

# Faith, Agency, and Pharaoh's Heart

*A Latter-day Saint Apologetics Deep Dive*

*Examining Calvinism, Irresistible Grace, the Greek of Ephesians 2:8,  
the Hebrew of Exodus, and the Restored Gospel's Defense of Agency*

*"Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself.  
Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be  
that he was enticed by the one or the other."*

*— 2 Nephi 2:16*

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## PART I

# "God Gives Us Faith" — The Calvinist Argument Examined

*The Question: Does God sovereignly bestow faith upon the elect, making human choice irrelevant to salvation? Or does God extend the invitation and capacity for faith to all people, honoring their agency to respond?*

## The Calvinist Claim

Reformed theology—commonly called **Calvinism**—teaches that fallen humanity is so utterly depraved that no person can, by their own will, choose to have faith in God. This is the doctrine of **Total Depravity**: the belief that sin has so corrupted every faculty of the human soul that, apart from a sovereign act of God, no one would ever turn to Christ. Faith, in this framework, is not something a person exercises—it is something **God unilaterally implants** in those He has chosen before the foundation of the world.

The cornerstone proof text for this claim is **Ephesians 2:8–9**. Calvinists read it as: *God gives you faith, because you are too depraved to generate it yourself*. But does the Greek text actually say that? Let us examine the passage with care.

## Ephesians 2:8–9 — Greek Grammatical Analysis

### The Text in Multiple Translations

#### *King James Version*

*"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." — Ephesians 2:8–9 (KJV)*

#### *English Standard Version*

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." — Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)*

#### *New American Standard Bible*

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast." — Ephesians 2:8–9 (NASB)*

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## What Does "It" Refer To? The Tauto Problem

The Calvinist argument hinges on a single word: "it" (or "that" / "this") in the phrase "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Calvinists claim the pronoun refers back to "faith" (πίστεως, *pisteōs*), making faith itself the gift God gives to the elect.

But Greek grammar tells a different story. The demonstrative pronoun in question is **ταῦτο** (*touto*), which is **neuter singular**. Here is the critical point:

Greek Word	Meaning	Gender	Matches ταῦτο?
χάριτι ( <i>chariti</i> )	grace	Feminine	<b>NO</b>
πίστεως ( <i>pisteōs</i> )	faith	Feminine	<b>NO</b>
ταῦτο ( <i>touto</i> )	this/that	<b>Neuter</b>	—
σωτηρία ( <i>sōtēria</i> )	salvation	Feminine	Concept match

Both "grace" (χάρις) and "faith" (πίστις) are **feminine** nouns in Greek. The pronoun ταῦτο is **neuter**. In standard Greek grammar, a pronoun agrees with its antecedent in **gender and number**. If Paul had intended to say "faith is the gift," he would have used the **feminine** demonstrative αὐτή (*hautē*), not the neuter ταῦτο.

So what does ταῦτο refer to? **The entire preceding clause**. When a Greek neuter demonstrative pronoun does not match any single noun in gender, it characteristically refers to the **whole idea** just expressed. The clause is: "by grace you have been saved through faith." **That whole reality—salvation by grace through faith—is the gift of God.**

As the Grace Evangelical Society's analysis puts it: "**Grace is not the gift—it is the basis of the gift. Faith is not the gift—it is the means by which the gift is received. Salvation is the gift.**" Even John Calvin himself, in his commentary on Ephesians, interpreted the "gift" as **salvation**, not faith.

## The Implications

This is devastating to the Calvinist reading. If ταῦτο referred to faith, it would mean God gives faith to some and withholds it from others—making God the author of unbelief and damnation. But Paul's actual point is far more beautiful: **the entire arrangement of salvation—grace extended, faith exercised, sins forgiven—is a gift from God**. God designed the plan. God provided the Savior. God offers the grace. But **you** exercise the faith.

## Other Calvinist Proof Texts

### Philippians 1:29

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." — **Philippians 1:29 (KJV)**

Calvinists argue this proves God "gives" belief. But the Greek verb **ἐχαρίσθη** (*echaristhē*) means "it has been graciously granted"—it speaks of **privilege and opportunity**, not irresistible compulsion. Paul is telling the Philippians that they have been granted the **privilege** of both believing and suffering for Christ. The same word is used for suffering—and no one claims God forces suffering irresistibly upon people.

## John 6:44

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." — **John 6:44 (KJV)**

Calvinists read "draw" (**ἐλκύσει**, *helkysē*) as irresistible compulsion. But the same Greek word appears in **John 12:32**: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will **draw all men** unto me." If "draw" means irresistibly compel, then **all people** would be saved—which even Calvinists deny. The drawing is a **powerful invitation**, not an override of will.

## Romans 9 — Jacob and Esau

"(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." — **Romans 9:11–12 (KJV)**

This is perhaps the Calvinist's strongest text. But context is crucial. Paul is discussing **national election**—God's choice of Israel as a covenant people—not individual salvation or damnation. The original prophecy (Genesis 25:23) concerned **two nations**, not two individuals' eternal fates. The Latter-day Saint understanding of **foreordination** (Alma 13:3–5, Abraham 3:22–23) explains that God's foreknowledge of individuals' choices in the premortal life informs His assignments of mortal roles and responsibilities, without overriding mortal agency.

## The TULIP Framework and Its Problems

Calvinism is often summarized by the acronym **TULIP**. Let us examine each petal and the problems it creates:

Doctrine	Calvinist Claim	LDS Response
Total Depravity	Humans are so fallen they cannot choose God	The Light of Christ is given to all (Moroni 7:16), enabling every person to recognize truth
Unconditional Election	God chooses who will be saved regardless of their choices	"God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34); foreordination is based on foreknowledge, not arbitrary decree

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<b>Limited Atonement</b>	Christ died only for the elect	Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); He "died for all" (2 Cor 5:14)
<b>Irresistible Grace</b>	The elect cannot resist God's call	"There is a possibility that man may fall from grace" (D&C 20:32); agency is preserved
<b>Perseverance of Saints</b>	The elect can never lose salvation	Names can be "blotted out" of the book of life (Ex 32:33, Rev 3:5); enduring to the end is required (Matt 10:22)

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## PART II

# The Restored Gospel's Defense of Agency and Faith

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## Agency: The Core Doctrine

If there is one doctrine that sits at the absolute center of Latter-day Saint theology, it is **moral agency**—the God-given capacity and right to choose. Agency is not a peripheral teaching. It is **the reason the war in heaven was fought**. It is the reason we are here on earth. It is the principle that Lucifer sought to destroy and that the Father's plan was designed to preserve.

### 2 Nephi 2: Lehi's Masterwork on Agency

*"Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other." — 2 Nephi 2:16 (Book of Mormon)*

*"Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil." — 2 Nephi 2:27*

Lehi's theology is breathtaking in its clarity. God **gave** agency. It was not an accident or a byproduct. Opposition exists **so that** agency can function. Without the ability to choose between good and evil, "righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad" (2 Nephi 2:11). Agency requires real options, real consequences, and a real capacity to choose.

### Moses 4:3 — Satan's Rejected Plan

*"Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down." — Moses 4:3 (Pearl of Great Price)*

This verse is enormously significant. Satan's sin was not merely pride—it was **the attempt to destroy agency**. He wanted to force all humanity to obey, removing the possibility of choice. God rejected this plan so forcefully that Lucifer was cast out of heaven. If God Himself went to war to **preserve** agency, how can we believe He then overrides it through irresistible grace or unconditional election?

### D&C; 93:30–31 — Agency Is Eternal

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*"All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man." — D&C 93:30–31*

This is perhaps the most philosophically profound statement on agency in all of scripture. Agency is not merely a temporary mortal gift—it is **co-eternal with intelligence itself**. Without the capacity to act for oneself, "there is no existence." Agency is ontologically fundamental. God did not create agency; He organized a plan that **honors and protects** it.

## Faith as a Choice — Alma 32

Alma's sermon to the Zoramites (Alma 32) is the Book of Mormon's most detailed treatise on the **nature of faith**. It stands in direct contrast to the Calvinist model in every particular.

### The Experiment

*"But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my word." — Alma 32:27*

Notice the verbs Alma uses: **awake, arouse, experiment, exercise, desire, give place**. Every single verb is an action that **the individual** performs. Alma is not describing a passive reception of irresistibly implanted faith. He is describing a **deliberate, chosen process** of spiritual investigation.

The Calvinist would say: "You cannot even desire to believe without God first giving you that desire." Alma says: "If ye can no more than **desire to believe**, let this desire work in you." The desire is treated as something the person **already has** or can choose to cultivate. The starting point is the individual's willingness, however small.

### The Seed Grows by Nourishment, Not Force

*"Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts." — Alma 32:28*

The seed (God's word) is offered to all. But **you** must "give place" for it. **You** must not "cast it out by your unbelief." The growth is a collaboration: God provides the seed, the individual provides the soil of a willing heart. Neither party acts alone. This is the Latter-day Saint model of faith: **divine gift meets human choice**.

## God Invites, Draws, Enables — But Does Not Force

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Latter-day Saints do not deny that God plays an active, essential role in the process of faith. We wholeheartedly affirm that without God's grace, no one could be saved. The disagreement with Calvinism is not about whether God acts—it is about **whether God forces**.

God **invites**: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28). God **draws**: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). God **enables**: He gives the Light of Christ to every person (Moroni 7:16; D&C 84:46). God **persuades**: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness" (D&C 121:41).

But God does **not** compel. He does not override. He does not implant faith against a person's will, nor does He withhold the capacity for faith from those He has pre-selected for destruction.

## The Resolution: Capacity vs. Exercise

Here is how Latter-day Saint theology elegantly resolves the tension between divine sovereignty and human agency:

**God gives every person the CAPACITY for faith.** This is the Light of Christ—"the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things" (D&C 88:13). It is given universally, without exception. Moroni 7:16 declares that "the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil." This is not Total Depravity. This is **total endowment**—every soul comes to earth equipped with the spiritual capacity to recognize truth.

**But the individual must CHOOSE to exercise that capacity.** The capacity is the gift. The exercise is the choice. God provides the light; you choose whether to walk toward it or away from it. God plants the desire; you choose whether to nourish it or extinguish it. God extends the hand; you choose whether to take it.

This model preserves **both** the biblical truth that salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8) **and** the equally biblical truth that God "commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30)—a command that makes no sense if humans lack the ability to respond.

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## PART III

# Pharaoh's Hardened Heart — A Deep Dive

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*The Question: Did God override Pharaoh's free will and force him to reject Moses, or did Pharaoh harden his own heart first — with God subsequently confirming Pharaoh in the path he had already chosen?*

## The Significance of This Question

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is one of the most frequently cited passages in all of Calvinist theology. If God "hardened Pharaoh's heart" in the sense of **overriding his free will**, then the Calvinist system gains powerful biblical support: God can and does determine who will reject Him. But if the Hebrew text tells a more nuanced story—one where **Pharaoh chose his own path first** and God simply confirmed him in it—then the passage actually supports the Latter-day Saint understanding of agency.

## Every Hardening Reference in Exodus

There are approximately **20 references** to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the book of Exodus. Three different Hebrew words are used, and the subject of the hardening varies. Here is the complete catalogue:

Reference	Who Hardens?	Hebrew Word	Meaning	Context
Ex 4:21	God (predictive)	chazaq	strengthen	God tells Moses what will happen
Ex 7:3	God (predictive)	qashah	make stiff	God predicts He will harden
<b>Ex 7:13</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	chazaq	strengthen	<b>Staff-to-serpent; Pharaoh hardens himself</b>
<b>Ex 7:14</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	kabed	heavy/dull	<b>Described as "heavy"</b>
<b>Ex 7:22</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	chazaq	strengthen	<b>Plague 1 — Water to blood</b>
<b>Ex 8:15</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	kabed	heavy/dull	<b>Plague 2 — Frogs; Pharaoh hardens himself</b>
<b>Ex 8:19</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	chazaq	strengthen	<b>Plague 3 — Lice/gnats</b>
<b>Ex 8:32</b>	<b>Pharaoh</b>	kabed	heavy/dull	<b>Plague 4 — Flies; Pharaoh hardens himself</b>

Ex 9:7	Pharaoh	kabed	heavy/dull	Plague 5 — Livestock disease
Ex 9:12	God (first active)	chazaq	strengthen	Plague 6 — Boils; <b>first time God actively hardens</b>
Ex 9:34–35	Pharaoh	kabed / chazaq	heavy / strengthen	Plague 7 — Hail; Pharaoh hardens again
Ex 10:1	God	kabed	heavy/dull	Plague 8 — Locusts announced
Ex 10:20	God	chazaq	strengthen	Plague 8 — Locusts
Ex 10:27	God	chazaq	strengthen	Plague 9 — Darkness
Ex 11:10	God	chazaq	strengthen	Summary before Plague 10
Ex 14:4	God	chazaq	strengthen	Pursuit to Red Sea
Ex 14:8	God	chazaq	strengthen	Pharaoh pursues Israel
Ex 14:17	God	chazaq	strengthen	Egyptians follow into sea

## Hebrew Word Study: Chazaq, Kabed, Qashah

### חָזַק (Chazaq) — "To Strengthen, Make Firm"

This is the most frequently used word for hardening in the Exodus narrative. Its root meaning is **to strengthen, to make firm, to make resolute**. Outside the Pharaoh narrative, chazaq is used **positively** throughout scripture—"Be strong (*chazaq*) and of good courage" (Joshua 1:6). When God "strengthened" Pharaoh's heart, the word itself does not inherently mean "forced to be evil." It means God **made firm what was already there**. God strengthened Pharaoh's resolve—a resolve Pharaoh had already demonstrated through multiple plagues of self-chosen resistance.

### כָּבֵד (Kabed) — "To Make Heavy, Dull, Insensible"

Kabed comes from the root meaning **heavy, weighty**. (It is related to **kavod**, the Hebrew word for "glory" — literally, "weightiness.") When Pharaoh's heart is described as *kabed*, it means his heart became **heavy, sluggish, unresponsive** to the promptings of conscience and the evidence of God's power. Critically, in the early plagues, it is **Pharaoh himself** who makes his heart kabed (Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:7). His heart grew dull **by his own choice**.

### קָשָׁה (Qashah) — "To Make Stiff, Obstinate"

Qashah appears only in Exodus 7:3, where God predicts that He will "make stiff" Pharaoh's heart. This word carries the sense of **stubbornness, rigidity, obstinacy**. It is used elsewhere for stiff-necked people who refuse to listen. Again, the word describes a **disposition** that is already present being confirmed and

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intensified—not a new disposition being artificially created.

## Who Hardened First? The Sequence Matters

This is the single most important observation in the entire Pharaoh debate, and it is one that Calvinist interpreters consistently overlook or minimize:

**In every one of the first five plagues, PHARAOH hardens his own heart.**

Exodus 7:13 — Pharaoh's heart was firm (chazaq) — *he would not listen*

Exodus 7:22 — Pharaoh's heart was firm (chazaq)

Exodus 8:15 — Pharaoh made his heart heavy (kated) — *he hardened his heart*

Exodus 8:19 — Pharaoh's heart was firm (chazaq)

Exodus 8:32 — Pharaoh made his heart heavy (kated) — *he hardened his heart*

Exodus 9:7 — Pharaoh's heart was heavy (kated)

**God does not actively harden Pharaoh's heart until the sixth plague (Exodus 9:12)—after Pharaoh has already hardened himself six times.**

The pattern is unmistakable. **Pharaoh chose his course first.** He refused to listen. He made his heart heavy and dull. He stiffened his resolve against God's messengers. Only **after** Pharaoh had thoroughly demonstrated his character did God begin to "strengthen" (chazaq) that character. God did not create Pharaoh's stubbornness—He **confirmed** it.

## "God Hardened" — What It Actually Means

So what does it mean when the text says "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart"? Several complementary explanations emerge from the Hebrew text and its theological context:

### 1. God Created the Circumstances That Revealed Pharaoh's Heart

Each plague was a test—an opportunity for Pharaoh to relent. **The same sun that melts wax hardens clay.** God's demonstrations of power were not designed to force Pharaoh into rebellion; they were designed to give him the opportunity to submit. Pharaoh's existing disposition was **revealed** by the circumstances God created. In this sense, God "hardened" Pharaoh by giving him the very evidence that should have softened him but instead provoked his pride.

### 2. God Withdrew His Restraining Spirit

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This interpretation aligns with **Romans 1:24–28**, where Paul describes how God responds to persistent rebellion: "Wherefore **God also gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts" (Romans 1:24). "God **gave them over** to a reprobate mind" (Romans 1:28). When a person persistently rejects God's influence, God eventually honors that choice by **withdrawing His restraining Spirit**. The person is left to their own devices—which, without divine restraint, naturally hardens into deeper rebellion.

*"And the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction." — 2 Nephi 26:11*

In LDS theology, this is a well-established principle. The Spirit strives with all people, but those who persistently reject it will eventually find it withdrawn. This is not God overriding their will—it is God **respecting** their will by ceasing to oppose it.

### 3. Hebrew Causative Language Is Broader Than English

Hebrew often attributes to God things that God **permits** rather than directly **causes**. This is a well-documented feature of biblical Hebrew. The Old Testament frequently says "God did X" when the meaning is "God allowed X to happen" or "God created the conditions under which X occurred." When we read "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart," the Hebrew allows for the reading: "the Lord allowed Pharaoh's heart to become hard" or "the Lord created the situation in which Pharaoh's heart became hard."

### 4. God Knew Pharaoh's Character — Foreknowledge, Not Predestination

From the Latter-day Saint perspective, God's foreknowledge is perfect. He knew before the first plague what Pharaoh would choose. His statement to Moses—"I will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 4:21)—is a **prediction based on perfect foreknowledge**, not a decree that overrides Pharaoh's will. God knew the kind of man Pharaoh was. He knew that the plagues would not soften him but would instead reveal his intransigence. God's "hardening" was His foreknown plan to use Pharaoh's freely chosen stubbornness as the backdrop for the deliverance of Israel.

#### Romans 1:24–28 — "God Gave Them Over"

*"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves." — Romans 1:24 (KJV)*

*"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." — Romans 1:28 (KJV)*

Paul's language in Romans 1 provides the single best parallel for understanding Pharaoh's hardening. Notice the sequence Paul describes:

**Step 1:** People knew God but did not glorify Him or give thanks (v. 21) — *human choice*.

**Step 2:** They became vain in their imaginations and their hearts were darkened (v. 21) — *consequence of*

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*choice.*

**Step 3:** They changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped the creature (v. 25) — *deepening rebellion.*

**Step 4:** God gave them up / gave them over (vv. 24, 26, 28) — *God honors their choice by withdrawing.*

This is exactly the Pharaoh pattern. **Pharaoh chose rejection first. God confirmed the choice by withdrawing.** The "hardening" is God's response to human rebellion, not the cause of it.

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## PART IV

# Does God Force People to Reject or Choose Him?

*The Question: If Calvinism is true—if God predestines some to salvation and others to damnation, with no regard for their choices—then is God just? Is He loving? And what do the scriptures actually say?*

## Biblical Evidence for Universal Invitation

The Bible is replete with passages declaring that God desires the salvation of **all** people—not just a pre-selected elect. These verses are deeply problematic for Calvinism and perfectly consistent with Latter-day Saint theology.

### 1 Timothy 2:3–4

*"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." — 1 Timothy 2:3–4 (KJV)*

*"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." — 1 Timothy 2:3–4 (ESV)*

If God **desires all people to be saved** but has predestined most to damnation, then either God's desires are frustrated (undermining His sovereignty) or His stated desire is not genuine (undermining His honesty). Calvinism cannot escape this dilemma.

### 2 Peter 3:9

*"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." — 2 Peter 3:9 (KJV)*

God is **"not willing that any should perish."** If Calvinism's unconditional election and limited atonement are true, then God **is** willing that most should perish—He has decreed it. Peter's statement flatly contradicts this.

### John 3:16

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." — John 3:16 (KJV)*

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"**Whosoever**"—not "whomsoever God has pre-selected." The invitation is universal. The condition is belief. And belief, as we have shown, is a **choice** enabled by God's grace and the Light of Christ, not an irresistible implantation.

### Ezekiel 33:11

*"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" — Ezekiel 33:11 (KJV)*

God takes **no pleasure** in the death of the wicked. He pleads with them to turn. This is incompatible with a God who has already decreed their destruction.

## The Light of Christ Given to All

*"For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge." — Moroni 7:16 (Book of Mormon)*

*"And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit." — D&C 84:46*

Latter-day Saint doctrine teaches that **every person born into this world** receives the Light of Christ. This is not the full gift of the Holy Ghost (which comes after baptism and confirmation), but it is a universal endowment of spiritual light that enables every person to **recognize truth, feel conscience, and discern between good and evil**. No one is left in Total Depravity. No one is born without the capacity to choose God.

This doctrine is the Restoration's direct answer to Calvinism's Total Depravity. Where Calvin saw a humanity so broken that no one could reach toward God, the Restoration reveals a God who has **already reached toward every one of His children**, giving them the light they need to begin the journey of faith.

## Calvinist Limited Atonement vs. LDS Universal Atonement

Calvinism's doctrine of **Limited Atonement** (the "L" in TULIP) teaches that Christ's sacrifice was intended only for the elect—that Jesus did not die for all people, but only for those God had already chosen to save. This is sometimes softened to "particular redemption" or "definite atonement," but the core claim is the same: the atonement's salvific scope is limited to the predestined.

The Latter-day Saint position is **universal atonement with conditional application**. Christ died for **all** (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). His atonement is infinite and eternal (Alma 34:10, 14). It overcomes physical death for every person who has ever lived (1 Corinthians 15:22). And it offers redemption from spiritual death to every person who will exercise faith, repent, enter into covenant through baptism, and endure to the end.

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*"For behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam." — 2 Nephi 9:21*

The atonement is not limited. The **application** is conditional on faith and obedience—but the **offer** is universal.

## The Logical Problem with Calvinism

If Calvinism is true, the following must all be simultaneously held:

1. God is perfectly just and perfectly loving.
2. God created billions of people knowing—indeed, *decreeing*—that they would be damned eternally.
3. These billions never had any real chance at salvation; it was withheld from them before they were born.
4. God will then punish them eternally for failing to meet a standard He ensured they could never meet.
5. This is called "justice."

This is not justice. It is a system in which God creates beings **for the purpose of damning them**. It makes God the author of sin—the very thing Calvinists claim to deny. If God withholds faith from the non-elect (because faith is a gift given only to the chosen), and then punishes the non-elect for not having faith, then God is punishing them for a condition **He created**.

The Latter-day Saint position avoids this moral catastrophe entirely. God gives **every** person the Light of Christ. God invites **all** to come unto Him. Christ died for **all**. Those who are lost are lost because they **chose** to reject the light they were given—not because God withheld it from them. Agency is preserved. Justice is preserved. And the character of God remains worthy of worship.

*"It is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward." — D&C 58:26*

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## Sources and Further Reading

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### FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research)

- Agency vs. Predestination — <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/archive/publications/agency-vs-predestination>
- Salvation by Grace Alone? — <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/archive/publications/salvation-by-grace-alone>
- By Grace Alone? — <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/archive/publications/ata-by-grace-alone>
- Come, Follow Me with FAIR: Ephesians — <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/blog/2023/10/02/come-follow-me-with-fair-faithful-answers-to-new-testament-questions-ephesians>

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- Salvation by Works or Salvation by Grace — Who Really Believes What? — <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/blog/2008/01/11/salvation-by-works-or-salvation-by-grace-who-really-believe-what>

## Scripture Central / Book of Mormon Central

- Alma 32 — Seeds of Faith — <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/alma-32/>
- Scripture Central — <https://scripturecentral.org>

## BYU Religious Studies Center (RSC)

- Seeds of Faith: A Follower's View of Alma 32 — <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-alma-testimony-word/seeds-faith-followers-view-alma-32>

## Greek / Hebrew Grammatical Analysis

- Is Faith a Gift from God? (Ephesians 2:8) — John Hart, CTS Journal — <https://www.chafer.edu/Is-Faith-a-Gift-from-God-Ephesians-2-8-Grammatical-Analysis-John-Hart>
- Is Faith a Gift? — Grace Evangelical Society — <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/is-faith-a-gift/>
- Greek Explanation of Ephesians 2:8-9 — Bible Bro Down — <https://biblebrodown.com/blog/greek-explanation-of-ephesians-2-8-9>
- Is Faith an Effectual Gift in Eph 2:8-9? — Soteriology 101 — <https://soteriology101.com/2022/08/17/is-faith-an-effectual-gift-in-eph-28-9/>
- Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart? — CJF Ministries — <https://www.cjfm.org/blog/2011/01/27/who-hardened-pharaohs-heart/>
- The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart — Gregory Beale (Trinity Journal) — <https://biblicalearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Beale-Hardening-TJ.pdf>

## Latter-day Saint Scriptures Cited

- 2 Nephi 2:11, 16, 27 — Agency and opposition
- Moses 4:3 — Satan's plan to destroy agency
- D&C; 93:30–31 — Agency co-eternal with intelligence
- D&C; 84:46 — Light of Christ to every person
- D&C; 88:13 — Light in all things
- D&C; 121:41 — Persuasion, not compulsion
- D&C; 20:32–34 — Possibility of falling from grace
- D&C; 58:26 — Not commanded in all things
- Alma 32:27–28 — Experimenting on the word
- Alma 34:10, 14 — Infinite and eternal atonement
- Alma 13:3–5 — Foreordination
- Abraham 3:22–23 — Premortal council and foreordination
- Moroni 7:16 — Spirit of Christ given to every man
- 2 Nephi 9:21 — Christ suffered for all

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- 2 Nephi 26:11 — Spirit will not always strive with man
  - Articles of Faith 1:3 — Atonement for all mankind

## **Biblical Passages Cited**

- Ephesians 2:8–9 — Salvation by grace through faith
- Philippians 1:29 — Privilege of believing and suffering
- John 6:44 — The Father draws
- John 12:32 — Christ draws all men
- John 3:16 — God so loved the world
- Romans 1:24–28 — God gave them over
- Romans 9:11–12 — Jacob and Esau, election
- 1 Timothy 2:3–4 — God desires all to be saved
- 2 Peter 3:9 — Not willing that any should perish
- Acts 10:34–35 — God is no respecter of persons
- Acts 17:30 — God commands all to repent
- 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 — He died for all
- Ezekiel 33:11 — No pleasure in the death of the wicked
- James 2:14–20 — Faith without works is dead
- Matthew 11:28 — Come unto me
- Exodus 4:21 through 14:17 — Pharaoh's hardened heart (full sequence)
- Genesis 25:23 — Two nations, two peoples
- Exodus 32:33, Revelation 3:5 — Blotted from the book of life

*This document was prepared as an LDS apologetics resource. It is intended to defend the Restored Gospel's position on agency, faith, and the character of God against Calvinist objections. The author affirms the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible as the word of God.*