

HOW CAN I KNOW
IF I AM ONE OF
GOD'S ELECT?

HOW CAN I KNOW IF I AM ONE OF GOD'S ELECT?

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING
THE DOCTRINES OF ELECTION
AND PREDESTINATION



GENE GOBBLE

© 2021 by Gene Gobble. All rights reserved.

Published by Reliant Publishing, an imprint of Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

Toll-Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

Redemption Press is honored to present this title in partnership with the author. The views expressed or implied in this work are those of the author. Redemption Press provides our imprint seal representing design excellence, creative content, and high-quality production.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by US copyright law.

Scripture quotations marked AMP are taken from the Amplified Bible. Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Scripture quotations marked EXB are taken from the Expanded Bible. Copyright ©2011 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version, © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked KJ21 are taken from the 21st Century King James Version®, copyright © 1994. Used by permission of Deuel Enterprises, Inc., Gary, SD 57237. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.* Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Excerpt from *What Is Reformed Theology?* by R. C. Sproul, copyright © 1997. Used by permission of Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

Some content taken from *Chosen by God* by R.C. Sproul. Copyright © 1986. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a division of Tyndale House Ministries. All rights reserved.

Quotes by Don Fortner used with permission of copyright holder Shelby J. Fortner.

Quotes by Ligon Duncan, taken from *Is God Unjust?*, are used with permission from the book's author, Rev. Freddy Fitz, and Ligon Duncan.

Content from *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, by J. I. Packer, copyright 2012, is used by permission from InterVarsity Press.

Some content taken from *Systematic Theology* by Wayne A. Grudem. Copyright © 1994 by Wayne A. Grudem. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com.

Excerpt from Bible.org, on thoughts of J. Hampton Keathly III, used with permission from Bible.org.

Excerpt from *Systemic Theology Lesson 8*, from the class recorded for Pocket College on “Knowing the Triune God,” used with permission from Calcedon College.

Excerpt from *God's Got Your Number*, New Leaf 1998, used with permission from Ken Gaub Ministries.

ISBN: 978-1-68314-959-0 (Paperback)

978-1-68314-960-6 (ePub)

978-1-68314-961-3 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2020905848

The information for the individual names seen throughout the book was obtained from various resources online. The following list is offered as examples of these resources.

<https://ammooni.ga/file-ready/second-helvetic-confession>
<http://apostles-creed.org>
<https://www.apuritansmind.com>
<https://www.blueletterbible.org>
www.britannica.com
<https://www.crcna.org>
www.cslewisinstitute.org
Dictionary.reference.com
www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-victim/john-harper.html
<http://www.flowingfaith.com>
http://www.generationword.com/bible_school_notes/30.html
<https://godandmath.com>
<http://gracegems.org>
<http://higherpraise.com/preachers/shields.htm>
www.history.mcs.standrews.ac.uk/history/Mathematicians/Bernoulli_Johann.html
<http://www.hsbchurch.com>
www.merriam-webster.com
<https://www.monergism.com>
https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Ages_Software
www.PocketCollege.com
<https://reformationhistory.org>
<https://www.salon.com>
<http://www.sbcec.net>
<https://sbvoices.com>
<https://www.scribd.com>
SermonIndex.net
<http://www.solid-ground-books.com>
<https://theancientpaths.org>
www.theopedia.com
www.thisday.pcahistory.org
<http://en.wikipedia.org>
<https://www.wikipedia.org>
<https://www.1689.com/confession.html>

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION	
How Can I Know if I Am One of God's Elect?	xi
CHAPTER 1	
A Controversial but Providential Doctrine	15
CHAPTER 2	
Basic Definitions	23
CHAPTER 3	
How God's Power and Attributes Relate to the Doctrines of Election and Predestination	33
CHAPTER 4	
The Ultimate Attribute of God Making the Doctrine of Election Possible: "Sovereignty"	43
CHAPTER 5	
"Irresistible Grace" or "The Spirit's Effectual Call to You"	51
CHAPTER 6	
Why Election and Predestination Are Absolute Necessities for Anyone to Be Saved	63
CHAPTER 7	
God's Choices Before Creation	77
CHAPTER 8	
Three Basic Principles of Election and Predestination	83
CHAPTER 9	
Election and Predestination: The Foundations of Many Biblical Truths	105
CHAPTER 10	
The Foundations of Biblical Truth: The Security of the Believer	113

CHAPTER 11	
The Foundation of Biblical Truth: Evangelism	119
CHAPTER 12	
The Foundation of Biblical Truth: Prophecy	135
CHAPTER 13	
Only Two Options: Mercy or Justice	143
CHAPTER 14	
God's Foreknowledge and Decree as it Relates to Salvation	147
CHAPTER 15	
Our Spiritual Blessings in Christ	153
CHAPTER 16	
The Unbreakable Links of Our Salvation	163
CHAPTER 17	
Who Will Call Upon the Name of the Lord?	167
CHAPTER 18	
The Bottom Line: Salvation is God's Action Toward Us	171
CHAPTER 19	
The Final Unfolding of History: The Merciful Destiny of God's Elect	179
CHAPTER 20	
Election: The Key to Worship	181
CHAPTER 21	
Some of the Hard Questions about Election and Predestination	185
CHAPTER 22	
Analogies and Illustrations of the Decrees of Election and Predestination	195
CHAPTER 23	
Practical Predestination	201
CHAPTER 24	
The Witness to Election in the Old Testament	213
CHAPTER 25	
The Witness to Election in the New Testament	221
CHAPTER 26	
The Witness of Other Biblical Doctrines to the Decrees of Election	227
CHAPTER 27	
Early Church Fathers Who Affirmed Election and Predestination	235

HOW CAN I KNOW IF I AM ONE OF GOD'S ELECT?

CHAPTER 28	
Church Fathers of the Middle Ages Who Affirmed the Decrees	241
CHAPTER 29	
Church Fathers of the Protestant Reformation Who Affirmed the Decrees	247
CHAPTER 30	
Puritan Fathers Who Affirmed the Doctrines	265
CHAPTER 31	
Eighteenth-Century Church Fathers through the American Revolution Who Affirmed the Decrees	287
CHAPTER 32	
Nineteenth-Century Church Fathers from the Second Great Awakening through the Century's End Who Affirmed the Decrees	309
CHAPTER 33	
Prominent Twentieth Century Christian Thinkers Who Affirmed the Decrees	339
CHAPTER 34	
Confessions of Faith that Affirm the Decrees of Election and Predestination	369
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	385
APPENDIX 1	
George Whitefield's Letter to John Wesley about Election and Predestination	387
APPENDIX 2	
Additional Resources	407

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

How Can I Know if I Am One of God's Elect?

Dear Friend,
If you are by God's providence looking at this book or reading about it online, and you are asking yourself, "Why spend the time to read through another long, dry book on one aspect of theology or drudge through another publication dealing with the various controversies regarding the biblical doctrines (systems) of election and predestination?" Please let me provide a few reasons for you to consider:

1. Maybe you will discover whether or not you are one of God's elect. That alone would make reading this worth your time.
2. The book is full of many flavors and variances of rich theology.
3. The book is full of all kinds of deep and stimulating philosophy.
4. The book is overflowing with rich history, including biblical history, European history, American history, and political history.
5. The book brings into focus the ongoing struggle between spiritual powers and political powers, which continue to this day.
6. Finally, the book contains many interesting and incredible true stories about different Christian people throughout the ages who have testified how God's

sovereign grace, through the knowledge of election and predestination, helped them endure the severest of trials and see their works for the kingdom of Christ made effective and fruitful for His glory. Some of these stories will give you goose bumps, some will thrill your soul, and some will make you wish you were more committed to the work of Christ on earth.

If you just love good theology and deep philosophy, you will enjoy the book. If you are captivated by all kinds of history, you will enjoy the book. If you take pleasure in theology, philosophy, and history—then I believe you will certainly appreciate the content. If powerful testimonies encourage you, then you will be inspired.

If you risk buying the book and actually take the time to carefully read through it slowly and attentively, saving your final conclusions about the content until you have finished every chapter and the appendix (which is one of the most vital pieces in the whole book) and you then have buyer's remorse—please let me know, and I will do everything in my power to refund the cost to you. I know for that to happen, I would still have to be alive, and I would have to have the financial means at that time to refund the purchase price to you, but I am willing to trust the Lord to help me do so at the time because I know you sincerely read the entire book and genuinely considered the points made on behalf of historical Christian orthodoxy regarding election and predestination.

Back in the mid-1980s, a man named Edgar Whisenant wrote a book called *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. Whisenant was a former NASA engineer and a diligent Bible student.¹ He was convinced that the rapture of the church would occur sometime between September 11 and September 13, 1988. He seemed to be very sincere at the time, because he was able to raise enough money to mail 300,000 free copies of his book to pastors, preachers, and ministers across America, but he was also went on to sell 4.5 million copies in bookstores and other venues.

After his book came out and was being consumed by the public, some wealthy individual contacted Mr. Whisenant and offered to make an incredible deal with him. The man told him that he would purchase every one of the books available right then if Mr. Whisenant would buy them all back from him if the rapture did not occur when Mr. Whisenant predicted. I think this man may have made his offer after Mr. Whisenant made this comment, “Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong and I say that to every preacher in town.”²

¹ Gregory J. Sheryl, “Can the Date of Jesus’s Return Be Known?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (2012), vol. 169, no. 163:27.

² Gregory J. Sheryl, “Can the Date of Jesus’s Return Be Known?”

Introduction and Invitation

Mr. Whisenant refused the offer and the rest is history. Why would I share this unrelated story with you about the selling and buying of books? My reason is to let you know that I did not publish this book to try and make money. I wanted to publish this book in gratitude for my own salvation, to honor the Word of God, and to see if the content of the book could help people visualize the truths of election and predestination from as many perspectives as possible. The Bible does not need my help at all, but it sure is a joy to write about eternal truths that cause me to rejoice every day.

The premise for this book comes from Romans 9:11–18 (NASB), which is listed below:

For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice (election) would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

From these verses, please note how God clearly explains how He does what He wants to do, which would be a natural thing for a sovereign God. He says, "I will do this and I will do that." Specifically, He says these four things:

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy."

"I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

"He has mercy on whom He desires."

"He hardens whom He desires."

The Bible is filled with examples of God doing what He wants to do and sometimes having to do what He did not want to do, but felt compelled to, even though it grieved Him to do so.

In God's four statements above, there is a natural cause-effect relationship seen in the "I will" and "I have." God wanted to do something and He did it. It is so simple. If we put the "I will's" together in one sentence, as we look back through biblical history (His-Story), it looks like this: "I have had mercy and compassion on the ones whom I wanted to have

mercy and compassion on and I have hardened the ones who I wanted to harden.”

What was our sovereign God talking about when He explains having mercy and compassion on the ones whom He wanted to have mercy and compassion on? From an eternal perspective, God was referring to the salvation of the elect. Even though God did manifest temporal mercies in many different forms, upon many different people throughout biblical history (such as physical healing, monetary blessing, the ability to bear children, family relationships, issues of worship, etc.), His primary mercy and compassion is seen in the gift of personal redemption and salvation in the lives of individual people (from all people groups) through election and predestination. Not much really matters if you have only a blessed life here on earth, but die and go to an eternal hell. So while it is a wonderful and blessed thing to experience God’s mercy and compassion in real and tangible ways during your short life here on earth, how much more wonderful is it to experience God’s mercy and compassion throughout eternity? This is what election and predestination does for you!

This book was compiled with the hope and prayer that it would help you understand, appreciate, and be deeply grateful for what our all-powerful God has done—in saving you *from hell* and *for heaven* through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When God chose to save you in Christ, before the creation of the universe, He chose you to:

1. Be saved from sin, from Satan, from yourself, and from eternal hell.
2. Be set apart from the ways of the world.
3. Be conformed to the moral and spiritual image of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Be Christ’s representative in this world to every person you will ever meet.
5. Strengthen the body of Christ by serving others to your greatest potential with your spiritual gift from Romans 12.
6. Join the Lord in heaven at the time of your physical death.
7. Worship and glorify God throughout the rest of eternity.

Thank you in advance if you take the precious time to read the following pages!

Yours in Christ,

Gene Gobble



A Controversial but Providential Doctrine

The doctrines of election and predestination are two of the most interesting doctrines in the Bible, and yet two of the most misunderstood, controversial, and divisive. These doctrines have the ability to exalt and glorify God when understood in a comprehensive and balanced approach, but when only partially understood or interpreted out of context, these doctrines have birthed some of the most divisive controversies in the history of the universal church.

I call these concepts controversial but providential because *beyond* the divisiveness caused by misunderstanding God's purpose and power in them (the doctrines), when properly understood, they provide the understanding believer with more comfort, peace, and freedom than any others—save the wonder of God's marvelous grace in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Properly understood, these doctrines will set you free! If you want more peace, more comfort from God's truth, and more understanding of the depths of our God's amazing character and the blessings He bestows upon those who believe, read on!

Throughout church history, Christian leaders on opposite sides of interpreting these doctrines have opposed and fought with each other for years and *never resolved* their differences. One well-known disagreement in the early church was the confrontation between Augustine and Pelagius culminating in the condemnation of Pelagianism (as interpreted by Augustine) at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Since the 1500s it would be hard to list all of the people who opposed John Calvin and

his explanations of election and predestination, which became known as Calvinism. In the 1700s George Whitefield and John Wesley, who were best friends and ministry partners for many years, ended up separating their ministries over their different beliefs about election and predestination (see the letter from Whitefield to Wesley in appendix 1 of this book. Please don't fail to read it).

Controversies over defining the *correct* or *best* interpretation of election and predestination continue to this day without producing much fruit for the glory of God. Just spend some time interacting with believers on Facebook, for example, and you'll observe some vehement arguments over it. Friendships have been lost, Bible study groups divided, and even whole denominations have split into one or more sub denominations entirely over a group's particular convictions about election and predestination.

Because God is infinite and eternal, any truths revealed by Him are of the utmost importance to all humanity. These truths bring salvation, identity, morality, spirituality, a sense of destiny, and manifold blessings into our lives. Therefore, we must step up to the *study plate* and do our best to discern and grasp these truths. Election and predestination can help form the needed foundation for understanding almost every other doctrine in the Bible. Through comprehensive and balanced insights into election and predestination, we can understand the purposes of creation, history (His-Story), the development of languages, the rise and fall of nations, prophecy, evangelism and missions, and the unique roles of Jews and Gentiles in God's plan.

Therefore, the purpose of this book is to attempt to make these two doctrines as simple as possible, whereby the reader can see and appreciate the biblical purpose of and the value to humanity of election and predestination. This understanding can be an immediate revelation or perhaps an epiphany to the believer's soul or such understanding may come slowly—through a diligent, thorough, and prayerful study of Scripture. Consider Paul's exhortation to all Christians in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (NASB).

For genuine spiritual worship to occur in our hearts, we must feel a genuine gratitude to God. If we do not feel grateful, we will not worship in truth and spirit. Election can be the key to establishing permanent gratitude in our minds and hearts, which will become the foundation of our worship. A right perspective of election and predestination will bring great joy into our hearts and will produce great praise from our lips to God. My prayer for you as a reader is found in Ephesians 1:18 (NASB): "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

So again, the goal of this book is to lay out the meanings of election and predestination in the simplest ways possible, so those who are open to it can embrace these truths and rejoice in gratitude and praise. For you as a reader of this book, freedom lies in the providence of God's choices and the grace He bestows upon us through these marvelous truths. The goal is not to present in great detail the many variations of interpretation, which have surfaced since the first century, or to share the many challenges to the historical orthodox definition of election and predestination. While a few examples of controversies will be mentioned for illustration sake, the goal is to unveil the simplest expressions of these two doctrines that best match the scriptural revelation when taken at face value (the simplest reading).

When a person becomes a Christian, reads Genesis 1, 2, and 3 for the first time, and simply accepts what the verses reveal about God's creation of the universe, it is natural for him or her to conclude that God created everything that exists in six literal days. Similarly, when a person becomes a Christian and reads the biblical texts referring to election and predestination for the first time, what conclusions do he or she come to on their own without outside influences? When new Christians read Ephesians 1 and Romans 8 for the first time, they usually conclude that God chose them to be saved, that the chosen ones became the elect, and that predestination brought the chosen ones (the elect) to salvation. Such is the plain, straightforward reading of the text, which causes a new or young Christian to rejoice exceedingly. This was my experience.

As a new Christian, I had never read any commentaries about Romans or Ephesians, nor had I read any systematic theology books on election and predestination, or topical books on the various attributes of God. I was simply devouring as much Scripture as I could, as one of those new born babes, craving the pure spiritual milk of the Word—which quickly turned into the solid spiritual meat of the Word.

Therefore, my convictions came from the Scriptures and not from commentaries. I really did not even know what a commentary was when I first got saved. Of course, as I grew in the faith, got involved with a church, and sat under the preaching and teaching of spiritual leaders, I began to hear about commentaries, Bible Dictionaries, and other useful study tools, but in the beginning, it was just the Holy Spirit teaching me from the Word itself. I would personally recommend this approach to any new Christian.

If you just came to Christ and want to experience solid spiritual growth, then please just read through the Bible two or three times on your own before considering the thoughts and words of men. Give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to be your exclusive teacher and tutor, like the apostle Paul did when he went out into the Arabian desert for three years just to be taught and mentored by Christ Himself (see Galatians 1:11–17).

My Story

I grew up in the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). My parents faithfully took me to Sunday School and church every week. I went to our church camp each summer. When I was twelve years of age, I went through our weeklong confirmation classes taught by our pastor. These classes were designed to help us understand the basic teachings of the church necessary to profess our faith in Christ and be baptized. At the end of these classes, we were each asked if we understood and believed what we had been taught and if we wanted to be baptized. Each of us in this small group affirmed our belief in what we had been taught and we were baptized. After baptism, we were allowed to take communion each week. All of these experiences make you feel like you are a Christian and a true member of the church. I have no way of knowing what was going on in the hearts and minds of my peers, who went through these classes with me, but something was still missing in my life, even though I did not realize it at the time.

I continued faithfully participating in our church throughout my high school years, but when my college years began, I fell away from morality and a presumed spirituality. My intellectual confessions of faith, baptism, church membership, communion, and acquired knowledge of the Bible did not dominate my life. My lusts took over as I pursued the pleasures of the world. I rarely went to church and never read my Bible. I got thoroughly acquainted with the world and loved it. I abused alcohol, drugs, and moral standards. After all of those years in a church environment, Christianity now had no hold on me. By my lifestyle and value system, I demonstrated that I was what the Bible calls “lost” in my sin. I never felt like I really knew the Lord personally anyway (I just knew what I had learned about Him), and my worldly pursuits took me further and further away from what I believed the Christian life should look like.

After trying to attend college for three semesters, my party life caused me to flunk out. The same semester I received my walking papers (the invitation from the college administration to not come back for at least a year).

Then the lottery system used by the military to draft people into service was initiated. My lottery number was nine, which meant I would be taken in the very first round of drafts. Out of a fear of getting drafted and sent to Vietnam, I worked up the courage to go down to my local army reserve unit and enlist in the US Army Reserves.

After attending boot camp and participating in eighteen months of weekend meetings and summer camps, my wild and rebellious ways caused me to fall out of grace with our local fulltime sergeant who managed our reserve unit. I was in constant trouble and I was certainly not enjoying it. I finally decided that I could not take another four and half years

of this kind of bondage. So I boldly went into our sergeant's office and told him I wanted to volunteer for active duty, get out of my reserve status, and take my chances (as to where they might send me). The sergeant was already so disgusted with me that he told me he *would not* activate me. In other words, I was stuck with him. He did not refuse to activate me because he wanted me around or valued my service. He just did not like me and wanted to keep me in my misery. So he told me he would not activate me.

How did I respond? In all my wisdom, I told him on the spot that I was quitting and would never come back again. I walked out in a huff (AWOL). Nine months later, I received this huge yellow envelope in the mail. I had sincerely concluded that this sergeant and the army had forgotten about me and that I was home free, but this big yellow envelope told a different story. The very sight of it made my heart skip a beat. I finally mustered up the courage to read what were orders from Washington, DC, to report to Fort Dix, New Jersey, on a particular date to be flown to West Germany for two years of service.

As this news sunk in, I actually began to rejoice, and I actually remember thanking God for this news. Rather than my worst fears coming true (going to war in Vietnam), my greatest dream came true (getting to live in Europe for two years). I really got excited and somehow was able to give God all the credit for this opportunity, even though I was totally lost.

When I got to Germany, I was chosen by the captain of a Military Police Unit in Ansbach, Germany (close to the larger city of Nuremberg in Bavaria), to serve in his unit as a truck driver and supply clerk. I learned (about a year after getting to Ansbach) from a friend of mine also serving there, that some clerk in the states had accidentally put down in my records that I already had earned 115 semester hours of college, which would make me only five hours short of graduation, when in reality I only had about thirty hours of credit and had flunked out earlier. So I think this captain presumed I had promise. I got along great with him, worked hard for him, and was grateful to be in a good duty station.

When I arrived in Frankfurt, had my first German beer, and put my first coins into a slot machine on the base, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I could not believe where I was and how much I liked it. From that first day in Deutschland, I pursued my pleasures and lusts with every bit of energy I had. Wine, women, and song were my life, and I traveled all over Europe and the Holy Land. From a worldly perspective, it was the best two years of my life. It was one constant party. I never went to church and I never had a discussion with any Christian.

About halfway through my tour in Germany, the Holy Spirit (completely on His own accord without human instruments involved) began convicting me in the deepness of my heart and spirit that I was a real sinner, separated from God, and could die and go

straight to hell. I became conscious of my sin, my sin nature, and my rebellious ways as never before. The fear of God fell upon me as I began to realize how lost I was and how controlled I was by my fleshly and sinful ways. It got so bad that I would go back to my room in the barracks at night, after partying as hard as I could, and fall asleep crying over my sinfulness, begging God to have mercy on me.

I would tell God that I was lost and confessed that I did not know him, but I wanted to and I did not want to die and go to hell. The more I cried out to God during that last year in Germany, the deeper the conviction of the Holy Spirit got . . . to the point I thought I would die if I did not find out how to get right with God and find forgiveness and salvation. I thought many times about everything I had learned in church growing up and all my experiences with the church, but there was nothing in those memories to set me free, except the knowledge that Jesus Christ was the Savior according to the Bible. I also knew my grandmother had always prayed for me, but I did not know how to come to Jesus. I did not know how to ask for salvation and forgiveness.

This may seem like a simple thing, but when you are lost, you are lost. I was spiritually blind, deaf, lame, and mute. All that I did know (through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit apart from any effort of other people, save the prayers of my grandmother and she had no idea what I was going through) was that I was totally lost and separated from God and that I wanted to be saved more than anything else in the world.

God in His wisdom allowed me to go on suffering in my lost state until the end of my tour in Germany. When it was time to be released and return home, I hoped that somehow the change in lifestyles and being back in my home environment might make things better, but it was not to be. The convictions and guilt only increased, and my crying out to God reached its zenith. I was either going to die or find the Lord. Finally four months after getting home and resuming college, one of my best friends growing up came back to town and made a point to contact me. Oscar Houchins (now Dr. Oscar Houchins) wanted to see me and catch up, but his real purpose was to let me know that he himself had become a Christian during my time overseas and he wanted to share the gospel with me.

Oscar had no idea about God's sovereign work of conviction in my life and how I had been crying out for the knowledge of how to be saved for the previous eighteen months. So he set about to explain the gospel in its fullness from Genesis to Revelation from 9:00 p.m. on a Friday night until 1:00 a.m. Saturday morning. After four hours of sharing what seemed to be every single Scripture related to becoming a Christian, he finally stopped and asked me if I wanted to call upon the Lord and be saved.

I told Oscar that I had been anxiously waiting the entire time for him to ask me this. So we both got down on our knees in his parents' living room and prayed together. He led

me in a traditional sinner's prayer that many people are familiar with. I personally asked Jesus Christ to save me from my sinfulness, to forgive me for all my sins, and I begged Jesus to take over my life and be my Lord. I knew immediately in my spirit that Jesus had responded and cleansed me from all guilt and shame and had made me into that new creature that Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:17. I have never been the same since. For the first time in my twenty-three years, I felt alive and free.

As I have thought about my salvation experience over the years, I am always overcome with such gratitude to God for how He interrupted my life of sin and pursuit of worldly pleasures and sovereignly produced (within the deepest parts of my soul and spirit) the proper fear of God, the deepest hunger, and thirst for righteousness possible. And then, just at the right time, He brought this good friend back into my life with the good news He had prepared my heart for. It was a divine experience from start to end and it would have never happened had God not taken the initiative. God also protected me from dying without Christ all those years I lived without Him. In my wild and rebellious ways, I was in near-death experiences three different times (that I'm aware of). I would have died, woken up in hell, spent the rest of eternity there, and as the Scriptures teach, I would have deserved it (Eph. 2:1–10), but God's mercy and grace protected me from dying as a lost person until He brought me to Christ.

As I read through Romans and Ephesians for the very first time as a baby Christian, I could clearly see how God had chosen me before the foundations of the world, faithfully worked to protect me along the way, and brought me to Christ just at the right time through the ministry of personal evangelism. It was a glorious revelation that has been the sweetest truth to my soul ever since. I pray that these glorious truths (doctrines) will become crystal clear and precious to your soul as you read through this book. The next chapter will be our diving board into the deep waters of election and predestination.