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Is Calvinism Biblical? (Part 2)



Is Calvinism Biblical? (Debate) - Steve Gregg

In this debate between Steve Gregg and Douglas Wilson, the topic of Calvinism and its biblical basis is explored. The two engage in a cross-examination, with Gregg questioning Wilson on his beliefs about predestination and God's sovereignty. Wilson argues that God determines everything that comes to pass, but he does not author evil, while Gregg challenges him on the idea of God being responsible for the sin and suffering in the world.

Transcript

We now have a period of cross-examination for 10 minutes, and we will begin with Mr. Gregg asking Mr. Wilson questions. Well, I'm not as prepared for the cross-examination, but I do, I would like, Douglas, to show me a scripture that tells me that God foreordains everything that happens. Now, I'll tell you right off, to say that God says, my purposes will stand, I will do all my pleasure.

That doesn't tell us he foreordains all that happens, because it doesn't tell us what his pleasure is. It doesn't tell us whether it's his pleasure to give freedom or not give freedom. It only tells us that what God is determined to do and what is his pleasure to do, he'll do that, and I agree with that.

Also, Ephesians 1.11, maybe you're going there, I don't know, but I'll let you give it if you want to. I don't think good exegesis will make that say that, but I should just give you the question and let you answer it. Let's give it a shot anyway.

Ephesians 1.11. Would you like to quote it for us? Yeah, God works all things according to the counsel of his own will. Yes, the whole verse, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. And that proves that point for you.

Well, it seems to me, I'm kind of a simple mind, but it seems that when it says he predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will, this means that he works all things after the counsel of his will. Okay, so when the Bible says that God does all things well, does that mean that he pole vaults well or

that he... That he what all? When the Bible says he doeth all things well. Right.

When it says he does all things, does that literally mean he does all things or that all things that he does, he does well? In that passage, he does all things well. I would take it the way you suggest, that all things that he does, he does well. Okay, and why would it be unreasonable to suggest that when it says he works all things according to the counsel of his will, that it would mean equally all the things that he works conform to the counsel of his own will, without saying that he is actually working all things that happen? Because of the rest of Ephesians chapter 1. Because what you're dealing with is in verse 4, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us under the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will.

It tells us what the good pleasure of his will is. It is my adoption as a son, which is that the redemption of the body, if you look at Romans 8, the final resurrection of the dead. I'm predestined to that and I was predestined to that before the foundation of the world.

An awful lot of things ride on me even being around in order to be predestined to that final end. And Ephesians chapter 1 is not just using a figure of speech, it's comforting saints who want to know that their lives are not blown about in the wind. It's secured.

Well, you just said that it says that you were predestined. Is your name in there? No, it's in a different book. I know I've read some of those books.

They're published by Canon Press. No, not that one. Let me ask you this.

You are aware that it does not say that I was predestined. It says that we were predestined. There's a collective there.

It's the church. The church is predestined to be adopted as sons. Actually, it's just the Jews.

But because there's a shift to the second person from the first person, we, and then later on, he shifts. You also were included, speaking to the Gentiles. Okay.

So the elect among the Jews are certainly not a different body than the elect among the Gentiles. That is certainly what Paul teaches in Ephesians 3. The cumulative effect is to say the middle wall of partitions come down, Jews and Gentiles together. What is true of the Jews is also true of the Gentiles.

You are no doubt very familiar with the Arminian view. It's not the view of Arminius, but many Arminians teach it, that election is corporate rather than individual. Right.

Okay. The airplane is destined to get there, but not the passengers. That's right.

Exactly. The ship's destined to get there, but the passengers decide whether to stay on

the ship or not. Well, not exactly.

Or if they stay in the airplane or not. There's a door. That's right.

There's a door. The point here is, this is the very figure of election that both Jesus and Paul give. I'd like to hear you answer John 15 about the vine and the branches, and Romans 11 about the olive tree and the branches.

It seems clear to me that the branches are in the tree or in the vine, and they are elect in the vine because the vine is elect. Both John 15 and Romans 11 will be a centerpiece to my presentation tomorrow on the perseverance of the saints. I should hold off on that.

But with regard to this, where Paul says, if you say, in Ephesians 1, the issue is comfort to the saints, encouragement to the saints. At the end of Romans 8, where he asks a series of wonderful questions, he says, Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And there's a series of rhetorical questions here that Paul expects the answer to. He anticipates what the answer is. And if God is not exhaustively sovereign, the way I've been arguing for over every detail of my life, all of these questions fall to the floor.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Maybe. Distress, probably. Persecution, almost certainly.

Famine, nakedness, peril, sword. It's looking pretty grim, if it's up to me. As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all day long.

We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I'm persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, including my will, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not academic, as I said at the beginning. This is pastoral. And if I know that the universe is out there with God governing lots of stuff, but I don't know exactly what, and people running amuck with their free wills governing other stuff and I don't know what it is, I have no comfort from a passage such as this.

These are pastoral truths. Predestination is not this dour, smelly doctrine thought up to scare little children. It was executed from the passages, pages of scripture in order to comfort the saints.

So God works all things according to the counsel of his will. That means I can be confident in all things. What do you make of the fact that the book of Luke tells us that the scribes and the Pharisees rejected the will of God for themselves by not being baptized by John? Did God work that? Thank you for asking that question, because that was the thing I wasn't going to be able to get to.

There's a difference. The Bible makes a distinction between the decretive and the preceptive will of God. Whose will was it that Jesus go to the cross? Well, Jesus says, not my will, but your will be done.

Then in Acts 4 it says, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and all the Jews did what God's will determined beforehand to be done. When Jesus went to the cross, it was God willing it before the foundation of the world. The land was slain before the foundation of the world.

It was the will of Jesus submitting to that. It was the will of Judas betraying Jesus for who knows what reason. It was the will of Peter denying Jesus in just the way that he said he was going to deny him.

This whole thing is scripted down to the behavior of the chickens. Before the cock crows, you're going to deny me three times. Herod, Pontius Pilate, all these people, they all did what God determined beforehand to be done.

Was Judas doing the will of God when he betrayed Jesus? Well, yes and no. He was breaking the Ten Commandments. He was betraying his Lord.

He was not doing the will of God. Was he doing the will of God that Jesus mentioned in the garden? Yes, he was. So when we say, Paul says in Thessalonians, this is the will of God concerning you that you avoid sexual immorality.

Well, there are Christians who fall into sexual immorality. They violate the will of God. They break the will of God.

That's the preceptive will of God. It's a violation of his precepts, his commands, which is different than a violation of his decrees. If God says, let there be light, the darkness can't say, no, I'm not going to.

And the Bible does say that when a Christian falls into fornication, that is agreeing with God's decreed will. Yes. When a Christian falls into... Where does it say that? God works all things according to the pleasure of his will.

Okay, but he's not the author of sin. Right. So when the baby that's born as a result arrives, is it a surprise to God? No surprises.

But God didn't determine that man would sin. He didn't determine this baby would come into being? He knew that the baby would become a sinner. Did he know the baby was

going to come into being? No problem, yes.

And he created the world anyway. Yep. And this baby comes to faith and Christ grows up and comes to faith in Christ.

And that baby's name is known to God before the foundation of the world that he'll come to salvation. And yet God doesn't determine decretively the act of fornication that brought that child into being. No, I don't believe he did.

So God determines the effect but not the cause. We're being commanded to stop. Yes, we are.

At a very inopportune time. Commanded to stop just in time because he was already shifting the questions over to you. Yeah, now you do that to me.

So you have... So let's follow up. You have ten minutes to continue that line. So let's do.

Did God determine the effect and not the cause? I believe that God permitted the particular cause because he permits everything that happens. He doesn't stop it. But at the same time, if that baby should have been born, if God determined that baby should be born ages before, he could have brought it about through a more... a union that complied with his stated will.

We agree. He causes the wrath of man to praise him. And even the sexual immorality of man he can cause to praise him.

That does not mean that God decreed that the man would have wrath. It only means that God is very ingenious and can exploit all things and work them together for good. We don't disagree that God could have done it another way.

But when God determined that this child would grow up to believe in him and live eternally with him, God determined that that child who would serve him forever in heaven came from the result of an immoral union. That's the world in which it happened. And God knew it was going to happen that way before it happened.

So when God determines the effect, does he determine the effect in this world without determining the cause in this world? Now, you see, I don't have a degree in philosophy. So you've got me at a disadvantage here. But as far as exegesis is concerned, the Bible says that God does not will for people to sin.

He does not will for them to perish. It never entered his mind to command it. And to suggest that God decreed infallibly and unchangeably foreordained that a certain sin would happen, though God adamantly says it never entered his mind to command such a thing, I think that takes some fancy philosophical footwork.

I do believe that that child came into the world because of the will of God. But I do

believe that God, if that couple had not fornicated, God could have taken the same spirit and put it in a child that was conceived in a better union. God uses the sins that people do, but he doesn't decree that they should sin.

We agree that God could have done it differently. Right. But we're both maintaining that this is the way he did it.

Right. Well, he exploited the sinner's choice. He did not make the sinner's choice.

He did not decree that the sinner would make that choice. Now, what you're doing is you're saying that the word will is univocal, that there's only one definition. No, there are other definitions.

Obviously, some people have. Well, for example, I may wish that my children would go into ministry. It might be my will that my son would go into ministry.

But I also want him to make his own choice. And therefore, at another level, it's my will that he do whatever he chooses to do, even if he chooses what he don't prefer. But to say that I choose for him to make his own decision does not mean I choose for him to make wrong decisions.

And I will live with wrong decisions if he makes them. And I will say that is, of course, part of his being a responsible adult. I believe that God's will, his overarching will, is that he made man responsible.

And he made man, in a sense, like himself, morally alert, morally alive. We can get into the dead and trespass and sins tomorrow, maybe. But God made man with the capability of making choices because God wanted man to have that responsibility and that choice.

Now, it doesn't mean that God wanted the man to commit fornication. But God didn't stop him because he preferred for the man to make the choice. But what you're doing is you're making the same distinction that Calvinists make, only you're calling it by different names.

We say that God prohibits certain things in his commandments. That's his preceptive will, his precepts, his commandments. And so when people sin, they're violating the will of God, which we could both find plenty of places in Scripture where God says, you ought not to violate my will.

And people, when they sin, are recorded as having violated his will. The Bible uses the word will that way. But the Bible also uses God's will with regard to the decrees of God.

When God says, thou shalt not steal, that's an expression of the will of God in one sense. When God says, let there be light, that's the expression of the will of God in another sense. It's not the same kind of expression.

When God says, this is what I want you to do, and I will punish you if you don't do it, but you can physically do it in the world, that's an expression of his will. When he says, I am going to do this, that's an expression of his will. And the Bible uses the word will in both cases.

So we simply say, this is will A and this is will B, decretive, perceptive. And it answers all the scriptural data that you're concerned about. So when God says he works out all things in accordance with the counsel of his will, that's his decretive will.

Well, see, I do agree that there are two levels of will, but I explained it differently than you do. And I don't use the word decretive will because, although both Arminians classically and Calvinists have had no trouble talking about God's decrees of salvation, the Bible doesn't talk about such. The Bible doesn't use the word decree that way.

It doesn't say that God has a decreed will that's different than his perceptive will. We could talk about God's permissive will, and that's not the same as decreeing. How about God permits? How about his predestining will? Well, that's not the same concept either because the Bible doesn't use the word predestined that way.

The word predestined is only found in two passages in the Bible, and it's not used that way. Right, but you haven't handled how it's handled in Ephesians 1:11 yet. How predestination is used? Yeah, he'd be predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will.

Okay, well, I'd be glad to handle it. The Bible talks about predestination as the thing that God has determined will be the destiny of those who believe in Christ, who are in Christ. God has predestined that those who are in Christ will be adopted as sons.

God has predestined that those who are in Christ will be eventually conformed to his image. Yes, Romans eight. So the predestination is not who will get saved.

The predestination is what will happen to those who are. Yes, it does not tell us that God predestinated you to be saved or me to be saved. It says that God predestined that those who are in Christ will have this destiny.

That's not the same thing at all of saying that he decreed that I would be in Christ or you would be in Christ. He decrees a destiny for his people. He does not say who will be or who will not be.

God does not decree that. So then you would say that all that list of things in Romans eight, every last one of them could separate some people from. No, none of those things could.

But Paul did not mention our choices. Now, you did mention our choices. You were reading when he said things to come.

You said that would include our future choices. No, you didn't read carefully because he says or any other created thing. When Paul talks about things that are or things to come or any other created thing.

A decision is not a created thing. A decision is an action and it's not an action of God. It's not created.

It's it's an action of a free moral agent that God has given the opportunity to see the created or uncreated. No, you're you're talking as though and Calvinist do this. They talk as though decisions are things.

Now, don't object to carnal reasoning here. I don't like carnal reasoning. A will is not a thing.

A will is a philosophical concept that describes the power to make choices. A choice is not a thing. A choice is an action.

OK, I would be happy to dispute that point with you, but let me give it to you and then say this uncreated will this action in the world. Can tribulation, nakedness, famine, peril, sword, threats, principalities and so forth. Can that those things all have an impact on someone's choosing? They can if the person chooses for them to.

The fact of the matter is, Paul is saying that. We are our salvation does not depend on our strength to resist those kinds of things, but it says, First Peter, chapter one says that we are kept by the power of God through faith. As long as we have faith, then we are kept by a power beyond ourselves.

That's greater than tribulation and principalities and powers. And there is nothing that can overpower the power of God. But a renunciation of our faith removes us from that protection.

So basically, my will is something that can negate every protection in this chapter. Yes. So what good is the chapter chapter? Well, what comfort is it? It's a great comfort to me because I don't expect any of those things overpower my will because I have I have the choice.

I don't have to renounce Christ. But look where the look at the subtle shift in your faith. Is it a faith in God or faith in your will? You didn't catch my meaning.

My choice is to trust Christ. If I trust Christ, I am kept by his power. The choice to not trust Christ is to trust in me.

But when I say I have the choice, it's given to me to put my faith in Christ. Then where is my faith? It's not in me. It's in Christ.

It's in you believing in Christ. If you wish to put it that way, but that's not what the Bible

says. Right.

All right. OK. One minute.

All right. I alluded to this earlier and this has been at the edges, but really quickly. Do you believe that God knows every event exhaustively before the world's created? I am presently of that opinion.

Do you believe that he created the world from nothing? I do. OK. How can you avoid the conclusion that this world is here this evening because God put it here knowing what would happen? I don't avoid that conclusion.

I believe that's exactly correct. So he determined what would happen. I didn't say he determined it.

He created a world and he invented contingencies. He invented conditions. He created those options and he gave a man and woman free choice to make choices.

God knew what they would choose, I believe. Now, of course, some openness theology people don't even believe that. But I do.

I believe God knew. But I don't believe that God determined everything that happened. Now, God did determine.

It says stop. God did determine the overall program. And that included our choices.

He took those into consideration. But he didn't determine them. Thank you.

We have now three minutes for closing statements from from each gentleman, beginning with Mr. Gray. Well, I better look at my watch. I really have only to reiterate what I said earlier.

I do not believe there's anything in the Bible that talks about God determining all things. I don't think there's anything in the Bible that says that God determines what men will choose in particular. Now, God decides whether what they choose will materialize in what they wish.

It says in Psalm 21, I think verse 11, it says they intended an evil work against you, but they were not able to perform it. Well, why not? Well, because God didn't let them perform it. But they did intend to.

And God did not ordain that they would intend to. If he I mean, he ordained that they wouldn't succeed. Why would he ordain that they would have these intentions when he didn't plan to? That wasn't his plan to happen.

I believe that God has power over all things and authority over all things. That's what the

divine sovereignty in the Bible means, as well as in the dictionary. But I don't believe that that in any sense teaches or that the Bible teaches that a God who does not determine all things that people choose is somehow not sovereign or is not God.

He for me as a sovereign in my home to allow liberty to my children is not a renunciation of my sovereignty. It's an exercise of it. If I wish to be a tyrant in my home, my unfortunate children will have no choice in the matter.

I'm sovereign. If I choose to be more democratic or more kindly or more considerate, my children also don't make any decisions about that. I do.

I'm the sovereign. But my style of governing is not the same thing as my sovereignty. When we talk about total determinism, we're not talking about the sovereignty of God.

We're talking about God's style of governing. And the Calvinist believes that his style is exhaustive and they controls all things and decrees all that will be. I don't believe that.

I don't believe the Bible teaches three minutes. OK, this will be the fastest of all. Picture a man at the top of a flight of stairs who has the power to bring pennies into existence.

And he makes this determination. I'm going to create a thousand pennies and I'm going to pitch him down the stairs. And I know beforehand where each of them is going to land and whether they'll be heads or tails.

I know that. And I'm going to bring these pennies into existence. And blam, they're into existence and down they go.

And then they, sure enough, they land right where he knew that they were going to land. The decision to create those pennies and pitch them down the stairs means that he has determined that outcome. If this was what was behind my series of questions, if you believe that God knows all things beforehand, before they come to pass.

And if you believe that God created from nothing, then that necessarily entails, I think, by good and necessary consequence. It's just it's a strict deductive operation that if God had not made that choice to create the world, we wouldn't be here. He knew that we would be here if he created the world and he created the world anyway.

That means he did it because he wanted this state of affairs to be. Now, we might debate why he wanted this state of affairs to be. Some might say it's because he wanted man to have free will or because of the glory of God or whatever.

But God's creation from nothing with knowledge beforehand necessitates a form of determinism, divine determinism, not philosophical determinism. I also want to remind you of the hermeneutical commitment that drives this. And it's not just a matter of having read it from the booklet.

But I think you've seen this hermeneutical commitment in operation and how Steve responds to certain texts. I think he sees certain things in the text because common sense tells him that if he didn't see that in the text, he would have to adopt some form of God as puppet master or God as tyrant or God as control freak. And I don't think the Bible requires that at all.

I think the safest thing for us to do is to just let reason tell us what the text actually says. If another text tells us something that's difficult to harmonize with the first text, we simply accept it as what God says and God will sort it out in due time. And as we study the scriptures more carefully and over time, as we grow in grace and wisdom, many of these things will be resolved in this life.

And some of them, some of the profound mysteries, the Trinity, how God could create from nothing and how God can be fully exhaustively sovereign and man fully exhaustively free, responsible for his actions, I think is in that number. I also want to remind you that that Steve has been in the difficult position of of defending the fact that God does not determine that God can determine the effect, but not the cause. And the the simplest example of this is I'm going to have to stop.

Thank you. Thank you. And please join me in thanking both of our speakers.

I'll begin the questions. We have five questions for each of the men. I apologize that we can't get to all of your questions because of the sake of time.

I think we'll look over some of them that were not read tonight. And if we can address some of the conclusion tomorrow, I would like to do that as well. But for Mr. Wilson, if God has foreordained everything that comes to pass, how is he not the author of evil? The the phrase author of sin is a phrase that is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

And what and I quoted it earlier. It's the chapter on the divine decrees. And what they're saying is God freely and unalterably ordains whatsoever comes to pass.

Yet so in such in such a way they're saying is that he's not the author of sin. And what they're trying to do is be faithful to two different types of statement that we find in Scripture. Ephesians 1:11, God works all things according to the counsel of his will.

And God is not tempted by evil. And James, he himself tempts no one, it says. So the Bible is very important for us to affirm what the Bible affirms everywhere.

So when the Bible says that God is not the instigator of sin, he doesn't tempt. He doesn't lure people into sin and so forth. That that is saying that God does not tempt or do evil the way sinful men do.

And it's important that that be part of our testimony. At the same time, we have to say

that God can decree a wicked act without performing the wicked act. God decreed the will of God was that Jesus go to the cross.

That's the will of God. God decreed that that act would be performed. He didn't decree that Judas was OK and Pilate was OK because he decreed it.

The Bible tells us that Pilate's sin was less than the Jews, but the Jews sinned. Pilate sinned. Judas sinned.

He was a son of perdition. The Bible tells us that they all sinned. Their sin was their own.

And at the same time, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father. So what we're trying to do is say, here's the theological tag that we use to say that God is not himself wicked. He's not the author of sin.

He's not the direct cause of it. At the same time, God controls all things perfectly for his good purpose. The best way to sum this up is that God draws straight with crooked lines.

For Mr. Gregg, what about the potter and clay example? The potter and clay example comes from Jeremiah 18 and from Isaiah, two passages in Isaiah. And of course, we're familiar with it, mostly from Romans chapter 9. There, we find that Paul anticipates a detractor who is going to say to him, why then does God find fault? For who has resisted his will? Now, those are two rhetorical questions. The detractor is really saying God can't find fault because no one has resisted God's will.

He's just saying it by form of rhetorical questions. Paul then says, nay, but who are you, O man, to answer against God? Has not the potter power over the clay to make of one lump whatever kind of vessel he wants to? I'm paraphrasing now. And basically, he says, can that which is formed say to him who formed it, why have you made me thus? And what the potter and the clay illustration teaches, if you go back to the original place where Paul's gaining it from, which is Jeremiah 18 and two passages in Isaiah, is that God said that Israel was the clay and that he was the potter.

Now, he did not say that the analogy holds to all aspects. The point here is the potter and clay is arguing that God has the right to do whatever he wants to. It does not say that God shapes every person's will like a potter shapes clay.

As a matter of fact, the potter house in Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah went and saw the potter working with clay. And he saw that the clay was marred on the wheel. Now, the potter didn't do that on purpose.

Potters don't want their clay to be marred on the wheel. But he discarded that one because it was marred. There was something wrong in the clay, apparently.

And so he discarded that. He made a new vessel. And God said, see, Israel, am I not like

this potter? Are you not like this clay that can I not discard you if you try out the way I don't want you to? It's about God's prerogatives.

It's not about God's offering. The potter that Jeremiah watched did not intend for that clay to be marred, but it was anyway. But he had the right to discard it.

That's his sovereign choice. And so also when Paul is quoting it, he said that God has the right to choose to do whatever he wants. However, he does not agree with the detractor who says who has resisted God's will.

The detractor says who has resisted God's will as if to say no one has. But Paul answered him, who are you? You're answering against God. Paul doesn't believe that no one resists God's will.

The Bible says that the scribes and Pharisees resisted the will of God for them. Paul would never say that no one resists God's will. The detractor said that, and Paul proves them wrong by taking their own form of statement.

Who has resisted his will? He says, well, who are you? You've resisted God's will. You're reacting to him right now. So the potter in clay simply is saying that God has the right to do what he wants to do.

But it doesn't say that he is the one who determines the shape of every person's will and what they will decide. That is not in the purview of his discussion. And it doesn't agree with where he's getting his information from in the Old Testament.

Mr. Wilson, if Shakespeare is responsible for Hamlet's sins, then why is God innocent of ours? Shakespeare is responsible for Hamlet's sins, but Shakespeare could not be tried for them. He's responsible for them in the sense that he wrote the play, but he's not guilty of them. So if we wanted to say, is God responsible for the world the way it is? I think everyone who affirms creation has to say God's responsible for the way things are.

Nobody else did all this. Here we are. And God set all these forces in motion knowing what would come from it.

God is responsible for us being here. God's responsible for the world. God's responsible for the created order.

God's responsible for all of it. He's not guilty of anything or anything within it any more than the potter is guilty for the sins of the pot or Shakespeare is guilty for the sins of Hamlet or God is not guilty for our sins. He does not partake of guilt.

He is the Holy One. But he is God, and we see that God sovereignly controls even wicked actions. I would go back to the centerpiece.

Many of you ladies have a cross around your neck. You wear jewelry. That's a gibbet.

It's a noose. The center of the Christian faith is a murder. That's the center of our faith, a murder.

Not only is it a murder, but it's a predestined murder. And not only is it a predestined murder, but it was prophesied centuries before Judas was born that he would share bread with Jesus and lift up his heel against him. He would betray the Lord.

A predestined murder is the centerpiece of our faith. When we start saying that God cannot control evil without becoming evil, we're on our way to denying the centerpiece of our faith. If God can't control evil without becoming evil, then whose will was Jesus submitting to in the garden? He thought the Father.

Mr. Gregg, in 2 Samuel 24.1, God moves David to number the people. In 24.10, David realizes this numbering is a sin, and then God punishes him. How can you explain this text? God moving David to number the people is, I think in the same category, is God hardening Pharaoh's heart or giving when he turned some people over to reprobate mine in Romans 1? I'm not saying that David became a reprobate.

I'm saying these are all in the same category. They all have to do with God being angry at someone. The passage says God was angry at Israel, and he moved David to number the people.

This was a judgment that came on Israel, just as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was a judgment that came on Egypt. And God was dealing with people who had already committed sins, and he was now doing what I think is a very special act of judgment where he actually hardens a man's heart or even encourages him in an area. We read, of course, in the parallel in Chronicles that it was Satan who moved David to do that.

God and Satan were both involved. I believe Satan initiated it. God permitted it, same as in Job.

I mean, Satan took all Job's stuff away, and Job said, well, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Well, the Lord did take it away by letting Satan do it. I believe that when we read in Chronicles that Satan moved David to do it and in 1 Samuel that God moved him, we see that God passively moved him.

God wanted to judge Israel. Satan was there ready to move David to do this thing, and God permitted it. And God is said to have done it because he permitted it.

Likewise, when an evil spirit was sent from the Lord to the mouth of Ahab's prophets in 1 Kings 22, this evil spirit had to come to God first and say, I'll go do it. I'll go do it. And God had already said, well, who's going to go judge Ahab for him? Who's going to go persuade him to fall at Ramoth Gilead? And different suggestions were made, and this evil spirit came and said, I'll be a lion spirit in the mouth of his prophets.

This guy said, good idea, go. Now, this was not God taking an innocent man and saying, I'm going to make you a bad man because that's my sovereign will. This is a case of God already being angry with somebody like Pharaoh or like Israel and David, their king, or Ahab.

And God said, OK, the method I will use to judge is to turn you over to this temptation and not rescue you from it. I'm going to let you make these sinful decisions. But to make any parallel between that and a person who's born, let us say, without having made any choices, haven't sinned at all, and God saying, I'm going to dictate that you are going to be an evil sinner for every day of your life and you're going to go to hell for it, is not a parallel situation.

One is the judgment on a man who's already, God has a quarrel with him. The other is simply God unilaterally deciding to make someone evil. Mr. Wilson, Jeremiah 19, 4 and 5, have built high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it enter my mind.

Please explain how this is possible according to Calvinism. The verse, not just the context of Jeremiah, but within the verse, he's saying God didn't command this thing. When he says it never entered my head, he's saying it never entered my head to command you to worship me in this way, the way the other idols around require worship.

So God's saying, I didn't command it, it didn't come into my head. He's not saying that this flummoxed God, this surprised him, because the Bible teaches throughout that God knows all things exhaustively, just apart from the predestining texts, the four ordaining texts, God knows. So when God goes down to Sodom to find out if the report he's heard is true, he's not going down to buy a newspaper and hire a private detective.

He is holding Sodom together at that moment. Godness in his transcendence is sovereign over all things, but God stoops and interacts with us, and one of the ways he interacts is through commandments, the covenant commandments to Israel. He says, Jeremiah, didn't enter my head.

He's not saying it never occurred to me that this was not a possibility, and we know that from the text because earlier, when the Jews were preparing to invade Canaan, it had entered God's head that they might disobey him in this fashion. He tells them, this is one of the reasons for the holy war against the Canaanites. It did occur to God that they might disobey him, and he warns them long before Jeremiah's life that you are not to do this.

You're not to cause your sons and daughters to pass through the fire. You're not to do this. The text says it did enter his head, so later in Jeremiah where it says it never came into my mind, it's simply another way of saying I didn't command this atrocity.

Mr. Gregg, could you elaborate on your answer to Doug's final line of questioning? In other words, if God knows that if P, then Q, and he wills P, then how has he not willed Q? Well, we could conclude that if we're going to depend on logic, and that is what Douglas was arguing from. He doesn't like it when Armenians use logic to interpret scripture, but it's okay for Calvinists apparently. The fact is there is a difference between that man determining where those pennies fall and determining that the pennies will exist knowing where they will fall.

It is true in an abstract sense, he somehow determines that they will fall that way because he brings them into existence knowing they will, but it is not he who is determining how each penny bounces and how it turns over. As I understand the will of God, God made everything, and he knew, I believe he knew Adam would sin, I believe he knew that I would sin, I believe he knew every sin that man would commit or woman, and he knew who would be saved, but that doesn't mean that he made the decisions of who would. Now, what Douglas was arguing is that if he knew that this would turn out this way, and he did it anyway, then it must all be his will.

No, not necessarily. I believe that God can have an outcome that he desires, and he can give freedom to individuals to do things that he knows they are going to do, and he knows what he is going to do in response to what they do, because he can exploit everything. God is ingenious.

He actually can control reality in a way much more ingenious than an author controlling a novel, because the author doesn't need any ingenuity at all. You know, Louis Littlemore can write hundreds of those, and he is not that much of a genius. All the plots look the same, but the fact is God is a genius.

God is intelligent. He can manage a creation that is full of things that from our perspective are ungovernable, but he can make the wrath of man to praise him. Now, he does not ordain the wrath of man to happen, but he knew it would happen, and to suggest that he made man knowing that man would do this, therefore God made him do it.

I don't see that logical. Maybe I am too hooked on carnal reasoning, or maybe the illustration itself comes from carnal reasoning. I am not sure.

Mr. Wilson, if we are all a bunch of wind-up robots, what glory does God get when we quote, choose, unquote, him? Absolutely none, because we are not. Because we are not wind-up robots. If we were wind-up robots, if we were puppets, God would get no glory out of making the puppets do certain things.

But this is what lies behind the exchange in Romans 9. The issue is not reason or logic. What I attacked in the book was carnal reason, carnal logic. And by carnal, I mean that which wants to set human common sense up over against what the scripture says.

That's carnal reasoning. Reasoning, logic, we can't function in the image of God without arguing and seeking to piece things together. So I have no quarrel at all with reason and argumentation and so forth, but I do have a problem with autonomous reason being set up as a rival to scripture.

Carnal reason looks like this. Someone says, God hardens whom he wants to harden, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy. All you have to do is say something like that.

In all my years as an Arminian or non-Calvinist, during that time, what I said never provoked any objection along this line. When I would say to someone, share the faith, no one ever said, well, Wilson, if what you're saying is true, then why does God still find fault with us for who resists his will? No one ever said that to me. And that's because I was never saying what Paul says in that chapter.

God hardens whom he wants to harden and he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy. As soon as I started saying that, I started hearing that objection all the time. And it's almost as though people didn't know that this verse was in the Bible and was in the mouth.

The objection was in the mouth of one of Paul's adversaries. And the reason the objection, I started hearing it all the time, and the reason for it is because of carnal reasoning. This offends our common sense, because what we think is happening is this.

God creates a puppet and then God has the puppet dancing here and then he says, now puppet, don't go over there. And then he makes the puppet march over there. And then he says, bad puppet and smashes the puppet.

Well, does that offend you? Well, that offends me. If that's the way it is, that's awful. That's horrible.

And that's what we think is happening. And that's why we object. We say, and this is the objection, why does God still find fault for who resists his will? In other words, what you're saying, Paul, is that no one resists his will.

And if you're saying that God hardens whom he wants to harden and has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and no one can resist God's will, then why does God still blame us? Doesn't this destroy free will? Doesn't this make us puppets, et cetera? The objection that came in on a card here is the same objection that the apostle Paul had to answer and anticipated in Romans chapter nine, because I have no doubt that he had to answer that same objection many times in the back of the synagogue. In the foyer. Paul, how is this not making us puppets? How is this? Who's got no one resists God.

If God does everything, no one can resist him. So why does he still blame us? That's the heart of the objection. And that's what carnal reason cannot grasp.

And there are hyper Calvinists who say, look, you're a puppet. Deal with it. Right.

And and there are many. And there are many Indians who say, no, we're we know we're not puppets. And so therefore, the puppets got to get over there partly on his own.

Well, I believe the scriptural position requires us to say that God is God in all things. And the more God determines, the freer I get. God's decrees don't take God's decrees.

Give the more God decrees life for me, the more life and choices I have. God's decrees give our decrees would take Mr. Greg, explain how God foreknows something and exactly how it comes to pass without pre destinating it and exactly how it come to pass. It's an excellent philosophical question, and I don't know the answer to it.

Many people have actually been so bothered by it that they've moved in the direction of what they call openness theology, where they just say, well, God couldn't know with certainty without determining it. And since God makes it clear that he doesn't determine it or else, why would he get angry at it? If he determined it, they say, well, maybe God didn't know it. And that is a that's the direction I think ignores too many important things in the scripture about God's foreknowledge.

And I agree with the Calvinist that God does foreknow. And basically, our minions all agree that, except for the ones who are going for the openness theology. As far as how God knows.

I cannot say only because God does not say the common way that people usually argue it is that God lives outside of time and that he is in eternity. And for him, all time is viewable. Our past, present and future is viewable to him at any given moment.

So he can see what we're going to do without being the one who determines what we're going to do. There is at least one problem with that explanation is that the Bible nowhere says that God lives outside of time or that time is a created area or that time is a place. You can be inside or outside of time is not spoken of that way in the Bible.

And so it's only a philosophical guess. C.S. Lewis suggested it, but he wasn't at all the first. There are others who suggest that God knows the future without causing it simply because he knows all the processes that are in motion right now.

And he can see where this is going to lead. And so they sometimes use that to explain how Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny him three times for the crows. But the fact is, God doesn't tell us how he knows these things, nor does he tell us how he is everywhere at once, nor does he tell us how he hears everybody's prayers at the same time and processes them all and pays special attention to everybody of the six billion people on the planet at one moment.

God is able to do a great number of things that we don't understand. And our minions

are not afraid to say so. There's great mysteries that the Bible does present, but trying to explain how God could decree that I will sin and then blame me for it is not one of the mysteries the Bible presents for me because it doesn't say that God decrees that I've sinned.

Mr. Wilson, why should we feel responsible to preach the gospel, even being admonished to pull someone out of the fire if it's already determined who will make it? Part of the answer to this is going to come tomorrow under the nature of the atonement and how I want to argue how the atonement applies to the human race. But let me just address right now the philosophical theological problem with it. God does not ordain the end without ordaining the means.

When we say that God ordains all things, we mean all things, means and end. And there's a perfect harmony between the means that he ordains and the end that he ordains. If he ordains the harvest, he ordained the planting and the plowing.

If he ordained the pregnancy, he ordained the union. And this is where I think the Arminians struggle because they want to say in some sense the ends are ordained and people, everlasting beings come into being. But oftentimes they do because of sinful acts.

Well, the Calvinist wants to say, no, God at the decretive level, God ordains all things in perfect harmony between ends and means. And he never ordains the end without the means. So if I ran my car into a tree and dented the fender and you saw the dent and you said, well, do you believe that that was foreordained before the foundation of the world? I say, yeah, I do.

And then suppose you then said, well, why do you have to hit the tree then? Well, I believe that the dent was ordained as a result of running into the tree. I don't believe that one day in the driveway, the bumper just goes boink. How'd that happen? Well, it was foreordained.

These things happen from time to time. It's all foreordained and it's all a wonderful tapestry of means and ends connected together. Consequently, God foreordained, I believe, the salvation of the world, not the possible salvation of the world.

God foreordained the salvation of the world. I believe the world is elect. We'll talk more about that tomorrow.

God also foreordained that these people would come to faith because people prayed for them, preached for them, sacrificed for them, gave their lives away. God foreordained the end and also the means. So God says, how will we hear without a preacher? Well, God could have arranged for them to hear without a preacher, but in his good, the counsel of his will, he established the ordinary means of bringing good news to sinners is

through preachers, people who pray and labor.

So I'll just finish by making this one observation. Many people think that Calvinism cuts the taproot of evangelism, evangelistic zeal and so forth, because they think that it results in this fatalism. Well, whatever God's decree, that's the way it's going to be.

And if they're predestined to become Christians, they'll become Christians without my help. And if they're not, then they won't and so forth. And so I'll just sit here and watch TV.

Well, if the difficulty with this is that we have to understand that we believe as Calvinists that God has something to do with people coming. So consequently, prayer for the lost makes perfect sense because you're talking to the one who determines this. And you're talking to the one who tells us in his word that he loved the whole world so much that he gave his only begotten son.

And so we pray and labor and preach, knowing that God has already told us his mind and that he's the one who has the authority to change hearts. And so we talk to him about doing so. And so consequently, we want to talk to God about men before we talk to men about God.

And we talk to God about men because we know that their lives and their eternal destinies are in his hands. And so we beseech him for them. Our last question for Mr. Greg.

When calamity befalls a city, did I, the Lord, not do it? What about the means of the calamity? This really dovetails with what Doug was saying. He's saying that the Calvinist believes that God not only ordains the end, but also the means. I do not believe the Bible says that.

The Bible does say that he ordains the ends. If there's calamity in a city, it's because God is judging that city. If Jesus died, it's because certain people.

God wanted Jesus to die and there were people that were instrumental in that. But to say that God ordained that Nebuchadnezzar must necessarily choose from his birth to be a bad man so that God could do this with him is not the same thing as saying that God found in this King Nebuchadnezzar the kind of person who was power hungry and wanted to come and destroy Jerusalem. And therefore, God allowed it to do it.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar, as it says in Proverbs, made his own plans. The plans are man's domain, it says in Proverbs. The outcome is God's.

And therefore, God leaves it to Nebuchadnezzar to make his own decision. God has no question what Nebuchadnezzar is going to decide. And if Nebuchadnezzar wasn't going to decide such a thing, then God could have raised up a different king.

Who would? If Judas had not betrayed, the Old Testament doesn't say Judas will betray Jesus. It says somebody who ate with Jesus would betray him. Well, there's hundreds of people that ate with Jesus in his lifetime.

Judas happened to be a willing goat. I mean, he was he wanted to do it. He did it for his own reasons.

He made his own decision. God ordained and predetermined that Jesus would die. God ordained that Jesus would be delivered over.

That's what those scriptures and acts that Douglas quoted said. But God did not. The Bible doesn't anywhere say that God ordained that Judas must necessarily be the man to do it or that Caiaphas had to be the man to do it.

There are other ways God could have worked this. But God found in the decisions of these people ready instruments to bring about the ends that God wished to bring about. And he gave them free reign to do what they did.

He could have stopped them. And the fact that he didn't means that he is, you know, he's responsible for the outcome. God is not embarrassed to be responsible for the outcome.

What he does not take responsibility for is the evil decisions themselves of men who have chosen to be evil. Even in saying that he hardens whom he will and shows mercy on whom he will. Well, the Bible makes it very clear.

He doesn't harden everybody. He doesn't even harden all sinners. He hardened Pharaoh and a few others we know in the Bible.

But why did he do it? Why did he will to do it? Well, he had a purpose for hardening Pharaoh. That's fine. But Pharaoh didn't become a bad man by God hardening him.

God hardened him because he was a bad man. It was a judgment on him. When God says, I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy.

Well, excellent. God doesn't have to show mercy on anyone he doesn't want to. But he's told us elsewhere who he'll show mercy on.

They shall obtain mercy. So it's God's will to show mercy on people who are merciful. It's not some kind of a unilateral thing that doesn't take into consideration any decisions people have made.

And to make Paul's statement that is to simply act as though Paul wrote nothing else in the whole Bible than that, or that Jesus didn't say anything or that the otherwise didn't. Yes, when there's calamity in a city, God is glad to take responsibility for it. But the people that were used made their own decisions.

And God, if these people weren't interested, there's plenty of other people God could have released on him. If I get killed by some homicidal maniac, maybe a person who killed me wouldn't be such a maniac. But the fact is, he'd be a homicide.

Then I have to say that God ordained for me to die that day. Now, how many potential murderers out there that might want to kill me, but God doesn't allow them to, I can't say. But when God lets one of them get through to me, that's because he wanted it to happen.

It doesn't mean that he put the evil desire or the evil choice in the man. It means that he did not prevent the man from carrying out because God had a purpose in that plan happening. And I believe throughout the scriptures, we find that God is saying they made the choices.

I've chosen the outcome. And I read a few scriptures early on that. And that's how I interpret God's sovereignty in bringing judgment on nations.

Now, I should make something very clear. He did say that he put a hook in the jaw of Gog and Magog to come down on the land of unwalled villages. And he draws them down.

But I believe that that is, again, like hardening Pharaoh's heart. The man is wicked himself. And God says, OK, your judgment has come.

I'm now going to manipulate you to judge your people. And Gog and Magog are groups like that, that God says he's bringing him. I believe he is bringing him down.

I believe that he is offering their mistakes for their judgment. But he didn't take innocent babies and decide to offer these kinds of lifestyles in them. They make their own choices.

And every king that God ever hardened, every tyrant that God ever used to judge others, were people who made their own decisions to be wicked before God ever exploited them. And that's, I believe, agreeable with everything the scripture says on this subject. Thank you both gentlemen.