

FOUNDATIONS

*of*

GRACE

1400 BC – AD 100

A LONG LINE OF GODLY MEN

STEVEN J. LAWSON

Foreword by John MacArthur | Afterword by R.C. Sproul

## ENDORSEMENTS

“Dr. Steve Lawson is one of the most committed and capable biblical expositors of this generation. The intensity and clarity of his commitment to biblical preaching—to true expository preaching—is the hallmark of his ministry. Beyond this, Steve Lawson understands that the text of the Bible presents a consistent witness to God’s sovereignty and the panoramic display of God’s glory. All this is evident in his preaching ministry and in his writing ministry as well. Dr. Lawson is a remarkable man driven by a remarkable passion.”

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“Steven Lawson clearly and comprehensively lays the scriptural groundwork for the doctrines of grace.”

— DR. JOHN MACARTHUR

*Pastor-Teacher, Grace Community Church  
Sun Valley, Calif.  
(from his foreword)*

“As Dr. Steve Lawson’s reconnaissance of this matter so clearly shows, God’s sovereignty is manifest throughout sacred Scripture. . . . When you finish reading this book, I would wonder and worry if you continue to persist in denying the full measure of God’s sovereignty in our salvation. Dr. Lawson has shown so clearly and conclusively that salvation is of the Lord and of His sovereign grace that he dusted off the spot where the opponents of this doctrine once stood. I, for one, am grateful for this labor of love, and for the elucidation and hope that those who read it will take to heart.”

— DR. R.C. SPROUL

*Founder, Ligonier Ministries  
Orlando, Fla.  
(from his afterword)*

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— *of* —  
**GRACE**

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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To the memory of  
Dr. S. Lewis Johnson  
—distinguished professor, eminent theologian, precise expositor—  
who shocked my world with the doctrines of grace

During my formative years, Dr. Johnson faithfully preached the Word of God—and, specifically, the doctrines of grace—at Believer's Chapel in Dallas, Texas. Although I initially resisted these truths, the Lord graciously prevailed and opened my eyes to His glorious sovereignty in the salvation of lost sinners. Sunday by Sunday, Dr. Johnson brought masterful exposition of the Scriptures with theological precision. My view of everything was dramatically changed, and I have never been the same. I shall always be grateful to Dr. Johnson for his clear and compelling preaching about our sovereign God.

*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.*

*To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

(Rom. 11:36, NASB)



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## FOREWORD

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### DIVINE IMMUTABILITY AND THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

**T**he Bible repeatedly and unapologetically underscores the fact that God does not change. In fact, He cannot change because He cannot improve on absolute perfection or decline in His eternally fixed nature. His person does not change: “For I the LORD do not change” (Mal. 3:6). His plans do not change: “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11). His purpose does not change: “So when God desired to show more convincingly . . . the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (Heb. 6:17). God does not change His mind: “The Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret” (1 Sam. 15:29); or His words: “The Holy One of Israel . . . does not call back his words” (Isa. 31:1–2); or His calling: “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29; cf. Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). There are absolutely no changes in God, no variations, and no surprises (cf. Ps. 102:27).

God does not increase or decrease. He does not improve or decline. He does not change due to some altered circumstances—there are no unforeseen emergencies to the One who is eternally all-knowing. His eternal purposes stand forever because He stands forever (Ps. 33:11). He does not react, He only acts—and He does so however He pleases (Ps. 115:3).

From a human perspective, of course, God sometimes appears to change His plans or His actions based on what people do. But this is not so from God’s viewpoint. Because He knows and always has known the future perfectly, having planned it according to His unalterable decree, He always acts in the way that He planned to act from eternity past. While men do not know how God will act, and are sometimes astonished as they see His sovereign

plans unfold, God is never surprised. He continues to work as He always has, according to His eternal purpose and good pleasure (cf. Ps. 33:10–12; Isa. 48:14; Dan. 4:35; Col. 1:19–20).

With respect to mankind, God predetermined to redeem a people for His own glory. Nothing can thwart that plan (John 10:29; Rom. 8:38–39). Perfect knowledge, perfect uninfluenced freedom, and perfect limitless power to accomplish all He perfectly willed—absolute holiness and moral perfection binding Him to be truthful and faithful to His Word—mean that what God set out to do before time began, He is doing and will complete after time is gone.

This sweeping, glorious intention of God has been revealed in the Bible and understood clearly through the history of the redeemed. The Word of God has disclosed it unmistakably, and since the completion of the canon of Scripture, all accurate interpreters of the Bible have believed and proclaimed the God-glorifying doctrine of sovereign, unchanging divine purpose. This truth, often called the doctrines of grace, began in the sovereign determination of God in eternity past.

God cannot change, His Word cannot change, and His purpose cannot change. His truth is the same because He is the Truth (cf. Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). In contrast to the so-called Openness of God theology, which claims that God does not know the future and therefore must adapt to circumstances as they unfold, the Bible presents God as the all-knowing Sovereign of all events, past, present, and future. In the words of Isaiah 46:9b–10:

I am God, and there is no other;  
 I am God, and there is none like me,  
 declaring the end from the beginning  
 and from ancient times things not yet done,  
 saying, “My counsel shall stand,  
 and I will accomplish all my purpose.”

## DIVINE JUSTICE AND THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

In spite of the clarity with which Scripture addresses this topic, many professing Christians today struggle with acceptance of God’s sovereignty—especially when it comes to His electing work in salvation. Their most common protest, of course, is that the doctrine of election is unfair. But such an objection stems from a human idea of fairness rather than the objective, divine understanding of true justice. In order to appropriately address the issue of election, we must

set aside all human considerations and focus on the nature of God and His righteous standard. Divine justice is where the discussion must begin.

What is divine justice? Simply stated, it is an essential attribute of God whereby He infinitely, perfectly, and independently does exactly what He wants to do when and how He wants to do it. Because He is the standard of justice, by very definition, whatever He does is inherently just. As William Perkins said, many years ago, “We must not think that God doeth a thing because it is good and right, but rather is the thing good and right because God willeth it and worketh it.”

Therefore, God defines for us what justice is, because He is by nature just and righteous, and what He does reflects that nature. His free will—and nothing else—is behind His justice. This means that whatever He wills is just; and it is just, not because of any external standard of justice, but simply because He wills it.

Because the justice of God is an outflow of His character, it is not subject to fallen human assumptions of what justice should be. The Creator owes nothing to the creature, not even what He is graciously pleased to give. God does not act out of obligation and compulsion, but out of His own independent prerogative. That is what it means to be God. And because He is God, His freely determined actions are intrinsically right and perfect.

To say that election is unfair is not only inaccurate, it fails to recognize the very essence of true fairness. That which is fair, right, and just is that which God wills to do. Thus, if God wills to choose those whom He will save, it is inherently fair for Him to do so. We cannot impose our own ideas of fairness onto our understanding of God’s working. Instead, we must go to the Scriptures to see how God Himself, in His perfect righteousness, decides to act.

#### **WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION?**

The idea that God does what He wants, and that what He does is true and right because He does it, is foundational to our understanding of everything in Scripture, including the doctrine of election.

In the broad sense, election refers to the fact that God chooses (or elects) to do everything that He does in whatever way He sees fit. When He acts, He does so only because He willfully and independently chooses to act. According to His own nature, predetermined plan, and good pleasure, He decides to do whatever He desires, without pressure or constraint from any outside influence.

The Bible makes this point repeatedly. In the act of creation, God made precisely what He wanted to create in the way He wanted to create it (cf. Gen. 1:31). And ever since creation, He has sovereignly prescribed or permitted everything in human history, in order that He might accomplish the redemptive plan that He previously had designed (cf. Isa. 25:1; 46:10; 55:11; Rom. 9:17; Eph. 3:8–11).

In the Old Testament, He chose a nation for Himself. Out of all the nations in the world, He selected Israel (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; Pss. 105:43; 135:4). He chose the Israelites not because they were better or more desirable than any other people, but simply because He decided to choose them. In the words of Richard Wolf, “How odd of God to choose the Jews.” It might not have rhymed as well, but the same would have been true of any other people God might have selected. God chooses whomever He chooses for reasons that are wholly His.

The nation of Israel was not the only recipient in Scripture of God’s electing choice. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called “My Chosen One” (Luke 9:35). The holy angels also are referred to as “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21). And New Testament believers are called “God’s chosen ones” (Col. 3:12; cf. 1 Cor. 1:27; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9; 5:13; Rev. 17:14), meaning that the church is a community of those who were chosen, or “elect” (Eph. 1:4).

When Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16), He was underscoring this truth. And the New Testament reiterates it in passage after passage. Acts 13:48b describes salvation in these words: “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” Ephesians 1:4–6 notes that God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds his readers that he knew God’s choice of them (1 Thess. 1:4) and that he was thankful for them “because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved” (2 Thess. 2:13). The Word of God is clear: believers are those whom God chose for salvation from before the beginning.

The foreknowledge to which Peter refers (1 Peter 1:2) should not be confused with simple foresight. Some teach this view, contending that God, in eternity past, looked down the halls of history to see who would respond to

His call and then elected the redeemed on the basis of their response. Such an explanation makes God's decision subject to man's decision, and gives man a level of sovereignty that belongs only to God. It makes God the One who is passively chosen rather than the One who actively chooses. And it misunderstands the way in which Peter uses the term foreknowledge. In 1 Peter 1:20, the Apostle uses the verb form of that word, *prognosis* in the Greek, to refer to Christ. In that case, the concept of "foreknowledge" certainly includes the idea of a deliberate choice. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the same is true when Peter applies *prognosis* to believers in other places (cf. 1 Peter 1:2).

The ninth chapter of Romans also reiterates the elective purposes of God. There, God's electing prerogative is clearly displayed in reference to His saving love for Jacob (and Jacob's descendants) as opposed to Esau (and Esau's lineage). God chose Jacob over Esau, not on the basis of anything Jacob or Esau had done, but according to His own free and uninfluenced sovereign purpose. To those who might protest, "That is unfair!" Paul simply asks, "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" (v. 20).

Many more Scripture passages could be added to this survey. Yet as straightforward as the Word of God is, people continually have difficulty accepting the doctrine of election. The reason, again, is that they allow their preconceived notions of how God should act (based on a human definition of fairness) to override the truth of His sovereignty as laid out in the Scriptures.

Frankly, the only reason to believe in election is because it is found explicitly in God's Word. No man and no committee of men originated this doctrine. It is like the doctrine of eternal punishment in that it conflicts with the dictates of the carnal mind. It is repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart. Like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the miraculous birth of our Savior, the truth of election, because it has been revealed by God, must be embraced with simple and unquestioning faith. If you have a Bible and you believe it, you have no option but to accept what it teaches.

The Word of God presents God as the controller and disposer of all creatures (Dan. 4:35; Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:38), the Most High (Pss. 47:2; 83:18), the ruler of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19; Isa. 37:16), and the One against whom none can stand (2 Chron. 20:6; Job 41:10; Isa. 43:13). He is the Almighty who works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11; cf. Isa. 14:27; Rev. 19:6) and the heavenly Potter who shapes men according to His own good pleasure (Rom. 9:18–22). In short, He is the decider and determiner of every man's destiny, and the controller of every detail in each individual's

life (Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:1; cf. Ex. 3:21–22; 14:8; Ezra 1:1; Dan. 1:9; James 4:15)—which is really just another way of saying, “He is God.”

### WHY DID GOD DETERMINE TO ELECT THE REDEEMED?

Though the doctrine of election applies to all that God does in a general sense, it most often refers, in a specific New Testament sense, to the election of sinners to become redeemed saints within the church. Divine election, in this particular regard, speaks of God’s independent and predetermined choice of those whom He would save and place into the corporate body of Christ. God did not save certain sinners because they chose Him, but because He chose them.

But why did God do this? Why did He sovereignly determine, from eternity past, to save a segment of fallen humanity that would make up a community of the redeemed? In order to answer this question without wrongly interjecting our own preconceived notions, we must turn to the Word of God, for it is there that God has revealed His mind to us. Of course, as fallen human beings, we will never be able to fully comprehend the infinite wisdom of God in this regard (cf. Rom. 11:33–36). Nonetheless, the Scriptures give us several glimpses into the divine motivation behind election.

Why, then, did God choose to save sinners?

### DIVINE ELECTION AND THE PROMISE OF GOD

The answer begins with the promise of God. In Titus 1:1–2 we read: “Paul, a servant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.” In these verses the Apostle Paul succinctly defines the fullness of salvation and ties it directly to the eternal promise of God.

Salvation in its fullness consists of three primary parts—justification (the sinner’s salvation at the moment of conversion from the penalty of sin through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ), sanctification (the sinner’s ongoing salvation from the power of sin in this life), and glorification (the sinner’s ultimate, complete salvation from the presence of sin in the life to come). As a minister of the gospel, Paul emphasized each of these aspects in his ministry.

Because he understood justification, he preached the gospel “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect,” realizing that through the preaching of the truth, God would justify those whom He had chosen to save (cf. Rom.

10:14–15). Because he understood progressive sanctification, Paul sought to strengthen those who already had embraced the truth, edifying them through “their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness.” And because he understood glorification, Paul passionately reminded those under his care about the “hope of eternal life”—the climactic consummation of their salvation in Christ.

Paul preached the gospel of Christ with great clarity so the elect could hear and believe. When they believed, he taught them the truth so they could become godly; and he also unfolded for them the hope of eternal life, which gave them the encouragement and motivation they needed for faithful living.

Having summarized salvation in three brief phrases, Paul ends verse 2 with these words: “which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.” The Apostle’s point is that the whole unfolding miracle of salvation, which culminates in eternal life, is based on the absolute promise of our trustworthy God. The fact that God cannot lie is self-evident as well as scripturally attested (cf. Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; John 14:6, 17; 15:26). In fact, because God is the source and measure of all truth, it is, by definition, “impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). Just as the devil speaks lies “out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44), so it is that whenever God speaks, He speaks the truth from His own nature, because He is the Father of truth.

This God of truth, who is the one true God, promised long ages ago that those whom He had chosen to be justified and sanctified in this life would certainly be glorified in the life to come. But the English phrase *before the ages began* does not simply refer to ancient human history. It is literally translated “before time began,” and it means exactly that. To be sure, God reiterated His plan of salvation and eternal life to such godly men as Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets, but the original promise was made and ratified in eternity past (cf. Eph. 1:4–5; Heb. 13:20). It was before time began that He chose those who would embrace the faith (Titus 1:1) and promised to save them for all eternity (1:2).

But to whom did God make this promise? If He made it before time began, then it could not have been made to any human being, or to any created being for that matter. Before the creation of time, nothing existed outside of God Himself. To whom, then, did He make this promise?

#### DIVINE ELECTION AND THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

Second Timothy 1:9 introduces us to the answer. Speaking of God, the verse says that He “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works



but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” The phrase *before the ages began* is the English translation of the same Greek phrase rendered with the same words in Titus 1:2. Here, too, it literally means “before time began.” In eternity past, before the dawn of history, God made the irrevocable decision to grant salvation to the redeemed. This is the promise of Titus 1:2, and it is a promise that God made according to His own independent purpose and grace. Put simply, it was a promise He made to Himself.

More specifically, as we will see, it involved a promise from the Father to the Son. The plan of God from eternity past was to redeem a segment of fallen humanity through the work of the Son and for the glory of the Son (cf. 2 Tim. 4:18). There was a moment in eternity past (if we might so feebly speak of eternity in temporal terms) when the Father desired to express His perfect and incomprehensible love for the Son. To do this, He chose to give to the Son a redeemed humanity as a love gift—a company of men and women whose purpose would be, throughout all the eons of eternity, to praise and glorify the Son, and to serve Him perfectly. Angels alone would not suffice in this regard, as there are characteristics of the Son for which angels cannot properly praise Him, since they have never experienced redemption. But a redeemed humanity, as the direct recipients of His unmerited favor, would stand forever as an eternal testament to the infinite greatness of His mercy and grace.

The Father therefore determined to give the Son a redeemed humanity as a visible expression of His infinite love. In so doing, He selected all those who would make up that redeemed humanity and wrote their names in the book of life before the world began (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). His gift to the Son is composed of those whose names are in that book—a joyous congregation of undeserving saints who will praise and serve the Son forever.

The gospel of John makes this wonderful reality all the more clear. In John 6, for instance, Jesus plainly states that believers are a gift to Him from His Father. He tells His listeners, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (v. 37). And later, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (v. 44). In other words, the Father draws sinners in order that He might lovingly present them to the Son. All those who are drawn, come. All who come, the Son receives and embraces. They will never be turned away because the Son would never refuse those who are a gift from the Father.

Salvation, then, does not come to sinners because they are inherently

desirable, but because the Son is inherently worthy of the Father's gift. After all, the purpose of redemption is that the Son might be eternally exalted by the redeemed—it is not for the honor of the sinner but the honor of the Son. And in response to the Father's love, the Son eagerly accepts those who are drawn, wholly because they are a gift from the Father whom He loves. It is His perfect gratitude that opens His arms to embrace the lost.

In verse 39, Jesus says that what was promised by the Father is protected by the Son: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." When the Son receives those whom the Father draws, He keeps them safe, ensuring that they will be resurrected one day to everlasting life (cf. John 5:29). When the Son raises those who will worship Him eternally, He will fulfill the plan that God purposed in eternity past. As Jesus says in verse 38, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will [not to fulfill some plan of my own] but the will of him who sent me." That plan, as the Lord explains in verse 39, encompasses the future resurrection of all whom the Father has given Him.

Without question, the doctrine of eternal security is inherent in this discussion because it is built into the plan. Christ protects those whom the Father has chosen. He will never lose any of them because they are love gifts to Him from the Father. They are precious, not because of their inherent loveliness, but because of the loveliness of the One who gave them. Therefore, the Son keeps them secure, which is why "neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

This profound truth is reiterated in John 17. With the cross only a few hours away, Jesus knew that He was about to experience a period of separation from the Father (cf. Matt. 27:46) in which He would bear the wrath of God for sin (cf. Isa. 53:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). Recognizing that He would not be able to protect His own in that moment, He entrusted their safekeeping to the very One who had given them to Him. In verses 9–15, Jesus beseeches His Father with these words:

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father,

keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

In the context, Jesus is praying for His own who are in the world. He acknowledges that the redeemed are those whom the Father has given to Him, and He reiterates that He has been faithful in protecting and preserving them. But now, as He comes to the cross, He asks the Father to protect them in the moment when He will be unable to do so. In the one instance in all of redemptive history when there might be potential for the evil one to interrupt the plan, the Son entrusts the redeemed to the watchful and loving care of His Father. As Jesus had earlier stated, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:29). The Son was confident that His own would be safe in the impenetrable grip of His Father.

In verse 24, Jesus goes on to pray: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” Here the glorious point of the Father’s love gift to the Son is unmistakable—that the Son’s magnificent glory might be extolled and exalted by the redeemed. The Father’s motivation in giving such a gift is also clear—that He might evidence the love that He had had for the Son from before the world was created.

Clearly, there is an acute sense in which the doctrine of election is far beyond our finite capabilities to comprehend. We are caught up in intra-Trinitarian expressions of love that are unfathomable and inexpressible. And we are repeatedly reminded, as we are given small glimpses into the divine purpose behind election, that salvation is about something far greater than our own happiness.

In Romans 8:29–30, we are given another inspired window into this immeasurable reality. Paul writes, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might

be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Though much could be said about these verses, two points are of primary importance in regard to the doctrine of election. First, when God predestined us by His elective purpose, He did not merely predestine us to the beginning of our salvation, He predestined us to the end of it. We were not chosen just to be justified. We were chosen to be glorified. Paul’s wording could not be more straightforward. What God started in election continues through calling and justification, and inevitably will result in glorification. The process, which is God’s process, is fail-proof because He is the One behind it.

Second, not only is God saving a chosen, redeemed humanity that will glorify and serve the Son forever, He is making them like the Son. The redeemed in Christ will be conformed to His image, which is something that will not fully and finally take place until glorification (1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:20–21). It has been rightly said that imitation is the highest form of praise, for this will be the supreme tribute to the Son—He will be the Chief One among many who have been made like Him. They will reflect His goodness, because they will be like Him, and they will proclaim His greatness as they worship Him unceasingly for eternity.

#### DIVINE ELECTION AND THE ROLE OF THE SON

In 1 Corinthians 15:25–28, we find a remarkable conclusion to this whole discussion. There Paul says, “For he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”

Referring to the end of the age, this passage reveals that there will come a day when Christ, the King of Kings, will take His rightful throne and reclaim the universe that is His. At that time, everything will be put into subjection to Him, including death, and all of the redeemed will be gathered into glory, rejoicing in the fullness of eternal worship. When all that is done, “then the Son himself also will be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him [meaning the Father], that God may be all

in all.” In other words, when the whole love gift of a redeemed humanity has been given to Jesus Christ, then He will take that redeemed humanity and, including Himself, give it all back to the Father as a reciprocal expression of the Father’s infinite love. At that moment, the redemptive purposes of God will be fully realized.

The doctrine of election, then, is at the very heart of redemptive history. It is not some insignificant, esoteric doctrine that can be trivialized or relegated to seminary classroom debates. Rather, it is at the center of how we understand salvation and the church. It informs our evangelism, our preaching, and our identity as the body of Christ.

It also helps us understand why Christ takes His bride, the church, so seriously—she is His love gift from the Father. The church is so precious to Him that He was willing to endure great trials and eventually death to receive the gift. “Though he [the Son] was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9; cf. Phil 2:5–11). He left infinite spiritual riches in order that His elect might inherit those same riches (cf. Rom. 8:17). He embraced the most profound poverty possible, divesting Himself of His heavenly comforts and the independent use of His divine attributes, choosing to embrace the penalty of sin through His sacrifice on the cross. As Paul explains, “He [the Father] made him [the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus was guilty of nothing. Yet on the cross, the Father treated Him as if He had committed personally every sin ever committed by every individual who would ever believe. Though He was blameless, He faced the full fury of God’s wrath, enduring the penalty of sin on behalf of those He came to save. In this way, the sinless Son of God became the perfect substitute for the sinful sons of men.

As a result of Christ’s sacrifice, the elect become the righteousness of God in Him. In the same way that the Father treated the Son as a sinner, even though the Son was sinless, the Father now treats believers as righteous, even though they were unrighteous. Jesus exchanged His life for sinners in order to fulfill the elective plan of God. And He did it so that, in the end, He might give back to the Father the love gift that the Father gave to Him.

In contemplating these truths, we find ourselves catapulted into the immeasurable depths of the plans and purposes of God. As Paul exclaimed in Romans 11:33–36:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
 How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his  
 counselor?”  
 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”  
 For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
 To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Awestruck and amazed, those who love God can only respond in heartfelt worship and humble submission. They must praise Him for His mercy, His grace, and His glorious purpose that planned it all from before time began. And they must submit themselves to His sovereignty, not only in the universe at large, but also in the smallest details of their daily lives. Such is their role as part of the love gift from the Father to the Son. To worship and to serve is what they were intended to do from eternity past. And it is what they will continue to do perfectly in the ineffable joy of eternal glory.

The reality, then, is that believers are simply a small part of a much larger divine plan. The Father, because of His love for the Son, determined before time began to choose a redeemed community that would praise the Son for all eternity. And the Son, because of His love for the Father, accepted this love-gift from the Father, considering it precious to the point that He gave His life for it. The Son protects those whom the Father chose to give Him, and promises to bring them to glory according to the predetermined plan of God.

#### THE LONG LINE OF GODLY MEN

History is the unfolding of this plan of God—as those whom He chose are called, justified, and glorified through the person and work of the Son. History began when God created time and space according to His eternal redemptive plan. And it will end when all of His purposes for His creation are accomplished according to that same eternal plan.

Not surprisingly, God’s servants throughout history have understood and embraced this reality. From Moses to the present, there truly has been a long line of godly men who have demonstrated this certainty in both their words and their lives. These servants of God are our human heroes of the faith. But it is not their inherent greatness that we applaud. Rather it is the greatness and glory of their sovereign God, as reflected in their lives and their teachings,

that is so compelling. The theme of these volumes, then, is the unchanging character and faithfulness of God in the doctrines of grace.

In Volume One, Steven Lawson clearly and comprehensively lays the scriptural groundwork for the doctrines of grace. This volume provides the biblical basis for all that follows. Volumes Two and Three stand like pillars on that firm foundation—recording the echoes of divine revelation throughout church history. Throughout the work, it becomes quickly apparent that the writers of Scripture, and the interpreters of Scripture who followed them, upheld and taught the same changeless dogmas that constitute divine sovereign salvation. As you read the accounts of these godly men, you will be amazed, not at their talent, ability, or unique circumstances, but at their consistency in practicing and proclaiming the same divine truth of the doctrines of grace.

Thus, *A Long Line of Godly Men* is not primarily about men at all, but rather about the God to whom the lives of these men testify. Though godly men come and go, as any survey of history makes clear, the God who spoke through those men never changes, and neither does His message. And that is what makes Lawson's work so rich and edifying. The God of Moses, the God of Peter, the God of Chrysostom, the God of Luther, the God of Edwards, the God of Spurgeon, and the God whom we serve today commands us to proclaim the unchanging truths laid down in the past. The immutability of God and the eternity of His truths, particularly the doctrine of sovereign election, form the cornerstone of this history.

— JOHN MACARTHUR  
*Los Angeles*  
2006

## PREFACE

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### THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE OF THEOLOGY

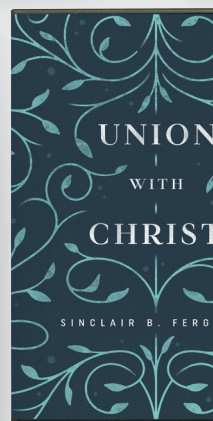
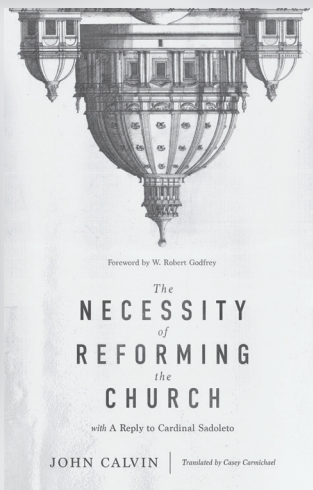
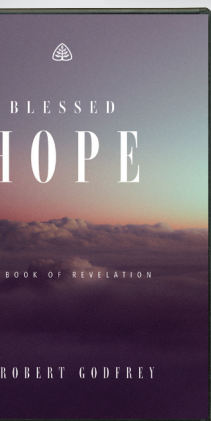
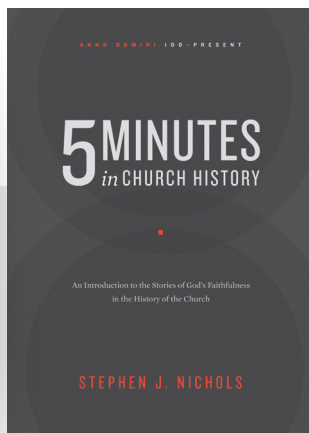
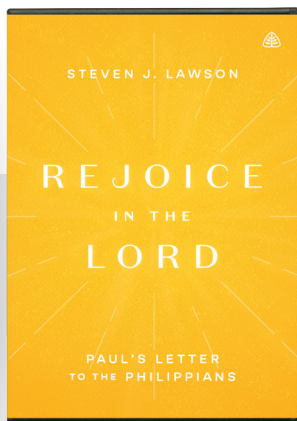
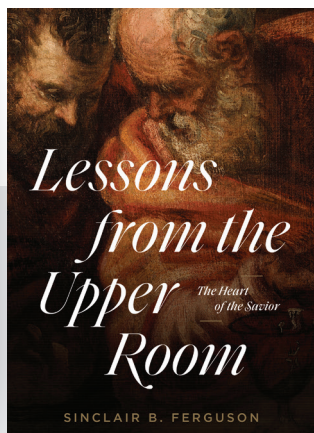
**T**hrough the western regions of North America, there runs an imaginary geographic line that determines the flow of streams into oceans. It is known as the Continental Divide. Ultimately, precipitation falling on the east side of this great divide will flow into the Atlantic Ocean. Likewise, water falling on the western slopes of this line will surge in the opposite direction until it finally empties into the Pacific Ocean. Needless to say, a vast continent separates these immense bodies of water. It is seemingly far-fetched to ponder that a raindrop falling atop a mountain in Colorado will flow to the Pacific, while another drop, falling but a short distance away, will flow into the Atlantic. Nevertheless, once the water pours down on a particular side of this great divide, its path is determined and its direction is unchangeable.

Geography is not the only place we find a great divide. There is a high ground that runs through church history as well—a Continental Divide of theology. This great divide of doctrine separates two distinctly different streams of thought that flow in opposite directions. To be specific, this determinative high ground is one's theology of God, man, and salvation. This is the highest of all thought, and it divides all doctrine into two schools. Historically, these two ways of thinking about God and His saving grace have been called by various names. Some have identified them as *Augustinianism* and *Pelagianism*. Others have named them *Calvinism* and *Arminianism*. Still others have defined them as *Reformed* and *Catholic*, while others have used the terms *predestination* and *free will*. But by whatever name, these streams are determined by the Continental Divide of theology.

This metaphorical divide differs from the geographical Continental Divide



We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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