

# *IN MEDIO*

Volume 1, Issue 6, December 2006

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## **The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man Part Two: Romans**

On September 27, 2006, I was a guest on The Narrow Mind show with Pastor Gene Cook and Dr. Robert Morey. As a result of that discussion it was agreed that I would debate Dr. Morey on the subjects of 1) the nature and extent of God's knowledge, and 2) whether or not the Bible teaches that mankind has "free will."

Shortly after the radio discussion I posted an article on IN MEDIO for October 1, 2006 ("Public Debates, the Extent of God's Knowledge, and Human Will"), which summarized several parts of the September 27, 2006, radio discussion. In that same article I also laid the groundwork for additional discussion of my views on the debate topics, which Morey requested prior to the debate itself, so that Dr. Morey would have a better understanding of my position and the position of Jehovah's Witnesses relative to the teaching of the Bible concerning the knowledge of God and whether or not mankind has "free will."

Part One in a series of three articles covering the teaching of the Bible respecting my and Jehovah's Witnesses' views of these two subjects was on the Old Testament book of Isaiah. This is Part Two, covering the New Testament letter to the early Christians in Rome, or the book of "Romans." Part Three will cover other aspects of the biblical teaching respecting the knowledge of God and the will of man. I offer these articles so that my views and the basis for them are clear to all prior to the debate.

Understanding one's position prior to any formal discussion or public debate is important so that each side can properly address the issues in dispute and, thus, better educate those listening. It does no good to mischaracterize another's position and intentionally or unintentionally miss the point of another's argument. Doing so only creates disconnect between yourself and the person to whom you are speaking or, worse, with those listening.

Consider, for example, the following excerpt from my September 27, 2006, discussion with Dr. Morey. I have numbered the exchange in order to make clearer the sequence of information as it was presented:

[1]Morey: So you really think that God created the universe and then was caught by surprise by Adam's sin? He didn't know from all eternity that the world, the universe, that evil would emerge?

[2]Stafford: Well let's just take a look at what the language of the Bible says. After Adam does not respond to the voice of God in the garden, he says, "What is this you have done?" Now what are we to conclude from that Dr. Morey? This is clearly anthropomorphic terminology that suggests, in your words, "surprise"! Now whether or not he actually knew and was shocked or dismayed, this is the language of the Bible. If you want to go beyond that, and characterize it in a way that suggests that what we're told and the way we're told it is not the way it was said, that's your decision.

[3]Morey: Well, no, the language of the Bible is very clear. Yes?

[4]Stafford: Yes.

[5a]Morey: God wanted Adam to think about exactly what he's done. It's like you would say to a child ...

[6]Stafford: Well, that's not what it says.

[5b]Morey: ... who is standing there with cookies smeared over his face, "What have you done?" We know he ate the cookies. But when you turn to Ephesians 1:4, when you look at 1 Timothy ...

[7]Stafford: But are you "surprised" that the child ate the cookie?

[5]Morey: ... you have that election, predestination took place *before* the creation of the world, *before* the world was created.

#### END OF TRANSCRIPTION

From here the discussion returned briefly to other questions related to God's knowledge followed by a commercial break.

If you will follow again with me the sequence of subjects under discussion in the above excerpt from the radio discussion, you may notice just how easy it can be to lose sight of the point at hand:

[1] Morey asks if I believe God "was caught by surprise by Adam's sin." Did God "know from all eternity that the world, the universe, that evil would emerge?"

[2] I respond by pointing to the Bible itself, specifically, to the events recorded in Genesis 3:8–13. This account shows that God went looking for Adam (described anthropomorphically, that is, using human language we can relate to but concerning activities of God himself which are in some sense beyond our ability to describe or to know fully) and after finding that Adam and his wife had clothed themselves Jehovah questions Adam about his understanding of nakedness relative to eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad (verse 11). Adam then tells Jehovah that Eve gave Adam fruit from this tree and that Adam then also ate some of the fruit. Jehovah then addresses the woman, “What is this you have done?” I pointed out to Dr. Morey that this type of questioning “suggests . . . surprise,” and that nothing in the account suggests that God knew that Adam and Eve would definitely disobey him and eat from this tree, before they actually ate from it.

[3–4] Morey and I agree that the language of the Bible is clear.

[5a] Morey then begins to explain what he thinks Genesis 3:8–13 means, namely, “God wanted Adam to think about exactly what he’s done.”

[6] I interrupt Morey here to point out that nothing in the account says anything about God ‘wanting Adam to think about exactly what he’s done.’ (To me the account shows that God never wanted Adam to do what he did, so he could not possibly have wanted him to ‘think about what he did’ if he was never supposed to do it according to God’s command [Genesis 2:17]!)

[5b] Morey continues his explanation of what he thinks Genesis 3:8–13 means by suggesting that what we have in this account is a situation similar to a parent who speaks to a child who ate a cookie he (presumably) was not supposed to eat, but who ate it and who is standing before you (the parent) with the evidence all over his face.

[7] I then point out that this is not the point, since we are talking about whether or not the parent is “surprised” by the fact that the child disobeyed, not whether or not the parent knows what happened *at the point where the parent confronts the child*, that is, with the evidence all over his face!

[5b] Morey then finishes his point by moving from the parent/child scenario to his belief about election/predestination occurring “*before* the world was created.”

Notice, though, that Morey’s question was “So you really think that God created the universe and then was caught by surprise by Adam’s sin?” While I would not use “caught” as if God was somehow unprepared (he obviously was prepared—see below), God clearly was “surprised” by Adam and Eve’s choice to disobey him, especially under the circumstances. That is what the language used in the Bible account of Genesis 3:8–13 suggests.

Morey tries to explain the language of Genesis 3:8-13 by answering it with the parent/child scenario that deals with how the parent who sees the evidence of his child's guilt speaks to the child *after seeing the evidence!* To quote Morey, "We know he ate the cookies." Yes, Dr. Morey, of course we know he ate the cookies if we can see the cookies "smeared over his face"! But to use your scenario, did the parent know the child ate the cookies or would eat the cookies *before* he saw the evidence "smeared over his face"? Morey did not address this question, and it was precisely the answer to this question in relation to the Genesis account that was put to him in response to his question about whether or not God was "surprised" by Adam's sin.

Again, my point had to do with whether or not God knew Adam would sin *before* he actually sinned. Not with whether or not God knew Adam sinned as God confronted Adam and Eve with the evidence 'smeared over their faces,' to use Morey's language. Of course Jehovah knew they had sinned after he saw them clothed and after he heard them speak of their nakedness. He certainly knew what had occurred when Adam answered him and told him what took place. But before he heard them speak about nakedness, before he saw them clothed, before they told him what they had done, the evidence from the Bible, the depiction in it of how Jehovah searched for and questioned them, shows that he did not know or choose to know what his creatures had done before he found them in the garden. He knew they were busy doing something, and no doubt he had hoped they were doing what he wanted them to do (see below), but the account suggests clearly that God did not choose to know what Adam and Eve had done before he saw the evidence himself, or before he spoke directly with Adam and Eve.

This in no way diminishes Jehovah's glory. It is his prerogative to trust that his servants will obey him and then find out whether or not they actually chose to obey him. If his creatures actually do something that he does not expect them to do, having given them so much and after asking for so little in return, it is not strange at all that we should find Jehovah "surprised" that people who should have known better, people who did know better, chose to do worse, much worse, than he expected.

It is important to remember how God reacted to Adam and Eve's sins. While Jehovah surely knew it was possible for creatures with thinking abilities to decide not to listen to him, no doubt the circumstances in Eden made this possibility seem quite remote. Consider: Jehovah created a beautiful earth and on it garden paradise (Genesis 1:1-25). Jehovah then created Adam and put him in the garden paradise allowing him to expand and to take care of it, and to enjoy all of its produce (Genesis 2:7-17). Jehovah also gave man dominion over all animals and all creatures of the earth with the pleasure and honor of naming each one (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:19-20). Then God complements Adam by creating woman, so that he would not "continue by himself" (Genesis 2:18, 21-25). There is no other way to look at it: Jehovah was a most loving Father, a generous Provider, and a magnificent God worthy of Adam's respect.

After all this, should Jehovah not have believed that Adam would listen to him rather than to anyone else, even Eve? Is it any great surprise to us that Jehovah was himself surprised by Adam's great lack of appreciation and disobedience? Indeed, "surprise" seems the only reasonable response under the circumstances! That is, in fact, just how the account in Genesis depicts Jehovah's disposition upon learning of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:8-13).

Jehovah was surprised by his human son's (Luke 3:38) disregard and disobedience. But he was not unprepared to deal with the undesired turns of events. He wanted Adam to fill the earth with children and to cultivate the paradise of Eden (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Now that Adam had sinned before having children, "before the founding of the world" (Genesis 4:1; compare Luke 11:50-51 where "*from* the founding [Greek: *apo kataboles*] of the world" is described further as "from Abel," one of Adam and Eve's children [to be discussed further in Part Three]), Jehovah would have to act against this rebellion and act he did.

Realizing what his creatures had done and what he must and would do to accomplish his purpose, Jehovah himself prophesied in Genesis 3:14-19. A prominent feature of his prophecy included a promised "seed" that would ultimately bring to an end the one who had lied and who became the slayer of men, the Devil, Satan (Genesis 3:4, 14-15; John 8:44). It is this "seed" that was further described in the book of Isaiah as one who would 'fill the earth with the knowledge of Jehovah' by judging "in the fear of Jehovah" (Isaiah 11:3-4, 9; compare Romans 15:12). The apostle Paul links this "seed" to that of God's friend Abraham by means of whom it is said, "all the families of the ground will certainly bless themselves" and Paul identifies the "seed" as "Christ" (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:16). Paul further states that all those who "belong to Christ . . . are really Abraham's seed, heirs with reference to a promise" (Galatians 3:29).

Thus, we have the foreknowledge of God with respect to the prophecy he decreed in Genesis 3:15 respecting this "seed" fulfilled in Jesus Christ and those who "belong to Christ." In the New Testament book of Romans Paul details a great deal more about God's knowledge respecting the promises he gave beforehand, and Paul also teaches us much about the will of mankind in relation to those same promises. Therefore, we turn now to the writings of Paul, in particular, to his letter "to the Romans," to see what it teaches about God's promises and how these relate to the nature and extent of God's knowledge, and whether or not mankind has "free will."

Note: As I explained in Part One, by "free will" I mean that men and women have the ability to make choices; they can decide what to do on their own, though there are many factors in life that can and do influence the decisions they make. God himself can and in my opinion does often influence the affairs of men and women, which was clearly seen from our study of the book of Isaiah in Part One, and which will also be evident here in Part Two, from Romans. True, mankind has the limitations of sin imposed upon us as an

inheritance from Adam (Romans 5:12). But while we are all at times “a slave of sin” (John 8:34) and thus subject to “hurtful desires” (Colossians 3:5) which themselves produce sin (James 1:14), each of us can still choose the “way out” (1 Corinthians 10:13) which God makes available to us. The sin is our own, as is the willful desire that gives birth to it, as we will see in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

## The Historicity of the Book of Romans

As noted in Part One, “historicity” refers here to a document’s historical value. Both Dr. Morey and I accept the letter to the Romans as a part of the New Testament. Whether it is the product of divine inspiration or not is not assumed as part of this discussion, though I openly admit that I believe Romans has been preserved as a part of the New Testament by God. Whether or not God directly inspired the writing of the letter to the Romans, I accept the letter as representative of early Christian teaching by a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ and one versed in the teachings of the Old Testament.

The letter itself appears to have been dictated by Paul through an associate of his named Tertius (Romans 16:22). There is nothing in the letter to indicate that Jerusalem had already been sacked by the Romans (which occurred in 70 CE). Therefore, the letter to the Romans was likely written several years or more before this event took place.

Commenting on the congregation to whom Romans was written, as well as on some of the historical facts related to the letter’s early transmission, the book *“All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial”* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1990), page 206, paragraphs 4–5, states:

The first reliable information about this congregation is found in Paul’s letter. It is clear from this that the congregation was made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians and that their zeal was praiseworthy. He tells them: “Your faith is talked about throughout the whole world,” and, “Your obedience has come to the notice of all.” (Rom. 1:8; 16:19) Suetonius, writing in the second century, reports that during the rule of Claudius (41–54 C.E.), the Jews were banished from Rome. They later returned, however, as is shown by the presence of Aquila and Priscilla in Rome. They were Jews whom Paul met in Corinth and who had left Rome at the time of Claudius’ decree but who were back in Rome at the time Paul wrote to the congregation there.—Acts 18:2; Rom. 16:3. The letter’s authenticity is firmly established. It is, as its introduction says, from “Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ and called to be an apostle, . . . to all those who are in Rome as God’s beloved ones, called to be holy ones.” (Rom. 1:1, 7) Its outside documentation is among the earliest to be found for the Christian Greek Scriptures. Peter uses so many similar expressions in his first letter, written probably six to eight years later, that many scholars think he must have already seen a copy of Romans. Romans was clearly regarded as a part of Paul’s writings and was cited as such by Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Ignatius of Antioch, all of whom lived in the late first and early second centuries C.E.

The letter to the Romans also has a wealth of early and varied textual support. In addition to being found completely in the Greek Codices Sinaiticus (4<sup>th</sup> century), Vaticanus (5<sup>th</sup> century), Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century), and the Uncial manuscript 0220 (late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, containing Romans 4:23–5:3, 8–13 [MS 113]), Romans has support from several early papyri, including P10 of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (supporting Romans 1:1–7), P27 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (supporting Romans 8:12–22, 24–27; 8:33–9:3, 5–9), P40 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (supporting Romans 1:24–27; 1:31–2:3; 3:21–4:8; 6:4–5, 16; 9:16–17, 27), P46 of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century (supporting Romans 5:17–6:14; 8:15–15:9; 15:11–16:27), and P113 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (supporting Romans 2:13–13, 29). Romans is also supported by several other language versions, such as the Syriac Peshitta of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Latin Vulgate manuscripts Codex Fuldensis of the middle 6<sup>th</sup> century, Codex Mediolanensis of the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, Codex Amiatinus of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, and Codex Cavensis of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, as well as other Latin manuscripts.

Additional Greek manuscript support for Romans could be cited, such as Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (5<sup>th</sup> century), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century), P26 of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century or early 7<sup>th</sup> century (supporting Romans 1:1–16), P31 of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (supporting Romans 12:3–8), P61 of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (supporting Romans 16:23–27), and P94 of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century or early 6<sup>th</sup> century (supporting Romans 6:10–13, 19–22), and a host of other manuscripts. But these and the earlier references should suffice to give support for the general textual credibility of Paul's letter to the Romans. With that in mind and with the historical period of the book already before us, I will now present my and Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the teaching of Romans regarding the nature and the extent of God's knowledge and whether or not mankind has "free will."

## **A Commentary on Romans Concerning God's Knowledge and Man's Will**

I will present the teaching of Paul as given in Romans by providing the results of a direct and complete reading of the letter, from Chapter 1 through Chapter 16, with the chapter and verses that to me have the most bearing on these two issues, together with my own observations and references to other relevant biblical texts as may be appropriate.

**Romans 1:1–7:** The letter to the Romans begins right away by identifying its author, Paul, who was "called to be an apostle, separated to God's good news, which he promised aforetime through his prophets in the holy scriptures" (verses 1–2). Paul thus shows that his calling relative to "God's good news" is in fulfillment of promises made by God long ago in the "holy scriptures," in this case, the Old Testament. God's promise is "concerning his Son" who came in the flesh "from the seed of David" (verse 3), who was 'resurrected from the dead, namely, "Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 4).

It is "through" this one that "mercy" or "underserved kindness" (NWT) has been given, as well as a ministry to and for those "among all the nations respecting his name" (verses

5–7). It is “to all those who are in Rome, beloved ones, called to be holy ones,” that Paul now writes.

**Romans 1:16:** This “good news” respecting the Christ is not something Paul is “ashamed” of, for “it is, in fact, God’s power for salvation to everyone having faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

**Romans 1:18–20:** By contrast, “God’s wrath is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who are suppressing the truth in an unrighteous way” (verse 18). These choose to ‘suppress the truth.’ It is their ‘way’ that is “unrighteous.” This is not due to ignorance on their part, for “what may be known about God is manifest among them, for God made it manifest to them” (verse 19). How? By the things “clearly seen from the world’s creation onward” (verse 20).

**Romans 1:24–32:** God’s wrath is expressed against those who have chosen to ‘keep with the desires of their heart’ (verse 24). These God ‘gives up’ because they choose to ‘exchange the truth of God for the lie’ (verses 25, 26). God does not ‘give them up’ before such persons make these decisions. He certainly, therefore, does not ‘give them up’ ‘from all eternity,’ as some today claim. When they choose to exchange “the truth of God for the lie,” it is then that God ‘gives them up.’

Those who choose to ‘leave the natural use of the male and the natural use of the female’ are given as examples of those will ‘receive in themselves full recompense, which is due for their error’ (verse 27). It is “their error,” resulting from the decisions they make, and thus a true “recompense.” We are all weak and subject to sinful desires (Romans 5:12; James 1:14). But “God’s wrath” is for those who though they could choose to listen to him and do what he says (which ends up benefiting the person, anyway), instead “become empty-headed in their reasonings and their unintelligent heart [becomes] darkened” (Romans 1:21). Again, these choose to follow “the desires of their hearts” (verse 24), not because of weakness, but because they make an ‘exchange’ [Greek: *metellaxan*] of the “the truth of God for the lie” (verse 25).

Because these same ones chose not to “approve of holding God in accurate knowledge,” God “gave them up to a disapproved mental state, to do the things not fitting” (verse 28). It is not as if these persons cannot see from the “world’s creation” that, for example, unnatural sexual acts are wrong. But it is a “lust” (verse 27) that they chose to let develop against the natural order of things, and any “lust” left unchecked can lead to an act or even the practice of such sin. Though God allows this to occur and though he gives these up “to do the things not fitting,” it is the persons involved who are responsible for “the desires of their hearts.”

Therefore, the punishment is deserving also for any of us who ignore the decrees of God found in nature and who practice such sin, but who do not repent:

Although these know full well the righteous decree of God, that those practicing such things are deserving of death, they not only keep on doing them but also consent with those practicing them [Romans 1:32].

**Romans 2:4–10:** In spite of this, “God is trying to lead [us] to repentance” (verse 4). But the “hardness and unrepentant heart” of some deserves God’s wrath (verse 5). That is why God will “render to each one according to his works” (verse 6). If we choose to endure “in work that is good,” he will grant us “everlasting life” (verses 7, 8; compare verse 10; 1 Peter 2:20). If, however, we do not “endure to the end” (Mark 13:13) or if we decide to “disobey the truth” then “there will be wrath and anger” (verse 8). The choice is ours. God the Father will never fail us, and if we “keep on doing these things [we] will by no means ever fail,” either (2 Peter 1:10; compare Matthew 7:21). But we must *choose* to “keep on doing these things,” in order to “make the calling and choosing of [us] sure for [ourselves]” (2 Peter 1:10).

**Romans 2:14–16:** God will even judge the “secret things of mankind” (verse 16) by ‘accusing or excusing’ those who are “a law to themselves.” He can determine if these choose to respond to the law “written on their hearts” based on how “their conscience” bears witness to “their own thoughts” (verse 15; compare Romans 9:1). Jehovah is watching the works we do and listening to the thoughts we think, and all the while our conscience bears witness for or against us.

**Romans 4:16–17:** Jehovah knows that his purposes will come to pass, for which we still pray (Matthew 6:10). It is he who “appointed” Abraham “father of many nations” (verse 17), this so “the promise [would be] sure to all his seed” (verse 16). That is why God is able to “call the things that are not as though they were” (verse 17) because he knows what they will be based on his appointments and decisions, this in spite of what some (for example, Adam and Eve) choose to do, namely, their own will and not that of God himself.

**Romans 5:1–5, 12–14, 18–21:** So it was that through the choice of “one man sin entered into the world and death through sin” (verse 12). But even though “death ruled as king from Adam down to Moses” (verse 14), and even though the Law ‘crept in’ so that “trespassing might abound” (verse 20), this was so that “underserved kindness [might] abound still more” (verse 20)! For “through our Lord Jesus Christ” we have been “declared righteous” (verse 1) so that while we still have “tribulations” we know that “tribulation produces endurance; endurance, in turn, an approved condition; the approved condition, in turn, hope, and the hope does not lead to disappointment” (verses 3–5).

**Romans 6:4, 6, 12:23:** For in being “declared righteous” we are no longer ‘slaves to sin.’ Before Christ was “raised up through the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4) we were subject to the “rule” of sin. But if sin was the king then we, our own person, were the subject. Our choices determined the extent of sin, though sin was inevitable. We might

win some battles, but we could never win the war as long as ‘sin ruled as king’ (verse 12). Thus, Joseph, though under the “rule” of sin (Romans 5:14) won a battle against sin (Genesis 39:9). His will won out in this instance over the rule of sin.

Now that Christ has come, however, we are under the rule of “underserved kindness” and sin is no longer “master over [us]” (verse 14). It is still a danger, as we will see (compare 2 Corinthians 11:3), but it is not our “master.” Because we no longer ‘present ourselves as slaves to sin’ by choosing to ‘obey it’ (verse 16), then in a greater way than Joseph before us we can ‘become obedient from the heart’ and present ourselves as “slaves to righteousness” (verses 17, 18), in exchange for which, “by Christ Jesus our Lord,” God gives us the ‘gift of everlasting life’ (verse 23).

**Romans 7:8, 15–25; 8:2:** Unlike Joseph, however, we can now escape the ‘rule of sin.’ For though sin “ruled as king from Adam down to Moses” (Romans 5:14), and in spite of the fact that sin “received an inducement though the commandment” for ‘working out’ sin in us (verse 8), we have since Christ been ‘set free’ from “the law of sin and death’ (8:2).

For though the ability “to will is present” (Greek: *to thelein parapkeita*) before Christ that “will” was at war with “another law” that led us “captive to sin’s law” (verses 15, 18, 23). Again, though there may have been a few occasions where “the law of [our] mind” (verse 23) won out against the “law of sin” (verse 23), before Christ sin was ‘at work’ (verse 8) in us so that what we would ‘will [Greek: *thelo*] is not what we would practice’ (verse 15). Thus, it is clear that before Christ we did have the “ability to wish” or to “will,” but we could not ‘work it out’ completely or always because sin was ‘at work’ in us. Thus, we could not gain mastery over sin, even if it was our “will,” since though our “mind” may have been a “slave to God’s law,” our ‘flesh was a slave to sin’s law’ (verse 25). The two were “warring” (verse 23). But this ‘war’ shows that man does indeed have free will, though his will was, before Christ, defeated by the power of sin.

**Romans 8:3–9:** But “God, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (verse 3). Now, as long as our will is not “in accord with the flesh but in accord with the spirit” (verse 4), then sin is no longer ‘at work’ in us (Romans 5:14), but rather “God’s spirit” is (verse 9, 11)! Now “the good that [we] wish [or, ‘will’]” we can do (Romans 7:19), that is, again, so long as we are “in accord with the spirit” (verse 5). But if our will is in “harmony with the flesh” then like those who follow the “desires of their hearts” (Romans 1:24) we “cannot please God” (verse 8).

**Romans 8:12–27:** Those who follow the ‘desires of their hearts’ *choose* to continue ‘living in accord with the flesh’ (verse 12). Those who live “in harmony ... with the spirit” (Romans 8:9) *choose* to “put the practices of the body to death by the spirit” (verse 13). Yet, even though we are now “led by God’s spirit” (verse 14) and though we have been

“set free from enslavement to corruption” (verse 21), we are still subject to the ‘weaknesses’ of our own “free will,” “the law of [our] mind” according to ‘the man or woman we are within’ (Romans 7:21–23), in association with our body members while in this world (verses 26–27). Therefore, while previously sin would have ‘worked out in us’ (Romans 5:14) the result of our sinful desires (compare James 1:14), now the “spirit also joins in with help for our weaknesses” (verse 26). The spirit now helps our “will” when it is weak in order to accomplish God’s will, similar in effect but different in quality to how before Christ sin ‘ruled as king’ causing us to ‘obey the desires of our mortal bodies’ (Romans 6:12).

The will of man, the “law of our mind,” was ‘present with us’ (Romans 7:18, 21–23) before Christ, but it was subject to the rule of sin. The will of man is present in us now, but subject either to ‘the desires of our hearts’ (Romans 1:24) or the ‘leading of God’s spirit’ (verse 14). We must always be watchful of ourselves ‘as to how we walk’ (Ephesians 5:15), however, for even after being declared righteous we could find ourselves ignoring the ‘pleadings’ of God’s spirit (verses 26–27) and sinning and causing others to sin (2 Corinthians 11:3; Galatians 2:11–14). If such persons do not “cease becoming unreasonable” (Ephesians 5:17) or if they are not ‘readjusted’ (Galatians 6:1), they could ‘fall away’ never to be ‘revived’ “*again* to repentance” (Hebrews 6:6; emphasis added).

**Romans 8:28–30:** God has “called” people “according to his purpose” (verse 28), not by simply waiting idly for events to unfold, but by ‘foreknowing’ (Greek: *pro’egno*) what will occur and even ‘defining beforehand’ (Greek: *pro’orisen*) those who would become the “many brothers” of his Son (verse 29). God has foreknown and “chosen” such persons “before the founding of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Jesus himself defined the “founding of the world” in Luke 11:50–51, when he said, “the blood of all the prophets spilled from the founding of the world may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zechariah.” Thus, the “founding of the world” is from the time of “Abel,” one of the first two children of Adam and Eve. But since Abel was the first “prophet” whose “blood was spilled” he is named, not Cain, with respect to the time referenced in Luke 11:50–51 (see Part Three of this series for more on the biblical meaning of “the founding of the world”).

After Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled against God, after doing what he expressly told them he did not want them to do (Genesis 2:15–17; 3:2–3), Jehovah immediately set into motion the means of reconciling mankind to himself, that is, through the promised “seed” (Genesis 3:14–15), his Son. In association with this prophecy Jehovah also ‘foreknew [Greek: form of *proginosko*]’ Christ’s sacrifice “before the founding of the world” (1 Peter 1:19–20). The certainty that the prophecy of the promised “seed” would ‘crush Satan in the head’ was such that, even as the promised “seed” was also to include those who “belong to Christ . . . heirs with reference to a promise” (Galatians 3:29), a ‘kingdom has also been prepared from the founding of the world (Matthew 25:43).

Without getting into too much detail concerning the biblical basis for the different hopes some Christians today express, namely, of living either in the biblical “new heavens” or in the biblical “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1–4), as that is not the focus of this debate, God has “foreknown” and even “defined beforehand” those who will belong to the promised “seed,” either as a class or as individuals. He knows “beforehand” those who are “patterned after the image of his Son” (verse 29) because he made them (compare Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5). He ‘defined them beforehand’ even as he made his Son according to his own image (Colossians 1:15) and, thus, he could prophesy about what his Son would do though his Son still had to do it.

Regarding the different hopes some Christians today express I will say this: I believe Paul and those to whom he wrote are a part of a specially sealed “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) that is either literally or symbolically given the number 144,000 in the book of Revelation 7:4–8; 14:1–5. The 144,000 of Revelation are clearly linked with those who were “slaughtered because of the word of God and because of the witness work they used to have” if you compare Revelation 6:9–11 with Revelation 7:3–4. Those “sealed” in Revelation 7:4–8 are from what is likely a symbolic depiction of the twelve tribes of Israel, even as James appears to speak symbolically of the “twelve tribes that are scattered about” (James 1:1). In Revelation 14:4 the 144,000 are described as 1) “virgins”; 2) “firstfruits”; and 3) “without blemish” (Greek: *amomos*). Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says that he “promised [them] in marriage to one husband that [he] might present [them] as a chaste *virgin* to the Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2; emphasis added). Therefore, it would appear that this ‘virginity’ is a spiritual type. James refers to the “twelve tribes scattered about” (again, James 1:1) as “certain firstfruits” (James 1:18). And Paul refers to the “holy ones” as “without blemish” (Greek: form of *amomos* [Ephesians 1:4; 5:27]). Christ himself was “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” but “afterward those who belong to the Christ during his presence” would be raised up from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20–23). Similarly the 144,000 appear to be “certain firstfruits” who come from the “twelve tribes scattered about,” with others who come, not out of these literal or symbolic “tribes of Israel,” but “out of the great tribulation” (Revelation 7:13–14). Then there is also the resurrection of those who will ‘sit on thrones’ for “the thousand years,” compared with those who ‘do not come to life until the thousand years are ended’ (Revelation 20:4–6). Therefore, there does appear to be a basis for believing that the “new heaven” is not the same as the “new earth,” but that they are distinct yet related for “*in these*” (literally, “in which ones” [Greek: *en hois* (note: plural)]), not “in this” (or “in which”), as if the “new heavens” and the “new earth” are somehow locationally one place, “righteousness is to dwell” (2 Peter 3:13). In the end, we can be sure, all will be made clear (Revelation 20:12).

Returning to Romans 8, the Greek word for ‘define beforehand’ used in Romans 8:29 is the Greek verb *pro’orizo*, which basically means to “foreordain.” Since the “purpose” (verse 28) of God relative to the “seed” and those ‘belonging to Christ’ was first spoken of “before the founding of the world,” but after Adam and Eve sinned, so, too, the

foreordaining of those “after the image of his Son” (verse 29) was done after Adam and Eve sinned but “before the founding of the world.”

**Romans 9:6–13:** God foretold that through Abraham’s seed “all the families of the ground [would] bless themselves” (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:1–8). In Romans 9:6–13 Paul shows that this promise was extended through Abraham’s son Isaac and ultimately will be fulfilled not merely according to “the children in the flesh” but that “the children by the promise are counted as the seed” (verse 8), since “not all who [spring] from Israel are really ‘Israel’” (verse 6). For God is the one who chooses those befitting his “purpose” (verse 11). He is able to do this before those belonging to his promise are even “born, nor had practiced anything good or vile” (verse 11). For such choices are not dependent “upon works,” as if we could ever earn a part in “the purpose of God” (verse 11). Rather, it depends entirely on God, “the One who calls,” and whether or not he ‘loves’ or ‘hates’ the person based on who he knows they will become because of the decisions they make, as in the case of Jacob and Esau (verses 11–12).

We do not decide to be a part of God’s purpose just because of what we decide to do. God decides because of how he feels about us based on the decisions we make. That is why he will express his affection or his wrath because of the “works” (Romans 2:6) we do from the ‘heart’ (Romans 2:15):

For he is not a Jew who is one on the outside, nor is circumcision that which is on the outside upon the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one on the inside, and [his] circumcision is that of the heart by spirit, and not by a written code. The praise of that one comes, not from men, but from God [Romans 2:28–29].

Thus, we are either “accused or even excused” (Romans 2:15). We are either “loved” or “hated” (Romans 9:13). God alone will decide.

**Romans 9:14–18:** God will have “mercy upon whomever [he] will have mercy, and [he] will show compassion to whomever [he] will show compassion” (verse 15). The mercy is never ‘dependent upon the one wishing or upon the one running, but on God’ (verse 16). We can never “wish,” “will,” or ‘run’ ourselves into his mercy. It will always be dependent upon God. Those to whom he chooses not to show mercy, like Pharaoh in Moses’ time (Exodus 7:14; 10:1), he “lets become obstinate” (verse 18) because of their own heart, this so that his “name may be declared in all the earth” (verse 17).

**Romans 9:19–26:** We should never question the “express will” (verse 19) of God when it comes to his mercy or his allowing a person to “become obstinate” (Romans 9:18). God is able to ‘prepare beforehand’ (verse 23 [Greek: form of the *Greek* verb *pro’etoimazo*]) those who will be “vessels of wrath” (verse 22) and those who will be “vessels of mercy” (verse 23). He has done this either “before the founding of the world” in connection with the promised “seed,” or sometime “from the founding of the world” as his purpose unfolded and he chose among all the ‘families of the earth’ the kinds of persons whom

he wanted to be merciful towards, knowing that such persons would appear among “all the families of the earth” which he prepared beforehand. Jehovah molded and continues to mold people as a ‘Potter’ ‘molds’ the “clay” (Genesis 3:14–15; Luke 11:50–51; Acts 3:25; Romans 9:21; Ephesians 1:4–5).

Again, mankind is as “clay” in Jehovah’s hands when it comes to producing ‘vessels’ fit for his purposes (Romans 9:21–23). In “Part One: Isaiah,” it was noted that Jehovah demonstrated his power as a great “Potter” also in the days of Jeremiah when he shaped and molded people, even entire nations, in order to influence the thinking of his people, to cause them to turn back to him and *choose* to respond to his work (Jeremiah 18:1–12). Indeed, Adam was the first ‘clay lump,’ as he was “formed from the dust’ or “clay” (Hebrew: *‘aphar*). But he was not just “clay.” He also became “a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).

The “Potter” made Adam to “be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it, and have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28), and to not eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad” (Genesis 2:17). Yet, the “clay” disobeyed the “Potter” who had put life and death before Adam, for him to choose (compare Genesis 3:3). So, too, Jehovah has acted toward the “clay” he has since formed:

*“See, I do put before you today life and good, and death and bad. [If you will listen to the commandments of Jehovah your God,] which I am commanding you today, so as to love Jehovah your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judicial decisions, then you will be bound to keep alive and to multiply, and Jehovah your God must bless you in the land to which you are going to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away and you do not listen, and you are actually seduced and bow down to other gods and serve them, I do tell YOU today that YOU will positively perish. YOU will not lengthen YOUR days on the ground to which you are crossing the Jordan to go to take possession of it. I do take the heavens and the earth as witnesses against YOU today, that I have put life and death before you, the blessing and the malediction; and you must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you and your offspring, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him; for he is your life and the length of your days, that you may dwell upon the ground that Jehovah swore to your forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give to them” [Deuteronomy 30:15–20; emphasis added].*

The “clay” is indeed “a living soul,” capable of ‘walking in Jehovah’s ways,’ capable of ‘listening and not letting our heart turn away,’ not completely, not perfectly, but to an extent that if we “*choose* [Hebrew: form of *bachar*] *life*” and ‘listen to Jehovah’s voice and stick to him’ he will be our “life.”

Jehovah could know all of the families of persons that would develop from Adam and Eve, both before they sinned and, of course, after they had sinned. He chose those who would choose to listen to him and thus “choose life,” even though they would not be

without any sin. Jehovah made us and chooses those who choose him, whom he makes into “vessels of mercy” (Romans 9:23), vessels in whom he has “found delight” that they might fulfill his “purpose” for the sake of his “glory” (Numbers 14:8; 2 Samuel 22:20 [Psalm 18:19]; Romans 8:28; 9:11; 9:23). But if the “clay” should ever say to the Potter, “Why did you make me this way?” (Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:20) and follow the “desires of their hearts,” then God will ‘give them up’ (Romans 1:24) as “vessels of wrath” (Romans 9:22) by molding them accordingly at the point of their departure “as they did not approve of holding God in accurate knowledge” (Romans 1:28).

After all, the Potter does not merely form the clay at birth, but even throughout the course of the existence of man and nations (Jeremiah 18:6) he continues to “mold” us like “clay.”

**Romans 9:27–33:** Thus, God “will make an accounting of the earth” (verse 28; quoting Isaiah 10:22–23) and ‘the remnant will be saved’ (verse 27). For though God “left a seed” to Israel, though he ‘offered his hand even a second time to acquire the remnant’ (Isaiah 11:11), they did not ‘pursue a law of righteousness’ by “faith” (verse 32). Thus, this “remnant” will now include “people of the nations” (verse 30).

**Romans 10:1–3:** For “because of [fleshly Israel’s] not knowing the righteousness of God but seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God” (verse 3).

**Romans 10:9–10:** But even though they “stumbled on the ‘stone of stumbling’” (Romans 9:32) Israel can still be saved both through individual Jews who choose to “publicly declare that ‘word in [their] own mouth,’ that Jesus is Lord, and exercise faith in [their] heart that God raised him up from the dead” (verse 9), and by those who were “grafted in among them” (Romans 11:17; compare 11:25–26).

**Romans 11:21–23:** That is, “provided [they] *remain* in his kindness” (verse 22; emphasis added), for “otherwise [they] also will be lopped off” (verse 22). But those who have been “lopped off” can also be “grafted in” again, provided “they do not *remain* in their lack of faith” (verse 23; emphasis added).

**Romans 11:29:** “For the gifts and calling of God are not things he will regret.”

**Romans 13:3–4:** But those of us who choose to “keep doing good” (verse 3) and who do not choose to do “what is bad” (verse 4) can make Jehovah “feel regret for the calamity that [he was] thinking to execute upon [us]” because we ‘listened and returned, each one from his bad way’ (Jeremiah 26:3).

**Romans 14:12:** In any event, “each of us will render an account for himself to God.”

**Romans 15:5–6:** But God does not leave us all to ourselves. He is a loving God who responds to his people by ‘supplying endurance and comfort’ and who will even “grant you to have among yourselves the same mental attitude that Christ Jesus had, that with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

## Conclusion

The book of Romans is as clear as the book of Isaiah on the subjects of God’s knowledge and the will of man. Jehovah God is able to “call the things that are not as though they were” (Romans 4:17) because he is a God of true prophecy. He gave the prophecy of the “seed” in Genesis 3:15 and he “appointed” people, like “Abraham,” to be “father of many nations” so that through him and his “seed” ‘the promise would be sure’ (Romans 4:16–17). God makes it sure by ‘molding’ people and nations as if they were “clay” and he the “Potter” (Romans 9:21–23).

But at times the “clay” follows the “desires of their hearts” (Romans 1:24). When this happens God ‘gives them up to a disapproved mental state’ because “they did not approve of holding God in accurate knowledge” (Romans 1:28). The first ‘clay lumps’ to follow the ‘desires of their hearts’ and not the will and commands of God were Adam and Eve. Though God made them perfect, though they were ‘in his image’ and “blessed” by him (Genesis 1:26–28), they *chose* to “disobey the truth” and thus they incurred God’s “wrath and anger” and were ‘given up’ as a “recompense” (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:3, 6–7, 9–13, 16–19; Romans 1:27; 2:8). They did not have to listen to Satan. They did not have to eat from the tree of “the knowledge of good and bad.” But they chose to “follow the desires of their hearts.”

Still, not all of the clay is unusable, and certainly God’s purpose for mankind or for the earth will not be kept from ever being realized because of the decisions of some. Jehovah did not put in motion laws that he could not himself follow to his own glory when others could not. The decisions of Adam and Eve were inexcusable and God did what was legally necessary according to his own standards for reconciliation under the circumstances: He prophesied about another “Adam,” the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45) who would redeem mankind and destroy the “wicked one” (Genesis 3:15; Romans 8:3).

Since Jehovah gave the prophecy of this promised “seed,” he has been working with and molding ‘vessels of wrath’ and ‘vessels of mercy’ for his glory and “according to his purpose” (Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 8:28; 9:21). All of such vessels are and can continue to be ‘molded’ by God as he watches to see if ‘with our mind’ we will be a “slave to God’s law” or if ‘with our mind’ we will follow our “flesh,” which is a slave to “sin’s law” (Romans 7:25). That is why God will “render to each one according to his works” (Romans 2:6).

Indeed, since the time of his prophecy in Genesis 3:15 Jehovah God has been keeping a record, a “scroll of life from the founding of the world” (Revelation 17:8) which, consistent with Paul’s teaching in Romans (2:6), gives the basis for judgment of people, “the great and the small,” before God “according to their deeds” (Revelation 20:12).

In Part Three of this series on the knowledge of God and the will of man, we will consider what the Bible teaches about how and why people are written into this scroll, and how and why they can be “wiped out” of it (Psalm 69:28; compare Revelation 3:5). The consequences of both are directly related to the knowledge of God and to the will of man.

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(REVISED April 19, 2008)\*

**\*This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**