



# A grace worth saving: Learning from history and the dangers of prooftexting

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Lecture 9

# When did these ideas develop?

It may occasion some surprise to discover that the doctrine of Predestination was not made a matter of special study until near the end of the fourth century. The earlier church fathers placed chief emphasis on good works such as faith, repentance, almsgiving, prayers, submission to baptism, etc., as the basis of salvation. They of course taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel. Some of their writings contain passages in which the sovereignty of God is recognized; yet along side of those are others which teach the absolute freedom of the human will... They taught a kind of synergism in which there was a co-operation between grace and free will. It was hard for man to give up the idea that he could work out his own salvation. But at last, as a result of a long, slow process, he came to the great truth that salvation is a sovereign gift which has been bestowed irrespective of merit; that it was fixed in eternity; and that God is the author in all of its stages. (Lorraine Boettner)



# It begins with Augustine!

This cardinal truth of Christianity was first clearly seen by Augustine, the great Spirit-filled theologian of the West. In his doctrines of sin and grace, he went far beyond the earlier theologians, taught an unconditional election of grace, and restricted the purposes of redemption to the definite circle of the elect. It will not be denied by anyone acquainted with Church History that Augustine was an eminently great and good man, and that his labors and writings contributed more to the promotion of sound doctrine and the revival of true religion than did those of any other man between Paul and Luther.

Prior to Augustine's day the time had been largely taken up in correcting heresies within the Church and in refuting attacks from the pagan world in which it found itself. Consequently but little emphasis had been placed on the systematic development of doctrine. And that the doctrine of Predestination received such little attention in this age was no doubt partly due to the tendency to confuse it with the Pagan doctrine of Fatalism which was so prevalent throughout the Roman Empire. (Lorraine Boettner)



# Augustine (354-430 AD)

- Spent 10 years as a Manichean
- The Manicheans were the pinnacle of gnosticism
- He famously did not know Greek! (Tried to learn it later in life)
- His theology changed in 412 AD
- Championed original guilt, not just original sin
- He and Ambrose introduced “just war” theology to the church
- Some people will say “early church” and mean Augustine



# Calvin admired Augustine greatly

“If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his” (Institutes, Book III, chap. 22).

“[Augustine is the one] we quote most frequently as being the best and most faithful witness of all antiquity” (Institutes, Book IV, chap. 14).

“Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so ... out of his writings” (Calvin, “A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God”)



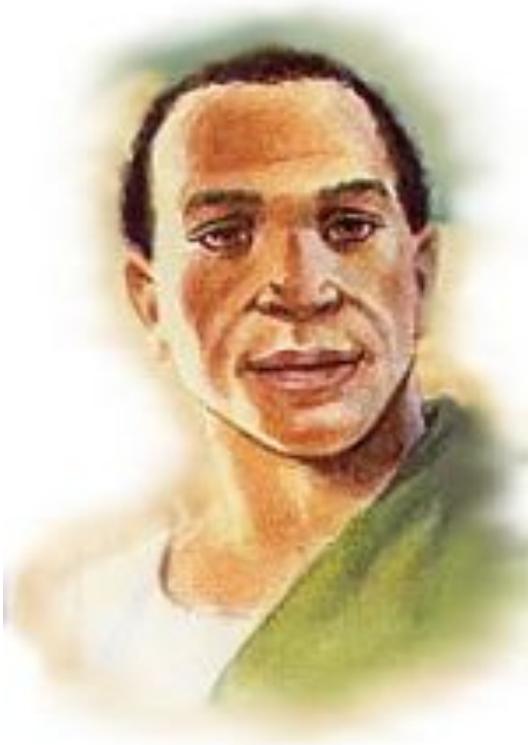
# Clement of Rome (35-99 AD)



“It is therefore in the power of every one, since man has been made possessed of free-will, whether he shall hear us to life, or the demons to destruction. . . . He who is good by his own choice is really good; but he who is made good by another under necessity is not really good, because he is not what he is by his own choice. . . . For no other reason does God punish the sinner either in the present or future world, except because He knows that the sinner was able to conquer but neglected to gain the victory.” (Clement of Rome)

“And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”  
(Philippians 4:3)

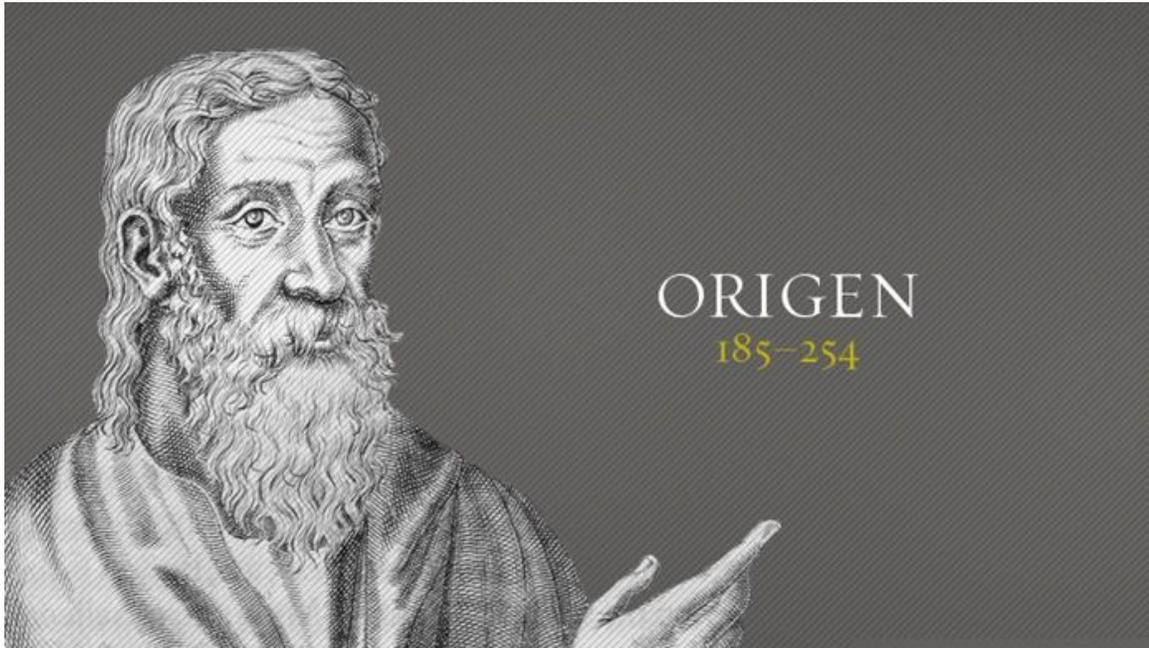
# Tertullian (155-240 AD) on free will



“Entire freedom of will, therefore, was conferred upon man in both tendencies. So that, as master of himself, he might constantly encounter good by the observance of it, and evil by its spontaneous observance of it... But the recompense for good and could not be given to the man who is found to have been either good or evil through necessity, and not choice.” Tertullian (c. 207), 3.315.

Illustration credit: Tim Ladwig

# Listen to Origen describe the gnostics



"Certain men [gnostics] who hold different opinions misuse these passages. They destroy free will by introducing ruined natures incapable of salvation and by introducing others as being saved in such a way that they cannot be lost." Origen (c. 225), 4.308.

## Lactantius (c. 250-325 AD)



“The Son clothed Himself with flesh so that--the desires of the flesh being subdued--He might teach us that to sin was not the result of necessity, but of man’s purpose and will.” Lactantius (c. 304-313), 7.127.

# What is prooftexting?

Cherrypicking isolated verses or ideas and presenting those as evidence for a position, even when contradicted by broader themes, the context, other verses, or author intent.

## Example from a movie review

LA Times “Even Laurence Fishburne's incendiary performance can't ignite Hoodlum, a would-be gangster epic that generates less heat than a nickel cigar. Fishburne's 'Bumpy' is fierce, magnetic, irresistible even... But even this actor can only do so much... While the scenes that are supposed to create audience involvement are easy to spot, they don't play as intended, and the result is a plodding epic that tends to the lethargic and lackadaisical.”

## How the ad appeared

“Irresistible.”

— Kenneth Turan of the Los Angeles Times

# Problems with prooftexting

Shows dishonesty and / or laziness!

Trying to draw authority and credibility for a source, but is actually using that source for a pre-determined agenda and against that person's intent.

# How to avoid prooftexting

Reading the whole of a book! Let the whole inform the parts.

As the world becomes lazier and lazier, prooftexting is going to become more prominent.

Learn about how others have read the book in history, **especially native speakers of that language.**

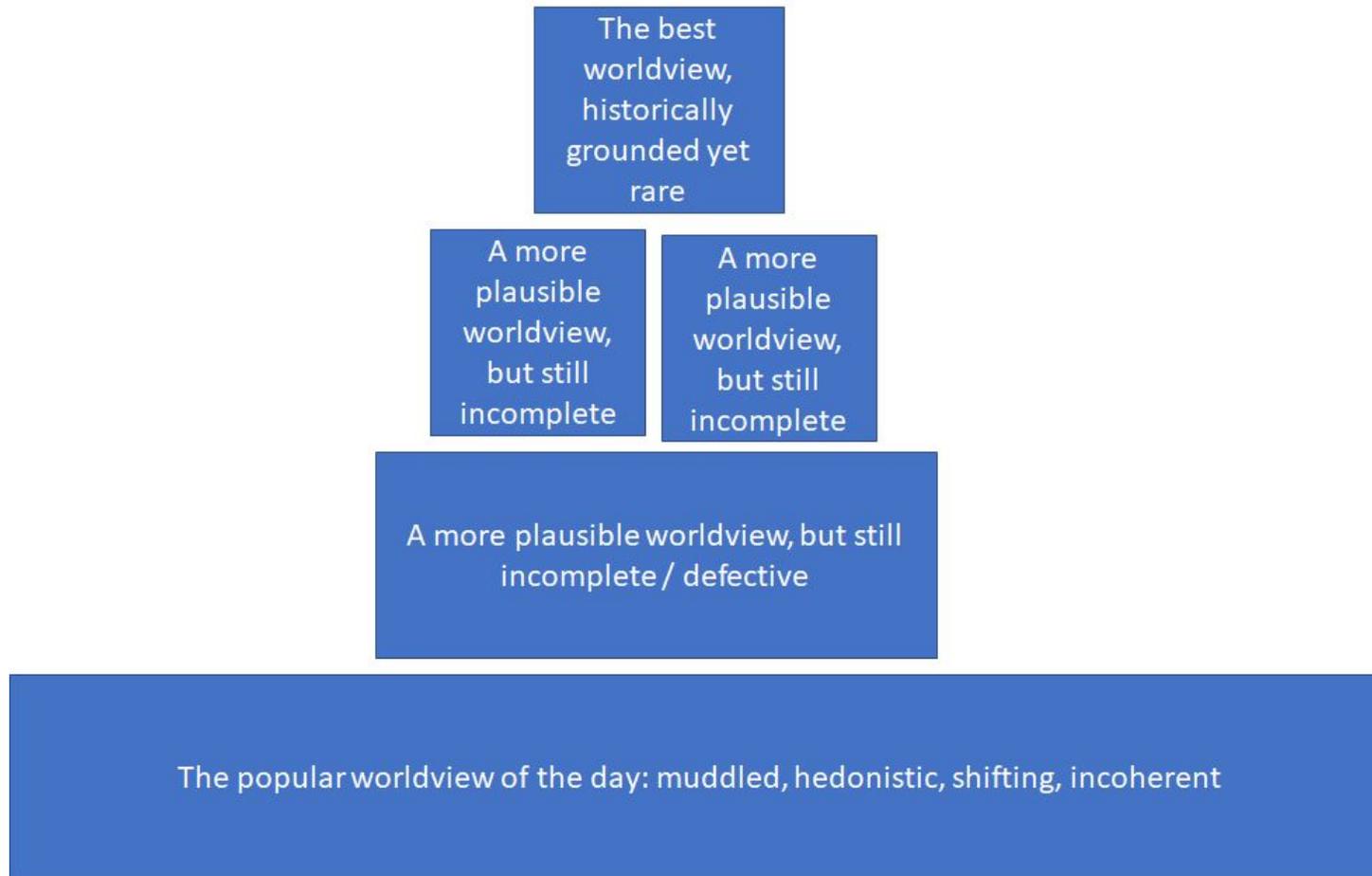
# Learn church history!



David Bercot (1950-)

Highly recommended:  
On [TheHistoricFaith.com](http://TheHistoricFaith.com)  
Course "Salvation: Mechanical or Relational?"

# Try to keep this diagram in your mind



# Total Depravity



[Jeremiah 17:9](#) ESV / 95 helpful votes

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

[1 Corinthians 2:14](#) ESV / 65 helpful votes

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

[Psalm 51:5](#) ESV / 63 helpful votes

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

[Ephesians 2:1-3](#) ESV / 59 helpful votes

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

[John 6:44](#) ESV / 58 helpful votes

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

[Romans 3:23](#) ESV / 56 helpful votes

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

# Total depravity / total inability

Two kinds of dead:

- Lazarus "dead" OR
- Prodigal son dead "For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

# There are many problems with the “Lazarus” dead analogy

2 Cor 4:4: The Bible says that the devil has blinded unbelievers

Mark 6:6: Jesus said that he was amazed at their lack of faith

The concept of judicial hardening

It's not taught in Genesis after the fall

# Unconditional Election



[Ephesians 1:4](#) ESV / 26 helpful votes

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

[Acts 13:48](#) ESV / 26 helpful votes

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

[John 15:16](#) ESV / 22 helpful votes

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

[2 Thessalonians 2:13](#) ESV / 20 helpful votes

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

[Romans 8:29](#) ESV / 19 helpful votes

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.

# John 15:16

The problem of Judas here.

For this and other reasons John Calvin even writes about this passage, “True, this does not refer to the ordinary election of believers, by which they are adopted to be the children of God, but to the special election by which he appointed his disciples to the office of preaching the Gospel.”

Calvin elsewhere writes, “Yet I agree that he is talking specifically about the apostolate; his intention is to move the disciples to perform their office diligently.”

## Acts 13:48

As many as were ordained to eternal life – St. Luke does not say fore – ordained. He is not speaking of what was done from eternity, but of what was then done, through the preaching of the Gospel. He is describing that ordination, and that only, which was at the very time of hearing it. During this sermon those believed, says the apostle, to whom God then gave power to believe. It is as if he had said, “They believed, whose hearts the Lord opened;” as he expresses it in a clearly parallel place, speaking of the same kind of ordination, Acts 16:14, &c. It is observable, the original word is not once used in Scripture to express eternal predestination of any kind. The sum is, all those and those only, who were now ordained, now believed. Not that God rejected the rest: it was his will that they also should have been saved: but they thrust salvation from them. Nor were they who then believed constrained to believe. But grace was then first copiously offered them. And they did not thrust it away, so that a great multitude even of Gentiles were converted. In a word, the expression properly implies, a present operation of Divine grace working faith in the hearers. (John Wesley)

Also note, that this verse has several other translations that are almost certainly better:

<https://atheologyintension.com/2017/05/29/an-arminian-analysis-of-acts-1348/>

# The problems of unconditional election are vast

The Bible never speaks of unconditional regeneration occurring first, then we express faith.

“You refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:40)

“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 21:30)

There are hundreds of verses and passages that say that our salvation is by faith / faithfulness.

# **A deep irony of Calvinists—they deny salvation by faith**

Sola fide, or salvation by faith, is something that Calvinists nominally adhere to  
But ask them, is election by faith?

So salvation is by faith, but election is not?

# Eternal Security



[John 10:27-29](#) ESV / 252 helpful votes

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 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 6:37](#) ESV / 130 helpful votes

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

[John 10:28](#) ESV / 115 helpful votes

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

[John 5:24](#) ESV / 102 helpful votes

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

[John 3:16](#) ESV / 96 helpful votes

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[Romans 11:29](#) ESV / 87 helpful votes

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

# Doesn't eternal mean eternal?!

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

# Perseverance of the saints

Look for an email with 86 passages and verses that teach or imply that someone can forsake his or her salvation. This is found in nearly every book of the Bible.

Examples:

- Parable of the sower
- Parable of the unforgiving debtor
- Passage on the vine and the branches
- 1 Cor 10:1-21
- Col 1:22-23 “He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard”
- Several passages in Hebrews