

The Doctrines of Grace Defined, Explained & Defended

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

I. Radical Corruption (total depravity, total inability)

There is no man who does not sin (1 Kings 8:46). This theme manifests itself throughout the entire corpus of Scripture, in both testaments, and by all the biblical writers. All men have sinned (Rom 3:23) and there is not a righteous man on the earth who continually does good and never sins (Ecc 7:20). More poignantly it is said in Psalm 143:2 as the psalmist affirms that in God's sight no man living is righteous. Speaking of God's people in Judah, they went deep in depravity (Hosea 5:2; 9:9). Israel transgressed Yahweh's Law (Dan 9:11) and to sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Since Adam fell into sin, and death came through sin, so it follows that death spread to all men because all sinned (Rom 5:12). So then, through one transgression, condemnation came to all men (Rom 5:18). Radical corruption affirms the reality that every person, naturally born into this world, is by his very nature radically corrupt before God. He is unclean, he is depraved, and an enemy of God (Eph 2:1-3; Rom 8:7). Radical corruption — or total depravity — does not affirm that every man is as bad as he possibly could be. On the other hand, the Bible teaches that sin, corruption, guilt, and depravity affects every part of every person. There is no person who is untouched by sin in some area of his life. On top of this, not only is every person radically corrupt and totally depraved but he is totally unable to do anything about it. Because he is depraved he cannot bring himself to God. He is at war with God, hating God, sinful in God's eyes, a vessel of wrath, under God's just condemnation, sinning by his unbelief and can no more change his very nature than an Ethiopian can change his skin color or a leopard can change his spots (Jer 13:23). Truly it is that the stain of man's iniquity is before God's eyes (Jer 2:22). Herein is the hopeless nature of every person. Moreover, herein lies the helpless nature of every man. No person, by his own merit or effort, can in any way do anything good before God (Rom 8:8).

2. Sovereign Election (unconditional election)

Paul described Christians in Colossae as believers who had been "chosen" (Col 3:12). God instigates, initiates, and accomplishes all of the believer's salvation. It is God who chooses from the beginning those who will obtain salvation (2 Thess 2:13). The gospel call extends to many but few are chosen — that is, the elect of God (Matt 22:14). God chooses the foolish of this world, the weak things, and the things that are not to shame the wise (1 Cor 1:27-28). Sovereign election belongs to God alone so that no man may boast before God (1 Cor 1:29). The entire process of divine election is due fully to the monergistic [*working of One*] act of God (1 Cor 1:30). Those whom God elects are those who receive a gospel call and those who demonstrate faithfulness proving the validity of their election (Rev 17:14). In no Scripture is it hinted that sinful man could initiate a motion toward God. After all, sinners are dead (Eph 2:1) and all the unregenerate cannot please God (Rom 8:8). They do no good (Rom 3:12) and they in reality hate God (Rom 8:7). This is why Jesus preached that no one can come to me unless the Father

who sent me draws him (John 6:44). God did not elect sinners according to their works but simply and solely by His own purpose and grace (2 Tim 1:9). Paul so clearly and unmistakably secures the sovereignty of God in election when he illustrates this with Isaac who had two children in the womb of Rebekah — Jacob and Esau — and before the twins were born and had done anything good or evil but God elected Jacob according to His purpose so that His sovereign election would stand (Rom 9:10-11). It depends not on works but on God who calls (Rom 9:11). Thus, the entire process of election is sovereign, unconditional, monergistic, gracious and simply due to the supreme good-pleasure of God who calls.

3. Definite Atonement (particular redemption, limited atonement)

The intent of the atonement defines the extent of the atonement. In other words, what God *intended* to accomplish in the atonement clarifies the question on the extent of Christ's redemptive work. Did Jesus die for all men and make salvation possible or did Christ die an actual death thereby purchasing a real, full, eternal salvation for *them* alone? The answer to this question determines for whom Christ died. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, exclaimed that God had visited them and accomplished redemption for His people (Luke 1:68). When Jesus lifted up His voice, he proclaimed that he would lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:15). His own sheep hear His voice, He knows them, and they follow Him (John 10:27). So secure and eternal is this salvation that no one can ever snatch God's sheep out of His hand (John 10:28-29). Isaiah prophesied that the suffering Messiah would come and bear the sin of many (Isa 53:12). The angel announcing the birth to Joseph said that the Messiah's name was to be Jesus for He will save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Jesus Himself is the wrath-bearing propitiation for the sins of His people — and not those of the Jews only but also for those of the whole world; i.e., the Gentiles (1 John 2:2). Jesus said that all that the Father gives to Him will come to Him (John 6:37). All those for whom the Father sent the Son into the world to save will, in fact, ultimately and eternally be redeemed. The night before His execution, Jesus prayed to the Father and made supplication for His disciples (John 17:9). He did not ask for the world but for those whom the Father had given to Him for they belong to the Father (John 17:9). So then, the original plan of God the Father was not merely to send Jesus, His Son, to the earth to make salvation possible for all men. Rather, God had a plan from all eternity to send His beloved Son, according to the riches of His grace and by His sovereign election, to secure the salvation for His elect by crushing His own Son under divine judgment in their place thus securing an actual, real, definite atonement on their behalf (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). This salvation is not, really, a limited atonement. It is definite in the sense that it definitively and actually secured the salvation only for God's elect. Therefore, God's redemption of specific sinners accomplished perfectly the eternal plan of God in providing a real atonement and a wrath-bearing substitute whereby God could judge sin (to satisfy His justice) and reconcile with repentant and believing sinners (as the one who justifies the sinner by His grace).

4. Irresistible Grace (sovereign regeneration, effectual call)

Irresistible grace logically follows from the previous three points. If man is really dead in sin and unable to come to God because of his *deadness*, and if God had sovereignly elected some to be inheritors of eternal life by His grace, and if God sent Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for their sins, then it logically follows that *God* must do the supernatural, sovereign, powerful, irresistible

drawing — calling — of the dead sinner unto Himself at the moment of salvation. The first act in the sinner's salvation is the sovereign, divine, monergistic working of God — regeneration. This grace, given by God, out of His own free prerogative, and perfectly fulfilling His eternal plan, accomplishes whatever God so desires. This is irresistible grace. When God desires to save a dead sinner, He draws that sinner to Himself so that the sinner *will* most certainly and most definitely come to salvation (John 6:44). The call that comes from God to the dead sinner comes with such power that it must be utterly impossible for the impotent sinner to resist the call from the Omnipotent Savior. Not only is God's grace irresistible at the moment of salvation as God had forordained but it also is effectual in that it perfectly effects — accomplishes, performs — exactly what God's grace had planned. So then, at the time of God's sovereign choosing, when a sinner hears the gospel message, God speaks through that message, in the Word, by the powerful Spirit, pointing to Christ, and giving the gift of faith so that the person is regenerated by the Spirit and then exercises faith in Christ. All that the Father gives to Jesus Christ will most definitely come to Him in faith (John 6:37). Herein is the grace of God supremely, powerfully, and initiatingly glorious in drawing sinners unto Himself. The glorious intentions of this gospel salvation will always be effectual or irresistible.

“We see that many come to the Son because we see that many believe in Christ, but when and how they have heard this from the Father, and have learned, we see not. It is true that that grace is exceedingly secret, but who doubts that it is grace? This grace, therefore, which is hiddenly bestowed in human hearts by the Divine gift, is rejected by no hard heart, because it is given for the sake of first taking away the hardness of the heart. When, therefore, the Father is heard within, and teaches, so that a man comes to the Son, He takes away the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh, as in the declaration of the prophet He has promised. Because He thus makes them children and vessels of mercy which He has prepared for glory” (Augustine of Hippo, 354–430A.D.).

5. Perseverance of the Saints (preservation of the saints, eternal security)

That which God begins, he completes. All who genuinely believe in Christ for salvation will most certainly make it to heaven. Once a believer is saved he is forever saved, secured, and guaranteed. It is utterly impossible for a true Christian to lose his salvation. All dead sinners, whom God elected unto Himself, for whom He sent Christ to redeem, and who have received the effectual call of salvation will most definitely make it to glory. This cardinal doctrine of biblical Christianity has two essential nuances. First, all Christians will persevere to the end (Rev 14:12). No true Christian will be lost. It is the one who endures to the end who will be saved (Matt 24:13). The author of Hebrews speaks of this very fact when Jesus became the source of salvation to all who obey Him (Heb 5:9). Jesus told his disciples to follow Him (Matt 4:19). True believers must prove themselves to be doers of the Word and not hearers only who deceive themselves (James 1:22). The true sheep of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, are those who follow Him (John 10:27). Believers must strive to make certain about their calling and election for as long as they practice godly virtues they will never stumble and they will receive an glorious entrance into the kingdom of God (2 Pet 1:10-11). Paul said to the Corinthians that they are saved by the gospel if they hold it fast (1 Cor 15:2). True believers have partaken of Christ if they hold fast the beginning of their assurance firm until the end (Heb 3:14). Truly, believers hold fast their confession without wavering (Heb 10:23). Another important aspect is not only the perseverance of the saints but, second, the preservation of the saints by God Himself. One must remember that God preserves His people who continue in the faith. It is

God's power that sanctifies and enables the believer to persevere, continue, abide, and endure. Jesus said that the disciples did not choose Him but He chose them that they would go and bear fruit (John 15:16). True believers are washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord (1 Cor 6:11) and should do the good works which God prepared beforehand that believers should walk in them (Eph 2:10). Ultimately, the only way the believer perseveres is through the preserving power of God. Paul expressed this vital understanding when he told the Philippian believers to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in them, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13). God gloriously equips His people with everything they need to do His will (Heb 13:20-21). Those who persevere show themselves as those whom God has preserved. These two truths go together. Jesus affirmed to His disciples that anyone who did not abide in Him would be thrown away and burned (John 15:6). But they must abide in Christ and His Words must abide in them (John 15:7). Truly, the Father is glorified when true believers bear much fruit and so prove to be Christ's disciples (John 15:8).

***Historically, the Doctrines of Grace include the aforementioned five biblical truths. For the purpose of this paper, I want to append two additional biblical truths.*

6. Double Predestination (the sovereignty of God in both saving & damning, reprobation) The topic of double predestination has sadly received the charge of "a most ruthless statement." The Word of God undeniably affirms God is absolutely sovereign over the heavens and the earth (Ps 115:3; Ps 103:19; Ps 135:6) and over every event in human history that follows His predetermined decree (Isa 46:9-10). Indeed, everything exists from Him, for Him, and through Him (Rom 11:33 & Col 1:16). The Doctrines of Grace unabashedly thunder the theology that God works in a sovereign, monergistic, and uninfluenced way in salvation. He does what He pleases and initiates the entire process of salvation from beginning to end. But what about those who will not be saved? What about the non-elect? Double predestination does *not* affirm that there is a perfect symmetry in both sovereign election and sovereign damnation (or, reprobation). Double predestination does *not* affirm that, from all eternity, God decrees some to sin and damnation and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. The misleading statement is contained in the middle of the previous sentence — that God *actively intervenes to work sin in their lives*. The Bible does not make God the active agent in making men sin. Double predestination should thus be defined: it is the sovereign decree of God from all eternity whereby He determines that some are vessels of wrath who have been prepared for destruction. God decrees their destruction but He does not produce their damnation. God sovereignly ordained eternal destiny of all the unsaved but He did not make them, coerce them, trick them, or work in them so that they would sin. It must be clearly stated again: God is not the author of sin. God forces nor coerces no one to sin. God never acts as the *active agent* in making a sinner sin. The sinner is held responsible for his sin (Rev 2:23; Rom 2:6). Thus, a strict parallelism and a perfect symmetry of predestination for both the elect and the non-elect must be rejected.

A number of Scriptures indicate the sovereignty of God in damnation (reprobation). Jude speaks of false prophets who have crept into the church of the Lord unnoticed and they have been long beforehand marked out for this condemnation (Jude 4). They clearly are unsaved and are reserved for the blackest darkness (Jude 13). First Peter 2 speaks of those who stumble and who do not come to the Chief Cornerstone because they were disobedient to the Word (2:8).

And yet, their doom, Peter continues to affirm has been appointed for them (2:8). The passive verb shows that they did not appoint themselves but their doom was appointed by another — God — even though they were entirely held accountable because they stumbled in their disobedience to the Word of God (1 Pet 2:8). The prophet Isaiah declares that Assyria is the “rod of God’s anger and the staff in whose hands is God’s indignation” (Isa 10:5). And yet, just a few verses later God declares that He would punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria for his haughtiness (Isa 10:12). Thus, Assyria was chosen by God and the instrument of God’s sovereign choosing and yet God punished Assyria for the pride and hardness of her own heart. Both realities are affirmed and sit side by side in the perfect and infallible Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, on the night before His execution, prayed His high Priestly prayer to the Father and affirmed that he kept the disciples and lost none of them (John 17:12) except the son of perdition (or, the one destined for destruction) so that the Scripture would be fulfilled (John 17:12). Though God ordained the betrayal of Judas, the eternal perdition that fell upon Judas because of His own sinful acts (cf. Matt 26:24). In speaking of Yahweh’s judgment, Isaiah prophesied that God has instruments of indignation to accomplish His judgment (Isa 13:5; Jer 50:25). Thus, God sovereignly decrees what will happen but is not Himself responsible for the evil that accomplishes that action.

At this point, it is essential to boldly affirm that the biblical record shows repeatedly that people face God’s judgment and go to hell of their own works — their unbelief (John 3:17; Isa 59:18; Zech 1:4; 2 Tim 4:14; Hosea 12:2; Rev 18:6; Rev 20:11-15).

At the same time, the Bible unambiguously affirms God’s sovereignty in having mercy on whom he wishes and having compassion on whom he wishes (Rom 9:15). Stated elsewhere, “God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom he desires” (Rom 9:18). In using an illustration to drive home the point, the Apostle Paul notes that God, if desiring to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (Rom 9:22). This text enhances the discussion in a number of ways. The verb “*prepared for*” is a passive participle which shows that these vessels did not *prepare themselves* for destruction but their preparation came from another — that is, from God Himself (to substantiate Paul’s entire point in Romans 9, namely, the utter sovereignty of God). Furthermore, the reason why God prepared these vessels for destruction was to manifest His own glory: to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known and to reveal His great patience (Rom 9:22a). The very next verse is where Paul affirms that God wanted to demonstrate the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory (Rom 9:23).

So then, God has a grand, sovereign, and passionate desire to manifest His glory in and through all things. God demonstrates this in both His sovereignty in displaying the glory of His mercy in election and in displaying the glory of His wrath and power in preparing vessels for destruction. God planned both. God is wholly responsible for the salvation of the elect. God planned and actively ordained the damnation of the non-elect yet it is the sinner himself, and the sinner alone, and the sinner held accountable for his sins who is responsible and punished for His unbelief and rebelliousness.

Men read this and may chant with fierce opposition: “why does God still find fault with the sinner? For who can resist God’s will” (Rom 9:19)? And undoubtedly the best answer is to allow the inspired text to speak at this point: “who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use

and another for common use” (Rom 9:19-21)? Let all saved men bow to the sovereignty of the Potter and be utterly grateful for the gracious mercy displayed in the redemption of their own souls.

7. God’s Glory (doxological purpose in all things, God’s glory as the end of all things)

The preeminent reality in all the universe is that God is making His Name great. To glorify God is to magnify His great character and to shine the spotlight on His Person, His gospel, and His Word. All that God does is rooted and sourced in bringing Him glory. God has created all men for His glory (Isa 43:7). God created all things and by His will they existed and they were created (Rev 4:11). In all God’s ways, He acts for His Name’s sake (cf. Ezek 36:22). God called Israel so that He would receive the glory (Isa 45:4). God elected sinners unto Himself before the foundation of the world according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph 1:4-6; 2 Pet 1:3). The chief aim of Christ’s church is that God would be glorified in the Church and in Jesus Christ to all generations (Eph 3:21). God will receive glory forevermore (2 Tim 4:21). The heavenly chorus even ascribes unending glory to God and to the Lamb who sits on the throne (Rev 4:9; 5:13). Even a sinner who realizes his lost state, repents of his sin and believes in Christ brings glory to God (Rev 16:9). The gospel must be preached that includes God’s worthiness to receive glory (Rev 14:7). Even the marriage supper of the Lamb will bring God glory (Rev 19:7). Contrary to what many may advocate, the Bible clearly states that God’s glory can be heightened, magnified, and manifested as God’s people suffer greatly even for the sake of His Name (Acts 9:16; Rev 2:23). Sometimes believers do not understand why God permits evil, suffering, trials, and calamities. God even appoints His elect to lives of suffering (John 16:33). So far does the Bible go that it says that all Christians are predestined to suffer affliction (1 Thess 3:3). Sickness can even bring about the glory of God (John 11:4). As believers grow in their faith God receives glory (Rom 4:20). All Christians must make their preeminent aim and foremost passion in life to glorify God — even in the most mundane of activities (1 Cor 10:31). The glorious plan of redemption which began with God’s election in eternity past and will find its consummation in the eternal glory of Christ with the ever-present assurance of eternal security all stands on God’s glory (1 Pet 5:10). The glory of God permeates and fills the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21:11). God’s people can cry out in worshipful praise to give glory to God (1 Chron 16:28). The Lord Himself is the King of Glory (Ps 24:10). The great goal in the entire universe and the purpose as to why everything happens in all of creation is to make God’s Name great (Eph 1:11). Paul the Apostle shouts in worshipful jubilation at the major transitional section of His epistle to the Romans that “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever” (Rom 11:36). All that God has done serves to enhance His glory among His creatures. All that God will do in both salvation and damnation, in saving and sanctifying the redeemed, and hardening all rebels serves to heighten the magnificent worth of God, His character, His works, and His gospel. May God be glorified as His people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit live to the honor and cherishing of Jesus Christ as the Preeminent Lord of all creation.