

YOU CANNOT ESCAPE THE TEXT

*A Comprehensive Defense of the Doctrines of Grace
for Those Who Refuse to Believe Them*

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part?

By no means!”

Romans 9:14

I. A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

This essay is written for people who have already decided that Calvinism is wrong. It is written for the person who believes that God would never choose some and pass over others, that election based on anything other than foreseen faith is monstrous, and that the very idea of irresistible grace is an insult to human dignity. If that is you, I am not asking you to set aside your convictions. I am asking you to do something harder: open your Bible and read what it actually says.

I am not going to quote Calvin. I am not going to appeal to the Westminster Confession or the Canons of Dort. I am not going to build a philosophical system and ask you to admire its elegance. I am going to walk through specific biblical texts—slowly, carefully, and in context—and ask you one question at each stop: **What does this text say?** Not what you wish it said. Not what your tradition has told you it must mean. Not what feels right. What does it *say*?

If the Bible teaches that salvation is entirely the work of God—that He chose, He called, He regenerated, He justified, and He will glorify a specific people whom He loved before the foundation of the world—then we are bound to believe it. If the Bible does not teach this, then Calvinism should be discarded without a second thought. The only court of appeal is the text. Let us go there now.

II. JOHN 6: THE FATHER GIVES, THE SON RECEIVES, THE SPIRIT RAISES

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

John 6:37

Begin here, because Jesus Himself begins here. In the sixth chapter of John, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus is followed by a crowd seeking more bread. He redirects them from physical food to spiritual life. And then He makes a series of statements that are among the most explicit in all of Scripture on the question of how people come to saving faith.

In verse 37, He says that all whom the Father *gives* Him *will* come to Him. Stop and notice two things. First, the giving precedes the coming. The Father gives certain people to the Son, and as a consequence of that giving, those people come. The coming does not produce the giving. The giving produces the coming. Second, the verb is not conditional. Jesus does not say, “All that the Father gives me *might* come to me, if they make the right choice.” He says they *will* come. The certainty of their coming rests not in the strength of their will but in the efficacy of the Father’s gift.

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:44

Now Jesus moves from the positive to the negative. Not only will the given ones come, but *no one can come* apart from the Father’s drawing. The word is *can*—a word of ability, not willingness. Jesus is not saying people do not want to come (though that is also true, as we will see). He is saying they are *unable* to come. The natural man, left to himself, does not have the capacity to come to Christ. This is not a matter of preference. It is a matter of power. He lacks the ability entirely.

The standard objection here is that “draws” means something gentle—an invitation, a wooing—and that this drawing can be resisted. But examine the word. The Greek verb is *helkuo*. It appears in John 21:6, where it describes the disciples dragging a net full of fish. It appears in Acts 16:19, where Paul and Silas are dragged into the marketplace. It appears in James 2:6, where the rich drag the poor into court. In every other usage, the word describes an effective action—not an invitation that may or may not be accepted, but a force that accomplishes what it sets out to do. And notice that Jesus ties the drawing directly to the outcome: “And *I will raise him up on the last day.*” Everyone drawn is raised. The drawing is effectual.

“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

John 6:65

After many of His disciples turn away, Jesus explains their departure. He does not say, “They left because they made a bad decision.” He does not say, “They left because they were not sincere enough.” He says they left because *it was not granted them by the Father*. The reason for unbelief is not insufficient evidence, not bad timing, not a failure of willpower. The reason is that the Father did not grant them the ability to come.

Now I want to ask you, plainly: If you read this passage with no theological system in mind—no Calvin, no Arminius, no tradition—what would you conclude? The Father gives specific people to the Son. Those people come. No one else can come. Those who leave were not granted the ability. What system does this text produce, all by itself? It produces the doctrines of unconditional election and effectual calling. It produces them without any help from systematic theology, without any philosophical scaffolding, without John Calvin. The text says what it says.

III. ROMANS 8: THE UNBREAKABLE CHAIN

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

Romans 8:29–30

Paul writes one of the most extraordinary sentences in the entire Bible. He constructs a chain of five links: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification. And every link has exactly the same subject group. There is no leakage between the links. Everyone foreknown is predestined. Everyone predestined is called. Everyone called is justified. Everyone justified is glorified. No one drops out at any point. The chain is seamless.

Notice also the verb tense of the final link. Paul says “glorified”—past tense—for an event that has not yet occurred. Why? Because in the mind and purpose of God, the outcome is so certain that it can be spoken of as already accomplished. The glorification of every elect person is as sure as their calling, as sure as their justification, as sure as the predestination that preceded it all. It is a done deal. God does not begin a work and leave it half-finished.

Now consider the most common alternative reading: that “foreknew” means “foresaw the faith of.” Grant this reading for the sake of argument. What follows? Everyone whose faith God foresaw is predestined. Everyone predestined is called. Everyone called is justified. Everyone justified is glorified. The chain still holds—no one whose faith God foresaw fails to reach glory. But this raises a devastating question: **What is the predestining doing?** If God merely looked down the corridor of time, saw who would believe, and then rubber-stamped their decision with the label “predestined,” then the word has no content. It adds nothing. Predestination becomes a ceremonial ratification of a human choice that was going to happen anyway.

But Paul does not treat predestination as a formality. He treats it as the ground of assurance. The entire argument of Romans 8:28–39 is designed to comfort suffering believers by anchoring their hope not in the strength of their own faith but in the unshakable purpose of God. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31). “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” (v. 33). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35). Paul’s argument only works if the initiating cause of the entire chain is God’s sovereign decision, not human response. If the first link is our faith, the chain is only as strong as our ability to keep believing—and that is no comfort at all.

The more natural reading—and the one that gives every word its full force—is that “foreknew” is relational, not merely cognitive. God did not merely foresee certain people; He *set His love upon* certain people before the foundation of the world. This is how the word “know” functions throughout the Old Testament: “You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). God obviously knew *about* every nation. But He *knew*—in the covenantal, relational sense—only Israel. Foreknowledge is not foresight. It is fore-love. And predestination is the appointment of those fore-loved ones to their destiny.

IV. ROMANS 9: THE TEXT THAT WILL NOT BEND

Romans 9 is the chapter that every opponent of Reformed theology must deal with, and it is the chapter that most of them wish did not exist. If there is a single passage in the Bible that should settle

this debate for any honest reader, it is this one. Not because it is the only text that teaches election—we have already seen that it is not—but because Paul so thoroughly anticipates and dismantles every objection to it that the only way to escape his argument is to deny that he is making it.

“Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”

Romans 9:11–13

Paul’s argument is built on two pairs of individuals: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. His point is that physical descent from Abraham does not guarantee membership in the people of God. The promise runs not through the flesh but through God’s sovereign choice. And the choice of Jacob over Esau was made *before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad*, for the explicit purpose of demonstrating that election rests on “him who calls” and not on human works or merit of any kind.

The most popular alternative to the Reformed reading is the “corporate election” view, which holds that Paul is talking about nations or groups rather than individuals, and that he is discussing historical roles rather than eternal destinies. But this interpretation collapses under scrutiny. Paul’s entire argument in verses 6–13 moves from the corporate to the individual precisely to make his point. Israel as a nation is the starting point, but Paul narrows the focus relentlessly: not all descendants of Abraham are true Israel (v. 6–7). Not Ishmael but Isaac. Not Esau but Jacob. *The individuals are the argument.* Paul is explaining why some individual Israelites believe and others do not, and his answer is God’s sovereign election.

But the most devastating evidence against the corporate-election reading comes not from the positive argument but from the objections Paul anticipates. Read what comes next:

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!”

Romans 9:14

Ask yourself: Why would anyone raise the charge of injustice if Paul were merely saying that God chose a nation to play a role in history? No one objects, “That’s unfair!” when told that God selected Israel for a particular historical mission. And no one objects, “That’s unfair!” when told that God elected those He foresaw would freely choose Him—because in that scenario, the human being is the decisive factor, and God is simply ratifying a choice already made. The charge of injustice *only* makes sense if Paul is teaching something that genuinely offends the human sense of fairness: that God unconditionally chose some individuals for mercy and passed over others, apart from anything in them.

And then comes the second objection—even more revealing than the first:

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’”

Romans 9:19

This objection is the death knell of every non-Reformed reading. The objector asks: If God’s will is decisive—if no one can resist it—then how can God blame anyone? This question assumes that human beings *cannot ultimately resist* God’s sovereign purpose. It assumes irresistible grace. It assumes that the reason people do not believe is that God has not willed them to believe. If Paul were teaching libertarian free will or election based on foreseen faith, this objection is nonsensical. Why would anyone say, “Who can resist his will?” if they believed God’s will *can* be resisted? The objection only arises because Paul’s teaching implies exactly what the Reformed tradition says it implies.

And here is the crucial point: **Paul does not correct the objector’s understanding.** He does not say, “You’ve misunderstood me. I’m not saying God’s will is irresistible. I’m saying He chose those He foresaw would choose Him.” That would be the natural response if the Arminian reading were correct. Instead, Paul reasserts divine sovereignty in its starkest possible form:

“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”

Romans 9:20–21

Paul’s answer to the charge of injustice is not to soften the doctrine. It is to invoke the absolute right of the Creator over the creature. The potter makes from the same lump—the same fallen mass of humanity—some vessels for honor and some for dishonor. And his right to do so is grounded in his identity as the maker, not in any quality of the clay.

Let me put it as directly as I can. If your reading of Romans 9 does not provoke the objection that Paul anticipates, then your reading of Romans 9 is wrong. If you can explain the passage in a way that no one would ever call unfair, you have not explained the passage—you have replaced it with something more palatable. The objections prove the doctrine. They are the fingerprints of the truth that Paul is actually teaching, and they cannot be explained away.

V. EPHESIANS 1: THE HYMN OF SOVEREIGN GRACE

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.”

Ephesians 1:3–6

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with an eruption of praise—a long, cascading sentence that piles blessing upon blessing, all tracing back to one source: the sovereign initiative of God. And within this avalanche of worship, he makes a series of claims about election that are extraordinarily difficult to square with any view other than the Reformed one.

First: “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” The choosing happened before creation. It happened before any human being existed, before any human being could believe or disbelieve, before any human merit or demerit could be evaluated. The choosing is logically and temporally prior to everything human.

Second: The purpose of the choosing was “that we should be holy and blameless.” Holiness is the *result* of election, not the *basis* of it. God did not look ahead and see holy people and then choose them. He chose unholy people in order to *make* them holy. If God chose those He foresaw would be holy, then holiness is the cause and election is the effect—and Paul has stated the relationship backward. But Paul does not make mistakes of this kind.

Third: The basis of predestination is stated explicitly. It is “according to the purpose of *his* will.” Not according to the foreseen response of our will. Not according to some quality God detected in us. According to the purpose of *his* will. And the goal of it all is “the praise of *his* glorious grace”—a phrase Paul repeats three times in this passage (vv. 6, 12, 14), as if to ensure that no reader could possibly miss the point. The ground of election is God’s will. The motive is God’s love. The purpose is God’s glory. The human contribution is zero.

If Paul meant to say, “God chose those He foresaw would believe,” he had the vocabulary to say it. The Greek language was not lacking the words. He never used them. Not once. Not here, not in Romans, not anywhere. What he actually wrote, consistently and emphatically, is that God chose according to His own purpose, His own will, His own pleasure. At what point do we take the apostle at his word?

VI. ACTS 13:48: THE ORDER THAT CANNOT BE REVERSED

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

Acts 13:48

Luke’s account of Paul’s ministry in Antioch of Pisidia contains one sentence that is almost startling in its directness. He does not write, “As many as believed were appointed to eternal life.” He writes, “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” The appointing comes first. The believing follows. And the verb is passive: they were appointed by someone other than themselves.

The attempt to reinterpret “appointed” as “disposed themselves toward” or “aligned themselves with” has no lexical support. The Greek word *tasso* means to arrange, to assign, to appoint, to order. It

is a word of authority and placement. When Luke uses it, he is describing a divine act that preceded and produced human faith, not a human disposition that preceded divine acceptance.

One verse does not build a doctrine. But when one verse says precisely what every other passage we have examined says—that God’s sovereign appointment is the ground of human faith, not the reverse—it is not a proof-text. It is another strand in a cord that is becoming impossible to break.

VII. EZEKIEL 36: GOD DOES THE WORK

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”

Ezekiel 36:26–27

Count the verbs. *I will give. I will put. I will remove. I will cause.* Every verb is first-person divine. God does not say, “I will offer you a new heart if you open yourself to receive it.” He does not say, “I will remove the heart of stone once you demonstrate a willingness to change.” He says He will do it. Period. Full stop. Without conditions, without prerequisites, without cooperation.

The heart of stone does not contribute to its own replacement. The dead heart does not cooperate in its own resurrection. The very faculty that would need to “accept” the offer is the faculty that is broken. You cannot ask a stone to soften itself. You cannot ask a corpse to choose life. The stone must be removed by an outside agent, and the life must be given by one who has it to give. This is monergistic regeneration: God acting alone to accomplish what the sinner cannot accomplish and will not accomplish and does not even desire to accomplish.

This is the Old Testament ground for the New Testament doctrine of the new birth. When Jesus tells Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7), He is describing exactly what Ezekiel prophesied. And when He adds, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8), He is describing a sovereign, mysterious, uncontrollable work of the Holy Spirit that cannot be reduced to a human decision. You do not decide to be born the first time. You do not decide to be born the second time. Birth is something that happens *to* you.

VIII. THE NATURE OF THE FALL: WHY INABILITY IS NOT INNOCENCE

The single most powerful emotional objection to the Reformed view is this: *How can God condemn people for what they cannot help?* It is a question that has turned many away from the doctrines of grace, and it deserves a thorough answer. Because the objection, though emotionally potent, is built

on a false premise—and the Bible dismantles that premise with devastating clarity.

The premise is that inability equals innocence—that if a person cannot come to God, they are not guilty for failing to come. But this premise, though it feels intuitively right, is not what Scripture teaches. The Bible does not portray fallen human beings as helpless victims of a condition they did not want. It portrays them as willing participants in rebellion—people who love their sin, prefer their darkness, and would not have it any other way.

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”

John 3:19

The key word is *loved*. Not “were trapped in.” Not “were victimized by.” *Loved*. The unregenerate person does not resent the darkness. He loves it. He prefers it. He chooses it—not once, at some distant point in history, but every single day, with every thought and every action that suppresses the truth of God. “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it *cannot*” (Romans 8:7). There it is again: *cannot*. But the inability is not imposed from outside. It rises from within. The mind set on the flesh *is hostile*—and out of that hostility flows the inability to submit.

Consider an analogy. A man borrows an enormous sum of money. He gambles it away—not under compulsion, but freely, joyfully, with full knowledge of what he was doing. Now he cannot pay his debt. Is he innocent because he is unable? Of course not. His inability is the direct fruit of his own choices. He is not less guilty for being unable; he is unable *because* he is guilty. His inability does not cancel his responsibility. It confirms it.

This is the biblical picture of the human condition. God does not condemn people for a nature they did not choose and wish they could escape. He condemns them for the sin they *love*, the righteousness they *despise*, and the God they *refuse*. Every unregenerate person is doing exactly what they want to do. Their will is not in chains; it is in love—in love with everything that is not God. And God is perfectly, unimpeachably just to hold them accountable for it, because they are acting according to their own desires every moment of every day.

And once you see this, effectual grace is no longer an offense to human dignity. It is the most astonishing mercy in the universe. Because what God does in regeneration is not overriding a reluctant will. It is *liberating* an enslaved one. He breaks in to the heart that would never, ever have wanted Him and gives it new desires, new affections, new eyes. He does not drag the unwilling into heaven. He makes the unwilling *willing*. He does not coerce. He resurrects. And the person who is born again does not experience it as violation—they experience it as the first moment they were truly free.

IX. THE UNIVERSAL TEXTS: ANSWERING EVERY OBJECTION

No defense of the Reformed position is complete without dealing honestly with the passages that appear to teach a universal saving intent. These texts are real, they are important, and they deserve more than a wave of the hand. Let us examine the three most frequently cited.

1 Timothy 2:3–4

“This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

1 Timothy 2:3–4

Read the context. Paul has just instructed Timothy that prayers should be made “for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions” (vv. 1–2). The “all people” in view is not an abstract universal—it is a specific corrective. Apparently, some in the early church thought the gospel was only for certain kinds of people: Jews, not Gentiles; commoners, not kings. Paul demolishes this by insisting that God’s saving desire extends to *all kinds of people*—every ethnicity, every social class, every station. He reinforces this in verse 7: “I was appointed a preacher and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles.” Paul is breaking ethnic and social barriers, not making a metaphysical claim about God’s decretive will.

Moreover, if this verse teaches that God has a simple, unconditional desire for every individual human being to be saved, then God is perpetually frustrated. Billions of people die without faith. If God desires their salvation in the same way He desires the salvation of the elect—with the same kind of will, the same kind of intention—then His desire is thwarted by human beings on a massive scale. He wants something and cannot get it. This is not the God of Scripture. This is a God whose purposes can be overruled by the creatures He made. The Reformed reading preserves both God’s genuine compassion for all people and His unfrustrated sovereignty over all things.

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

2 Peter 3:9

This verse is perhaps the most misquoted text in the entire debate, because it is almost never read in context. To whom is Peter writing? He tells us in the very sentence: “patient toward *you*.” And who is “you”? Peter addresses his letter to “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours” (2 Pet 1:1). He is writing to believers. The “you” toward whom God is patient is the elect community. God delays His return not because He is trying to give every human being extra time, but because He is waiting for all of *His people* to come to repentance—for the full number of the elect to be gathered in. Read this way, the verse teaches the opposite of what it is usually claimed to teach. It teaches that God’s patience is directed toward His chosen ones, and His purpose will not be complete until every last one of them has come to faith.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

This is the most beloved verse in the Bible, and rightly so. It tells us the staggering scope of God’s love: He loved the *world*—not just Israel, not just one ethnic group, but the world in all its rebellion and brokenness. And it tells us the means of salvation: belief in His Son. The Reformed tradition affirms both of these truths without reservation.

But notice what the verse does *not* say. It does not say that God’s love guarantees that everyone will be saved. It does not say that the ability to believe comes from within the individual. It does not say that God’s love is the same toward all people in every respect. It says that whoever believes will be saved. The Reformed question is: *Who believes?* And the answer, given by Jesus Himself just a few verses later, is devastating: “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light” (v. 19). Left to themselves, no one comes to the light. Everyone loves the darkness. The universal offer is real. The universal inability is also real. And the resolution of that tension is sovereign grace—God opening blind eyes and giving new hearts to those He chose before the world began.

X. THE PREVENIENT GRACE PROBLEM

The Arminian system requires a doctrine called prevenient grace to function. The logic runs as follows: total depravity is affirmed—the fallen person cannot come to God on their own. But God gives a universal enabling grace to every person, restoring the ability to believe or reject the gospel. This grace is given to all equally, and what differentiates the believer from the unbeliever is the individual’s free decision to cooperate with or resist this grace.

The problem is simple and insurmountable: **prevenient grace, as the Arminian defines it, is nowhere taught in Scripture.**

There is no passage in the Bible that says God gives a universal, resistible enabling grace to every person that restores the ability to choose Christ. Not one. The concept is a theological inference—a necessary postulate to make the Arminian system work—but it has no exegetical foundation. It is a gap-filler, invented to reconcile total depravity with libertarian free will, and it does enormous theological work without any biblical warrant.

Compare this with the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling. When the Reformed theologian says that God’s grace is irresistible—that those whom God calls to saving faith infallibly come—he can point to John 6:37 (“All that the Father gives me *will* come”), to Romans 8:30 (“those whom he called he also justified”—no gap between calling and justification), to Ezekiel 36:26–27 (“I will give

you a new heart”), and to Philippians 1:29 (“it has been granted to you that... you should believe in him”). Every one of these texts describes a grace that accomplishes its purpose. Every one describes a divine action that produces a specific human response—not an offer that may or may not be accepted.

The Arminian cannot produce a single text with comparable clarity for prevenient grace. He can point to passages that speak of God’s common goodness to all people—rain on the just and the unjust, the general call of the gospel—but these do not establish the specific Arminian claim, which is that God restores the ability to believe to every individual equally and then waits for a decision. That doctrine is not derived from any text. It is required by a system, and the system is built to protect a prior commitment to libertarian free will. The question is whether our commitment should be to a philosophical category or to what the text actually says.

XI. THE DIRECTION OF INITIATIVE ACROSS THE WHOLE BIBLE

Step back now from the individual passages and survey the entire landscape of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, the direction of saving initiative moves in one direction: from God to man. Never from man to God. The pattern is so relentless, so consistent, so woven into the fabric of every genre and every testament, that denying it requires not the reinterpretation of a few verses but the reinterpretation of the entire story.

God seeks Adam in the garden; Adam hides. God calls Abraham out of Ur; Abraham does not apply. God chooses Israel—“not because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you” (Deut 7:7–8). God sends prophet after prophet to a people who stone them. God sends His Son to a world that crucifies Him. And even after the resurrection, the pattern continues: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Romans 9:16). “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

The consistent testimony of Scripture is that God initiates, God accomplishes, and God preserves. Human faith is real. Human repentance is real. Human responsibility is real. But they are the *fruit* of God’s work, not the *root* of it. Faith is the instrument by which we receive Christ. Grace is the engine that produces the faith. And the glory belongs entirely to the One who planned it, accomplished it, and applied it—from first to last, without any help from us.

XII. THE DECISIVE QUESTION

There is one question that exposes the deepest fault line between the Reformed and non-Reformed positions. It is not a question about philosophy or church history or theological systems. It is a question about you and the person sitting next to you in church.

Why did you believe and they did not?

If your answer is, “Because God chose me, regenerated me, and gave me the gift of faith,” then you have no room for boasting. Your salvation is pure mercy. You contributed nothing. You are a beggar who was handed bread.

If your answer is, “Because I made the right choice and they did not,” then you have introduced a decisive difference between yourself and the unbeliever that resides in *you*—in your wisdom, your openness, your willingness, your better use of the grace that was given equally to both of you. And that is a ground for boasting, however much you try to dress it up in the language of humility. At the end of the day, in the Arminian scheme, the thing that separates the saved from the damned is a human decision. And the person who made the right decision has something to be proud of that the person who made the wrong decision does not.

Paul anticipated exactly this, and he cut it off at the root: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, *not a result of works, so that no one may boast*” (Ephesians 2:8–9). The purpose clause is devastating. The reason salvation is entirely of grace is precisely *so that no one may boast*. If your decision is the decisive factor, boasting has not been eliminated. It has merely been relocated—from the arena of works to the arena of will. And Paul will not allow it in either place.

XIII. IF THE TEXT SAYS IT, LET GOD BE TRUE

I have not quoted Calvin in this essay. I have not quoted Augustine, or Edwards, or Spurgeon. I have quoted Moses, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Luke, John, and Paul. The doctrines of grace are not a sixteenth-century invention. They are not the peculiar property of Reformed Presbyterians or Southern Baptist Calvinists. They are the testimony of the biblical text itself—written across both Testaments, in narrative and prophecy and Gospel and epistle, from the call of Abraham to the doxology of Romans 11.

They are also deeply unsettling. I will not pretend otherwise. The doctrine of unconditional election raises questions that do not have neat answers. Why does God choose some and not others? Why create those He knows will perish? How do sovereignty and responsibility fit together without contradiction? These are real questions, and the Reformed tradition has always been honest about the fact that the full resolution lies in the mind of God, not in ours.

But the question is not whether the doctrine is comfortable. The question is whether it is *true*. And truth is determined not by our comfort level but by what the text says. If the text says that God chose us before the foundation of the world, then He did. If the text says that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, then they cannot. If the text says that those whom God predestined He also glorified—past tense, as certain as if it has already happened—then it is certain. We do not get to

vote on the truth. We receive it.

And here is the final irony: the very doctrines that skeptics find so offensive are the doctrines that, rightly understood, produce the deepest worship. Because if God is sovereign in salvation, then your faith is not your achievement. Your standing before God is not the product of your superior intelligence, your stronger willpower, or your better decision-making. It is sheer, undeserved, breathtaking mercy. You were dead, and He made you alive. You were blind, and He gave you eyes. You were running in the opposite direction with everything in you, and He intercepted you, turned you around, and set your feet on a path you never would have chosen.

That is not a doctrine to be argued against. That is a doctrine to fall on your face before.

You cannot escape the text. You can only decide whether you will submit to it or keep running. The God who wrote it is patient. But He is also sovereign. And His word will accomplish exactly what He sent it to do.

*“So then it depends not on human will or exertion,
but on God, who has mercy.”*

Romans 9:16

*“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

Romans 11:33–36