* (Cape Coral: Christian Gospel Foundation, n.d.) P. 53; Theodore Beza, cited by Vance, pp. 479, 481.
 15. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. I, p. 46.
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