

# OpenTheo

## Is Calvinism Biblical? (Part 4)



### Is Calvinism Biblical? (Debate) - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg and Douglas Wilson debate the biblical accuracy of Calvinism. The conversation focuses on the assurance of salvation, specifically whether Christ died for every individual or only for a select few.

### Transcript

We now have 10 minutes each for cross-examination. We will begin with Mr. Gregg cross-examining Mr. Wilson. The main concern I have about this doctrine is that it seems to me if we affirm that Christ did not die for every man, then there is no guarantee that any particular man falls within the realm of those for whom Christ died.

For example, last night you said your name is written in a book, I presume the book of life. I agree that it is. And I believe mine is as well.

But how can we know this if Christ didn't die for every man? You see, many Calvinists will say, well, there are ways to know that we are among the elect. But many people who have had all those evidences in their life of being elect and who are as sure as you and I are that they were elect, have fallen away and did not persevere and died that way. And according to Calvinism, they never were the elect.

So the only way we can really know if we are elect is if we persevere to the end. And all the other evidences that we may flatter ourselves that we have of being the elect simply aren't there. And if Jesus didn't die for every man, then there is no guarantee he died for me personally.

But if he did die for every man, then I can say with certainty, Christ died for you. How can we have assurance of salvation individually or personally if Christ did not die for every man? You're escaping one horn of one dilemma by going lurching over to the other horn. B.B. Warfield said the atonement is like pie dough.

The farther you spread it, the thinner it gets. And one of the things that you have to realize is that you can say, well, if you don't know that you're among the elect, although Peter says to make your calling an election, sure. And we can.

John says we can know that we have eternal life. And so. Right.

So the Bible says that we can know these things now, but we can't know them because we've looked into God's decree of election. Deuteronomy 29, 29 says the secret things belong to the Lord God. But the things revealed to us and to our children that we may keep the words of this law.

So I make my calling an election sure by paying attention to what God has revealed, not by trying to peer into what he is not revealed. If I tried to escape from this difficulty, I need to know my name's written down. I need to know that before I can function.

And I try to solve that problem by saying, well, Jesus died for every man. Well, now I have an atonement that doesn't secure my salvation either. Now I've got an atonement that applies to me in just the same way that it applies to Judas and Pontius Pilate and Adolf Hitler and everyone else.

So now I've got an atonement that applies to me. But what good does that do? OK, well, it is not my contention that the atonement applies to you the same way it does to Judas, because you are a believer and Judas was not. And as long as I continue to believe.

That's right. But how can I know that? Well, you decide that a child can believe it doesn't take a rocket scientist to believe it's a choice that people make. And it's not it's not a work that you earn anything by believing.

Everyone believes something. And if you choose to believe God and if you choose to put your trust in Christ, there's no one who can take that from you. But you can abandon it yourself, as the Bible says.

The difficulty there is that, as you pointed out, there are others who were professing Christians and walk with the Lord for a time. And then for all appearances, they fell away. Well, I can see look around and see people who've made the same professions that I'm making.

I believe now and I will never stop believing. And then they stopped believing. And one.

And so what I have to do is if I want to guard against that problem is I have to. And this is what I believe the central problem with Arminianism is, is when you boil it all down, boil all the meat off the bones. You get to a point where the fundamental faith is in self, because if I say that Christ died for every man in the same way and then some men believe and some men don't, then the distinction between the saved and the lost is not a distinction that's made in the councils of God.

It's a distinction that the distinction between them depends upon the choices of men. He made an unwise, ungodly choice and I made a wise choice. And that's why he is lost and I am saved.

The thing that distinguishes us is our responses. And so consequently, I don't see how to process that without trusting in me. And I don't want to trust me.

See, you just you confuse faith in oneself with taking responsibility for oneself. You see, to say that God in his eternal counsels determined that all who believe will be saved does leave the prerogative with God to decide that this category of people be saved. To say I am given the dignity of choice is not to flatter myself.

It's simply to agree with what the scripture says. If I choose to follow God, if I choose to be in the category that he has decreed will be saved, then I experience that salvation. If I choose not to be, which is a choice also given to me, then I then I won't be saved.

Now, it's not that I trust in myself. I don't even trust in my choice. But again, I don't consider a choice to be a thing to be trusted in.

I think a choice is the selection between options and the option of trusting in Christ is open to me and I can do as much as I want. It's true. There are people who have fallen away.

And of course, in the Calvinist system, it'd be argued they never were saved. This is not very comforting because many of the people I know who died lost had been every bit as evidentially Christians as yourself and myself, both in their conviction about it inwardly and in their outward behavior and in their suffering for Christ and so forth. Even Demas, who followed with Paul a great long time, as far as we know, and was convincingly a Christian as far as Paul was concerned.

He fell away because he chose to do so. I believe the Bible teaches me that I can know I am saved. It doesn't teach me that I know I will be saved no matter what I do.

But it tells me that it's basically up to me to continue in the faith, to abide in Christ. I'm commanded to do that. If that was going to happen automatically, there'd be no need to give me that command.

Paul says, what do you have that you did not receive as a gift? And if as a gift, why do you boast as though you did not? That which originates with me, I can take satisfaction, pride in. By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, lest any man should boast.

Paul was pastorally shrewd. He knows that sinful human beings can take pride in anything, especially their own choices. And the way he knocks that out of our hand is by saying, look, you're saved by grace through faith.

And that faith, it's not of yourselves, lest any man should boast. Don't think that your salvation, that you differ from this other fellow because of something that you did and he didn't do. Because pride doesn't sneak in.

Pride gallops in. To say that the Arminian believes in a faith that originates in himself is a caricature of the non-Calvinist view. The non-Calvinist believes in prevenient grace and believes that when we have faith, it's not the first move.

It's the second move. It's a response to God's drawing that God draws and we decide whether to believe or not. The decision to believe doesn't mean that this originated with us.

It originated with God's wooing and God's drawing, but it was left to us to make the decision. That's not something to boast about. Paul says, where is boasting then? It is excluded by what principle of the law? No, by the principle of faith.

So when we say we're saved by faith, Paul says, we're saying something that excludes boasting. We agree that faith excludes both boasting by definition. But the reason it excludes boasting is that we don't do it.

God gives it to us. So if God gives prevenient grace, grace that comes beforehand to every last man, and then some men play the hand that they're dealt well and other men play it poorly. The thing, the reason they're saved, one saved and one's lost is not the prevenient grace.

The reason one's saved and one's lost is because this guy was wise and this guy was foolish. The difference was in them. And that's what distinguishes.

What causes you to be distinguished from another? Well, Paul would ask that and answer it by saying God is the one who distinguishes. Therefore, don't take pride. But if I say, ultimately, the thing that distinguishes is my choice.

And God, yeah, God gave me the grace to choose, but he gave Vishnu the grace to choose and he bungled it. You know, God gave us both the ball and I didn't fumble it. And he did.

There's ground for boasting there. And Paul wants to slap that out of our hands. There's only ground for boasting if we think that we originated the faith.

But again, we it is true. Some people make wiser choices than others. Those who make a wise choice have nothing to boast about.

And if they do boast, they're not really understanding the grace of God. But you're maintaining that we originated the non fumbling. God gives prevenient grace to every man.

Some men fumble it, drop it, slap it down, throw it away. Other men don't fumble this prevenient grace. They originate that.

Well, OK, we obviously aren't going to agree about that. But I certainly would want to

contest also your view that that Ephesians 2, 8, 9 says that faith is a gift of God. Whatever it is, it's the gift of God.

He says is not of works. Lest any man should boast. Paul would not say this if he's talking about faith, because nobody has ever argued that faith is of works.

People do argue that salvation is of works. And that is what is the gift of God, not the faith. I've heard people argue that faith is a work of choice.

Never heard it in my life. McLaren had neither. He argued the same way that no one Paul couldn't mean that because it just no one would argue that way.

Paul never met anyone who argued that faith is a result of works. And I don't argue it. Nor does any Armenian.

All right. You hit me now. All right.

In John 10. Why did some not believe? Well, as you quoted, I'm glad you brought up because I didn't get around to it in my rebuttal. But Jesus said, you do not believe because you're not my sheep.

It certainly sounds like it is saying that, you know, the belief is the result of being sheep rather than vice versa. I would caution against being too sure of this interpretation, though, because of Jesus use of similar language elsewhere. For example, the sinful woman that came in, she said her sins, therefore, are forgiven because she loved much.

Now, taking that at face value sounds like he's saying her love for him caused her sins be forgiven. But we know from the passage what he means is, especially from the parable he just told, is that because we can see that she loved much, we can deduce that her sins are forgiven. So therefore, her sins are forgiven.

How do we know that? Because she loved much. And that is a result of having her sins forgiven. Why don't you take the love much passage just at face value to her sins are forgiven because she loved because that's not the way his parable goes.

He tells a parable of a person who's forgiven a little and he loves little and a parable who's forgiven much and loves much. So his parable teaches that the much love is the product of the much forgiveness. And then he says, therefore, she is forgiven because she loves much.

In other words, you can see the evidence in her that she has been forgiven much because she loves much. Likewise, you do not believe because you're not my sheep could in the same sense mean you do not believe. And we can see that by the fact that you haven't become my sheep, you haven't become followers of mine.

That's the sheep to the sheep. Listen. And it's because you don't believe.

Now, I'm not saying it must be taken that way, but that is at least a possibility in view of the other statement he made, which has the same structure. Here's what I would suggest is that. Those who are his sheep, he says, are those who hear the father and are taught of the father.

OK, to say, well, you haven't you haven't heard the father. You haven't been taught of the father. Therefore, you haven't made that step.

You haven't listened to the father. You haven't allowed yourself to be taught. Therefore, you're not my sheep.

And therefore, you don't believe you would if you had listened to the father. And therefore, I do not lay down my life for you. No, he didn't say I don't lay down my life for anyone in particular.

He said, I do lay down my life for my sheep. And you're not my sheep. Well, he said they were not his sheep at that moment.

But that doesn't mean that none of them ever became sheep in that crowd. There may have been some who later did. He's not making a statement that those who are his sheep are those that God decreed before the foundation of the world should be his sheep.

He doesn't say I lay down my life for sheepness. That's true. But it's not an abstraction.

No, but the sheep, his sheep are category. His sheep are a category. That's an abstraction.

His sheep are people. Well, not an abstraction. You can say that.

I mean, when you look at our goat herd in our house, like these are our goats. That doesn't mean there aren't individuals among them. But we're talking about these.

These in our pen are our goats. These are our goats. Now, if later another goat comes in, that's one of ours, too.

To say that these goats are our goats, we have goats. You're welcome to get my goat anytime you'd like, because we don't I don't like them very much. But to say that these are my goats doesn't mean that they were predestined for eternity.

My goats, it means that they are in a category. They have come into our fold and they are now part of that category we call my goats. So Jesus lays down his life for the sheep in that passage.

And he says, you're not my sheep. And furthermore, you're not my sheep. And as people who are not my sheep, for whom I did not lay down my life, you don't believe that Jesus.

You're adding to Jesus. Jesus never said I did not lay down my life for you. He said, I lay down my life for my sheep.

That is a categorical statement. He also says you aren't in that group at this moment. You're not my sheep.

Suppose in that we're having a discussion with after the debate and I say to a certain group of people, if your name begins with the last name begins with M or following, I buy doughnuts. I'll buy doughnuts for you. You are not in that category.

You put those two things together. The fact is, you can't change your name. If you had the power to change your name and you said all who have M as the beginning of their name can buy doughnuts.

I could say from now on, call me Mortimer. But I'm not I'm not really more to where my name is really Steve. I can't change that.

I could go through a legal process. But but to be his sheep is a decision that is made and for which people are held accountable. It's a decision made certainly, but not by this, not by the goats.

Wolves. Wolves don't decide to become sheep. That's right.

Wolves and goats don't. But but, you know, Jesus spoke of his sheep as the ones that the father had given him. And Calvinists love to speak of the ones that the father had given Jesus.

And I think it's a great thing to speak about. But we have to realize that Jesus said in John 17 that those that the father gave him, Jesus said to the father, they were yours and you gave them to me. In other words, the ones he refers to as the ones who the father has given him, he's talking historically in his time.

There were people that came to him. They were God's people before they were not the ungodly. They were the remnant.

And because they already were God's people, the father turned them over to his son. And so, yes, they were his sheep. They were his sheep even before Jesus came.

And when he came, the father gave them over to Jesus. Let's let's go on to another question. I want to develop.

Do you believe that someone can be saved and not saved? I believe that persons can be forgiven in one sense and unforgiven in another. In the same sense that I said earlier, that if you insult me, I can forgive you in my heart whether you repent or not. In that sense, you're forgiven.

My heart does not hold that against you. My disposition is that we be friends. But if I come to you and say that was an insult, would you repent and you don't repent? Then the forgiveness is the same in my heart.

But the relationship is not restored. You know, and the relationship with God is what saves a person, not God's positive disposition or he doesn't impute their sins against them. But they can then they can refuse to accept his overtures of forgiveness.

Did Jesus die for the sin of unbelief? I've I've heard you use that before. And it is a philosophical point that I'm not philosophical. It's pastoral.

It's evangelistic. OK, he died for the sin of unbelief, but he did not cover the sin of rejection of light. That's where the condemnation is.

When the light comes and men love darkness rather than light, that is not covered. All right, let's just shift the ground. Did Jesus die for the sin of rejection of light? Let's put it this way.

When a person repents, the atonement of Christ covers even that, even the fact that they had formerly rejected light. But I don't believe, as some do, that the atonement of Christ covers all sin, past, present and future unconditionally. I believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but only those who repent experience it.

And even after I repented and I'm a Christian, God forgives me for my former unbelief. But if I can, if I return to unbelief, he doesn't automatically forgive that or any other sin unless I repent. That's why John said if we are confessing our sins, you know, he is faithful and just to be forgiving our sins and to cleanse us from all our sins.

This is an ongoing relationship, just like any relationship between people. I can forgive you for something you may have done to me, which you haven't done to me. But but if you later repeat it and don't repent, it may break our relationship.

Salvation is not a mere contract. It is a relationship between people and God. So what you're saying is that.

In the atonement, God is not giving anything, he's offering something. Well, that is. Well, no, he is giving to all who are his by faith.

Now, he gives to all those who receive, but he's offering what he does to all is that he offers. Yeah. OK.

He doesn't give as repugnant as that sounds to you. Yes, that is what I believe. OK.

So we're talking about a potential ransom, not a not a ransom accomplished. No, we're talking about an actual ransom of a category believers. He guaranteed by his ransom that those who are believers, that category, whoever may be in it.



Will be saved. He bought that category about the church. Did he guarantee that there would be anybody in it? Not by his ransom.

He didn't. He did. He wouldn't have made the ransom if he had not foreknown that there would be a great number of people in it.

But the fact is, his ransom did not decide that they would be in it. That's where we did. And this is why we come back to our previous point.

If God foreknows who's going to be in this category and he provides the precondition for that category, we are time. If we if God foreknows who's going to be in that category and he establishes the atonement with that knowledge, then how is he not securing the salvation of those who believe? Well, that relates to a question that was asked me last night. And I said, I don't know the answer of how God foreknows things without necessarily determining them.

But the Bible does say he foreknows all things. It does not say he determines them. And while I don't know which way is the right answer, because God doesn't tell us, I believe it's not philosophically impossible for somebody to know that somebody else is going to do something without being themselves the cause of that person doing it.

If I see a child running off toward the deep end of a swimming pool and I and I say that child is about ready to take a step into the pool. I see it before it happens. I see it happening.

I know it's happening. I didn't make the child do that. Right.

But if I made the swimming pool and the child and the water and the sky and the day. But not the child's decision to go into the pool. Well, no, if I if I made the whole world in which that decision is made and I make that come to pass, then I'm settling it.

I'm doing that sounds like philosophical determinism that God made all these preexisting conditions that determine the actions of the child. And that's why I'm surprised you believe in it. I don't.

That's right. That's exactly what I'm denying. Yeah.

And I've given your premises. I don't see how you can possibly deny it. You're saying this is the condition.

This is the out of timeliness. OK, we are to the point of the closing statements by each man. And we'll begin with Steve.

Great. Well, I guess I'll just summarize what I've said already, because I don't believe it's been answered adequately. The Bible indicates that Jesus died for all men.

This term all men is used in contexts where it clearly means more than just the elect, including a distinction between all men and believers in one passage and a passage in the same context for all men, includes all kings who are not all believers are not certainly all the elect. Not only did Jesus die for all men, including those who aren't saved, but those who have benefited from his atonement at one point may fall away. We're going to talk about that in our next debate.

And also, there are apparently some for whom he died who never become believers. As we read in some of these passages, I gave that the false prophets who deny the Lord who bought them, either they were Christians who fell away or there's no indication they ever were Christians. But Jesus bought them anyway because Jesus bought the whole world.

So there is there is enough in Scripture to guarantee us, I believe exegetically, that the view that Jesus only died for a select number of people is not the view of the Scripture, notwithstanding the fact that we read passages about Jesus purchasing the church, laid out his life for his friends or his sheep, which obviously refer to the Christians. My contention is that in saying that Jesus died for the Christians, it is not denying that he also died for the non-Christians. It depends on the context and the purpose of the statement.

And so that really is my summary statement. Again, I feel that the bottom line is that if Jesus didn't die for all men, then we don't know for sure whether we are among those that he died for. And we might have many things that we call the basis of assurance of salvation.

But according to Calvinism, these things don't guarantee that we're really safe because if we don't persevere, we'll show we weren't saved in the first place. All these so-called assurances were simply a self-deception. And I think we're proud if we flatter ourselves to think that we can't be self-deceived where we know others have been.

I have assurance of salvation because Christ died for me. I don't have assurance given to me by God that I must necessarily persevere. But he has given me that option.

And if I do persevere through his grace and through his assistance and through his help, it'll not be I who boast of it. Just as if I was drowning and someone threw me a life preserver and I grabbed it, I wouldn't go on the ship and boast about how I saved myself. I would congratulate the one who threw me the life preserver.

There'd be no occasion of boasting. But if I refused to take the life preserver because I didn't like the character of the person who threw it, well, I would certainly be to blame for my own death. But if I grab the life preserver, I'm not to be given credit for my own salvation.

You see, and that's how it is, I believe, with the atonement. God has made atonement for all, as he has said he has, the whole world, all men, every man. It says in Hebrews, Jesus tasted death for every man.

There it is another term, every man, all men, every man, the whole world. These terms are found repeatedly. It says in Romans chapter five, I think it's verse six, that Jesus died for the ungodly.

Well, not everybody was ungodly. There were godly people before Jesus was born, like John the Baptist's parents were godly. Anna in the temple was godly.

But Jesus died for the ungodly as well as the godly. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

Steve, earlier when I pressed him about John 10, you do not believe because you're not my sheep. He appealed to another passage where the woman who loved much had been forgiven much. I think a closer parallel in the Gospel of John, in the Gospel of John, is John's actual usage of this.

This phrase of just a couple of chapters later in John chapter 12 in 1229. He's well up back up in verse 37. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believe not on him.

But the saying of Isaiah, Isaiah, Isaiah, the prophet might be fulfilled, which is which he spake, Lord, who has believed our report and to whom have the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe because that is, I said again, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted. And I should heal them. So what what we're dealing with is Isaiah spoke 700 years prior to this.

And John says they could not believe because Isaiah said he God had blinded their eyes. They could not believe because God has done this particular thing. God is the one who makes the distinction between sheep and non sheep.

And this is John talking about the same subject. The Jews who did not believe in Jesus. It's not an illustration of a point of grammar from another kind of situation.

It's John discussing the same issue. So he says, I lay down my life for the sheep. You're not my sheep.

You're not my sheep. And therefore, you don't believe. And furthermore, two chapters later, he says, you don't believe because Isaiah prophesied seven centuries earlier that God has blinded eyes, hardened hearts that they should not see with their eyes and so forth.

Because if they saw and understood, they would be converted and I, God, would heal

them. Now, you have to put this next to something else that's brought up in John chapter 12, and that's in verse verses 31 and 32. Now is the judgment of this world.

Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, Jesus is referring to his cross. If I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.

He doesn't say, if I be lifted up from the earth, that will give all men a chance to look at me and decide whether or not they want to come. The death of Christ is efficacious. The death of Christ draws the Greek word here for draw means it's like the word used for drawing a sword from a sheath or water up from a well.

It means drag. Jesus said, if I'm lifted up from the earth, I will drag all men to myself. The cross is potent.

The cross doesn't create the ultimate question. The cross creates the ultimate answer. The cross, Jesus says, I'm going to I'm going to defeat the devil.

I'm going to cast out the devil, which he did 2000 years ago, not sometime in the future. He is going to draw all men to himself. And we're in the midst of that glorious process now.

I disagree with it because I believe the Bible rejects that view. It has nothing to do with what I like or dislike. And and I wonder sometimes when Calvinists assume that non-Calvinists believe what they do because they dislike it.

If that's Calvinist admitting that that's why they believe in Calvinism, because they like it, because they assume that people believe what they like. Well, not everyone believes what they like. I believe in hell, but I don't like it.

I believe in many things I don't like. Now, the question is more of a philosophical question. If God knew that I wear this shirt today and he knew it, certainly was I free to make a choice to wear a different shirt.

That is a very that's the same question that came up earlier. You know, if God foreknows it, how could he do so without foreordaining it? I have to appeal to my ignorance on that again, as I did then. But I will say this.

I can imagine lots of ways that God might know I'm going to do something without him making the decision for me. Now, it's obviously a metaphysical question. Whether God's knowing I'm going to do it leaves me free to do anything else.

Of course not. If God knows that I'm going to put this on, then I'm not going to do anything. But what God knows I'm going to do.

Did God determine it by knowing it? No, I may well have made the determination, but God knew I would do it. I made the determination for my own freedom. But God, having

some access to future knowledge that he has not disclosed the basis of, was not surprised that I did it.

And I really, of course, there's nothing else I really could have done, but not because God determined it, but because that was what I was going to do. And I was going to do it out of my own free choice. If that sounds like it's difficult philosophically, I will agree.

It is difficult philosophically. Anytime we try to figure out how God can be different than us in the ways he is, for example, how he could have no beginning, I believe that God has no beginning, but I don't understand how that works. I don't know what God's consciousness is of his earlier existence, or even if he has a consciousness of earlier existence, or if he's in a timeless zone.

We don't know any of these things. And therefore, all I can affirm is what the Bible affirms, namely, that God knew, but God did not take responsibility for any of these choices. Now, he does take responsibility for some choices.

And Douglas pointed out that God blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of the Jews, according to Isaiah's prediction. That's not talking about all people. That's talking about those Jews of that generation.

God does harden people's hearts as a judgment against them, after they've already earned judgment by their free choices. He hardened Pharaoh's heart. He didn't do it from Pharaoh's babyhood.

He did it from Pharaoh's adulthood, after Pharaoh had made many choices to deserve this judgment. God judges people, and hardening their hearts is one of the ways he does it. So God does actually, once he's brought a man under judgment, he may actually lead a person to do that which would be self-destructive and sinful for that person to do.

On the other hand, once a person is chosen to be a follower of Christ, God works in us to will and do of his good pleasure. Of course, not absolutely, because we still do some things that he doesn't like, but he is at least at work in us doing it. I may have taken too much time here.

Mr. Wilson, Jesus said he is no respecter of persons, but if you can't be saved unless you are appointed to believe, then he is a respecter of persons, and sinners have no choice. Joshua said, Choose you this day whom you shall serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

That speaks of choice. Two things. The second part first.

It certainly does speak of choice. The debate is not over whether men choose. The debate is over why men choose.

So I agree that Joshua chose to serve the Lord and his house. I make choices all day long. I've made the same choice that Joshua did.

We will serve the Lord, and I'm choosing. The debate is not over whether men choose. Arminians assume that if God is sovereign exhaustively, as the Calvinist describes, that that bumps out or excludes or removes our power of choosing.

But that's not what we believe. We believe that God chooses and man chooses. The debate is over the relationship of two very real things, God's choice and man's choice.

But both sides of the debate agree that God chooses and man chooses. The issue is what the relationship between those two things is. Could you prompt me on the first part of the question about the respecter of persons? Thank you.

The respecter of persons. God does not make choices based upon things that are valuable to men. He does not respect persons in accordance with wealth or height or popularity or good looks.

God is no respecter of persons. And when the Old Testament speaks of this, it speaks of it as God not being bribable. God is no respecter of persons.

He does not take a bribe. He does not acquit the guilty. He doesn't hold in high esteem the things that we hold in high esteem.

So when God makes choices based upon his good pleasure, it's not arbitrary or capricious choices. It's simply saying that the reason for the choice is not to be found in us. And that does not make God a respecter of persons, which he would be if he said, if you are wise or shrewd or godly or pious or if you work hard and get wealthy, then I'll receive you.

Or if you make these choices, then he would be a respecter of persons. So I'd want to turn the question around. How can we put the ball in man's court without making God a respecter of persons? Mr. Gregg, what is the definition of a work? And what is the difference between trying to believe in God on your own esteem and whatever your definition of work might be? Well, the definition of work would have to depend on the particular passage we're looking at.

In some cases, work just means to go out and make a living. And the Bible speaks of it that way. Other times, it means to work out or to live out your convictions.

Other times, it means to work as if to earn salvation. And, of course, the Bible always says we can't do that, that we can't be saved by works. On another in another sense, it does say Abraham was justified by his works.

But in that case, I believe it just means his actions, which were an expression of his faith.

But the word work is not always the same. The difficulty, and if this is a Calvinist who asked the question, I'd like to say that your probable difficulty is in the Arminians saying that we have the power to choose to believe.

Calvin and most Calvinists have said, and it may be your conviction to ask the question that if we can choose something and we do it and God didn't make us do it, then that's a work. Well, I don't believe the Bible uses the term work that way anywhere in the Bible. It certainly doesn't apply to faith that way.

In terms of conditions of salvation, faith is always in Old and New Testament presented as a condition of salvation. If you do not believe, you will not prosper. If you believe, you will be saved.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. Belief is a condition of salvation. Works is not.

And in all discussions about such things in the Bible, Paul, especially who does this more than other writers in Romans four and in other places, points out that to be saved by works is just the opposite of being saved by faith. Now, Douglas Wilson said in one of his books that that proves that faith is a gift, because if we come up with the faith and that makes it a work. Well, he's making up a definition of work that isn't found in the Bible.

The Bible doesn't say that God creates the faith, doesn't say that God gives the faith as a gift. It's true. There's a verse that talks about God granting that we could believe or granting repentance.

There's about one or two verses like that. And then there's about three or four hundred that tell us to believe and tell us to repent. And Calvinists, of course, do like to look at the verse that say God grants faith or God grants repentance as if that's unilateral and unconditional.

And then say, if you believe that you can repent or if you believe that you can believe, then you believe in works. Well, I'd say I'd ask them to defend that notion scripturally. I don't think they can do that.

I believe we're saved by faith. I believe that everywhere in discussions of soteriology, at least in Paul's writings, faith is in contrast with works. And therefore, faith to say we're saved by having faith is not the same thing as saying we're saved by a work.

That's just the opposite of what the Bible says. Mr. Wilson, I was alive before the law came, as Mr. Gregg says, but then died. What did Paul mean when he said that? Paul was a covenant member.

He was not simply a random pagan. That's the first thing to recall, the first thing to remember. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7, 14, that children of believers, of at least one

believer, are *hagia*, saints, holy ones, sanctified.

And the believing spouse sanctifies *hagiazzo*, the unbelieving spouse, so that the children are *hagia*, holy ones. The alternative, he says, if both parents are unbelievers, is the word he uses there. Otherwise, your children would be foul, unclean, corrupt.

So it is not true to say scripturally that human beings are born into this world innocent or saved. There are people who are not in that condition. The Bible doesn't tell us where to draw the boundary lines explicitly, but that is the case.

My mother conceived me, it says in Psalms, and Paul tells us that we are by nature objects of wrath. He doesn't say by nature we have a slight tendency towards sin and we'll probably go that way. He says, by nature, we are objects of wrath.

And then God, from one lump, took some vessels for honor and some for dishonor, and the lump is not a neutral category or an innocent category. By nature, under God's wrath, because of Adam's sin, because of Adam's one sin, sin entered the human race. The Apostle Paul was not a Hittite.

The Apostle Paul was not an unbeliever out there, part of the pagan nations. When he says that once I was alive apart from the law, but when the law came, sin revived and I died, he's talking about his experience as a covenant member, a Jew, growing up under the law. And God's covenant is a covenant of grace, Old Testament and New Testament.