

# Landon - Sharp Debate on Divine Election

**David Landon** (Reformed Presbyterian Church)

and

**Keith Sharp** (Church of Christ)

## *Propositions*

**The Scriptures teach that God before the foundation of the world unconditionally chose certain individuals to salvation and that only these can be saved.**

*Affirm:* David Landon

*Deny:* Keith Sharp

**The Scriptures teach that salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation.**

*Affirm:* Keith Sharp

*Deny:* David Landon

# Affirmative

## David Landon

"The Scriptures teach that God before the foundation of the world unconditionally chose certain individuals to salvation and that only these can be saved."

The above proposition states that God's decree of election is eternal, unconditional, and certain.

- I. **It is, first of all, an eternal decree.** The elect are chosen "from the beginning," 11 Thessalonians 2:13,14 and Ephesians 1:4.

It is essential, in any discussion of predestination, to consider God's chief end in all that He does and the means He employs to achieve that end. It is our position that God's primary purpose in all His acts is the manifestation of His own glory. "The LORD hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," (Proverbs 16:4). Keeping this in mind, we say the following about election and reprobation. On the one side, that God decreed to create a certain number of men, and to permit them to fall into sin, and, by His gifts of faith and repentance to rescue them from that state, to the praise of His glory in showing mercy. On the other side, God decreed to create some, to permit them to fall into sin, and, continuing therein, to be finally punished for their sins, to the praise of His glory, in the way of justice.

- II. **Secondly, God's decree of election is unconditional.** This follows necessarily from the fact that the decree is eternal. No temporal act of man can cause or condition an eternal decree. Acts 13:48 clearly shows that the temporal act of faith is the effect of an eternal decree- "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." But to properly understand how the idea of condition is treated in Scripture it will be necessary to look first at the decree of election itself and, secondly, at the qualifications of those elected.

**A. Election.** In Scripture the doctrine of election is built upon the doctrine of grace and grace is bestowed sovereignly, - "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth," Rom.9:18. Yet Scripture seems to require something of men in order to salvation (faith, repentance, and perseverance therein). It is necessary therefore, if we wish to conform our thinking to Scripture, to make a distinction between the decree and the thing decreed. Of the decree itself there can be no cause or condition for it is eternal, but the things decreed, taking place in time, may have conditions. There are distinctions then, to be observed, both with election and with reprobation.

1. **Election.** On this side we distinguish between election and salvation. Election, we say, is God's eternal decree to be gracious to a vast number of

people (vessels of mercy) and to bestow upon them the gifts of faith and repentance. This decree is unconditional, proceeding from God's mere good pleasure, Rom.9:18. Salvation, on the other hand, is conditional, for God has decreed to save no man of mature age apart from faith and repentance.

**2. Reprobation.** On this side we distinguish between reprobation and damnation. Reprobation is God's eternal decree to withhold grace (for He is not bound to give it to any) from those whom Scripture calls "vessels of wrath." This decree is unconditional, Rom.9:18. Damnation, on the other hand, is not unconditional, but being something that happens in time, comes upon men as a judgement for perseverance in sin and final impenitency.

These distinctions are necessary to keep before us, for Calvinists are often charged with denying conditions altogether. Our position is that God, who has determined the end, has also determined the means. The end is that God's redeemed will glorify God forever for His mercy. Election is God's unconditional determination of who will make up that blessed company. The means include creation, permission of sin, calling and the gifting of faith and repentance. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (end) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (means)."

The sole question to be decided is whether faith and repentance are truly gifts, in God's power to bestow on whom He will, or are they simply in the power of free will. We say that Christ so died as to merit faith and repentance for His elect, Eph.2:8. The natural man cannot believe (John 15:5; 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom.8:8), but "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," Psalms 110:3.

**B. Qualifications of the elect.** The unconditional nature of election will further appear if we consider the nature of the elect before calling and justification. God's election is without regard to either good or evil, Rom.9:11. God justifies the ungodly, Rom.4:5, those who are without strength, Rom.5:6, enemies, Rom.5:10, and the rebellious, Psalms 68:18. It was when we were in our blood that God said "Live," Ezekiel 16:6. The elect, prior to their calling, are children of wrath, "even as others," Eph.2:3. Obviously then, there is nothing in the elect to commend them to God. They are debtors to grace, start to finish, Heb.12:2. It is God who makes men to differ, 1 Cor.4:7. He is the divine potter who, of the same lump (Rom.9:21) makes His vessels, some to honor and some to dishonor. Paul, I believe, used the above words, to help his readers avoid a common error; that the difference in the vessels is one caused by themselves. Paul does not make the mistake that I have read in many authors, of likening God to the sun which, shining upon wax and clay, softens the one and hardens the other. The Holy Spirit specifically used the words "of the same lump" to show that it is the potter, not the materials, that makes the difference.

**III. Election is certain.** "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," John 6:37. The reason given in Scripture why some do not come is that they, "are not of my

sheep," John 10:26. Paul's detractors in Romans 9 saw where his reasoning was headed. Note their objection in verse 19, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" While God's prescriptive will (that which is given in His commands and injunctions) is resisted and undermined (Acts 7:51,) yet His decretive (or secret) will is never thwarted (Daniel 4:35, "He does according to His will...and none can stay His hand"). And all this so that God's "purpose according to election might stand," Rom.9:11.

This Biblical distinction between God's prescriptive and decretive will is of great practical importance. God's prescriptive will, given in His law, shows what His good pleasure is. It would be well pleasing to Him if men would do according to His will as revealed in His holy law. The decretive will of God is what, from all eternity, He has determined shall in fact come to pass. It was, for example, God's prescriptive will that Pharaoh should allow the people of God to leave the land of Egypt. It was God's decretive will that Pharaoh's heart should be hardened and that he should resist Moses. It was God's prescriptive will that Abraham should slay his son Isaac. It was His decretive will that Isaac should live. God's prescriptive will shows man his duty. God's decretive will shows what He Himself has determined shall come to pass. That this distinction is essential for a correct understanding of Scripture is evident, for we say that while it is God's prescriptive will that all men should repent (Acts 17:30) and believe the gospel, yet He has not decreed to give all men faith and repentance, for, had He so decreed, then all men would in fact be saved for "Who hath resisted the will of God?" With this our confession agrees: "These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished," (Westminster confession III,4). The certainty of final salvation is not left to the changeableness of men, but to the unchangeable character of God and His decree,- "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," Malachi 3:6.

**Questions for Keith:**

1. If God intended to save all men by the gospel, why is it not revealed to all men?
2. Does not the certain foreknowledge of God presuppose absolute predestination?
3. We stated above that the doctrine of election is grounded in the Biblical doctrine of grace. Grace is bestowed sovereignly. Therefore the destination of men to salvation is previous to anything wrought by them. It is truly predestination. I have heard the opposite position called postdestination. It is the teaching that it is not grace, but, rather, the sinners response to grace that ultimately saves, and that God's decree to save is based on His foreknowledge of our response. How do you avoid the charge of teaching postdestination?

# Negative

**Keith Sharp**

Dave claims God eternally determined which individuals would be saved or lost; I contend God predestined the salvation of an elect group (the church) to which all may be added conditioned upon their faith in and obedience to the Gospel. Calvinists read passages that teach divine predestination and assume they refer to the predestination of certain individuals.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14: God predestined that "all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (verses 11-12) and that those who were sanctified by the Spirit and believed the truth would be saved (verses 13-14). The Spirit sanctifies us through the truth (John 17:17).

Ephesians 1:4: Election to eternal salvation is through union with Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6).

If Proverbs 16:4 means God predestined the evil of evil men, then God is the author of sin. Proverbs 16:4 teaches that God sovereignly decreed the doom of the wicked (New King James Version). God over rules the wicked acts of sinners to accomplish His purpose and glorify His name (e.g., Romans 9:17).

Acts 13:48: The Lord predestined that honest hearted Gentiles would hear and believe the gospel and be saved (Acts 13:38-39,47; Isaiah 49:6).

Presbyterians teach that God unconditionally elected which individual, lost sinners would be saved, unconditionally gives them the ability to believe and obey, and then saves them conditioned upon their faith and obedience. This means God predestined the sins and "sinful nature" of sinners, then condemns them for what He predestined they would be and do. He unconditionally elects who will be saved, then saves them for doing what He unconditionally foreordained they would do. We're just computers doing what we're programmed to do. If garbage comes out, it's because God put garbage in. And that glorifies God?

"Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."  
(Romans 9:18) Romans chapters 9-11 defends God's rejection of national Israel and acceptance of believers in Christ whether Jew or Gentile (9:1-5, 22-24; 10:1-3). God has the sovereign right to choose whom He will on whatever basis He will (9:15-16,20-21). God has revealed to whom He will show mercy, all those with obedient faith in Christ (9:30-33; 1:5; 16:25-27; 10:8-17; 2:5; 6:3-4; 12:1-2). He hardens those who, as Pharaoh, harden their own hearts and refuse to believe (Exodus 8:15; 9:12). Those who were not of the elect at the time Paul wrote might become God's elect by believing (11:5,7,23), and those who were at that time elect might be cut off (11:20-22). Individual sinners determine whether or not they will be among the elect by

choosing either to believe or disbelieve. God wills to have mercy on all who are disobedient, i.e. God wills the salvation of all lost sinners "without exception or limitation." (11:32) Paul was no Calvinist.

The "gift" of Ephesians 2:8 is salvation. The word rendered that - J@ØJ@ - is in the neuter gender, and the word faith - B\FJ4H - is in the feminine. The word 'that,' therefore, does not refer particularly to faith, as being the gift of God, but to the salvation by grace of which he had been speaking. (Albert Barnes [Presbyterian scholar], Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. 42) Faith comes by hearing the word (Romans 10:17).

The "natural man" is one who follows human wisdom, whereas the "spiritual man" follows the Word of God, the revelation of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:16). Fleshly people "set their minds on the things of the flesh," while spiritual people set their minds on "the things of the Spirit." (Romans 8:5-7) Some of God's elect are fleshly (carnal) rather than spiritual (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:1). Certainly God's people are willing (Psalm 110:3). Dave assumes God supernaturally makes them so.

Romans 9:11 doesn't deal with the salvation or condemnation of either Esau or Jacob. In Romans 9:10-13 Paul quotes two Old Testament passages concerning Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:2-4) to establish God's sovereign right to use whom He will how He wills. The promise that the elder should serve the younger pertained to their descendants, for Esau never personally served Jacob (Genesis 25:23; 33:1-16; 2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Chronicles 18:12-13). The description of hatred and love was spoken centuries after the deaths of Jacob and Esau and pertained to the dwelling places of their descendants (Malachi 1:2-4). If this passage proves unconditional election, then no offspring of Esau can ever be saved, and no offspring of Jacob can ever be lost. Thus, Judas would be among God's elect.

Of course "God justifies the ungodly, Rom.4:5, those who are without strength, Rom.5:6, enemies, Rom.5:10, and the rebellious, Psalms 68:18," but not before they turn to God (Acts 26:15-20). Dave just assumes and asserts that God supernaturally turns the individuals He has predestined to salvation.

The Lord decreed to Israel, "Live!" (Ezekiel 16:6, cf. verses 1-5), but at the very time Ezekiel wrote Israel was apostate (verses 15-34). Their hearts were degenerate rather than regenerate (verse 30).

Of course the elect were formerly sinners (Ephesians 2:3), but God regenerates them through the gospel (1 Peter 1:18-25), which is for all people everywhere "without exception or limitation." (Mark 16:15).

1 Corinthians 4:7 teaches not to "be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" in regard to preachers (verse 6). Whatever gifts they had were from God (verse 7). This certainly doesn't prove there aren't differences in the hearts of people (Matthew 13:1-23).

Paul's illustration in Romans 9:21 is from Jeremiah 18:1-10. National Israel is the clay. God has power over the clay (Israel) to destroy it or build and plant it (Jeremiah 18:6-10). What God did was determined by whether or not they obeyed Him (verses 8-10). In Romans 9 Paul is asserting God's right to call the Gentiles to salvation (Romans 9:25-26) and reject the unfaithful Jews (Romans 10:1-3, 20-21).

Certainly God determines which vessels will be honored and which dishonored, but Calvinists assume and assert that God's determination is not based upon any difference in the vessels. The vessels come from "the same lump" in that Jews and Gentiles share a common humanity.

National Israel was rejected "[b]ecause they did not seek (righteousness) by faith...." (Romans 9:32) Salvation is based upon the principle that "whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (Romans 9:33) One's character determines whether God uses him to honor or dishonor (2 Timothy 2:19-21). We determine our character, and God uses us accordingly.

John 6:37: God gives Jesus all who hear and learn from Him. (John 6:45)

John 10:26: All those who hear Jesus and follow Him are His sheep. (John 10:27)

A man who has a hidden will that contradicts his declared will is a liar. Why would not the same be true of God? God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-18).

Romans 9:19: No one can successfully resist God's will to accomplish His purpose, and it will stand. But men constantly resist God's will for their own lives (Luke 7:30; Acts 7:51).

Of course God "does according to His will" (Daniel 4:35), but His will ("prescriptive" and "decretive") is "whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

God works all things "according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5, cf. verses 9,11). God's "good pleasure" is the same as "His will." Calvinistic hair-splitting between "prescriptive will" and "decretive will" is theological clap-trap.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart by sending miraculously confirmed commands He knew Pharaoh wouldn't obey (Exodus 3:19-20; 4:21; 7:3-4; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:9-10; 14:4,8,17). Pharaoh hardened his own heart by refusing to believe the signs or obey the commands (Exodus 8:15,32). The Scriptures say nothing about a hidden, divine decree for Pharaoh to disobey.

God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son and accepted his intent for the act (Genesis chapter 22). That's far different from commanding one act (obedience) and decreeing another (disobedience).

Dave assumes and asserts the failure of men to repent fulfills a secret, divine decree (Acts 17:30). It is God's will that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

The Lord is always the same (Malachi 3:6), but He changes His action toward man according to how man handles His Word (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

### ***Answers to Questions***

- (1) The gospel is revealed to all men (Titus 2:11-12). If some don't hear it, it's because the elect fail to obey God's command (Mark 16:15).
- (2) If God's foreknowledge is absolute, why did he regret He had made man? (Genesis 6:6) How did Israel do things which never entered God's mind? (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5) Furthermore, foreknowledge is not foreordination. I can tell you how "Driving Miss Daisy" will end, but I didn't predestine it's ending.
- (3) God sovereignly, graciously predestined the salvation of an elect group (the church) to which all may be added conditioned upon their faith in and obedience to the Gospel. I don't believe salvation is based upon God's foreknowledge of what we will do. I don't care what theologians call it.



# Response

David Landon

In my affirmative I had stated that election was eternal, unconditional, and certain. Keith denies all three.

- 1. He denies the eternity of election.** The distinction between God's eternal, decretive will and His prescriptive will, Keith calls "theological clap-trap." Perhaps he would prefer the Scriptural terms secret and revealed. Deut. 29:29. In addition to the examples previously given of Pharoah and Abraham, consider that of the crucifixion of Christ. Who can deny that God's revealed will forbids the killing of an innocent man, Exodus 20:13. At the same time it is clear that God determined (willed) that wicked men slay His Son, Acts 2:23; 4:27,28. God's revealed will shows what man should do, or not do. His secret will concerns what He Himself will perform, or hinder. There is no contradiction here.

Augustine once said that the denial of absolute foreknowledge in God was "open madness," and yet, having rejected a decretive will in God, it is impossible to retain foreknowledge. Keith denies foreknowledge, giving Genesis 6:6 and Jer. 7:31 as his proofs. These verses, as I am sure he knows, are instances of anthropopathic speech, and are not intended to give positive instruction on the attributes of God.

- 2. Keith also denies the unconditionality of election.** He compares the Presbyterian model to a computer; "if garbage comes out, it's because God put garbage in." He denies that this glorifies God, and so do we, for it is not our position. We say all good is from God, all sin is from man. And yet we have to reckon with that verse in Isaiah 45:7, "I...create evil." God brings evil to pass, not efficiently ( for that would make Him the author of sin ) but deficiently, by withholding preserving or custodient grace. This grace God gave to the elect angels, but withheld from Adam. Sin was the result.

Keith spends a great deal of space defending what we have not denied,- the conditionality of salvation. The thing to be determined, we said, was whether these very conditions were gifts of God. I cited Eph. 2:8-10 as evidence that faith is a gift. The difference between commentators as to whether the word "that" in verse 8 refers to faith (my position) or to salvation by grace (Keith's position) is of little consequence. As D.M. Lloyd Jones points out, the authorities are about equally divided on this point. Calvin himself took Keith's position. Theologically it makes no difference. As proof of this, let me bring in Keith's own witness, Albert Barnes. Would Keith agree with the conclusion Barnes gives to Keith's quote?- Barnes comments on our position that faith is the referent in verse 8, and concludes, "As a matter of grammer this opinion is certainly doubtful, if not untenable; but as a matter of theology it is a question of very little importance. Whether this passage proves it or not, it is certainly true that faith is the gift of God. It exists in the mind

only when the Holy Ghost produces it there... " (Barnes on Ephesians, p 42).

Romans 9, Keith says, does not address the subject of individual salvation. Instead, the nation of Israel is the focus, Paul's object being to demonstrate the justice of God in rejecting that nation for unbelief, and calling instead a new people, the gentiles. There are at least two difficulties with this interpretation:

- A. First, it proceeds on the false principle that the New Testament authors are obliged, in their use of Old Testament material, to give it always the same meaning that the prophets did. Our position is that it is the apostolic use of the Old Testament text that ought to determine our understanding of any passage. Consider, for instance, Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." In Hosea this verse clearly refers to the nation of Israel ( cp. Ex.4:22 ). Matthew, however, quotes this verse and applies it to Christ, Matthew 2:15. The question then, with Romans 9, is to what end does Paul use the accounts of Jacob and Esau, of Pharaoh and the nation of Israel. We believe that an honest examination of this chapter will show that Paul is arguing for God's sovereignty over individuals as well as nations.
- B. The second difficulty with Keith's interpretation of Romans 9 is that it renders the objections to Paul's doctrine ( verses 14&19 ) meaningless. According to Keith, national Israel is the clay. "What God did was determined by whether or not they obeyed Him." The gentiles "might become God's elect by believing." Why the objections then? Even unsanctified reason would agree with the justice of God's government over the nations as per Keith's interpretation. It is only the Calvinistic interpretation of Romans 9, that provokes any objection. We might add to that, that it is only the Calvinistic explanation of sin that adequately answers the objections. The lump of clay is a fallen lump, and it is of mere mercy that any are saved. We agree with Keith,- "Paul was no Calvinist." But we rejoice that Calvin was a Paulist.

- 3. The inevitable result of a temporal and conditional election is uncertainty of salvation.** Assurance of salvation is one of the chief blessings of the gospel. God justifies the ungodly and rebellious while they are so. It is a free and unmerited justification, and that gives certainty of salvation as Paul argues in Romans 5:8-10. Keith agrees that God saves the ungodly, "but not before they turn to God." But how can they who are ungodly and without strength turn to God? Keith answers, "God regenerates them through the gospel." But that only takes the problem one step further. Why do some believe the gospel and some do not? (See Acts 28:24.) Ultimately, according to Keith's theology, it is neither God nor the gospel that determines that any man will be saved, but, "We determine our character, and God uses us accordingly." This is self-salvation, and not the eternal, unmerited, and therefore certain, gospel of God.

# Affirmative

**Keith Sharp**

This is the second in a series of debates between David Landon, Reformed Presbyterian of Syracuse, New York, and me covering differences between the Presbyterian Church and the church of Christ. David is a friend, a worthy debate opponent, and an honorable man. The first debate covered the nature of man; in this one we will discuss the nature of divine election. In this article my purpose is to offer scriptural proof of my proposition.

Proposition: The Scriptures teach that salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation. The Bible, the Word of God, imparts the information that it is God's will that every individual lost sinner receive eternal life in heaven and that the Father has done everything possible, in harmony with His nature and ours, to effect the salvation of every lost sinner. There is no hidden divine decree which limits the actual possibility of salvation to divinely predestined individuals.

## **What Are the Issues?**

False issues must not be created, for they only obscure our real differences. I believe in the sovereignty of God as strongly as did John Calvin (Acts 17:24; Daniel 4:35). I defend the absolute right of God to do what He wills with His creatures as stoutly as Dave (Romans 9:20-21). I firmly believe in salvation by grace (Ephesians 2:8-10), and that, in our salvation, all glory is to God (Romans 11:33-36; Ephesians 1:3-6,11-12). The issues in principle are threefold: the justice of God (Ezekiel 18:25), the impartiality of God (Romans 2:11), and the universal love of God (John 3:16; Ezekiel 18:32). Certain truths we both believe are irrelevant. God's plan is eternal (2 Timothy 1:9) and unchangeable (Numbers 23:19). It includes the future acts of men (John 6:64) as well as chance happenings (Proverbs 16:33). Some events are fixed or inevitably certain (Luke 22:22). Even sinful acts of men are included in the plan and are overruled for good (Genesis 50:20).

## **The questions are:**

1. Does God predestine the salvation or condemnation of individuals, doing so with no consideration of their belief or unbelief, obedience or disobedience, righteous, godly character or unrighteous, ungodly character?
2. Does God predestine the moral choices every individual makes?

## **Questions for Dave**

1. Does God love every individual human?
2. Is God's love the pattern for our love?
3. Is God responsible for the lost condition of sinners?
4. Is God partial (i.e., Is He a respecter of persons)?
5. Does God predestine the moral choices every individual makes?

## **Biblical Predestination**

God did "predestinate" certain things (Ephesians 1:3-11). He has an "elect" (1 Peter

1:2), His "chosen" (1 Peter 2:9). The predestination of the Bible involves an elect group (the church) of saved to which all may be added conditioned upon their faith in and obedience to the Gospel. Election to eternal salvation is only as we are in union with Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6; "in Christ" [verse 3], "in Him"[verse 4], "by Jesus Christ" [verse 5], "in the Beloved" [verse 6]). All who by faith are baptized into Christ Jesus are God's children of promise (Galatians 3:26-29). God determined in eternity before time that salvation would be in Christ and that all those who trusted Him would be saved in Him.

### **Proof of Proposition**

#### **The Love of God**

God's love that makes salvation possible is for the whole world (John 3:14-17). Certainly the term "world" is often used in a limited sense, but when so used it denotes the wicked in contrast with the elect (John 12:31; 15:19). Will Dave contend that God's saving love is for the wicked but not for the elect?

#### **The Impartiality of God**

The Scriptures clearly affirm that, in salvation, God is impartial. Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.' (Acts 10:34-35) "For there is no partiality with God." (Romans 2:11; cf. Romans 10:13; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:23-25; 1 Peter 1:17-19). He could save none or save all and remain impartial. But if He is to save some and not others, to be impartial, He must sincerely offer salvation to all, without exception or limitation, and on the same conditions.

#### **The Will of God**

God wills that all people everywhere be saved. He wills to show mercy to as many as are disobedient (Romans 11:32)

He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4) The term "desires" is translated "will have" in the King James Version, "would have" in the American Standard Version, and "wants" in the New International Version. It is the same Greek word, "thelo," translated "willing" in Matthew 8:2-3: And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'

Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. It is also found as "will" in Matthew 26:39: "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'" This is also the case in John 5:21: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will." It is rendered "God willing" in Acts 18:21. In Romans 9:18 it is twice translated "wills" in reference to God. (See also 1 Corinthians 4:19; Philippians 2:13; James 4:15.) The word denotes the divine will. In context, "all" of 1 Timothy 2:3-4 refers to everyone lost, whether elect or condemned (verses 1-2). It is the divine will that all the lost, "without exception or limitation," be saved.

He is potentially the Savior of "all." (1 Timothy 4:10) In this passage, the "all" is a greater group than "those who believe."

The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) If "all" means all the elect, then all the elect need to "come to repentance," including those who are already saved.

"All" is as universal as physical death which came through Adam and the physical resurrection which shall come through Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22; cf. John 5:28-29). Calvinists certainly have no trouble understanding the unlimited scope of "all" when the apostle teaches that "all" sin (Romans 3:9-18, 23).

### **The Grace of God**

God's saving grace is for "all." (Titus 2:11-12) The "all" of this context includes opponents of the doctrine of Christ (verse 8). The result of the grace of the passage is that God "might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people..." (verse 14), i.e., His elect.

### **Salvation in Christ**

Salvation in Christ is for the "world" (John 3:14-17; 6:33; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19), for "all peoples" (John 12:32; Colossians 1:19-20). Remember, if "world" is limited, it means sinners.

### **The Invitation of Christ**

The invitation of Christ is sincerely universal (Isaiah 45:22). It is for "all you who labor and are heavy laden..." (Matthew 11:28-30) He calls anyone who "thirsts" (John 7:37), whoever "desires." ("will", KJV; Revelation 22:17) There is nothing in the context of any of these verses to limit the "all." Surely, a loving Savior, "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22), would not invite those whom His Father has already predestined to eternal Hell, knowing full well they cannot come.

### **The Gospel**

The Gospel, the power of God to save (Romans 1:16) is to "all the world." (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16-17) If the gospel is the divine power to save, and, as Calvinists admit, it "is available to all mankind without exception or limitation," then "salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation."

### **Command to Repent**

God "now commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) How could Paul have made his language more universal? The "all" of this passage is the "world" Christ will judge (verse 31). That certainly includes the lost. God does not command us to do what we cannot do (Matthew 23:14-30). Thus, "all mankind without exception or limitation" should and can repent.

### **Conclusion**

Glory be to the Father and thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, God loves all people without exception or limitation, He is completely impartial in granting salvation, He

wills that all people be saved, His saving grace is for all, salvation in Christ is freely offered to all, Jesus sincerely invites all sinners to come and be saved, the gospel, "God's power to save," is for all, and the command to repent is directed to all. You need not fear that a secret decree made in the mists of a prior eternity forever exclude you or your loved ones from the joy of salvation, for the Scriptures teach that salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation.

# Negative

**David Landon**

Keith's proposition, as it stands, has always been found within the Reformed tradition. Calvinists have constantly believed in the free offer of the gospel. Is not this very proposition, then, one of those false issues that Keith is concerned might be raised?

The entire controversy, it seems to me, is about this word "limitation." If all men came into this life in an upright and sinless state, and morally capable of accepting salvation, and God, in His free offer to all, secretly purposed to limit it to some few, then, and only then, could we suspect God of insincerity. But if, as the Scriptures teach, all men are born in sin, and morally incapable of any desire for God, then God can, without insincerity, offer salvation to all and yet purpose to bestow it on some as a free gift. The limitation is in man, not in God.

This distinction will also serve as an answer to Keith's argument from the impartiality of God, for he brings in this word "limitation" again without any explanation. Keith writes, "...to be impartial [God] must sincerely offer salvation to all, without exception or limitation, and on the same conditions." But that would only be true if men were sinless and the limitation was in God. We say that the limitation is in man. All men, by nature, are sinners, and deserve only the wrath of God. Therefore God could be only just and save none, or He could be only merciful and save all. Scripture teaches that God is both just and merciful. In justice He withholds saving grace from some and, in mercy, grants it to others. In all of this He is sovereign, Romans 9:18.

Keith's first remark, after giving his proposition, is that it is "God's will that every individual lost sinner receive eternal life." We ask, "is it His revealed will or His decretive will that all be saved?" It is essential to bring in this distinction for it is everywhere in Scripture, and yet Keith never mentions it though he speaks of God's will close to twenty times in his affirmative. God's revealed will clearly shows that it is the duty of every individual to repent and trust in Christ. But it is impossible that His eternal decree of election includes all, for if it had then all would be saved for, "who hath resisted the will of God?"

Keith goes on to state that God has done everything possible to effect the salvation of every sinner. How, then, does he explain God's refusal to do "mighty works" in Tyre and Sidon? Such works, Jesus assures us, would have accomplished repentance in the men of those cities, Matt. 11:21.

Under the heading "What are the issues,?" Keith expresses concern that false issues might be avoided, and then goes on to raise one himself in his first of two issues which he gives at the bottom of this section. As I state in my affirmative, we distinguish between the eternal decrees of election and reprobation (wherein no regard is had to anything in man, Rom.9:11) and the temporal outworking of these decrees in the

salvation or condemnation of men (wherein means and conditions are taken into account).

### **Answers to Keith's questions**

1. God has a general love of benevolence towards all His creatures as evidenced in His works of creation and providence, Matt.5:45; Acts 17:24-28. But God's special, covenantal love is only upon His own people, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau Have I hated," Rom.9:13. See also Jn.17:9; 1 Jn.3:1,16.
2. God's love is our pattern; we are to love all generally, and some specially. We are to do good to all men, but especially to them who are of the household of faith, Gal.6:10. See also Eph.5:25 where Christ's love for His church is our example for how we are to love our wives. Who can deny that this is a special love?
3. We might re-phrase this question as follows: "Was it the will of God that Adam, and, in him, his posterity, fall into sin?" Certainly it wasn't His revealed will that Adam sin. God's command was clear; "thou shalt not eat, etc." But who can deny that God purposed from eternity that Adam would fall, and that in a very real sense God can say, "I [the Lord]...create evil," but how does He create it?- Not in an efficient way, by positively working evil in His creature, but deficiently, by withholding preserving grace from Adam. Nor is God to be faulted in this, unless Keith is able to prove that God is bound to give grace to any, which, I suspect, he can never do.
4. Answered above.
5. Keith himself seems to admit that God predestines all moral choices when, in quoting Luke 22:22, he agrees that some events are inevitably certain. That verse includes the moral choice Judas made to betray Christ. But Acts 4:27,28 puts it beyond contradiction where the moral choices of a great many are said to have been, "determined before to be done." We distinguish, however, between the infallible certainty of the event itself, and the manner in which God brings it to pass. There is agreement in those who have written on this subject, that God works in all agents according to their nature; working in necessary things, necessarily, and in contingent things, contingently.

### **Answers to Keith's proofs**

1. **Biblical predestination.** Keith says, is not of individuals. It is of a group (the church) and membership is based on ones ability or willingness to fulfill certain conditions. This is essentially a works based salvation; it is not grace that saves, but ones response to grace that ultimately saves him. Romans 9 deals with individuals. It is Pharaoh's heart that God hardens, not a group of people collectively called Pharaoh. It is Jacob that God loves, not a group collectively called Jacob. We do not deny that salvation is in Christ. We agree with the verses Keith quotes in proof of this. Our question is, why, in a group of men who all equally hear the gospel, all do not equally believe? All men have sinned, and



therefore the Scriptures represent repentance as being man's duty; but it is a huge philosophical mistake to argue from duty to ability. All through Scripture faith and repentance are shown to be God's gifts, effectually worked in those who are ordained to life, Acts 13:48, 18:27; Phil.1:29; Matt. 1:25-27, 13:10-16.

Having already responded to Keith's arguments from the impartiality and will of God, I will use the remainder of this space to consider his use of texts that seem to include all men without exception. These texts include the words all, world, none, etc. Bible scholars agree that these universal terms may be variously interpreted. They often indicate a distributive universalism (all of all sorts of men). More often, however, they suggest a particular universalism (some of all sorts of men). Two rules will help us here:

- 1. The historical-cultural setting.** Keith includes this in his "Rules of Biblical Interpretation," (With All Boldness, Dec.2000). In interpreting a verse, Keith writes, we must ask, "what did it mean to the people to whom it was written?" The vast majority of early Christians were of Jewish descent, and it was to these first disciples that the Apostles wrote their epistles. The Jewish mindset was that they alone were the people of God. Gentiles were dogs. To the Jews belonged "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law," Rom.9:4. So much so that Peter needed a special revelation before going to the gentiles, Acts 10. Peter now sees that God has redeemed some out of every tongue and nation, Rev.5:9. Some out of every,- a particular universalism. A large number of Keith's proof texts fall under this rule. John 3:14-17; I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11-12 and several others were written purposely to show that God's love and salvific will were not for the Jews only, but for the whole world.
- 2. The immediate context of the verse.** Space will permit only a couple of examples. Keith's most glaring neglect of this rule is in his quote of 2 Peter 3:9, where he inserts an ellipsis before the words "not willing that any should perish." The missing words clearly indicate who the Apostle is writing to; God's longsuffering is, "toward us." The immediate context shows this "us" to be God's "beloved" ones, 3:1,8.

Acts 17:30- The word "now" shows that there was a time that all men were not commanded to repent, a time (prior to Christ) that God, "winked at" sin. Why was God's love, at that time, only for the Jews? "You only have I known," said God through the prophet Amos 3:2.

Keith concludes by noting that we, "need not fear a secret decree." Fear on the one side, and presumption on the other, have always been the false inferences of this doctrine. Properly understood and believed the doctrine of election yields great comfort.

# Response

**Keith Sharp**

Dave affirms, "that God before the foundation of the world unconditionally chose certain individuals to salvation and that only these can be saved." I affirm, "that salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation." Dave thinks we can believe both these propositions. Not and retain our sanity and honesty! Calvinism is well summarized:

*You can, and you can't.*

*You will, and you won't.*

*You shall, and you sha'n't.*

If you offer to sell me a house for one million dollars, knowing I can't come up with the money, having a secret, "decretive will" not to sell it to me, is that sincere?

Calvinism teaches that man's inability to obey, a doctrine which was conclusively disproved in our first debate, makes God's offer sincere. Suppose all in a city contract a disease making it impossible for them to eat and retain food. They are dying of malnutrition. A doctor discovers a remedy. For reasons known only to himself, he gives the remedy to some but not to others. He offers nutritious food to all. Those given the remedy regain their appetite, eat, and live. The others die. Should we praise the doctor for saving some, or should we blame him for deliberately leaving many to die? Was his offer sincere? Should we blame those who died for not eating? Was the doctor just or unjust? Should he be glorified, or should he be arrested for malpractice? Need I point out the parallel?

Yes, I explained "limitation." There is no hidden, divine decree which limits salvation to predestined individuals. God's "secret will" is none of our business (Deuteronomy 29:29) and doesn't contradict His revealed will, or God is a liar (cf. Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-18).

Did that doctor show partiality? Matthew 11:21 doesn't help Calvinists. If the mighty works done in Bethsaida and Chorazin had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. There was no direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of those in Bethsaida and Chorazin, else they would have repented (according to Calvinism). Thus, Tyre and Sidon would have repented without the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on their hearts. Tyre and Sidon were given sufficient evidence that they could and should have repented (Acts 14:17; 17:26-28; Romans 1:18-21; 2:14-15).

Is the charge that Calvinism teaches God unconditionally predestines the salvation of certain individuals a false issue? Read Dave's proposition. I understand the absurd distinction between election and salvation. What are they elected to? How do they get the ability to repent and believe?

Farmers love their hogs more than Calvinists teach God loves the nonelect. Treat them well until it's time to destroy them. That's self-interest, not love. God's love is shown in special ways to some. But His universal love is the basis of salvation (John 3:14-17).

So, if we treat people well in the short term, it's alright if we determine their destruction. Would you call that love or hypocrisy?

No, it wasn't God's will that Adam sin. When He told Adam not to eat of the fruit (Genesis 2:16-17), He meant it. God, in His perfect freedom (Job 23:13), can choose not to know that which He has the power to know (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5). Even if God knew what Adam would do, foreknowledge is not predestination. David decreed the murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Others carried it out unwittingly but acting with free will. But David was responsible for murder (2 Samuel 12). If God decreed Adam's sins and ours, God is responsible for those sins. Calvinism makes God the greatest sinner of all eternity.

God foreknew Judas' sin (Luke 22:22) and Jesus' crucifixion (Acts 4:27-28) and planned accordingly, but He did not predestine Judas to betray Christ nor certain individuals to crucify Him. Otherwise, God would be responsible for their sins. Our salvation is based on grace (Ephesians 2:8-10), but, as Calvinism recognizes, this doesn't make works unnecessary for salvation. Israel had to work to take Jericho, but God still gave them the city by grace (Joshua 6:2).

Some are saved and some are lost because of differences in their hearts (Matthew 13:1-23).

God is just. He doesn't require of anyone what He is unable to do (Matthew 23:23-24). God gives faith and repentance by sending the gospel (Titus 2:11-12; Romans 10:17). Dave contends that "a large number of proof texts" that I used were teaching "particular universalism", i.e., eternally elect from among both Jew and Gentile, rather than the unlimited availability of salvation. Let's try Calvinism's definition of "world" in John 3:16-17: For God so loved those eternally elected from among both Jew and Gentile that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God did not send His Son into those eternally elected from among both Jew and Gentile to condemn those eternally elected from among both Jew and Gentile, but that those eternally elected from among both Jew and Gentile through Him might be saved. It both turns the golden text of the Bible into nonsense and demonstrates Calvinists really do not believe God loves all people. Try substituting Calvinism's definition of "all", "world", and "whoever" in the other controverted passages and see if it will work.

The context of 2 Peter 3:9 includes "ungodly men." (verse 7)

Yes, there is fear in Calvinism. Calvinists concede they cannot know by subjective experience or obedient life the reality of their salvation. And if you're not one of the elect, according to Calvinism, there's nothing you can do about it. Calvinists should be in mortal terror.

Calvinism's portrayal of God, denials notwithstanding, is of an unjust, sinful, dishonest, arbitrary, partial, unloving deity. How that glorifies the God of heaven is beyond me! "The Scriptures teach that salvation is available to all mankind without exception or limitation."