

HEALING HEREAFTER



**Finding Rational and Refreshing Answers
for Why We're Here
and Where We're Headed**

Jason Dykstra, MD

Healing Hereafter

*Finding Rational and Refreshing Answers
for Why We're Here and Where We're Headed*

Jason Dykstra, MD

Healing Hereafter. Copyright © 2013 by Jason Dykstra, MD.

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, email comrade@samizdatcreative.com.

Published in association with Samizdat Creative, a division of Samizdat Publishing Group (samizdatgroup.com).

Cover design: Jarrod Joplin (White Bread Design)

Interior illustrators: Emily Oliver, Brooke Wolters, and Harrison Gugino

Visit the author's website at jasondykstrawrites.com

Scripture quotations in this publication are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

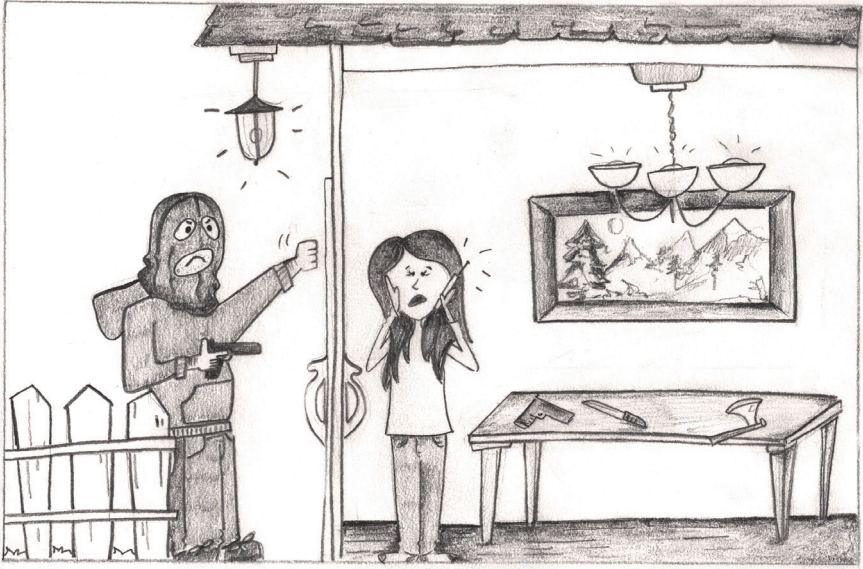
*For everyone who wonders
what the hereafter has in store for us,
and especially for those who want to know why*

*With deep gratitude and love
to my Savior, spouse, and sons,
who all significantly gave of themselves
to make this possible*

Booklet 4

Yes, I Gotta Have Faith, Ooooo, I Gotta Have Faith

*Questions about God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, free will and predestination,
and precisely why and how human faith and God's grace
are both necessary for salvation*



HEALING HEREAFTER

It's always interesting to see how a patient reacts to me the first time I walk into the room. In most of my patient encounters, I am performing some sort of procedure on them, such as a joint injection or biopsy, so they regard me with extra scrutiny before I approach them with any needles. Moreover, I'm a young-appearing, kinda-scrawny, unimpressive-looking individual—even in scrubs and a white coat—which I never wear anyway. I can't tell you how many times the first sentence out of a patient's mouth has contained the words "Doogie" and "Howser." They could at least include the "MD" if they're gonna go that route!

Honestly, I don't mind at all, and I actually kind of like it the older I get, but it does remind me that the way I look at them is very different from the way they look at me. Having done so many of these procedures, I often act as if the patient had been present for every one of them, you know, business as usual. But for most of these folks, this is the first "surgery" they've had, they don't know what risks or pain are in store for them, and they definitely would rather see George Clooney, Hugh Laurie, or even young Doogie open that door instead of me!

Aside from the fact that I am much more procedurally proficient than the above actors, I totally understand. My patients trust me, at least with a part of their bodies, and at most with their lives. Even if I build rapport, adequately obtain informed consent, and satisfactorily answer all of their questions, they still really can't know enough about me to know that they are safe in my hands. All they can do

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

is believe to be true what I say about my credentials and about what I'm going to be doing. Allowing me to begin working on them is an act of faith, no less. Forcing them to believe me is out of the question; they must decide to do that themselves. And it is only once they exercise faith that we truly enter into a patient-physician relationship that can result in healing. Given the somewhat less invasive nature of the procedures that I do, the patients are almost always pleasantly surprised by how quick and easy their experiences are, and one even fell asleep as I was inserting a four-inch needle into his shoulder! He must have been a veteran. They won't flinch at anything you do to them, since "it ain't nothin' compared to 'Nam." I believe it!

In Booklet 2 we described how Jesus saves humans and how humans need to accept the message of Jesus in order to close the loop on God's salvation process for them. But the process doesn't start there, and it is the task of this booklet to find out where salvation really does begin and what exactly happens from that point on as a human's hereafter is healed. Like a patient before a procedure, we all have our apprehensions about God, and he will never force us to believe that he is who he says he is and that he will do exactly as he says with our best interests in mind. But that kind of faith does remain essential if we are to enter into a healing relationship with him, allowing him to begin working on us to bring us the gospel in a way that will accomplish salvation. Yes, you gotta have faith, ooooo, you gotta have faith,¹ and soon you'll know exactly what that faith looks like ...

1

To provide context as we begin this discussion, it may be helpful to know—if you don't already—that Booklet 3 focuses on presenting the evidence for the postmortem preaching Jesus does in the Bible. This allows a response to the argument that everyone gets the information they need for accepting the gospel while they're alive. While this is true for many, it's not for all, and there is clearly still a need for reaching some people after their bodies have died. Enter Sheol/Hades and its three provinces, particularly the one we've called Lugg. But what about the argument that every human's eternal fate was already decided by God prior to the universe being created? Did God's salvation process for everyone begin, and in many ways end, before humans were even around? Well, as we will demonstrate, if God did predestine which humans would be saved—and therefore which ones would not—before he created them, then humans do not have free will. If he predestined their salvation decisions, then he clearly chose for them and can only justly hold himself—not them—responsible for those decisions. This is obviously problematic, so many believe instead that God didn't predestine their salvation decisions based on his own preference and independent of human free will. Rather, by either warping to judgment day from within time or observing all of time simultaneously from outside of it, his resultant foreknowledge of how they eventually would use their free will to make their own salvation decisions would guide his predestination. But God cannot have foreknowledge of their salvation decisions if they truly have free will. Why not?

To answer, we must first remember that while God may warp within time or exist outside of it, we cannot, at least as far as we know for the purposes of our discussion. Humans are subject to physical time and can only exist in the present. You cannot exist right now reading this page and also in the future at judgment day to be observed by God there, not because his time-transcending abilities are limited, but because yours are. So if humans truly have free will, then

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

up to the present time, those free choices are now fixed, but from the present time on, they are absolutely unpredictable. If God decided to create humans with free will and then warped to judgment day, would he find a single reality where he could memorize exactly which humans had freely chosen to be saved or not, allowing him to predestine them respectively to Heaven or Hell before they were created? No. Instead, he would either encounter no reality beyond the present, as one would not have been decided by humans beyond right now, or he would simultaneously encounter every possible reality beyond the present, containing every permutation of human choices to be saved or not. What if God didn't limit himself to a point in time like judgment day, but observed all of time at once? Would he find a single human history unfolding before his eyes, showing him when each person chose to be saved or not, allowing him to predestine them respectively to Heaven or Hell before they were created? No. Instead, he would either encounter no reality beyond the present, as one would not have been decided by humans beyond right now, or he would simultaneously encounter all possible human histories beyond the present unfolding before his eyes, again containing every permutation of human choices to be saved or not. The only free-willed decisions he could accurately predict, regardless of his point of view, would be those already made before the current time, because humans cannot change their past, as they can their future. However, these "predictions" would not be foreknowledge, but hindsight, which humans also possess, albeit not to the extent that God does.

Therefore, human free will necessitates that no one fixed reality or human history can be predicted until humans, not God, have reached that point in time to choose it. If it can be predicted before that via any kind of foreknowledge, then humanity's free will was not truly free to alter it. So if God wants to foreknow how human free will will play out, whether by visiting a point in future time or by observing time as a whole, he will see that it plays out freely, with every possible outcome from the current time forward equally predictable and therefore equally real. If humans have free will, God can only foreknow that he *cannot* foreknow whether or not they will choose to be saved, and this foreknowledge obviously cannot be the

HEALING HEREAFTER

basis on which he predestines who is saved or not.

God can accurately predict which humans will “choose” salvation or not only if *he* directly makes this choice for them, if *he* creates a fixed future reality to encounter on judgment day, or if *he* chooses one of the infinite judgment day potential realities to be *the* reality. Any of these options allow him a single, fixed list of not saved and saved folks (his naughty and nice list, ho ho ho!), but it also sets in stone every circumstance in that reality leading up to those salvation statuses, all the way back to creation, which is equivalent to predestination. Therefore, God’s decision to foreknow whether or not humans have freely willed to be saved removes that free will from them! The predestination based on this foreknowledge is not dependent on how humans would eventually use their free will to make their own salvation decisions; it is solely based on God’s determination of who is saved and who is not, as he alone forced the reality that reflects that. God is either directly picking Gertrude to go to Heaven and Gary to go to Hell or he is picking a *potential* reality in which Gertrude will go to Heaven and Gary will go to Hell to be the *actual* reality, giving neither Gertrude nor Gary any actual say in the matter. God can only justly hold himself, not them, responsible for that decision. Forcing you to choose something and forcing you to exist in a reality where you must choose that same something are no different.

Perhaps all this talk of multiple realities makes you wonder which reality, if any, I’m living in! A simple example will hopefully land us in the same one. Say Isabel is at a park right now, living out her free-willed life just the way she wants to, and God either warps to, or observes from outside of time, her situation on judgment day to see whether or not she chose to be saved. The hypothetical single reality that confronts him there gives him the foreknowledge that Isabel will make a decision ten minutes after leaving the park against following him that persists for the rest of her life, resulting in a post-judgment day residence in Hell. This can only mean one of two things: either Isabel at the park no longer has free will and cannot choose to be saved or God’s foreknowledge is unreliable. In other words, God either knows Isabel will be damned and there’s nothing she can do at the park or anytime afterwards to change that, or she can freely

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

change her destiny throughout her life and God's foreknowledge is only good until her next free-willed decision changes the reality he observes at judgment day. This is why there can never be just one fixed reality there for God to foreknow about free-willed folks; this reality would always be changing with each human decision made until we all finally join God there ourselves. Unlike him, we are stuck in time, so only then will none of us exist prior to then to change our decision to be saved or not. Only then could God's foreknowledge be reliable, except it would no longer be foreknowledge, but hindsight, right? The only way God could foreknow that free-willed Isabel would irrevocably choose to pursue Hell ten minutes after she leaves the park is by forcing *that* hypothetical single reality observable at judgment day to be *the one, fixed, actual* reality, thereby predestining her damnation and removing her free will. Predestination and foreknowledge of a human's salvation decision are no different, and neither can coexist with a freely-willed human choice to be saved or not.

But why can't God wait for us to meet him at judgment day, look back on the entire now-fixed past of human history, obtain the knowledge—not foreknowledge—of which folks freely chose to be saved or not, and *then* warp back to before creation to predestine our salvation according to those decisions? Maybe he can't have foreknowledge of our free-willed salvation decisions, but he can still predestine them while keeping them truly free, right? No. Our choice to be saved or not must arise from free will that has not been determined by predestination. As soon as God warps prior to creation to predestine what would have been a free choice after creation, the choice is no longer free, because the predestination now determines it before it can be freely made by a human. The non-predestined free-willed decision of a human to be saved or not no longer exists anywhere in time, forcing God's knowledge at judgment day to be a result of his own free choice rather than that of humans. Besides, if this predestination wouldn't change the fate known by God of anyone on judgment day, which it wouldn't, then why would he even want or need to go back to the beginning and predestine these fates? Because he suddenly remembered on judgment day that he forgot to validate a few verses about predestination? Because he wants to fit in better

HEALING HEREAFTER

with those who advocate such predestination? God would already know on judgment day which of them he'll be hanging out with forever anyway, so there's no necessary reason for him to predestine it too, is there? No matter how you slice it, God cannot predestine or foreknow our salvation decisions without removing our free will.

And this should not surprise us, because neither of these are things the God of the Bible would ever consider doing anyway. In Booklet 3 we discuss two problems with the belief that God picks who goes to Hell and Heaven without giving some humans exposure to the gospel. Here we'll explore three problems with the belief that God picks who goes to Hell and Heaven without giving *any* humans a say in the matter. First, it violates the very purpose for which he created us: to seek him, reach out for him, and find him, so that we can exist in perfect community with him (Acts 17:26-27). Desire to accomplish our purpose is reflected in those of us who do find him, who long "to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God" (2 Corinthians 5:4-5). Recall that this ideal relationship with God absolutely requires that humans have the free will to choose to enter into that relationship. Otherwise it's just God having a tea party with himself and stuffed animals, who speak his words and do his deeds because they can only perform his will, not having wills of their own. God wanted real community, not fabricated community, so he gives us the free will necessary to make that possible.

Some would counter by saying that God's purpose in creating us was not to enjoy perfect community with him, but rather to glorify him. Make no mistake, glorifying God is a second purpose for which we were made, and God certainly deserves such praise (Isaiah 43:6-7, Revelation 4:11). But how many people are going to glorify a God that predestined them to Hell? And how much glory will he get from the rest of us, who are forced to be with him and praise him? Would he not be glorified much more if he knew that those who chose him did so because they truly wanted to? Are you honored more by someone who spends time with you and praises you because they have to or because they want to? It is *because* of the free will that God

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

gives us to accomplish his first purpose of establishing real, perfect community with us that he is truly glorified, which in turn accomplishes the second purpose. If “our primary reason for existence is to *know* and *worship* God,” free will is necessary.²

The second major problem with God’s will as the sole factor determining who goes to Hell and Heaven is that it makes him out to be a liar! Remember, God “wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth,” “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance,” “so that through him all men might believe” (1 Timothy 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9, John 1:7). He sure doesn’t want all people to be saved if he predestines people to Hell! If it’s ultimately up to him and he forces people to spend eternity in Hell, God has lied. Big time. And if we can’t trust that he wants all to be saved, then how can we trust that he wants any of us to be saved, or anything else he says for that matter? Of course, God is no liar (Numbers 23:19). He wants all to be saved, but the goal of that salvation is perfect community with him, which necessitates the free will that becomes the reason that all are not saved.

Third, if God predestines people to Hell or Heaven, he must violate his own just nature; he must disown himself, something he “cannot” do (2 Timothy 2:12-13). There are only three possible parties who might be responsible for whether or not an individual is saved: Christians through evangelism, God, and the individual herself. If there will be people going to both Hell and Heaven, then only an individual’s choice to be saved or not can maintain God’s justice. Obviously, it is not just for God to condemn people to Hell only because a missionary never made it to their tribe with the gospel, while welcoming others into Heaven from the tribe across the river because that missionary did make it to them. And regarding the dependence of salvation on God, it is perfectly just for him to predestine us all to Hell, since that’s the ultimate consequence of our sin, or *all* to Heaven, by choosing to equally have mercy on us all. But it is not just for him—or any judge—to use a double standard, to acquit some but condemn others when all are equally guilty, so he doesn’t. Not only is God just, he “*judges* justly” too (Deuteronomy 32:4, 1 Peter 2:23). And if he did condemn all to Hell, he would violate his

HEALING HEREAFTER

merciful and loving nature. Why didn't he predestine all to Heaven then, so "that everyone was chosen to enjoy it"?³ Because once again, it violates his purpose in creating us, producing false community in which we are merely non-conscious extensions of his will.

These three problems are very serious. But the response I am typically offered when I raise them with people is that God is sovereign and has all these issues worked out, so we should stop worrying about them and trust him, as some things about God are just too lofty for humans to understand. The all too common appeal to mystery and unresolved tensions! Is God so sovereign that he can't fulfill his purposes in creating us? Is God so sovereign that he has to violate his own nature and disown himself? Should I just trust a God who by all appearances is a liar? Should I stop worrying about my eternal destiny because this not-so-sovereign, not-so-trustworthy God has got it all figured out? No, if this God is God, then we've all got a lot to worry about. But it's not. God is sovereign, trustworthy, and does have it all figured out, but not by deciding how everything will be ahead of time. For God to accomplish his purpose for us, for God to be truthful, and for God to be God, he must at least allow our free will to decide to want him or not.

Please, let me clarify that it is undeniable that God does predestine many things in the Bible. He has many purposes that he will accomplish, both in history and in humans, regardless of where their free will takes them. "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do *all that I please*.'" "*What I have said*, that I will bring about; *what I have planned*, that I will do" (Isaiah 46:10-11). But one thing God has not purposed, said, or planned is that he alone decides who goes to Hell or Heaven. In fact, I hope it's clear now that his purpose in creating us will only stand if we decide that, albeit only on his terms and only in his timeframe. He can harden Pharaoh's heart from letting the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 11:9-10), he can temporarily send his Holy Spirit on people to make them do involuntary things (1 Samuel 19:19-24), he can bring famine and destroy armies to alter history (Genesis 41:25-41, 2 Kings 19:32-36), he can make prophecies and fulfill them centuries later (Isaiah

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

53:1-12), he can appoint Jeremiah from the womb as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5), his Spirit can cause John the Baptist to leap in utero (Luke 1:15, 44), he can arrange for the Jews and Romans to play their roles in Jesus completing his work (John 18-21), he can set Paul apart as his instrument of outreach to Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16), he can confidently predict the apocalyptic events at the end of the world by making them happen just as he wishes (Revelation 22:6), he can specifically prepare ahead of time good works for humans to do (Ephesians 2:10), and he can influence or alter our choices at any moment to do whatever else he has planned for you and others (Philippians 2:13). He can direct virtually any facet of anyone's life for as long as he wants, but he *cannot* remove anyone's free will when it comes to choosing him and Heaven or not him and Hell.

Cannot? Doesn't that degrade God's sovereignty? Not one bit. No one is forcing or can force this limitation on him, and he is free to remove it—via removing our free-willed salvation decision—at any time, although he won't for all the reasons above and below. If I choose to close my eyes, does that make me blind? If I choose to remain still, does that make me paralyzed? Of course not, as at no time have I lost the ability to see or move; I have only chosen not to do so. And if what I have chosen to not look at is the sun and if what I have chosen not to move toward is an oncoming car, limiting myself from seeing and moving has actually preserved my ability to see and move, has it not? So it is with God. By limiting himself, God doesn't lose his sovereignty; he preserves it. By giving us free will, God voluntarily chose to restrict both his knowledge and control of at least this one decision we make about salvation in order to fulfill one of his most important purposes, to remain trustworthy, and to keep true to his nature. It is only when humans claim that God *can't* make that voluntary choice that his sovereignty is degraded!

Besides, think of how boring it would be for God to know how everything was going to turn out. If you could know how every single detail of your life would unfold, would you? I certainly wouldn't! You would be forced to be reminded of every upcoming negative event instead of being blissfully ignorant until it occurs. You would be unable to enjoy the suspense and thrill associated with every

HEALING HEREAFTER

upcoming positive event, because you already know what will happen. And the worst part is that nothing could ever turn out better than you already know it will; if you don't like what you're going to experience, tough beans. In the same way, if God foreknows which reality will exist at judgment day, he can't do anything to change it, at least not without invalidating his foreknowledge! In fact, by foreknowing our salvation decisions, he would not only be negating our free will, he would be limiting his own! Whatever ways he would have acted to bring that reality about he *must* maintain, and whatever human "choices" would have brought that reality about he *cannot* alter. If God *did* anything in that reality except sit there and watch between now and judgment day, it would change it in some way, and the foreknowledge he had of the future would cease to be correct. If God *didn't do* anything in that reality except sit there and watch between now and judgment day, his foreknowledge would remain accurate, but the ability to exercise his own free will—unless he wants to only sit there and watch—would be extremely limited. No wonder he chose to limit what he knows about the future! Our free will allows him to accomplish his purpose in creating us, to be honest, to be true to his nature, to not resign himself to monotonous boredom for all of time, and to remain able to intervene in human affairs any way he wants, because no hypothetical single foreknown reality exists beyond the present time to constrain him!

These reasons for this self-imposed limitation are apparent throughout the Bible, and God operates under it even before humans make any salvation decisions! When God finished his creative work in Adam and the animals, "he brought them to the man *to see what* he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Genesis 2:19). God waits in suspense, because he doesn't want to know beforehand what Adam will call them! How boring would predestining that be? Anyone who works with or has children knows how fun it is to see what surprising words come out of their mouths! Of course God the Father would—and does in this verse—want to enjoy that same surprise with his children! Unfortunately, sometimes children surprise their fathers in less enjoyable ways (as I am experiencing now while potty training our son), and

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

God's reaction to our pooppy behavior proves to be no more anticipated. For example, how could God have "regretted that he had made humans beings on the earth" just before the flood of Noah if he had already known for millennia that "that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time?" It was only when he "saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become" that he knew how devastating the surprise of how they used their free will would be to him (Genesis 6:5-6).

And God's shock and alarm at human behavior, unexplainable in the presence of foreknowledge, permeates the Bible. Why would he constantly wonder in frustration why his people turn away from him if he foreknows every reason? He is bewildered because "each pursues their own course," not one foreknown to him, so he is unpleasantly surprised by what causes their free will to play out the way it does (e.g. Jeremiah 8:4-6, Isaiah 55:2-3, Ezekiel 18:30-32). Similarly, there's no reason for God to have "looked for justice" and "for righteousness" among his people, if he already knew he would only find "bloodshed" and "cries of distress." Instead, he was disappointed to learn this only once he "saw" and "heard" these products of human free will (Isaiah 5:3-7). Why would he hold out his hands "all day long" to a people he foreknew would be "obstinate"? Seems quite the waste of time, unless they were freely "pursuing their own imaginations" instead of a reality foreknown to God, in which case their rejection of him would not be predictable. God conveys a sense of surprise upon learning of the first human sin, and Jesus continues to be "amazed" by his clearly unanticipated encounters with both free-willed human faith and the lack thereof (Genesis 3:8-13, Matthew 8:5-10, Mark 6:4-6). The Bible is even clear that he doesn't know what humans are thinking until they think it (Mark 2:6-8)!

Apparently, God has no qualms advertising this self-imposed limitation of omniscience, knowing how crucially important and sensible it is. Speaking of those who reject him, "I will hide my face from them," he said, '*and see what their end will be*'" (Deuteronomy 32:20). He withdraws his influence, not knowing what fate humans will choose. God's people were told that he tested them without foreknowledge, "*in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not*

HEALING HEREAFTER

you would keep his commands” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Judges 2:21-3:4 reiterates this. Only upon seeing Abraham’s faith in being willing to give up his son Isaac can God say, “*Now I know that you fear God*” (Genesis 22:9-12). On the way to the Promised Land, God doesn’t know if his people will lose faith in him, and he doesn’t know how he will respond to them as a result (Exodus 13:17, 33:3). Later he confirms that the decision to follow him is theirs to make. “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now *choose* life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). “Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. *Perhaps* they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. *Then* I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done” (Jeremiah 26:2-3). “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and *if* that nation I warned repents of its evil, *then* I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and *if* it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, *then* I will *reconsider* the good I had intended to do for it” (Jeremiah 18:7-10). Whenever he wishes to, God allows his response to humans to depend on how they use their free will, doesn’t he? He would never “reconsider” his response to a foreknown human decision! “So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. *If* anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Revelation 3:20). His purpose for us is inseparably intertwined with this voluntary allowance. God created humans “so that they would seek him and *perhaps* reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:27). He doesn’t *lose* his omniscience; he simply doesn’t fully *use* it. By giving us free will concerning salvation, God gets his way and remains God in the process. Now that’s what I call sovereignty!

Besides, God voluntarily restricting himself is not exactly a foreign concept that we should balk at or find onerous. God chose to limit his omnipotence by confining himself to a human body to take the sin of the world on himself as he hung on a criminal’s cross (Philippians 2:5-8, Colossians 2:9). God will choose to limit his omnipresence by keeping himself absent from Hell (Jeremiah 23:39-40, Matthew 25:41,

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10). And if he can do these things without jeopardizing his sovereignty, choosing to limit his omniscience by giving us free will doesn't seem like much of a threat in comparison. In fact, such a free will is so important to God that *all three* of his voluntary restrictions directly allow humans to arrive in the eternal destination of their choice without him interfering in that decision. *This* is the sovereign God of the Bible, who can accomplish his purposes, uphold his nature, and make sense, all at the same time.

2

But wait, doesn't the Bible talk about predestination, the elect, and other things that might suggest that God decides who goes to Hell or Heaven? Sure it does, and I never claimed that God doesn't play *any* role in the salvation process. In fact, he plays quite a large one! But he doesn't play the only role. To make sure you know I'm not withholding vital information from you, we're going to look at the passages in the Bible most supportive of salvation predestination. Then we're going to see how they fit into a model for salvation that maintains both their integrity as well as God's integrity, by avoiding the many problems in the last chapter that salvation predestination cannot. Before we begin though, there is one valuable truth to keep in the back of your mind. When the Bible uses the term "predestination" or "election," it simply means predestination or election, not necessarily all of the theological constructs and connotations that have been attached to these words since the Bible was written. If you adhere to the teachings of those who championed salvation predestination, it may be difficult to separate those teachings from the simple respective meanings of these words: to determine something ahead of time and to choose something. And yet you must, because these words are what the Bible gives us. They might be associated with salvation predestination views, or they might not. But to say that God prehistorically predestines and chooses exactly who goes to Hell and Heaven simply because the Bible uses the words "predestination" and

HEALING HEREAFTER

“election,” and that’s what those words have come to mean to you, is to succumb to circular reasoning. Our job is to strip ourselves of such post-biblical preconceptions, so that we can read the words God uses more objectively and with an open mind, which is precisely why I’m sharing with you the passages that do *not* appear to agree with me at first glance. Here they are.

Exhibit A: Judas. In John 17:12 Jesus talks to God the Father about his disciples, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.” There you go; God dooms Judas to Hell to fulfill his purpose of Jesus’ betrayal in the Bible, right? Not likely. First, no verse in the Bible predicts that Jesus’ betrayer must go to Hell, so Judas wouldn’t be fulfilling any Scripture by going there. The Scripture that *is* fulfilled by Judas’ actions is Psalm 41:9, which only predicts his betrayal, not having anything to say about the fate of the betrayer. Jesus’ disciples tell us only that he “left to go where he belongs,” which is quite non-specific (Acts 1:25). Since none of them could have possibly known his eternal destination, they most likely meant that he belonged dead in a field for betraying Jesus to death on a cross (Acts 1:18). Regarding Judas, Jesus says, “It would be better for him if he had not been born,” but if this is because Judas went to Hell, then it would be better for *every* unsaved person to have not been born. Rather than arguing for salvation predestination, this makes a God who allows people to be born just so that it is possible for them to be predestined to Hell even more unnecessarily cruel, as he could have prevented their birth, knowing it would have been better for them. And if every unsaved person would be better off never born, then why would Jesus single Judas out here? Not because he’s unsaved, but because Judas died in a gruesome suicide and has been uniquely known to billions of people ever since then as the one who betrayed the savior of all mankind! With that kind of reputation, it wouldn’t at all be surprising if he had rather not been born.

But if the destruction he is doomed to isn’t Hell, then what is it? Well, what were the other disciples protected from by Jesus “while he was with them” that Judas was not? Death, right? While Jesus

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

was with them, none of them died except Judas. Clearly Jesus wasn't protecting them from Hell, since he had already confirmed that they would have eternal life with him (Matthew 19:27-29). What Judas wasn't protected from—what was doomed—was the destruction of his body, his death, not his eternal fate. In fact, don't be surprised if Judas ends up in Heaven, as he confessed his sin before he died (Matthew 27:3-5). Moreover, Jesus' confirmation that his disciples would have eternal life extended to *all twelve* of "you who have followed me," which unequivocally included Judas when these words were spoken (Matthew 19:28). So no, we can't use Judas as proof that God predestines people to Hell, especially when doing so makes God seem even more unnecessarily cruel and when Judas is almost definitely going to be in Heaven! I certainly hope he is!

Exhibit B: Psalm 139:4, 16. "Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely," and "all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." If God knows what we're going to say before we say it and has written out our whole life before it happens, how can we have free will at all, let alone in a salvation decision? First, remember that God does not limit *all* of his knowledge of and influence over our words and deeds, just at least that which involves our salvation decision. There are plenty of other things about us he chooses to know and affect. Second, knowing our words before we say them doesn't necessarily mean God knows everything we're going to say for the rest of our lives. It may just as validly mean that he knows what's *presently* in our minds before it's in our mouths. So which one is it? Is the psalmist saying that God knows everything we're ever going to say or simply that God can read our minds? Let's take the verse in context. "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely" (Psalm 139:2-4). *All* of what God knows about us here is in the *present* tense isn't it, including perceiving our thoughts and therefore knowing our words before they're on our tongues. Similarly, God "knows everything" in the context of our *present* salvation status, whether or not we currently "belong to the truth" (1 John 3:19-20). And we have

HEALING HEREAFTER

confirmation that God's unlimited present knowledge does not automatically extend into the future when we are told that Jesus only knew what people were thinking once they were thinking it (Mark 2:6-8)! There's no suggestion of God knowing in the past everything that would pertain to our present, nor is there anything about God knowing in the present everything pertaining to our future. These verses claim nothing more than that God knows in the present everything in the present, a supernatural ability that does not interfere with human free will at all.

But what about verse 16? "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." This most likely means that God either preordained the number of days in our lives or simply preordained that we would have an existence, rather than predetermining every event that occurs during it. The Hebrew in this verse literally describes the forming or fashioning of days for the psalmist, the creation of his existence. This fits well within the context of verses 13-16, which describe the development of his body in the womb! In contrast, there is no mention of specific events or choices being preordained, only a person's days of existence. So whether God predetermines how long we live or simply that we live, our free will is left intact in Psalm 139:16 as it concerns salvation and likely several other decisions we make as well. And since only the days that God ordained for us are written in his book, it's quite possible that there are days, events, or choices he didn't ordain for us, again allowing room for free will. After all, if God has prewritten every occurrence in our lives, he would have to take the blame for every act of sin we do and suffering we cause, turning his claims of perfection into lies, his opposition to sin and suffering into hypocrisy, and his unjust assignments to Hell into a punishment fit only for himself! But he doesn't have to. God may predestine the length or presence of our existences, but he has not predestined everything else, and we can still freely choose him and Heaven or not him and Hell.

Exhibit C: Romans 9:1-11:32. In this passage Paul is arguing that God has the right to intervene in our lives in any way he wants, and the focal point of our discussion is Romans 9:18. "God has mercy on whom he *wants* to have mercy, and he hardens whom he *wants*

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

to harden.” The important question for us is this: does God *want* to extend this authority to our eternal destiny or not? We’ve seen several reasons above why he would not, but what does this passage say? Well, let’s look at the examples given of people God hardens. First is the story of the twins Jacob and Esau (found in its entirety in Genesis 25-27 and 32-33). Esau is the older brother, but God predestines Jacob to get the family blessing and birthright, resulting in Esau serving Jacob instead of the other way around. Nothing about predestined salvation or eternal destiny here (Romans 9:10-13). “God’s purpose in election” was not to damn Esau; God was electing Jacob to be served by Esau, confirming that this major upheaval of cultural norms regarding the rights of the firstborn did not occur because of any human “works” or decisions. It is only when we force the concept of salvation predestination into Paul’s mind that “election” becomes “election to Hell or Heaven.” The second example is Pharaoh, who is the Egyptian tyrant oppressing his Israelite slaves (see Exodus 5-11 for the whole story). God predestines him to refuse to let the Jews escape, despite all kinds of plagues that come Egypt’s way (Exodus 4:21). Again, there is nothing about this predestination that relates to the eternal fate of either Pharaoh or the Jews (Romans 9:17-18). Third, the Jews themselves are being predestined or prepared for destruction (Romans 9:22), both because they are trying to become perfect in a manmade way—by doing x, y, and z—and because God is spreading his gospel to the Gentiles by showing everyone that the Jews are not exclusively his people (the whole account is found in Romans 9:22-11:32). But is this destruction Hell, or is it something less than that, as in the case of Judas?

In Romans 9:30-10:4 in particular, Paul is clear that this predestination was a punishment for the Jews following their own way (trying to become righteous by obeying rules) instead of God’s way (depending on his solution of Jesus for righteousness). But this punishment was also for the purpose of God bringing people outside the Jewish nation to him. God used punishment similarly in Ezekiel 16:1-63, where a temporary judgment on the nation of Judah ultimately offered both the Gentile Sodomites and the Jews an opportunity for salvation. Likewise, in Isaiah 6:9-10 he told the Jews who

HEALING HEREAFTER

had rebelled against him for decades to “be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Sounds pretty harsh until you keep reading through verse 11, where we discover that God only kept these folks from turning to be healed until they were exiled, after which he restored them. Isaiah 6:9-10 is a passage quoted in two more settings in the New Testament (Matthew 13:13-14, Acts 28:24-28). In all three places this judgment is a reaction to the calloused hearts of Jews, not a predestined ticket to Hell.

In these passages and in Ezekiel 16, the Jews’ punishment wasn’t intended by God to be eternal, and Paul tells us that the predestined punishment for the Jews in Romans is not meant to be eternal either. “Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people (*the Jews*) to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but *life from the dead?* . . . As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your (*the Gentiles*) sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that *they too may now receive mercy* as a result of God’s mercy to you” (Romans 11:13-15,28-31). God doesn’t harden people to keep salvation from them; on the contrary, the “hardening” of the Jews was purposed by God to make salvation available to far *more* people, including eventually these same Jews, all according to the one human criterion for salvation that this part of the book is all about: free-willed faith (Romans 11:25, 23).

So the destruction that the Jews were “prepared for” wasn’t Hell at all; rather, it was simply earthly punishment meant to bring them back to God “that they too may now receive mercy” and be granted “life from the dead!” When we look at *all* of Romans 9-11, none of the examples of God having mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and hardening whom he wants to harden deal with salvation

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

or eternal destinies do they? Paul’s “prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved,” so obviously he is not arguing that God has elected them to Hell, or he would be knowingly wasting his breath and praying against God’s will (Romans 10:1)! Instead, he is simply telling us something we’ve already come to grips with, that God has the right to influence our everyday, non-salvation decisions however he wants, in order to accomplish his purposes, just as he did with Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh, and the Jews. His involvement in these affairs “does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Romans 9:16), and we really don’t have any right to complain. But as his interference in the given examples demonstrates, he does not want to or act to extend this authority over our choice concerning salvation.*

Exhibit D: Ephesians 1:4-6. “For God chose us in Jesus before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.” Unlike the three previous exhibits, the predestination in this final example *is* clearly talking about eternal destiny. There can be no doubt that one of God’s purposes was to save a group of people, who are called “the remnant” or “the elect” throughout the Bible, no matter what. Recall that God would be perfectly just in allowing us all to spend eternity in Hell, but his merciful and loving nature would be violated in the process. Before he creates humans, anticipating that some would use their free will to sin—particularly since some of his previous free-willed creations, the angels, had already done likewise—he decides in his mercy and love that no matter what happens, at least some people are going to be saved (Micah 7:18-19). God will not let sin chalk humanity up as a total loss, so he elects to predestine a remnant. This necessitates that “from the creation of the world” there must be a plan for how humans can be included in that group, which is Jesus, “the Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 13:8). And for those who adhere to this plan and become part of this remnant, there must also

* Ironically, this is further confirmed in another passage sometimes employed to argue that God decides who is saved or not, as seen here.⁴

HEALING HEREAFTER

be a record ready for keeping track of them, which is “the book of life from the creation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). The issue we need to resolve is this: does God stop there and then create humans to freely choose to adhere or not, or does he go ahead and decide exactly which of them are in the elect before he creates them? Does he only predestine *that* a remnant will be saved, or does he predestine precisely *who* is in that remnant, and therefore who is not? Two questions will help us choose between these options.

First question: Which kind of predestination would God choose based on who he is? We’ve already answered this, haven’t we? God cannot be truthful or just if he picks the second option, so for God to remain true to his nature, he would have no qualms with predestining that a remnant be saved, so long as he didn’t handpick who was in that remnant ahead of time. Jesus teaches that Hell was originally “prepared for the devil and his angels,” not humans, which supports the notion that when God created us, it wasn’t his plan for any of us—let alone specifically chosen individuals—to go to Hell (Matthew 25:31-41). In this same passage Jesus describes Heaven to its imminent inhabitants as “the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Some quote this verse to argue for salvation predestination, when it is actually strong evidence *against* it. If God picked each inhabitant of Heaven before they were created rather than simply preparing a kingdom for the unspecified group of folks who would someday be saved, then he must have prepared Hell for all the other humans. Except he couldn’t have done that, because he tells us here that Hell was “prepared for the devil and his angels.” Not to mention that we are clearly told why the inhabitants of Heaven *were* selected, and it has absolutely nothing to do with God prehistorically handpicking them. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” We’ll discover that such persistent deeds for Jesus and those he cares for are a necessary part of the salvation process begun by free-willed human faith and verified by acceptance of the gospel. It makes no sense for Jesus to tell those going to Heaven that they

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

are saved because of their impressive acts of compassion toward Jesus that they were forced by Jesus to inevitably do when he predestined their salvation before they were created. Would you consider it praiseworthy, let alone salvation worthy, for someone to act compassionately toward you only because you literally forced them to? Of course not. Likewise, the God of the Bible would never make our salvation decision for us.

Second question: What reasons does God have for this predestination? We're given three in Ephesians 1:4-6. It was according to his pleasure that he did so, it was according to his will that he did so, and it results in the praise of his glorious grace. We'll take them in reverse order. One reason that God predestines is so that people will praise his grace. Makes sense, considering what he went through, who he went through it for, and that he deserves our praise anyway because he's God and has created us! But we've already seen that predestining certain people to go to Hell and certain people to go to Heaven will actually bring him *less* praise than enabling people to choose for themselves. On the other hand, predestining to make sure that no matter what, some humans are saved when they otherwise wouldn't be is quite praiseworthy, isn't it? Next, God predestines because he wants to. What else have we seen that God wants? He "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Again, this leads us away from God handpicking which people aren't saved and which are. Finally, God predestines because it pleases him. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Without considering any human input, God choosing who he rewards with Heaven doesn't leave much room for humans to have faith or believe in him, does it? How can people come to him and earnestly seek him to be rewarded if God has already removed their free will in the matter by predestining their eternal fate? Does God reward people for something he's forced them to do, something they played no role in whatsoever? Does he give an extra cookie to the teddy bear at the tea party for behaving so well? Similarly, does he punish someone for sins he forced them to commit? Quite

HEALING HEREAFTER

honestly, if God forces people to sin—as they would have no free will to do so themselves—then God becomes responsible for all the sin and suffering in our world, doesn't he? If the naughty dolly steals the teddy bear's cookie, it's only because God did so through the doll, right? Unless it's a doll from one of several horror movies, in which case God might not be to blame. But he is blameless anyway! Forcing certain people to choose him and forcing others not to is not predestination that pleases God. Allowing them to earnestly seek him and freely come to him in faith does please God.

After all, isn't his purpose for creating us to "seek him, and *perhaps* reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:27)? God's predestination would be consistent with his purpose, for his praise, and in accordance with his will and his pleasure. "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). He predestines according to his plan for us and in conformity with his purpose for us, which is to freely seek him, reach out for him, and find him in perfect community. If God has determined how everything goes down in the absence of human free will, he can't "work out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will," because everything already would be his will! There's nothing to work out or conform! It's only when he gives us free will that something, our sin and its consequences, can mess with God's plan, making it possible for him to work it out in conformity with his purpose via the solution of Jesus. He *has* to give us free will; he doesn't choose our eternal fate for us before we're even around to weigh in. So based on who God is, the reasons he gives for predestining us, and his purpose for us, we are led to conclude that in Ephesians 1:4-6, God predestined *that* a remnant would be saved before he created us, not precisely who would be in that remnant.

This explains why no one in the Bible knew that they were in the elect before they had accepted Jesus' message; it was only *after* they accepted the gospel that they applied this term to themselves. There is no biblical example of a specific person being one of the elect

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

prior to them believing in God's solution, because God hadn't already picked them. Yes, they "are a chosen people," but only after a period of time when they "were not a people" of God and "had not received mercy" from him yet (1 Peter 2:9-10). If they were elected by God to be saved before their creation, then when were they not a people of God and when were they not recipients of his mercy? Never, which means that those in the elect are chosen by him based on something that happens *after* their creation, after a time of not being his people and not receiving his mercy! This something is faith, the one human element of the salvation process that God leaves untouched and freely willed. And if we continue reading Ephesians 1, this is confirmed. "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also *were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*" (1:11-13). Even in Ephesians 1 then, individuals aren't *specifically* chosen, elected, predestined, or included in Christ before their free-willed lives on earth are already in full swing. And during their lives, their faith obviously plays a pivotal role in the salvation process. It is impossible to please God without faith, the faith that he exists and that he can and will do what he says he will do by rewarding with Heaven those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6). People who seek God are fulfilling the purpose for which he created them, to find him in perfect community, which is precisely why granting the Heavenly reward of perfect community to them makes so much sense.

I know that these four exhibits don't exhaustively examine every time the Bible brings up predestination, but the few others do adhere to the same explanations given for the passages above, leading to the same conclusion. If you run across one, apply to it the summary of these explanations below, and you will see that this is the case. Whenever the Bible mentions people whose eternal fates seem to be predetermined, there is also the mention of a voluntary human component involving faith or belief in God (James 2:5, 1 Peter 2:4-8,

HEALING HEREAFTER

Jude 1:4-5). In any case, the exhibits we've discussed are unquestionably the ones that mount the strongest opposition to the claims I've made. If we take our final exhibit—Ephesians 1:4-6—in context then, we learn that before humans were created, God mercifully and lovingly predestined (general predestination, if that helps) that at least some of them would be saved, no matter how much sin and death would result from human free will. He made that possible with his solution of Jesus. Retrospectively, Paul and all others who accept Jesus' message assume they are one of the chosen or elect, but they only do so after demonstrating faith to God. It is only upon being convinced of this faith that God specifically predestines them (special predestination, if that helps) for Heaven. From the creation of the world on, special predestination continually makes entries of those who are saved in the book of life, a record that is necessitated by general predestination (Revelation 20:11-15). So faith is necessary and God's election is necessary. How can we combine these two to describe a person's salvation process in a biblical, logical, and understandable way?

3

Salvation starts with a free-willed human act of faith. God may not want to know *who* will be saved, but he does know *how* they'll be saved. It has always started with faith. Even before there was a message from Jesus to have faith in, it started with faith. Way back in the day of the brand-new Jew, Abraham, the first of the Hebrews, received a promise from God that every human would be blessed through him. That'll turn a bad day around for sure! And God kept his promise. Abraham's descendants became the Jews, one of whom was this guy named Jesus, God's blessed solution for every human's problem. And what was Abraham's response to God's promise? He believed that God could and would do what he said. And for that, God considered him righteous. "Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Understand, then, that

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Galatians 3:6-9).

Notice that the gospel God announces isn’t Jesus, is it? It leads to Jesus, it is fulfilled in Jesus, but what Abraham has to believe to trigger his salvation is that God will bless everyone through him. He has to have the faith that God can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best, especially considering the significant life changes God subsequently requires from Abraham (a.k.a. Abram) at 75 years of age (Isaiah 48:17). “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him” (Genesis 12:1-4). Abraham considered what God said to be more reliable and better than nearly everything he knew. And once it was known that Abraham possessed this faith, God took over the salvation process and credited Abraham with righteousness.

It is this same faith that instigates the salvation process for others as well. In Hebrews 11 we are given tons of examples of people throughout biblical history being commended for their faith. But in none of these cases is it faith in Jesus; rather, it is faith that God can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best. Like Abraham, who is listed with them, these folks had to believe that God’s promises were true, even though it wasn’t easy, even though they were persecuted for it, and even though they all died before the promises came true. “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance...they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13, 16). Ring a bell? The faith that all these folks who lived before Jesus

HEALING HEREAFTER

demonstrate to God—for which he commends them—is the identical faith that Christians must have today, isn't it? Christians are also longing for a heavenly country, and they also may very well die before they see it, yet they have faith that God's promises are both true and best, that eternal perfect community with him in Heaven is our ultimate longing. The only difference is that we now have the Jesus piece of the salvation process to apply our faith to that they had to wait for, but the faith itself is the same for both parties, with or without any knowledge of Jesus. Throughout human history God is looking for faith, not merely faith in Jesus, but faith that God can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best. We must have faith in the words of God before we can truly have faith in *the* Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14). This is why Jesus tells us that not even resurrection from the dead will convince those who don't have faith in the rest of God's teachings (Luke 16:25-31).

This faith *must always* lead to Jesus, and *it will always* lead to Jesus, as it did for Abraham and the other folks in Hebrews 11. Only *he* is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), the solution that can translate our faith into perfection. "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 11:39-12:2). In God's process of salvation for all these folks, their faith inevitably had to be applied to the solution of Jesus, but it didn't start there, did it? It started by believing that God can and will do what he says he will do, and that what he says is best.

So it is with all of us. When God sees this faith in a person, he specially predestines him to be saved. "God chose you as first-fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). It is that free-willed human act of faith that God is looking for in each one of us that begins his process of salvation for us. Once God is convinced

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

that we believe that he can and will do what he says, and that what he says is best, God foreknows that this faith will be applied to Jesus, because God repeatedly says that he can and will save people through the solution of Jesus and that his solution is the best (e.g. Acts 4:11-12). “Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe” (2 Corinthians 4:13). Then all God needs to do is to make sure that we hear Jesus’ message, so that we can practically apply our faith to what God says he will do through the gospel. He might use a person, a dream, literature, a vision, an angel, a video, an e-mail, a song, or even send Jesus himself to us between our death and judgment—if we didn’t have meaningful access to his message in life—as he has before (e.g. Job 33:14-18, Acts 10:1-6, 34-43, Acts 16:9-10, Revelation 14:6-7, 1 Peter 3:18-20). Once he knows that you are one of his sheep, he will do whatever is necessary to bring you into his pen (Luke 15:3-6). His word “will not return to him empty, but will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). God’s process of salvation for humanity always begins with human faith, always requires God conveying the gospel, and always requires accepting the solution of Jesus. “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:17). And since the only step that depends on humans is what gets it all going, once the process starts, it will always finish.

Let’s take a closer look at this human faith then, as it’s the only part of the process that God leaves up to us. There are three important things to understand about the faith that God seeks. First, this faith will always *provoke* a gospel presentation, but it will not always *precede* one. If a person has this faith, the gospel will be presented to him. But the gospel is also presented to many who don’t yet have this faith or who will never have this faith. This might happen because a person who God knows does not have faith is shown the gospel by someone or something that doesn’t know that or because God is bringing Jesus’ message to someone with faith, and others in the vicinity hear it coincidentally (Acts 13:48). It also happens simply because God gives *every* human meaningful access to his solution for us (Colossians 1:22-23). God doesn’t do this because everyone has the

HEALING HEREAFTER

faith that will result in their acceptance of this solution; clearly they do not. He does it to convince us that he is just and fair. True, he could get by only proclaiming the gospel to those who have the faith to accept it, but it would seem a bit shady to tell everybody else, as they were being sent to Hell forever, that he didn't even bother evangelizing to them just because he knew deep down that they wouldn't believe. God ain't shady, and we know from Booklet 3 how much he likes to publicize his message of Jesus anyway! He leaves humans with absolutely no excuse to doubt his fairness. He communicates his solution to everyone equally, even though many will never accept it. "Many are invited but few are chosen" because "they refused to come" (Matthew 22:1-14). Not because God refused them, but because the gospel was not preceded by their faith. Faith has to be the first step for the gospel to be genuinely accepted.

Second, just like God, this faith makes sense. The faith that God can and will do what he says he will do, and that what he says is best, is exactly the kind of requirement for salvation that we would expect from God. It forces humans to depend on his power, reliability, knowledge, and authority. It directly opposes humanity's problem of sin, which is the faith that something *other* than what God says is the best. It allows us to meaningfully use our free will in the salvation process while still necessitating God's special election once faith is present. And it maintains its importance throughout a Christian's existence, not just upon hearing the gospel. In committing to the Christian life, we must continually trust that God is reliable in his everyday promises and that the lifestyle he calls us to is the best. And in hoping for Heaven, we must continually believe that he will keep his promises and that his promise of Heaven is the best.

The faith that God requires makes even more sense because it fulfills his purpose in creating us. If you were God and needed to pick the one thing that humans would need to demonstrate to prove that they truly want eternal perfect community with you, what would it be? It wouldn't simply be faith in the gospel; that only proves that they don't want to go to Hell. There are a lot of people who believe in the gospel and want to go to their idea of Heaven but who don't act in any way to suggest that they want to be with and know God

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

himself. And your one requirement for salvation wouldn't be doing x, y, and z either, since that demonstrates that people don't even recognize that they need you to be saved, let alone desire an eternal relationship with you. These criteria are human-centered and bear the hallmarks of a manmade origin. The one criterion that does make sense and is much more God-centered is for him to require that you trust him; after all, the most central component to the deepest and longest of relationships is what? Trust. If a person trusts that God can and will do what he says, she will believe in Jesus' message, but she'll also trust that spending time getting to know God is worthwhile because God says it is (John 17:3), that valuing what God values is optimal because God says it is (Isaiah 48:17-18), and that God is reliable enough to reciprocate the relationship because God says he is (Hebrews 13:5, Revelation 21:3-4). A person with this faith is exactly the kind of person who matches God's purpose for creating humans, a person who trusts God enough to seek, reach out for, and find perfect community with him, right (Acts 17:26-27)? God created us for a purpose, and he requires the very faith from us that leads us to fulfill that purpose! God knows which people don't have this particular kind of faith (Acts 22:17-18). Those who only have faith in the gospel—but not in much else God says—don't want to be with God forever; they only want to be saved. Those who only have faith in doing good deeds, being a good person, or accomplishing whatever x, y, and z they've picked to be saved don't want to be with God forever; they only want to know that they got themselves saved. God saves those who have faith in *him*, because he knows that they are the folks who truly want eternal, perfect community with him.

Moreover, this faith is equal opportunity. Having a lot of resources, living in a certain part of the world, gaining exposure to special religious teachings, growing up in a particular culture, obtaining an advanced education, being taught a specific moral code, and possessing a consistent, strong social support system are all virtually irrelevant and unnecessary when it comes to this faith. The faith to fully trust your creator is a fundamental, deep decision almost everyone can make independent of their situation in life. Very few circumstances consistently alter your chance of having it, and very

HEALING HEREAFTER

few experiences are necessary to possess it. And if there is any significant unequal opportunity remaining that keeps a person from having a fair chance to exercise saving faith during life (which there is not for any of us), God can eliminate it in Lugg. God requires faith that is consistent with his purpose for us and equally accessible to all, which is exactly what we would expect if he truly wanted all of us to achieve that purpose and find him. This faith makes sense.

Third, this faith does not allow us to take credit for our salvation. But why not, if it really is a necessary human component associated with the salvation process? Well, perhaps like you, I was taught to answer this question by claiming that faith is simply our acceptance of God's salvation, not a human work that we actively do on our own. The typical illustrative analogy is this: when someone gives you a gift, you are not working to get it, you simply accept it; likewise, faith is a passive acceptance of God's gift of salvation. It is argued then that this salvation "by grace alone through faith alone" "is not something we do, but rather something that Jesus does and we receive as a gift by personal faith in him alone."⁵ But how is receiving not something we do? How is faith not something we do? If human faith is required for salvation—and those who submit to this mantra would agree that it is—then salvation cannot be by grace alone. And if faith is not required, leaving us with just "salvation by grace alone," then God either has to save everyone or be forced to pick who does and who doesn't get saved, as there is no truly free-willed human component for him to consider. For salvation by grace to involve free-willed human faith—which we have repeatedly seen that it must for God to fulfill his purpose for us, remain trustworthy, and stay true to his nature—this faith must be a necessary, active human component of the salvation process. Interestingly, the phrase "salvation by grace alone through faith alone" is derived from Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith." Notice that to get from the Bible to this phrase, we must add "alone" twice. I understand what the phrase is intended to mean; nonetheless, adding "alone" to both grace and faith forces this phrase to be unnecessarily confounding. Let's read the Bible for what it says and make sense of this verse. In Ephesians 2:8—and in the phrase as well—the prepositions "by" and

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

“through” convey the same meaning; indeed, simply interchange them and you will find this to be the case, so neither grace nor faith are more necessary to salvation than the other. True, one is the component by/through which God is involved in salvation and the other is the component through/by which humans are involved in salvation, but both components must be equally active for salvation to take place. Neither is adequate “alone.”

The analogy above exemplifies this. How many Christmas gifts have you ever truly received, experienced, and enjoyed by passively sitting next to them like a motionless blob? None. How many people who have given you these gifts would feel as if they had achieved their purpose in doing so if you passively sat next to the gifts like a motionless blob. None. Of course not! When they give you a gift, you *must* freely and actively choose to lift up your arms, tear off the paper, and find out what’s inside to receive that gift, experience it, and enjoy it as intended. And why wouldn’t you want to? In fact, if you assume the role of the motionless blob, you are making it clear to everyone involved that you’re actually *refusing* their gift, aren’t you? Likewise, it turns out that passive reception of God’s salvation is no reception at all; it’s *active rejection*! Let’s not be motionless blobs. You can’t “just trust Jesus and open your eyes” to discover the relationship with him that “you don’t have to work for” without first doing the work of opening your eyes, right?⁶ If “all you have to *do* is believe it (*grace*)-nothing else,” then salvation *cannot* be “a free gift that needs only to be believed, not earned,” because the believing is a *required free-willed human act* for the gift of gracious salvation to be effectively given.^{7-8*}

Such contradiction is unnecessary. Faith is a free-willed, necessary, active component of your salvation process, just as God intended it to be, so that he could fulfill his purpose for you. Notice that I never claimed that we can’t take credit for our *faith*, although we’ll see very soon that we can’t take full credit for it. God himself has at least partially “commended” and “credited” humans for the faith that leads

* Other analogies have also been crafted as attempts to show how faith would not be a work, but they break down for similar reasons, as we’ll discover here.⁹

HEALING HEREAFTER

to salvation, and he would do neither if he was wholly responsible for it (Hebrews 11:1-40, Galatians 3:5-9). Rather, I claimed that this faith does not allow us to take credit for our *salvation*. There's a huge difference between assuming some true responsibility for our free-willed faith and taking credit for our salvation, and it is important to understand that. So the question we need to answer then is why doesn't our faith allow us to take credit for our salvation?

Well for starters, humans often don't know that they're contributing to their salvation process when they exert this faith. They don't even necessarily know exactly which God or worldview that they're having faith in (Genesis 11:26-12:4, Acts 18:24-28)! When salvation begins, humans only need know that they believe that a God exists who can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best. Such a faith is pleasing to God, as we've seen in Hebrews 11:6, especially a God who names himself "I AM" (Exodus 3:13-14). Such a faith is also humble like a child's and is welcomed by Jesus (Matthew 18:3-4). When children approach an adult for help, they don't necessarily know exactly which adult they should seek, nor do they know the details of how that adult is going to help them. They simply believe that whomever they choose exists, is capable and reliable, and knows what's best to do. Likewise, when God sees the faith associated with the beginning of the salvation process in someone, that person doesn't necessarily know to seek and may not specifically be seeking the God of the Bible (Romans 3:10-12), nor is he always aware of the details involved in God's solution for him. That person will not know that his salvation process has been underway until God is convinced of his faith, specially predestines him to be exposed to the message of Jesus, and joyfully watches his inevitable acceptance of the gospel. God seeks and sees our faith (John 6:64), but we don't always know that we're specifically showing it to him, and we certainly don't necessarily know that it's contributing to our eventual salvation. A salvation that this faith doesn't permit us to be recognized for.

Abraham didn't know that he was instigating his salvation process when he freely chose to have faith in God's promise, but God did (Galatians 3:6-9). People in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom didn't know that they had the faith to respond with repentance to Jesus' miracles, but

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

Jesus did and alters their judgment (Matthew 11:20-24). A paralyzed man didn't know that he was instigating his salvation process when he and his friends had faith that Jesus could heal him, but Jesus did and forgave his sins on the spot (Mark 2:1-5)! A Roman centurion didn't know that he was instigating his salvation process when he gave to the poor and consistently prayed to God, but when God saw this man's faith that valuing what God values was best and that engaging in a relationship with God was worthwhile, he arranged for the gospel to be presented to this man (Acts 10:1-6). Lydia didn't know that she was instigating her salvation process, but because she had the faith to be "a worshiper of God," "the Lord opened her heart to respond" to the gospel (Acts 16:14). Paul certainly didn't know that he had the faith associated with salvation at the time he was called to serve God, since he was actually on his way to kill Christians! But many years later Paul knows to "thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me *faithful, appointing me to his service*" (1 Timothy 1:12). God can seek and see our faith because he knows our minds (Matthew 9:3-4, Luke 9:46-47, Psalm 139:2), he knows our motives (Proverbs 16:2, 1 Corinthians 4:5), and he knows our hearts (John 5:42). "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them" (Acts 15:8). We can't take credit for salvation that we don't know that we're instigating.

There's a second reason we can't take credit for our salvation, even if we did know that we were pursuing the God of the Bible and did understand all the details of the gospel when we first chose to exert our faith. We wouldn't even be able to have faith at all if God hadn't been gracious enough to create us with this ability, right? "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The "this" here may very well refer to being saved rather than to faith, which is consistent with our claim that humans can't take credit for their salvation. But even if "this" does refer to faith, it still makes sense. God doesn't determine who has that faith, but without him making this gift possible for us, none of us would be able to. Moreover, it's impossible to validly take credit for our salvation because without God's provision of Jesus as our solution and without God doing all the work of bringing us

HEALING HEREAFTER

Jesus' message once he does see our faith, we wouldn't ever be saved anyway! Just as we would expect from a Godmade salvation process; we need to depend on God completely. God completely depending on us to accomplish our salvation is the hallmark of a manmade mechanism.

But the most significant reason humans can't take credit for their salvation is this: the free-willed human faith that God looks for is not a work that can *earn* us salvation; it is the work that demonstrates to God that we truly *want* his salvation. Wanting and earning are not the same thing, as the many who desire to find employment to make an income know very well. God is not looking for people to *earn* their salvation through an ineffective manmade mechanism that defies his gracious solution of Jesus. God is looking for people who *want* his salvation, people who want eternal, perfect community with him. He searches for those who exercise faith that he can and will do what is best, faith that he can offer this Heavenly community, will offer this Heavenly community, and that this Heavenly community is the best of all outcomes. God is looking for people who want to be saved in his Heaven and fulfill the purpose for which he created them! He knows that our work of faith to want this salvation can *never* earn Heaven or get us to Heaven, but it can convince *him* to earn Heaven for us and get us there. Once it does—and he alone would know when that faith is genuinely present—*he* accomplishes our salvation through the application of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as detailed throughout Booklets 4 and 5. And for the many individuals who don't want his salvation in his Heaven, so be it, they have the free will to demonstrate that, and he will not force the application of his solution, spirit, or salvation on them. Salvation is by grace, but only after our work of faith to want God's salvation has convinced him to apply that grace to us.

For all three of these reasons, Christianity is not simply another manmade stepwise path to God and Heaven like all the others. The "Just take one step of faith that you need God to take and don't really understand that you're taking before you depend on God for everything else and you'll be saved" mantra doesn't really work as a self-help strategy, does it? How can a work that we needed to be given

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH

the ability to do allow us to take credit for our salvation? How can instigating a process that we may not even know that we're part of allow us to take credit for our salvation? How can the unaided act of believing that God's salvation is both real and optimal actually earn or obtain it for us? It can't! We are impotent to earn salvation; God enables us. We don't seek the God of the Bible; he seeks us. We may not know that we're exhibiting the faith that he seeks for salvation; he sees that we are. We don't find the gospel; he brings it to us. We're not working our way to Heaven; he's working his way to Heaven in us. Free-willed faith is a work, but it does not in itself produce salvation; it convinces God to start and finish *his* immense and indispensable production of salvation in us. And without this grace, our faith, no matter how great a work it might be, could do no more than accompany us to Hell.

Let's summarize then how our faith and his grace beautifully merge, resulting in the gift of salvation that works does not accomplish, only desires. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8). Now that we've unpacked this faith, we can finally paint a biblical, rational, and complete picture of how saving faith in God must and always will lead to faith in Jesus' message. As we freely think and act in our lives, God seeks out—not foreknows—our minds, motives, and hearts to see which of us have the faith to believe that he can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best. What he does foreknow is that the people with this faith would believe what he says about his one best solution for them, even though they may not know that yet. As such, upon being convinced of their work of faith, he specially predestines them to hear and accept the gospel and then calls them to whatever presentation of Jesus' message he has worked out for them. These people believe in God's solution of Jesus, and their perfection is justified in God's sight. Because Jesus has removed their imperfection and released them from death's grip, they will be glorified in Heaven in eternal community with God, the very thing that their initial faith demonstrated that they wanted and the very purpose for which God created them. "And we know that in all things

HEALING HEREAFTER

God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30). A Godmade, not manmade, solution that fits the problem. A purpose fulfilled by a faith that desires it. God stays God and humans stay free, with both parties necessary and active in healing hereafter. Biblical. Functional. Brilliant. Exciting!

As physical healing often results from placing faith in a physician to do her best, so the actual process of salvation begins when you freely choose to have faith that there is a God who can and will do what he says, and that what he says is the best. God then knows that you'll believe what he says about the message of Jesus and specially predestines that you'll be exposed to his solution and accept it. When you are and when you do, your faith has closed the loop on your salvation process. He will never force this faith, but he does require it, as it is precisely what will convince him to accomplish his purpose for you. So you gotta have faith, ooooo, you gotta have faith faith faith!

YES, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, OOOOO, I GOTTA HAVE FAITH



A woman is confronted by a problem she cannot fully identify and may not fully understand. There are multiple available ways she could try to work her own salvation from this situation, but instead, she freely chooses in faith that the authorities over her—even though they're not really familiar to her—will do what they say, resulting in the best solution. God the Father does not force her to pick up her phone and pursue him or not, and he chooses to remain in a situation where he doesn't know if she will call until she does. He doesn't want to force Jesus on her before she willingly trusts him to take the best course of action, as she may very well go on to freely choose a different option despite his best prediction. He is always looking to respond to willing faith, but only upon her demonstration of it does he send Jesus to her as his only solution to her predicament. Because her faith wanted God to do his reliably perfect work of removing such a problem, he will accomplish salvation for her, and that salvation will never be threatened again.

Notes

1. Michael, G. (1987). "Faith". *Faith*. Columbia Records.
2. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 90.
3. Capon, R.F. (1993). *The Mystery of Christ...and Why We Don't Get It*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, p. 82.
4. Some might still disagree, citing John 12:37-40, although this passage only further affirms what we have just learned. "Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in (*the Jews'*) presence, they still *would* not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' For this reason they *could* not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.'" It seems clear that the reason that they *could* not believe, the impetus for God blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts, was that they *would* not believe, even after seeing Jesus' miracles. They were able to use their free will first to show God their lack of faith; therefore, God was justified in maintaining their stubbornness in order to fulfill Isaiah's prophecies. We are not told how long he hardened them or that any of these folks ended up in Hell. And since the whole point of this passage is to demonstrate fulfillment of prophecy, it would make sense that they were only hardened long enough to adequately do so. This is confirmed when we look back at the actual prophecy in Isaiah 6:9-13. The hardening only lasts until Isaiah's contemporaries receive a temporary earthly punishment, not an eternal one. Moreover, even after they are punished, a "stump in the land" remains, indicating some sort of earthly restoration for these folks rather than final destruction. In Isaiah's time this restoration was the return of the Jews to their homeland after being exiled to Babylon. Since the Old Testament pervasively demonstrates that the Jews, not God, initiated their hardening and since their hardening was only meant to last until the prophecy predicting their

NOTES

temporary punishment was fulfilled, shouldn't we interpret Jesus' citation of this prophecy in the same way?

It makes no sense if we don't. If God is solely responsible for the hardening of Jesus' audience, then why did Jesus do miracles for them in the first place? As God he would have already decided that they weren't going to make any difference. And why would God say that he "would heal them" if they turned, when he is the only one keeping them from turning! Certainly God is not saying, "I would heal you if only I hadn't kept you from turning so that I could heal you!" Just like Isaiah's audience, Jesus' audience "would not believe," so God would not heal them. God wants to heal them, but their free will has precipitated a situation where that is not possible. Wherever we see God hardening folks in the Bible, it never determines a person's eternal destination. Indeed, if "he wants to harden" someone to the extent that they are forced to go to Hell, how is it possible that he also "wants all people to be saved" (Romans 9:18, 1 Timothy 2:4)? It's not.

5. Driscoll, M., Breshears, G. (2010). *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, pp. 260-263.
6. Capon, RF. (1993). *The Mystery of Christ...and Why We Don't Get It*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, p. 67.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
9. Three other analogies employed to keep faith from being a work also falter. The first states that in order to produce an apple (salvation), I have to acknowledge that I can't do it myself. Instead, I can perform the work of planting an apple tree and have faith that it (God's grace) will produce an apple. The argument is that my work did not directly produce the apple; my faith in the tree of grace did. Ergo, my salvation is generated through "acts of faith, not works."¹⁰ The obvious problem is that neither my faith nor the tree of grace could have produced the apple of salvation without my work of planting the tree! In fact, in this analogy, human faith in God's grace and even God's grace itself are dependent on my work to even exist! Oops. Let's move on to the second analogy.

HEALING HEREAFTER

Now I'm in the hospital, malnourished because my apple tree wouldn't make any apples without my works (in college I couldn't even keep a cactus alive!). And on top of that, you (as God, but don't get a big head about it) come to tell me that if my house doesn't get painted, the siding will rot. Bummer deal! But because both you and God are gracious souls, you return a week later to tell me that the painter you hired (Jesus) has finished the job. The argument is that you're inviting me "to trust your (*God's*) word and stop worrying about my siding," even though "it involved no plan (*work*) on my part to have the job (*salvation*) done."¹¹ This time, it's true that no work of mine is required to produce salvation, but it's also true that no faith of mine is required either! The siding is painted whether I believe in your grace or not, isn't it? D'oh!

The third analogy is similar. This time you (still as God, but only until the end of this paragraph), an *exceedingly* gracious soul, tell me you've buried a million dollars (salvation), and solely because you did so on my property, it's mine! The argument is that my faith in your words "is in no way the cause of the gift; the only thing it can possibly have any causal connection with is (my) own enjoyment of the gift."¹² True, but is the gift really a gift if it cannot be enjoyed, if my belief that you're telling the truth *and* my work to dig up the money aren't a necessary part of the equation? Is salvation truly salvation if my faith in God's gracious gift is not put to work to play its essential role in the experience of being saved? Of course not. Neither I nor God would consider me truly saved to Heaven, fulfilling my purpose of perfect community with him, unless I can believe in enjoying *and* act to enjoy that experience and relationship. God merely telling us we're saved without including in the salvation process our faith *and* work that make that salvation experience enjoyable is no different than a mother who promises her son a trip to Disneyland, with the caveat that he can't actually be present there to enjoy it if he believes her promise or acts upon it. The only way his mother (God) is allowing him to truly be in and enjoy "the happiest place on earth" (Heaven) is if he is forced to

NOTES

go without his agreement! That would be vacation (salvation) by “grace” alone, without any role for faith or a free-willed act.

So in the gift analogy, faith cannot be separated from a work. In the apple analogy, both faith *and* grace cannot be separated from a work. In the siding analogy, there is only grace, with no necessary role for my faith or work. And in the money analogy, there is either only grace again, or grace, faith, and work *all* must play a role in a true, enjoyable salvation. No matter how people literarily dress it up, any actual salvation “by grace alone through faith alone” is *always* accompanied by a human work, just as the Bible teaches and just as we’ll continue to discover throughout Booklet 5 (James 2:14).

Now there are apparently those without qualms with the siding analogy, arguing, “It is God who from start to finish accomplishes the work of salvation.”¹³ But not only must they accuse him of forcing people to go to Hell; they must also somehow demonstrate how the human faith that is so vital for salvation can exist without a work of human free will. It can’t, and this unresolved tension becomes a stumbling block to them and to the people who come to them to understand Christianity better. For a typical example, consider one book’s conflicting claims. “And that’s the gospel. Not that we have an innate free will, but that God in his freedom came to us to rescue us from spiritual slavery.” “According to Scripture, faith is grabbing on desperately to Christ, who has come to save us. And though it is a free response, the response really is conditional on the rescue.”¹⁴ How can we not have an innate free will, yet freely respond?

10. Capon, R.F. (1993). *The Mystery of Christ...and Why We Don't Get It*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, pp. 91-92.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
13. Galli, M. (2011). *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 132.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-74.

