

My answer to inquirers about the doctrine of free and sovereign grace

by F. Leon King

(1983)

"Leon, you didn't always believe what you believe now about election, predestination, and the sovereignty of God. Why did you change your mind?" asked an earnest church member. I've had this question in different forms asked me during the past seventeen years or so many times. I earnestly want my brethren to understand me in this matter. I am not out to offend anybody, so if you are offended by what I am saying, please give it all due consideration before passing judgment on me. Please give me a fair hearing, then make up your mind as to whether Leon King has gone "off the deep end" or not.

It was just a few months before my father passed away when I was faced with a life-changing question. Dad went home to be with the Lord on January 16, 1981. A few months before, Jan and I were privileged to be with him for a few days. We talked a lot about Bible doctrine. One thing we always talked about was our influence and testimony toward other people in terms of their salvation. By that I mean, what influence we might have had upon the New Birth of the individual. He made this statement to me, which I will paraphrase because I cannot remember every single word exactly the way he said it: **"Son, I believe that no man is going to spend an eternity in hell because I failed to preach the gospel to him. I didn't speak to everybody I could; I didn't do everything I could have. I didn't spend every waking moment seeking to speak to somebody about the Lord. No doubt about it - I failed to do all I could have done."** After having made this statement to me, it would be just a couple of months before he went home.

Few men that I've known in my lifetime have been as committed to the Lord's work with an honest heart as much as my own father was. His father (my paternal grandfather), Elder C.N. King, once made this statement to me about my dad: "Son," grandpa said, "there aren't many people who love the Lord and make the sacrifices your dad makes to serve him." I believe that is true. Judgment Day will undoubtedly prove that to be true.

Dad's statement made a tremendous impact on me. Don't misunderstand me. My Dad is not and was not my God, but he certainly pointed me by word and example to the great God of the heavens. I believe He was a man true to the word of God as He understood it, and a man committed to the cause of Jesus Christ. I watched many times as he went off to preach to others without adequate means to get there. Then he preached and poured out his life an offering for others with no support from the people he served except the words to "be warmed and filled." Nevertheless, God always provided for us all.

His words disturbed me greatly. I had no peace and rest within at all. I knew I was one of God's children, but I felt as though I knew little or nothing about His great grace and salvation. I set out to search the scriptures and find some answers to the things that plagued me about the way men are saved. I believed nothing different at that point than I had been taught as I grew up. I believed all men were saved by grace through faith. I believed that if men would call on the name of the Lord they would be saved. I believed if men believed on the Lord Jesus Christ they would be saved. I believed in the eternal security of the believer. I had been well taught in those things having grown up around preachers and the Lord's churches in northeast Arkansas.

My church background may help some to understand where I have come from. Unity Landmark Missionary Baptist Church on Highway 18, west of Jonesboro, Arkansas, was the church that heard my confession of faith in the Lord Jesus. It was that church that administered New Testament baptism

to me and received me as a member. In those days, the churches used the rivers and ponds for baptismal fonts. I was baptized in Cache River near Egypt, Arkansas. Elder Clyde Branson was the pastor of the church, and Elder James Ivy was the visiting evangelist that year when the church had its annual summer revival. During that summer revival, I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my savior. I was just eleven years old when this happened. Unity Church is affiliated with the Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA) formerly the North American Baptist Association (NABA). The church was in the American Baptist Association (ABA) before the associational split in 1950. The church was organized in 1927.

I was told, by my grandfather, that on organization day for the Unity Missionary Baptist Church, there were representatives from the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Association present. Upon organization of the church, they would decide which organization they would fellowship with. The church could have voted either way - to fellowship with either organization. They chose the ABA. Most Southern Baptists and Associational Baptists at that particular point in history were Landmark Baptists. That means they believed in the perpetuity of the Lord's churches from the time of Jesus Christ to the present. They believed in the local church and rejected the teaching of the invisible universal church. They refused alien baptism and practiced closed communion. They were missionary and evangelistic. Their doctrinal position was, and still is, Arminian. That means they believe Christ died for the sins of every single human being and that it is the choice of each man about his salvation. For them, every man has the opportunity and choice to be saved. This is the doctrine I was taught in my growing up years in Arkansas. As far as I knew, all the preachers in the churches that were affiliated with Unity believed and preached the same thing. That is what I believed and preached until 1982.

Ø My next church relationships (in order) were:

Salem Baptist Church near Fort Campbell, Kentucky. This was a rural Southern Baptist Convention Church. When Jan and I joined this church by letter from Unity Baptist Church, we simply thought of them as a church of like faith and order. Our perception was that they supported missions through the Southern Baptist Convention and that was about the extent of things different.

Next came Bible Baptist Church, in Clarksville, Tennessee, also near Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Bible Baptist Church was an independent, sovereign grace missionary Baptist church. Bible Baptist Church was not affiliated with the Baptist Bible Fellowship as the name might imply. I didn't understand it at the time, but later came to realize that Brother Elton Wilson, who was the pastor, believed in the sovereign grace of the Lord.

Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Wiesbaden-Bierstadt, West Germany was our next church. Jan, our four children, and I went to Germany. I was in the US Army at the time and had been transferred from Fort Campbell to Mainz, Germany. The Friendship Missionary Baptist Church was an independent Missionary Baptist Church, but did have leanings toward the American Baptist Association (ABA). While a member of this church, the Lord placed in me the desire to preach the gospel and I become a bishop (pastor). Some people say that is a call to the ministry. I believe it was. The church ordained me as Pastor on March 25, 1967. In, July, 1968, I brought my family back to Arkansas and went on to serve in Vietnam until, August 1969.

Returning from Vietnam, I was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Jan and I united with Bible Baptist Church in Radcliff, Kentucky, which was an Independent Missionary Baptist Church. Its pastor was Elder Noah Broughton.

While serving in Bible Baptist Church at Radcliff, Kentucky, I was asked to preach at Pole Bridge Missionary Baptist Church near Cecilia, Kentucky, in view of a call. The church did call me as Pastor. I accepted and

we moved to a house near the church. Pole Bridge was an Independent Missionary Baptist Church. I served there as Pastor until, June, 1972 when I was transferred by the US Army to Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Upon arrival in Alaska, we began a diligent search for a church. We found no churches, which we considered to have had the correct view of the Lord's church and its perpetuity. We met Brother James Crumpton who was then pastor of the Mountain View Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska. The Mountain View Baptist Church was a member of the General Association of Regular Baptists. Brother Crumpton had what we considered to be a correct view of church and important foundation doctrine, but had not completely informed the church of his beliefs. Because of doctrinal convictions, we told the church that we had to leave.

Almost immediately, we found the Bruin Park Missionary Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska. The Bruin Park Church was affiliated with the Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA). Brother James Hoffman was the Pastor when we united with the church in, May, 1973. (The church withdrew from the BMAA in 1991 and is now an unaffiliated, Sovereign Grace Missionary Baptist Church.)

For a brief period of some six months or so, we moved our membership back to the Pole Bridge Missionary Baptist Church near Cecilia, Kentucky when I left the military service in, September, 1974. During those six months, a number of things happened in which we saw the hand of God on our lives. The Bruin Park Missionary Baptist Church called me as Pastor in, March, 1975. My family and I returned to Alaska in, March, 1975, and I have served as Pastor at Bruin Park since that time.

These church affiliations may help you to understand my background. Now, I believe all men are initially Arminian in their thinking unless they have been schooled diligently from their youth in the Bible doctrine of God's grace.

Ø I have never denied the doctrine of Election and Predestination, but didn't understand it.

Whenever these topics came up while growing up and talking of them with preacher brethren, there usually was some kind of brief statement about it then the subject abruptly changed. If I ever heard a sermon about election or predestination before I studied it out for myself, I do not recall it. My wife told me that my grandfather, C. N. King, once preached on Predestination for three hours in a church where she attended as a young person. I did not hear the sermon, but wish I could have. I remember once while at Bible Baptist Church in Radcliff, Kentucky, Brother Noah Broughton and I were talking. Somebody came by and said, "We were chosen before the foundation of the world." Both of us said at the same time, "Yeah, according to the foreknowledge of God." We laughed. It stuck in my mind, and I never forgot it. My training in the associational churches was wrapped around the Sunday School quarterlies, Training Course quarterlies, and topical sermons. Most sermons I ever heard were topical - where a text was chosen, then various scriptures were brought in to prove the point. That's the way I learned to preach. And - that is the way I preached from 1966 to 1982. Sixteen years, I tried to copy what I had seen and heard. Frankly, I preached more sermons "about the Word" than sermons where I "preached the Word." There is a difference.

Ø Learning the real meaning of sovereignty, election, predestination, and grace meant trouble for me.

When I came to grips with the doctrine of grace as it is taught in all the scriptures, I had a serious dilemma. I was the pastor of an Arminian church. I had taught my people to get folks down the aisle, have them pray, and maybe the Lord would save them. I had been schooled in the Romans Road and other methods of witness. I gave classes to the church on the Jack Hyles visitation method. We looked at D. James Kennedy's Evangelism Explosion. During the first sixteen years at Bruin Park, we visited, visited,

visited. We knocked on doors. We ran busses. We had junior church. We tried to have a choir. We had tract laying days. We had volley-ball nights. We even had a pink-piggy party! We had a night for the kids to dress up like little Mexicans and try to flail the stuffed toy with all the candy! We tried every new program we could think of or had heard of. We prayed and witnessed but found that we were not salesmen! I saw scores of people come and go, but few grew in the Lord. Fewer were saved and followed on to know the Lord. We had preachers in from other churches to conduct "revival meetings." I was frustrated and disappointed to say the least.

Well, what would I do? What could I do? I now believed the Bible taught that men were saved totally and absolutely by the grace of God, plus or minus nothing. No amount of praying, calling, pleading, crying, or anything would produce saving faith. That, I learned, by simple scripture to be the gift of God. How are men born again? When I answered this question according to the Bible, the Scriptures showed me that God did it all.

Would I just blurt it out and unnecessarily offend and confuse the people I had been trying to teach? I changed my preaching method. I believe that God showed me that I must change the method. I began to preach expository sermons. I have tried to take great pains not to overlook even a single verse or concept. I took a book and preached through every verse of it. I explained the meaning of the words and compared scripture with scripture. That remains my method today. Occasionally, I preach a topical sermon, but the rule is exposition. My wife said to me, "Leon, have you just quit preaching altogether?" I didn't blame her at that point - because there weren't nearly as many loud words when I spoke; it wasn't nearly so exciting to the flesh; it didn't challenge the rebellious charging spirits in the people. We were in the midst of a huge building program when all of this was taking place. In fact, what we had envisioned to be a rather small endeavor turned out to be nearly a half-million dollar project. Amazing as it all was, the Lord gave grace both to myself and the hearers so that the church suffered no loss of members from the transition. I tried my best to

simply preach the Bible. That is what we are doing today. Dad's statement, which I spoke about earlier, was a catalyst, which sent me scurrying to the Scriptures. It also sent me on my knees to seek understanding from the God of all grace. I must say there are just a few things that turned my thinking, but it didn't all come together at once. There was a learning process. Here a little, there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line. Some serious questions came to mind. I want to list some of them for you. Maybe you should ask yourself the same questions. I know that sometimes the questions, themselves, demand an answer that we do not want to give. I believe these are honest questions that demand honest answers.

1. When God created Lucifer (if he became Satan, I believe he did), did God know what he would do? I concluded the answer was yes, and God created him anyhow for His own purpose and glory. As much as men want to malign God for creation of Lucifer, knowing what Lucifer would do, how can any doubt that the ultimate thing in God's mind was His own glory?

2. When God created Adam, did he know what Adam would do? Of course he did. He knows everything - and that in the present tense - Because God is the God of the present. He is "I AM, THAT I AM." God had already provided the means of salvation for fallen man in ordaining His only begotten Son to be the substitutionary sacrifice for their sins. You may call this purpose, call it decree, call it covenant, or whatever you want to call it, but it is an august fact. Jesus stands as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

3. Were the names of God's elect written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world? Yes, they were. Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 show that rather plainly. One verse says it negatively and the other positively, but both say it without doubt. Paul knew the believer's names were written in the book and said so when he wrote the letter to the Philippians and the Roman letter. Jesus told the apostles to rejoice because their names were written in heaven.

4. What is the meaning of foreknowledge? Does it simply mean to know beforehand? It means to know beforehand, but in Romans it speaks of whom God foreknew and not what he foreknew. Some folks think that God looked forward and saw who would believe, then after they had chosen Him, he chose them. That's a foolish statement. He *knew* them before the foundation of the world and wrote their names in the Lamb's book of life. *"Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."* -- Jeremiah 1:4-5.

5. What about predestination? Incredible word! It is found four times in the New Testament and pertains only to God's people. God simply left the unsaved, the non-elect, to themselves. His leaving of the non-elect to themselves can rightly be called positive reprobation or the other side of election.

6. Are men really dead in sins? What can a dead man do? A dead man can do nothing, absolutely nothing. Not only is the natural man unwilling, but he is also unable. That is why Jesus said, *"No man **can** come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:"* -- John 6:44. The emphatic testimony of scripture is that unregenerate men are dead in their sins. *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;...Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"* -- Eph. 2:1,5.

7. Did God give some to the Son? How do we answer this? Did he give everybody? All the Father gave him will come to him and those who do will never be cast out. God did not intend to save every single man. It is very likely that sin had to be introduced into the world in order for God to show his most wonderful attributes - love, mercy, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, etc.

8. How are men born again (regenerated)? They are born again of the incorruptible seed, the Word of God. Regeneration (or the new birth) is

totally a sovereign act of God whereby the dead sinner is quickened or made alive. Up to that point, he was said to be "dead in trespasses and in sins." A Person must be born again in order to see or enter into the kingdom of heaven. Regeneration or the new birth gives the sinner the ability to "hear" the preached word. The preached word tells him what he must do and by it, he is converted.

9. Why did the majority of Baptists in our land in early years believe the doctrine of sovereign grace? From the first Baptist church in Rhode Island, through the Philadelphia Association, and down to the churches which composed the New Hampshire Confession, all have said that a holy disposition is created in man by God through which the individual exercises faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith and repentance are fruits of regeneration (the new birth) and both are gifts (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:24-26.)

10. Are men looking for God? Are men thirsting for God and wanting to be saved? Hardly. Exactly the opposite is true. Unregenerate sinners want no part of God or his word in their natural self. They are dead in trespasses and sins and they love their sinful condition.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. -- Psa. 14:2-3.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. -- Romans 3:10-12.

That men will not and do not seek God is precisely the reason why the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

11. Does God love every single person? "Of course, He does," replies the majority of professing Christians. Not so, says the Bible rather emphatically.

Every blessing stems from God's love for his people - his eternal, unchangeable love. The Bible says that he chastens every one he loves. It also says there are some he doesn't chasten. What is the conclusion? He loves his own. His love is discriminatory, and it is unconditional toward His elect - his sheep. That leads to us to understand precisely for whom Christ died.

12. Did Christ die for every person? Was the atonement universal?

Obviously, Jesus Christ did not die for the people who had already died and went to hell before his suffering. That fact alone is sufficient to prove that his death was not for the sins of every man. He died to save **His** people from their sins. Remarkable statement! For Him to save *His* people from their sins suggests that He first had a people. Will you say it was the Jews? I don't think you will because all the Jews aren't saved - but all the sheep are saved or will be saved. They are *His* people. They will hear His voice. The Bible says so. *"And other sheep I have (present tense), which are not of this fold: them also I must bring (future tense), and they shall hear (future tense) my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* -- John 10:16. The ones who won't or don't hear his voice are not his sheep. They will never believe because they are not his sheep. *"Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 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:"* — John 10:24-27.

13. Brother King, have you gone hard-shell? I'm not a hard-shell. I've been accused of that, but I am not. A few years ago, an elderly lady (now with the Lord) came to unite with our church. She said, "My daddy was a hard-shell Baptist." Inquiry proved that she didn't know what a hard-shell was. Her daddy was a staunch Baptist, but not a hard-shell. The very fact that churches name themselves "Missionary" emphasizes the fact they are

not hard-shell. That is why Baptist churches began to take the name "Missionary Baptist" over a hundred years ago, to separate themselves from churches with unscriptural practices – that is, churches who would not preach the gospel to unsaved people.

The Bruin Park Baptist Church is very active in supporting a number of missionaries, and the church gives liberal offerings for them. The church produces tracts, booklets, and a newsletter, which proclaims the gospel. The church members are active in their witness to others of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hard-shell people believe that people are regenerated without hearing the gospel. For that reason, they do not deem it necessary to "preach the gospel to every creature." We do not believe that! We believe that *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Nobody can be saved unless they hear the gospel. God has commanded us to preach the gospel to every creature, and we believe that is our responsibility. I know a number of *"Arminian Hard-shell"* churches when it comes to missionary support and gospel witness, though they believe every man *can* be saved.

No, I'm not a hard-shell! Our Lord commanded us to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature! Obviously, we cannot do that from each individual church any more than one man can populate the earth by himself. We can be witnesses to the Lord in the area where we are located. We can support other workers who are located in the various places around the world. We try to do that.

After coming to grips with the answers to the questions I have placed before you, I have seen that the Bible is alive and replete with references to God's sovereignty and choosing. I can scarcely read any part of the Scripture without seeing God's sovereign hand in all things.

I have come to see that He places kings and leaders in power for His own purpose and that He moves them to do his bidding. Do they exercise their wills? Yes, but God turns them as He turns the rivers of waters. He is over all. He does all things after the counsel of His own will. What is His purpose

in all this? Why did He create things as He did? It is a very simple answer - but many do not want to hear it. The answer is that He created all things for His pleasure and for His glory. That includes the man whom He created in His own image. We want to make our own choices and master our own destiny. That is the epitome of carnality and self-love.

Not that we have power to stop anything, but let us, in our minds and hearts, let God be God in all things. He does what He wants to, when He wants to, and where He wants. It is His choice to do according to His will, and because He is God, what He does is always righteous whether we understand it or not.

I have often used this illustration to show our shallow thinking about God. Suppose one of your children were playing in the mud and wanted to make a mud pie. He could make it any way he chose, in any shape he chose, and for any reason he chose. If a child can do that when playing, Cannot God speak a lump of clay into existence, then form from that lump some vessels unto honor and others unto dishonor? It is His choosing to do so - isn't it?

Is he unrighteous because He shows mercy on some and not on others? Do not our Governors and Presidents the same when they pardon hardened criminals at their pleasure?

What about God's election and whosoever will? I heard about someone who asked a preacher to reconcile these two concepts. I'm told the preacher replied, "They do not need reconciliation; they never were apart." To that statement, I give a hearty "Amen!" God foreknew the elect and wrote their names in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. They are the same persons who are willing to come. By the way, the term "whosoever will" is found only once in the New Testament. That is found in Revelation 22:17.

We all believe that "*all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*" Who are these "called according to His purpose? It is in the next two verses, Romans 8:29-30.

For whom (not what - though He knows all things) he did foreknow, he also did predestinate (the same ones whom God foreknew) to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren (expression of God's purpose). Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called (the very same ones whom He foreknew and predestinated): and whom he called, them he also justified (the very same ones whom He foreknew, predestinated, and called): and whom he justified, them he also glorified (the very same ones whom He foreknew, predestinated, called, and justified)." These are the very same ones for whom He went to prepare a place. These are the very same ones who are His sheep, and because they are His sheep, they believe - or are willing. They are the elect, foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, glorified, and willing people the Lord Jesus came to seek and save.

Blessed Sovereign God of all grace He is!

Epilogue: As I edit this article, the date is, December, 2002. Since coming to believe and understand the sovereign grace of God, many of the things that I wrote in this article have been confirmed again and again. Some things have been embellished through more study of the word and exchanges with good brethren.

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound,

That Saved a Wretch Like Me!