

And the corollary doctrine of reprobation demonstrates that God has ordained some to dishonor and wrath to suffer the awful consequences of their sins. “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov 16:4). “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction...” (Rom 9:21-22). “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day” (Rom 11:7-8). “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thess 2:11-12). “And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (I Pet 2:8). “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation...” (Jude 4).

Doesn't it seem a bit odd that Peter would say that God desires the salvation of every human being when he has just mentioned those “whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (II Pet 2:3)? Does he not speak of those who are “as natural brute beasts made to be taken and destroyed...” (II Pet 2:12)? This indicates that God in no fashion desires to save everyone. The very fact that God elects and rejects individuals from all eternity (Rom 9) proves conclusively that God does will that some perish in their sins.

GOD'S WILL CONTROLS THE PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE GOSPEL

Peter indicates that in order not to “perish” a person must “come to repentance.” How is this to be accomplished but through the preaching of the Gospel (Matt 3:1-2, 4:17, Rom 10:14). Yet God has withheld the means of salvation from multitudes who die in nations where the Gospel of Christ has never been heard. While the Great Commission urges the Church to preach the gospel to “every creature” (Matt 28:19-20) God has providentially withheld it from various parts of the world for His own wise ends. Let there be no mistake that the unreached tribal people in the darkest jungles of Africa are perishing in their sins. Without a missionary preaching the Gospel of grace they cannot come to repentance. Yet God sovereignly controls the spread of the Gospel.

Paul and Timothy “were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:6-7). God directed Paul instead to go to Macedonia. God sends His gospel to one area while withholding it from another. In the Old Testament this truth was even more pronounced. “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them” (Psa 147:19-20).

Isn't it strange that if God desired to save everyone the Gospel would not reach every human being? Suppose a person from North Carolina came to visit Pittsburgh for the Arts Festival. This person then became totally lost in the

middle of the city due to the construction, detours, and difficult street layout. Now you have a map in the glove box of your car with a detailed street plan of Pittsburgh which this person could use to find his way. You could give it to this visitor and help him out of his difficulty. Would it not be strange for you to say to this person, “I'd really like to help you” and yet withhold from him the city map? Yet wouldn't that be in a sense what God would be doing if by “any” and “all” the passage meant all mankind? God has the “map” of the gospel by which to save lost sinners, yet He withholds it from some. They never receive spiritual light.

Now even when the Gospel is present in an area God sovereignly controls the influence which it has upon an individual. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast HID these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matt 11:25-26). “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (Jn 10:26-27). “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is GIVEN unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matt 13:10-11). “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me DRAW him...” (Jn 6:44). The truth of the Gospel is “hidden” from some because they are not of Christ's chosen sheep. God does not give them an understanding of His truth. God opens the heart of others so that they believe the message of salvation. He draws them irresistibly to Christ.

Is not REPENTANCE God's gift (Acts 5:31, 11:18, II Tim 2:25, Heb 12:16-17)? It is not something which a person may do on his or her own. A spiritually dead sinner has no natural ability to turn from sin unto Christ. If God truly desires for “all” human beings to “come to repentance”, why doesn't He grant this gift to everyone who hears the Gospel?

Summary: God sovereignly determines the destiny of every human being through His eternal election and reprobation and through control of the presence and influence of the Gospel. He is not a helpless Bystander waiting patiently and hoping that somehow some way sinners will come to repentance. He is actively engaged in the calling of His elect to salvation in Christ. If God desires the salvation of every human being why are not all men saved?

2. GOD DOES NOT HAVE TWO CONTRARY WILLS

THE DOUBLE-WILL OF GOD THEORY

It is alarming to find those (even among Reformed Theologians) who claim that there are contradictory wills in God. Supposedly God has a DECREERING WILL whereby He determines what shall be done and also a DESIRING WILL which indicates what He wishes. Some say that II Pet 3:9 teaches that God truly DESIRES to have all men saved but He has DECREED otherwise. Thus God's decrees do not always coincide with His desires! Those who hold this position usually seek a haven of refuge in the fact that this is an unexplainable mystery.

The Romans had an interesting god called Janus. He was the guardian of portals and patron of beginnings and endings. The month January is named after him. The unique thing about Janus was that he had TWO FACES. One in the front and the other at the back of the head. The double-will of God theory is very much like this strange god. God is going in two opposite directions at the same time. He has an ardent desire for every human being to be saved yet He has decreed otherwise.

GOD IS NOT CONFUSED

In the book of Daniel King Darius faces a real dilemma. He has made a “decree” which in effect seals the fate of Daniel. He must be cast into the lion's den for the king has so decreed. Yet Darius is very unhappy for he really desires for Daniel to escape death. He is “sore displeased” and cannot even sleep. Yet what can he do? “No decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed” (Dan 6:15). He is a man torn between what he has decreed and what he really desires in his heart.

Dare we place God in this same position? Is there a struggle within the Almighty regarding what He desires and what He has decreed? Does He reprobate a person while at the same time wishing to save the individual? Is God confused? Is He schizophrenic? Does such a contradiction exist within the Being of God? There is no “mystery” about this position. God is being portrayed as irrational.

“The question facing us here is whether God could ‘desire’ that which He does not bring to pass. There is no question at all that He can desire certain things, and these things which He desires He possesses and enjoys in Himself eternally. Otherwise, He would not be the ever-blessed God...He would be possessed of some frustration which would not only bereave Him of some blessedness, but would manifestly destroy all blessedness. This is clearly the case because His blessedness would be mixed with infinite regret. Our God would be the ever-miserable, ever-blessed God. His torment in the eternal damnation of sinners would be as exquisite as it is everlasting. He would actually suffer infinitely more than the wicked” (John H. Gerstner).

It is interesting that the English Puritan John Owen attacked this very position in the 1640's. The Synod of Dort rejected this double-will of God theory when the Remonstrants proposed it. How could a Reformed Theologian now embrace such a position? Listen to what Owen has to say:

“They [the Remonstrants] affirm that God is said properly to expect and desire divers things which yet never come to pass. ‘We grant,’ saith Corvinus, ‘that there are desires in God that never are fulfilled.’ Now, surely, to desire what one is sure will never come to pass is not an act regulated by wisdom or counsel; and, therefore, they must grant that before he did not know but perhaps so it might be. ‘God wisheth and desireth some good things, which yet come not to pass,’ say they, in their Confession; whence one of these two things must need follow, - either, first, that there is a great deal of imperfection in his nature, to desire and expect what he knows shall never come to pass; or else he did not know but it might, which overthrows his prescience.”

If God has desires which are never fulfilled the question of “why” must be asked. What is stopping God from fulfilling His longings? None in heaven or on earth can restrain Him (Dan 4:35). He openly declares, “My counsel shall stand

and I will do ALL MY PLEASURE” (Isa 46:10). Has He not “done whatsoever HE HATH PLEASED” (Psa 115:3)? “Whatsoever the LORD PLEASED, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). What is this talk then about unfulfilled “pleasures” in God? How can God claim to do ALL His pleasure and yet have an unrealized one? If God sincerely longs for the salvation of all men and cannot fulfill that desire then He must be a very unhappy God! Dare we say that God is not happy with the way He has DETERMINED things to be (Eph 1:11)? Can God really decree something contrary to His nature? Does He do so with eternal regret? This is a very degrading theory respecting the Being of God!

“All really consistent Calvinists ought to have learned by now that the original position of the great writers and confessions of the Reformed Churches have only been confused, and neither improved, strengthened nor illustrated, by all the talk with which the Church has, in the mean time, been distracted as to the ‘double-will’ of God, or the ‘double reference’ of the Atonement. If men will be consistent in their adherence to these ‘Novelties,’ they must become Arminians” (Archibald Hodge).

GOD'S DECREE IS IN VIEW

Attempting to make II Pet 3:9 refer to God's desire rather than His decree is difficult because the word for “willing” in the Greek is “boulomai”. The Greek word “thelo” is usually used to denote God's desire while “boulomai” is commonly used to denote His decree.

“On the distinction in meaning between thelo...and boulomai see L.N.T. [Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament] p.286. According to that authority the former designates the will which proceeds from inclination; the latter, that which follows deliberation” (William Hendriksen).

The Nestle Interlinear by Marshall makes this point quite clearly:

“ὅτι βουλομενος τις αὐτολεσθαι
not purposing any to perish ”

“Boulomai - - used about 37 times in the NT in 17 Books having the meaning of: ‘to take counsel,’ ‘to resolve’ or ‘to purpose’ (following deliberation), hence, ‘to decree’....Boulomai, when used in reference to God, always has the idea of purpose, hence, ‘purposive will’ or ‘sovereign will,’ and it is never hypothetical or thwarted....POINT: When God wills (boulomai), it is not a hypothetical wish, but an actual willing or purposing of the Divine will; that is, the sovereign or decretive purpose of God” (Gary D. Long).

Since “boulomai” refers to God's will based upon His counsel and deliberation it cannot be reduced in this passage to a mere wish! It is God's determined and sovereign purpose that not “any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” This cannot be a mere wish or whim on the part of God which is not fulfilled. What does Paul say in Rom 9:19? “For who hath resisted his will (boulomai)?” God's purpose cannot be thwarted. An omnipotent God always fulfills His will! If the “any” and “all” of II Pet 3:9 refer to every human being, then every human being will come to repentance without fail!

Note: God's desire (thelo) is also something which cannot

remain unfulfilled (Job 23:13, Rom 9:18) In other words, God's desire and God's decree cannot really be separated, for God decrees exactly what He desires!

Summary: The double-will of God theory is unsound. It creates a confused God who acts contrary to what would actually please Him. And the strong term "boulomai" clearly denotes that God's sovereign purpose is in view, not some unfulfilled wish.

3. GOD'S WILL CONCERNING SALVATION HAS A SPECIFIC RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST'S RETURN

To what divine "promise" does Peter refer in II Pet 3:9? It is the promise of Christ's return: "Where is the promise of his coming?" (V-4). Peter is explaining why God's promise remains unfulfilled. The Apostle states that God doesn't count time the way man does. A long delay on the human level is but a short interval with God: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (V-8). And then Peter says God is longsuffering and patiently waits to fulfill His promise until "all come to repentance" (V-9). Now, if Christ's return awaits the repentance of every human being without exception, there is a real problem! Jesus evidently will never come again! The "scoffers" will be proved correct!

"For then I come to this absurd reasoning: 'Jesus cannot yet come, because God's will must be fulfilled, and, according to God's will, all men must first come to repentance. But ... If Jesus cannot come, until all men come to repentance, then Jesus will never come. For, first, there are already hundreds and thousands of dead people, who died unconverted.... Secondly, there are millions upon millions who will die today, tomorrow, or next year, without ever having heard of Jesus.... And finally, if God, without a definite goal, simply allows new men to be born continuously, and the coming of Jesus then must be delayed, until these also are converted, that coming of Jesus can be delayed endlessly....'" (Abraham Kuypers).

Summary: If "all" and "any" in II Pet 3:9 mean every individual Peter's argument is destroyed and Christ is prevented from ever returning to this world.

Conclusion: God does not desire the salvation of every person. The doctrines of election and reprobation indicate that He determines the destiny of every human being according to His own good pleasure. The presence and influence of the Gospel are totally controlled by Him. He does not have two contrary wills, but is of one mind. II Pet 3:9 specifically refers to the decree of God, a will which is never frustrated. Finally, this verse cannot be so interpreted as to prevent the return of the Lord Jesus.

II. GOD'S WILL CONCERNING SALVATION IS LIMITED TO THE "USWARD"

1. THE TERM "USWARD" CONTROLS THE APPLICATION OF THIS VERSE

"'The will of God,' say some, 'for the salvation of all, is here set down negatively, that he would not have any perish, and positively, that he would have all come to repentance....' Many words need not be spent in answer to this objection, wrested from the misunderstanding and palpable corrupting of the sense of the words of the apostle....Will not common sense teach us that *us* is to be

repeated in both the following clauses, to make them up complete and full, - namely, 'Not willing that any of us should perish, but that all of us should come to repentance?'...Now, truly, to argue that because God would have none of those to perish, but all of them to come to repentance, therefore he hath the same will and mind towards all and every one in the world (even those to whom he never makes known his will, nor ever calls to repentance, if they never once hear of his way of salvation), comes not much short of extreme madness and folly...." (John Owen).

"The Lord cannot fall short of His intention toward any upon whom He takes pains, nor does His good-will to save reach to any sinners but those whom He does really make partakers of salvation: for the Apostle says here, He is long suffering to us-ward...not willing that any such should perish, but that all of that kind should come to repentance; so that [in] the Scripture all is not always to be understood of all and every individual person in the world, but oftentimes it is put (here comprehended in *us*) for all the elect only, as is clear by comparing Jer. 31:34 with John 6:45 and this present Scripture" (Alexander Nisbet).

Suppose a minister made this announcement prior to Sunday morning worship. "I brought cherry pie and vanilla ice cream for us to eat after the service. I don't want any to miss out on it. I want all to enjoy this delicious treat." Would you assume that the pie and ice cream was for the people in the community who were sitting at home watching T.V. or still snoozing in bed? No, you would recognize that the "any" and "all" are confined to the "us" for whom the cherry pie and ice cream were actually brought. In a similar manner the word "usward" dictates the meaning of "any" and "all" in II Pet 3:9.

2. THE "USWARD" ARE THE ELECT OF GOD

Now who are the "usward" of whom Peter speaks? Is it the human race or God's chosen people? In light of the context this is really not open to debate. You are not free to form your own opinion. The Holy Spirit defines the term "usward". Obviously, the "usward" must be distinguished from the "scoffers" who mock the truth concerning Christ's return (V-3-4). The word refers back to V-8 and speaks of the "beloved". In fact Peter continuously calls those to whom he writes "beloved" in this chapter (3:1,8,14,15,17). The "usward" are the "beloved".

Now this could refer to the fact that these people were beloved as brethren by the apostle. But since Peter by design includes himself in this company (usward, not merely you) it must refer to the beloved of God. And even if some translations have the word "you" here it doesn't change this understanding of the text. There is good reason for viewing "beloved" in the sense of being those whom the Lord loves. It certainly would be a comfort to these suffering saints to be reminded of this important fact - "Beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom 1:7). Peter identified these people as God's "elect" in his first epistle (I Pet 1:21).

Notice how the word "beloved" is closely associated with the idea of being among God's elect people. "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching election, they are beloved for the father's sakes" (Rom 11:28). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies..." (Col 3:12). "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God" (I

Thess 1:4). "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath chosen you to salvation..." (II Thess 2:13).

God has an elect people. Those upon whom He has set His Great Love (Eph 2:4) He will certainly bring to repentance. It is His determined purpose that none of these elected or beloved ones perish. Each and every one of them will be converted. How can this be known with certainty? Because Peter goes on to describe the effectualness of God's longsuffering! "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation..." (V-15). God is longsuffering toward His beloved ones and this guarantees that they will come to repentance. Since this "longsuffering" is always fruitful, Peter cannot have in mind all mankind in this text. II Pet 3:15 refutes such a notion.

3. CHRIST WILL RETURN WHEN THE FULL NUMBER OF GOD'S ELECT ARE BROUGHT TO REPENTANCE

"The case stands thus: there was a promise of Christ's second coming, to judge the world, delivered out; it was expected that this would have been very quickly, whereas it has been a long time deferred. Hence scoffers shall arise in the last days, charging the Lord with slackness and dilatoriness concerning his promise, though he is not slack with respect to it, but is long-suffering towards his elect, waiting till their number is completed in effectual vocation, and for their sakes bears with all the idolatry, superstition, and profaneness that are in the world; but when the last man that belongs to that number is called, he will stay no longer, but descend in flames of fire, taking his own elect to himself, and burn up the world and the wicked in it" (John Gill).

Summary: God's will concerning salvation is limited to the "usward" - i.e. the elect of God. The "any" and "all" of II Pet 3:9 are restricted by the term "usward". If God is longsuffering toward every human being hoping that each one will come to repentance then Christ will never return. Nor would Peter's statement about God's longsuffering being effectual be true.

MAIN CONCLUSION:

Leaving out a single "comma" made a vast difference in the message returned to the wealthy wife by her husband in the story related earlier. In the same manner, leaving out the "usward" in II Pet 3:9 changes the entire thrust of the passage. God does not desire the salvation of all men. He desires the salvation of His beloved ones. And all of these chosen ones will be gathered into the fold of the Church of Christ before our Lord returns.

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DOES GOD DESIRE THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN?

II PETER 3:9 BY JACK A. WERTH

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" - II Pet 3:9 KJV

A wealthy woman who was traveling overseas saw a bracelet she thought was irresistible, so she sent her husband a cable. The cable read: "Have found wonderful bracelet. Price \$75,000. May I buy it?" Her husband promptly wired back this response: "No, price too high." But the cable operator omitted the comma, so the woman received this message: "No price too high." Elated, she purchased the bracelet. Needless to say, at her return her husband was dismayed. It was just a little thing - a comma - but what a difference it made!

II Peter 3:9 is one of the most commonly quoted scriptures used to combat unconditional election and reprobation. However, it is usually not quoted in full. People have a habit of leaving out the "usward" which is found in this text. They simply quote the last phrase of this important verse about God not desiring that any should perish. And yet leaving out the "usward" is like leaving out the comma in the preceding story - it changes the whole meaning of the statement! Please remember God not only condemns the person who adds to His sacred Word but also the one who takes away from it (Rev 22:18-19).

I. DOES GOD DESIRE THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN?

1. GOD DETERMINES THE DESTINY OF EVERY HUMAN BEING

GOD'S ELECTION AND REPROBATION

How does the phrase "not willing that any should perish" coincide with the rest of Scripture IF it means that God sincerely desires to save every member of the human race? You must always seek to harmonize the teachings of the Scripture. The Bible contains no contradictions for it is the inerrant Word of God. Is it therefore the clear central message of Scripture that God desires the salvation of all men?

The prominent doctrine of election found in the Bible indicates that God desires to save SOME of mankind. "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causedst to approach unto thee..." (Psa 65:4). "Thou hast given him [Son of God] power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou [God the Father] hast given him" (Jn 17:2). "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). "According as he [God the Father] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love" (Eph 1:4). "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess 2:13).

