



FAITH

COMMUNITY CHURCH



TO GOD BE THE GLORY

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION

There is much confusion regarding the sovereignty of God in salvation, also known as predestination or divine election. This is undoubtedly a very controversial issue that evokes a great deal of emotion in people. The prayer is that this statement will bring some clarity to the issue.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION

As we look at this issue, we must go to the Word of God. The Bible clearly says that God is sovereign in all things. "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from the father's will? But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:29-30). "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Psalm 135:6). As we read the Bible it is clear that God is a sovereign God, and that everything that exists in the universe exists because God allowed it, decreed it, and called it into existence.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The sovereignty of God carries over into the salvation of men. The Bible says that even faith is God's gracious gift to His chosen people. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65). Ephesians 1:11 says that "we were predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." Ephesians 1:4-5 says that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Romans 8:28-30 says that "we are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." All that God predestines will come to Him in saving faith.

Sometimes that term "foreknew" is misunderstood. Foreknowledge does not mean that God was aware beforehand who would believe and chose them because of their foreseen faith, but it means that God

determined before time those whom He would have a relationship with based solely on the kind intention of His will. This means that if any man is saved, he is saved by divine grace, and the reason for his salvation is not to be found in him, but in God. No man ever merited his own salvation. Men do not seek God first, God seeks them first. The Bible says that man is totally depraved and dead in his sins, and if a sinner seeks after God it is because God first awakened you by His grace. In Romans 9 the Apostle Paul anticipates problems that people might have regarding divine election, and his response is simply this, “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?” (V. 21) In other words, God is good and merciful, and unless God predestines people then no one will be saved. This is hard to understand, but the call is to trust God in these hard-to-understand Biblical truths and praise Him for your salvation.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN

While the Bible is very clear about the sovereignty of God in salvation, it is also clear that man is responsible. God’s sovereignty does not cancel out human responsibility. We are called to accept both sides of the truth, even though we may not understand how they fit together. People are responsible for what they do with the Gospel, and those who reject Jesus do so voluntarily. Jesus said, “You are unwilling to come to me, that you may have life” (John 5:40). He told unbelievers, “Unless you believe that I am (God), you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). In Luke 13:34 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem in His divine compassion, but the people were unwilling to come to Him in repentant faith. The reason they were lost was not because of something God did or did not do, but it was because of their own unwillingness. Biblically, that unwillingness was on their heads, not on God’s.

Both divine sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility are true. In John 6, our Lord combined both divine sovereignty and human responsibility when He said, “All that the father gives me shall come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out” (V. 37); “For this is the will of My father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life” (V. 40); “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (V. 44); “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (V. 47); and, “No one can come to me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (V. 65). How both of these two realities can be true simultaneously cannot be understood by the human mind – only by God. Both are true, and we are to take them in faith.

HERE ARE SOME QUOTES THAT MIGHT HELP

“If I was asked, ‘Why is a man damned?’ I should answer and say, ‘He’s damned because he destroys himself.’ I should not dare lay man’s ruin at the door of divine sovereignty. On the other hand, if I were asked, ‘Why is a man saved?’ I could only give the Biblical answer, ‘He is saved through the sovereign grace of God and not at all of himself.’ I should not dream of ascribing man’s salvation in any measure to himself.”
Charles Spurgeon “I can’t understand how people go to hell and they are fully responsible for rejecting Christ and they’ll go to hell because they fail to believe, and on the other hand they go to heaven because they believe, because they were chosen and God is all responsible for that. How does that harmonize, I don’t know? But it isn’t important that it harmonize in my mind. If I fully understood that I’d have the mind of God. That by the way, is one of the great proofs that the Bible was written by God, because it doesn’t resolve those apparent paradoxes...Don’t get caught up in trying to harmonize everything in the mind of God. You can’t, you have to take it by faith; leave those doctrines where they are...God will resolve it, sometime in the future when we know as we are known.” John MacArthur

“That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths

cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.” Charles Spurgeon

There are some truths of God that we simply cannot completely comprehend with our human minds. However, just because we cannot totally comprehend a truth of God does not mean that we reject it. Instead, we must hold true to God’s Word, praise Him for His amazing grace, and get on with glorifying Him and sharing His truth with the lost world that is desperate for Him.

Some information adapted from Grace Community Church