

God's Sovereignty and human responsibility

One of the great theological controversies of Christian history has been over the relationship between God's Sovereignty and human responsibility. Godly men have held differing positions on this issue. It continues to be a most controversial issue today and has divided churches and believers all over the world. It affects many areas of belief and practice such as prayer, Christian growth, and the methods by which the gospel is to be presented.

Position Statement:

"God, in His sovereignty and grace, is the initiator of and completer of our salvation made possible through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. As unregenerate sinners we cannot come to saving faith without God's sovereign work in our lives, nor can we do anything to earn salvation. God has created us as responsible moral beings with the capacity to accept or reject His gracious offer. This choice is made willingly because of the special grace that God gives at the time of conversion in response to the enlightenment and prompting of the Holy Spirit."

1. Salvation is a work of God totally

Our salvation is a work of God – and no glory that belongs to Him is to be taken by us. Left to ourselves we would never have the wisdom or the will, the moral strength or the desire to turn to God from sin and seek to follow Jesus

God saves us according to His pre-determinate counsels in eternity past. Our salvation is not contingent upon any works we can do, but solely on divine grace, without reference to human merit.

2. People are free to choose

The responsibility of each person equally to obey God's call in the gospel. Obedience is a function of the will. Salvation is for those who *obey* the gospel, thus receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32, Hebrews 5:9). Judgment is for those who do *not obey* the gospel (Romans 2:8, 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Scripture clearly teaches that humans are capable of resisting God's will.

God's offer of salvation is to 'whosoever will' and is a bona fide offer that comes from His love for all the world: The "whosoever will not" are held responsible for their decision (John 3:36).

John 3:16,18 *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. He who believes in Him is not condemned; he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"*

2 Pet. 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"*

1 Tim. 2:4 *"(God) desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

A problem that cannot be solved

God's sovereign election and mankind's exercise of voluntary choice seem opposite and irreconcilable truths. In the matter of the acceptance or rejection of divine grace there is a problem as to how man's will can be considered really 'free' if God has predetermined some form of sovereign election.

Because many find it difficult to live with the tension of paradox, they are inclined to adjust what the Bible teaches so that it will fit their own systems of order and logic.

Most people compromise one truth in favour of the other, or weaken both by trying to take a position somewhere between them.

The paradox should remain – we are to believe both truths completely because both are taught in Scripture. We should leave the reconciling of them to God. The Bible never seeks to explain the mystery.

Other examples of paradoxes that we are incapable of reconciling with our human minds:

- Scripture is the work of human authors, yet the very Word of God
- Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man
- Jesus was crucified by the voluntary agency of sinful man (God does not incite evil – James 1:13), and at the same time by the predetermined plan of God (Acts 2:22-24 “... *delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*”)

We believe that both truths should be held in balance, and that emphasizing one to the detriment of the other is unbiblical.

Gerstner: *“Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not inherently contradictory. Saying God is sovereign does not necessarily mean that man is not free – nor visa versa. Rather, God’s sovereignty co-exists with human freedom. A mystery is not a contradiction, but is something only partly known or understood”*

Charles Simeon *“The truth in this matter lies, not in the middle (at some golden mean), and not in one extreme, but in both extremes.*

C H Spurgeon spoke of the paradox this way: *“Two parallel lines – I cannot make them meet and you cannot make them cross”*

God Himself appeals to choice. He weeps, and pursues sinners with calls to repent.

Unfortunately the truth of God’s sovereignty has been carried by some to an extreme that is scarcely distinguishable from fatalism, or which make God arbitrarily to select some men for salvation and others for hell.

How can perfect justice allow a human being be held morally responsible to God, ending in the lake of fire, if that person cannot do what God has declined to enable him to do? If His will is in such bondage that he could not respond, then by that logic he would be unable to obey.

In his book ‘In understanding be men’ Thomas Hammond writes “In practice, the Christian must keep firmly in mind that there are two parallel truths taught in Scripture. There is the divine sovereignty, by which we are assured that God’s purposes will be completed, but also we are nevertheless responsible to work and to appeal to men as though everything depends upon our diligence and upon human response to the message. The oft-quoted lines from St. Bernard will bear repetition: *“Remove free will and there will be nothing to save; remove grace and there will be nothing to save with.”*

Calvinism

Anyone who disagrees with Calvinism is typically labeled an Arminian (taken from Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who strongly objected to the Reformed system). The Calvinist emphasizes God’s *Sovereign Grace*, but they mean by the term that God will save sinners independent of anything they say or do. They deny that mankind has been given the ability by God to be a free moral agency to reject or accept the Lord.

We must beware of systems. Calvinism when viewed internally is totally logical, as is the Arminian view. But neither system is consistent with all of Scripture. Some seek to apply

human limitations and reasoning to truths about God that are far outside the reach of human thought processes.

What Calvinism believes:

1. Total depravity. As a result of Adam's sin, people are born in a "depraved" state. This means that although people may do things that are good, they are constitutionally unable to respond to God's message of salvation unless they are elect (chosen to salvation). They have *"wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual; good accompanying salvation..."* (Westminster Confession of Faith).

Rom. 3:11,12 *"...there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one"*

Eph. 2:1 *"You were dead in your transgressions and sins..."*

2. Unconditional Election. Because of total depravity, salvation is completely dependent on God's choice to bestow it. God sovereignly chooses which individuals He will save and to allow all others to go to hell, even though He could save all mankind if He so desired. "Unconditional" means that there are no conditions that humans must meet, including faith. Faith is a gift of God. If human-generated faith plays a part in salvation, salvation is not entirely by grace.

Isa. 46:10,11 *"... My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do."*

Eph. 1:4-5 *"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will..."*

1 Pet. 2:8 *"...they stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for."*

Some believe that most people are "reprobated to damnation" before their birth and life on earth. That is their unfortunate lot. They can do nothing to change this. Not all Calvinists believe this.

3. Limited atonement. Christ died for the purpose of saving only the elect. Calvinists infer this from the passages that say that Christ died "for his people" (Matt 1:21; John 10:11,15,26-27; John 15:13; Acts 20:28). Since God sovereignly elected some to salvation, he sent Christ to die only for them. Not all Calvinists hold to limited atonement.

4. Irresistible grace. God's grace in salvation cannot be resisted. Without His drawing the elect to Himself, and imparting faith selectively to them, no one could be saved. God causes the elect to believe the gospel (Acts 13:48), even though they may not be aware of this fact.

John 6:37 *"All that the Father gives me will come to me"*

Acts 13:48 *"all who were appointed for eternal life believed."*

5. Perseverance of the saints. Because election depends on God, those who are elected cannot lose their salvation as God will not allow any of the elect to fail to persevere. The elect will show evidence of their election by continuing to believe in Christ and manifesting good works consistent with salvation (2 Pet. 1:10; Heb. 3:6,14; Col. 1:23). Man has absolutely nothing to do with getting saved" and has nothing to do with persevering in saving faith. All of this is entirely the work of God.

2 Pet. 1:10 *"Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall."*

Heb. 3:14 *"We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."*

ANSWERING THE EXTREME CALVINIST:

The extreme belief is that, in eternity past, God chose to save only a fraction of the human race and consigned the rest to eternal torment, simply because it pleased Him to do so. The unavoidable conclusion is that, according to this view, God would arbitrarily choose not to make salvation available to everyone and thereby consign to hell millions of people whom He could save if He so desired!

▪ **Total Depravity:**

Total depravity for an extreme Calvinist really means total inability – left to themselves all men not only do not seek God, they are completely unable to do so, let alone trust in the Lord Jesus for their salvation. Add to this the belief that those who are unable to repent and believe the gospel are then held accountable for failing to do so, there can be no doubt that this teaching is a misrepresentation of God that demeans His love, contradicts His justice, and does nothing to promote His glory.

There is not a verse in the Bible to give clear support to the extreme Calvinist's belief that the sinner is incapable of repenting and believing the gospel. God commands *"all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30). It makes a mockery of God's holy and loving character to believe that He commands all men to do what they cannot do without His grace, and then to withhold that grace from all but a small minority, resulting in their eternal judgment in hell. The problem with sinful mankind is not inability, but unwillingness!

God in His grace has enabled all people to respond to His convicting influence (John 16:8 *"When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt"*). God reasons with sinners (so did Paul - Acts 18:4,19) and calls us to give answers to those who ask us for a reason for our hope (Isaiah 1:18, 1 Peter 3:15).

The extreme Calvinist believes that regeneration (new birth) must precede repentance and faith. This means a person has to be saved in order to be saved! Again, no Bible verse can be cited to clearly support the notion that regeneration must precede faith in Christ. However, there is good support for the belief in prevenient grace that God gives at the time of conversion through the enlightening, convicting and prompting work of the Holy Spirit.

God has given mankind the capacity for faith. Salvation is a gift of God through Jesus Christ, and this gift is offered to all mankind (Romans 5:18). Faith is not a work and thus cannot be gloried in. A person drowning cannot boast when, realizing he is unable to save himself, he lies limp in the arms of a lifesaver and trusts in his ability to return him to the shore!

"Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to him. This is the salvation-bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men." (Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949], pp. 344-345).

Total depravity cannot mean that people are without any good. It relates to salvation. God recognizes good in some men, although it is *not good enough* to earn salvation. In Acts 10:2, Cornelius is described as "a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household and gave alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually". Then in verse 4 the angel says: "The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." With this background he is sent to Peter by God to hear the way of salvation.

The *generalization* that "there is none who does good", (Romans 3:12), does not set aside instances where God does recognize good in some men.

Finally, if the extreme Calvinist's view on the total depravity of man is true, it makes God out to be insincere, for it contradicts the consistent revelation of God from Genesis to Revelation, pleading, repeatedly calling, weeping, over sinners who refuse to repent, knowing all the time they are totally incapable of doing so, and whom He has already consigned to eternal torment!

- **Unconditional Election:**

God's election of people to salvation is conditioned upon their faith response to the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Rom 3:28). The NT never regards people as mere automations moved by God without regard for the exercise of the voluntary will God has chosen to endow them with.

God's sovereignty properly understood is not incompatible with the truth that God has chosen to give mankind the power of genuine choice. Mankind's free will does not limit or remove God's ultimate control over all things. In fact God is glorified by being able to fulfill His gracious purpose despite the often contrary will of mankind. God is able to cause those He has chosen to come to faith without overriding their wills.

The only condition that God places on our receiving salvation is faith in Jesus Christ (true faith involves repentance – John 3:18-21). It is unbiblical to think of faith as a work, since faith merely receives the gift that God offers (Rom 4:4,5; Gal. 2:16). If faith is a work, that very faith that God requires is rejected by God, as salvation is "not by works" (Eph 2:8-9).

In the New Testament, faith and works are contrasted as opposites. Rom 4:4,5 *"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness"*

C.H. Spurgeon *"Faith is the simple act of trusting - it is not an action of which man may boast, it is not an action of the nature of a work."*

In Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast"*

The pronoun *'this'* (*'this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God'*) does not refer to faith (teaching that faith is a gift of God), but refers to salvation, as the Greek gender for the word *'this'* is neuter, whereas *'faith'* is feminine.

- **Unlimited Atonement:**

Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross was not limited to benefit a few but to be *available for all*.

1 John 2:2 *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"*

Isa 53:6 *"All we like sheep have gone astray ... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"*

John 1:29 *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*

Romans 5:6 *"Christ died for the ungodly"*

Christ's atonement is therefore *sufficient* for all people, but *effective* only for those who believe.

In John 12:32 Jesus says He will draw all men to Himself, indicating an unlimited invitation.

1 Timothy 2:6 *"who gave himself as a ransom for all men"* - the "all" is defined by "all men" in verse 1 (for whom we are to pray).

Hebrews 2:9 – *“(Jesus) tasted death for every man”*

Romans 10:13 - *“Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”*

2 Cor. 5:19 *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”*

1 Tim. 4:10 *“we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe”*

To hold to the extreme Calvinist teaching but concede on this point, namely that Christ died for the whole world, the conclusion must then be that God was either *“unable or unwilling to carry out His plans”* (Boettner)

Irresistible Grace:

It is God's desire that all people be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; Ezek. 18:23). Therefore, God in His grace draws all people to Himself (John 12:32; 16:8). But scripture clearly teaches that humans are capable of resisting God's will.

Free will exists in both believer and unbeliever. “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” (John 7:17) “Whosoever will” means just what it says.

Jesus wept over the city that rejected him and said, *“I would...but you would not”* (Luke 13:34, Matthew 22:37). His tears were not a charade – He acknowledged that their lack of response was in the absence of His enabling them to respond. He said that they could have responded but refused.

Matt. 23:37 *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”*

Luke 7:29 *“But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves”*

Obedience is a function of the will. Will is involved in salvation. Salvation is for those who *obey* the gospel, thus receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32, Hebrews 5:9). Judgment is for those who do *not obey* the gospel (Romans 2:8, 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Charles C. Ryrie says: *“If efficacious grace is necessary to salvation and if God alone can supply such grace, then God cannot hold us responsible if we reject the Saviour.”*

“Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

▪ **Perseverance of the saints:**

We believe that truly saved believers, but not all those who *profess* to be so, are possessors of “eternal salvation”. They are “in Christ”, sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), “for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). They are *kept* by the power of God and cannot be snatched from His hand (John 10:27-29). They are saved forever and sustained by the intercessory prayers of the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 7:25). They are “born again” into the family of God and cannot be “unborn”.

By its very nature, saving faith *continues* (Colossians 1:23), does not fall away (Hebrews 6:6), does not forsake the fellowship with God's people (1 John 2:19), does not practice lawlessness (1 John 3:4-9). True salvation is proved by its fruit. Though a true believer may *for a time* be out of fellowship and without fruit, the “situation is exceptional rather than normal”.

Acknowledgement: In the above critique have taken some of the arguments and some wording from the 3^d edition of Dave Hunt’s book “What love is this”

Further reading:
DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM
by Samuel Fisk (Loizeaux Bros - New Jersey)

Dr Arthur Pierson, a presbyterian who is widely recognized said *"Election, taught in the Word, must be consistent both with the sovereign will of God and the freedom of man and if we cannot reconcile these two, it is because the subject is so infinitely lifted up above us"*.

Dr H. Hobbs, in a book "What Baptists believe" said *"man is endowed with free will and thus he is responsible for his choices. He is not a pawn in the hands of fate, nor is his conduct governed merely by physical forces apart from his will. Man is responsible to God for his acts. The freewill of man denotes man's freedom to act within the context of his own will and judgement, otherwise he would be nothing more than a puppet. The doctrine of the free will of man appears to conflict with that of God's sovereignty. However, reason itself demands both, to say nothing of scriptural teaching. Both are facts of experience. The sovereignty of God must not cancel man's freedom or man loses his personality and is incapable of fellowship with God. God would become responsible for man's sin, a thought which is untenable with the very nature of God. Man is free to receive or reject God's overtures of grace, but he is responsible for his response to them. "*

H.C.G. Moule, a recognized scholar, wrote *"Election never appears as a violation of human will. For never in the Bible is man treated as irresponsible. In the Bible, the relation of the human and divine wills is inscrutable; the reality of both is assured. Where election has been placed in the foreground of the system of religious thought and allowed to dominate the rest, the truth has (to say the least) to often been distorted into an error."*

Man's will is circumscribed in its exercise, that it operates within very definite limits, that it is bounded by the overall controlling plan and purpose of God, that the divine sovereignty is supreme in the larger outreach of all things.

Secondly, it does not mean that man, by the exercise of will, can of himself do that which will meet the just demands of a Holy God, or that by anything that He does, He can attain the standing before God. Man in his fallen state cannot by any means please God nor do anything to save his own soul. Apart from the grace of God, man would be unholy and forever lost.

Thirdly, the employment of that free will which man does make use of is nothing meritorious, it is nothing wherein to glory or boast, it is nothing to his personal credit.

Fourthly, God to be sure, has taken the first step in man's salvation by providing the Saviour as planned in the eternal past. In His grace, He furthermore provides the availability of that salvation to men through such means as the preaching of the gospel and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

With these considerations in mind, it may be noted that it also seems clear that, to be saved, man must do something in the sense of exercising faith, believing the gospel, actively receiving the Saviour, and he will be held accountable if he does not do so. However, exercising of faith is not meritorious.

C.H. Spurgeon said, "A knowledge of the truth that teaches us that faith is the simple act of trusting, that it is not an action of which man may boast, it is not an action of the nature of a work, so as to be a fruit of the law."

A problem, however, may here present itself. How could man who is totally depraved, utterly sunk in sin and morally bankrupt, fulfill any responsibility at all in the matter of his own salvation. However, total depravity in man does not mean his total inability.

Dr James Orr, a Scottish presbyterian said "The doctrine in question is misunderstood when the adjective total is held to imply that every human being is as bad as he can be or that there are not natural virtues and even beautiful and lovable traits in characters that are yet unregenerate. Total here does not mean that every part of man is as corrupt as it can be, but that no part has escaped depravation or corruption."

A H. Strong said "Yet there is a certain remnant of freedom left to man, the sinner can: (a) avoid the sin against the Holy Spirit, (b) choose the less sin rather than the greater, (c) refuse altogether to yield to certain temptations, (d) do outwardly good acts though with imperfect motives, (e) seek God for motives of self interest."

Dr H.C. Thiessen declared "We believe that the common grace of God also restores to the sinner the ability to make a favourable response to God. Paul said 'for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men (Titus 2:11). This results in the freeing of the will in the matter of salvation."

Is Faith The Gift of God?

Dr R.A. Torrey said "Faith is God's gift. Like all of God's gifts it is at the disposal of all who wish it, for there is no respect of persons with Him. We shall see directly that it is given through a certain instrument that is within reach of all, and upon certain conditions that any of us can fulfill".

Dr Harry Ironside said "Faith is the gift of God. All men may have faith if they will, but alas many refuse to hear the Word of God so they are left in their unbelief. The Holy Spirit presents the Word but one may resist His gracious influence. On the other hand, one may listen to the Word and believe it, that is faith. It is God's gift, it is true because given through His Word".

C.H. Spurgeon says "As far as we can tell, faith has been selected as the channel of grace because there is a natural adaption in faith to be used as the receiver. Suppose that I am about to give some alms, I put it into his hand - why? The hand seems made on purpose to receive.

So in our mental frame, faith is created on purpose to be a receiver. It is the hand of the man and there is fitness in receiving grace by its means. Both forgiveness and repentance flow from the same source and are given by the same Saviour. Jesus has both ready and He is prepared to bestow them now and to bestow them most freely on all who will accept them at His hands."

Dr H. Thiessen said "It would seem very strange if God should call upon all men everywhere to repent and believe, when only some may receive the gift of repentance and faith."

In Ephesians 2:8-9 where it says "that not of yourselves", F.F. Bruce points out the fact, *"The fact the demonstrative pronoun 'that' is neuter in Greek, whereas faith is a feminine 'now', combines with other considerations to suggest that it is the whole concept of salvation by grace through faith that is described as the gift of God. This incidentally was Galvin's interpretation"*.

Predestination and election do not refer to certain people of the world becoming saved or lost, but they relate to those who are already children of God in respect to certain privileges or positions out ahead. They look forward to what God will work in those who have become His own. This is seen in the works of a number of outstanding men of God.

H.A. Ironside showed the limited use of that term (predestination) in the Bible. *"Turn to your Bible and read for yourself in the only two chapters in which this word predestinate or predestinated is found. The first is Romans 8:29-30, the other chapter is Ephesians 1:5 and 11. You will note that there is no reference in these four verses to either heaven or hell but to Christ-likeness eventually. Nowhere are we told in scripture that God predestinated one man to be saved and another to be lost. Men are to be saved or lost eternally because of their attitude towards the Lord Jesus Christ. Predestination means that someday all the redeemed shall become just like the Lord Jesus"*.

C.H. Spurgeon said *"Mark then, with care, that our conformity to Christ is the sacred object of predestination. The Lord in boundless grace has resolved that a company that no man can number called here 'many brethren' shall be restored to His image in the particular form in which His eternal Son displays it"*.

Dr H. Moule said of election *"It is always (with one exception - Romans 9:11), related to a community, and thus has close infinity with the Old Testament teachings upon the privileged nation of Israel as the chosen, selected race. The objects of election in the New Testament are, in effect, the Israel of God, the new, regenerate race called to special privilege and special service...it is assumed there (2 Pet. 1:10) that the Christian, baptized and a worshipper, may yet need to make sure of his calling and election as a fact to his consciousness. This implies conditions in the election which far transcend the tests of sacred rite and external fellowship"*.

M.A. Vincent says *"Election and the kindred words to choose and chosen or elect, are used of God's selection of men or agencies for special missions or attainments but neither here nor elsewhere in the New Testament is there any warrant for the revolting doctrine that God has predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life and the rest to eternal destruction.*

Election, the act of God's holy will in selection has in selecting His own methods, instruments and times for carrying out His purposes, is a fact of history and a daily observation".

Dr Harry Ironside had this to say *"D.L. Moody used to put it very simply the elect are the 'whosoever wills' the non-elect 'whosoever wont's'. This is exactly what scripture teaches, the invitation is to all, those who accept it are the elect. Remember, we are never told that Christ died for the elect"*.

Dr Harry Ironside also said *"Whosoever means, whosoever". Only a biased theologian, with an axe to grind, could ever think that it meant only the elect."*

If God is sovereign, how could man have any measure of independent action?

Man, controlled or free?

Some deep thinkers on the subject have concluded that both concepts are true that it is a noble view of God to see him in His supremacy, voluntarily allowing man a certain limited sphere of free action. Of course it would only be within the circle of man's own circumscribed existence that this is granted, beyond which God remains in absolute control. By the nature of the case, man's actions would be bounded in many ways and only exercised within the sphere allotted to him by his creator. To allow man such a measure of self determination is something which only a great and omnipotent would do.

Dr Biederwolf, applies a principle to the act of relations between man and God saying, "If God can in response to the petition of His confiding child, alter what, without such petition, would have been otherwise, we find ourselves wondering if such a view is not, in comparison with that of absolute predestination, equally honouring to God and quite as stimulating to man. To many it seems far more so."

Man is seen to possess a will which is real and its use may be of momentous consequence, for God's sovereignly allows man to resolve certain issues to his own wheel or woe. But while recognizing this place of freewill and responsibility in man, we know, of course, that God holds the reins of the universe in His firm grip. We also rest assured that with God in control, evil will never triumph. Satan himself, can go only so far and no further. That forces of iniquity will be finally put down and judged. Likewise, we believe that God has a plan for each yielded life that, as we allow Him to do so, God will work out His perfect will for each of us, and we do not need to walk in the light of our own eyes.

The position of the celebrated C.H. Spurgeon has often been appealed to. He made strong statements on the sovereignty of God but those who stop there, do not do justice to Spurgeon. To be sure, he emphasized the divine sovereignty, yet that is only one side of Spurgeon. A study of his works shows that he forcefully brought out the other side as well. This is also the observation of some who knew Spurgeon well.

Dr Arthur Peterson was called upon to follow immediately the ministry of the Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, which he carried on for several years. He must therefore have had a real acquaintance and an understanding of Spurgeon's position. He recognized clearly that two sides of Spurgeon's outlook. *"Divine sovereignty and human freedom are alternatively emphasized in scripture and no attempt is made to harmonize them.*

The fault with all theological systems is that they attempt a scientific harmony and are adjustment of what the Word of God leaves an unsolved problem and a hopeless paradox".

C.H. Spurgeon had not long been a preacher and pastor before he also was content to insist on God's sovereign election of man, and on man's voluntary election of God, as both true and essential to salvation. But he made no more attempt to make them harmonize than Christ did before him, when he said almost with the same breath "no man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" and again, "you will not come unto Me".

C.H. Spurgeon said on the sermon on the crucifixion *"The soldiers did whatever they wished to do. They acted of their own free will, and yet at the same time they fulfilled the eternal counsel of God. Shall we never be able to drive in to mans minds the truth that, predestination and free agency are both facts? Men sin as freely as birds fly in the air and they are altogether responsible for their sin and yet everything is ordained and foreseen by God. These two truths need no reconciliation, for they never fell out. Why should I try to reconcile two friends? Prove to me that the two truths do not agree. These two facts are parallel lines. I cannot make them unite, but you cannot make them cross each other. Permit me also to add that, I have long ago given up the idea of making all my beliefs into a system. I believe, but I cannot explain. I fall before the majesty of Revelation and adore the infinite Lord."*

W.E. Vine said *"The foreknowledge of God is the basis of His foreordaining counsels...foreknowledge is one aspect of omniscience...God's foreknowledge involves His electing grace, but this does not preclude human will. He foreknows the exercise of faith which brings salvation"*.

Godet in his commentary on Romans says *"The decree of predestination is found in the act of foreknowledge. What does St Paul understand by this last word? Some have given to the word "foreknow", the meaning of elect, choose, destined, beforehand. Not only is this arbitrary, as being without example in the New Testament, and as even in profane Greek the word "to know" has the meaning of deciding only when it applies to a thing, as when we say to judge of a case, and never when applied to a person but what is still more decidedly opposed to this meaning is what follows he did also predestinate. In that case, the two verbs would be identical in meaning and would not be connected by the particle of Crodacian. Also, especially in view of Romans 8:30 where the successive degrees of divine action are strictly distinguished and graduated.*

There is not a passage in the New Testament where the word "know" does not above all contain the notion of knowledge properly so called. The same is the case with the word "foreknow". In what respect did God thus foreknow them. There is but one answer. Foreknown as sure to fulfil the condition of salvation, viz, faith so foreknown as His by faith. Such is the meaning to which a host of commentators have been led. St Augustine himself, in early times, then the Lutheran expositors, therefore it is the believers faith, as a future fact, but in His sight already existing, which determines His foreknowledge. This faith does not exist because God sees it He sees it on the contrary, because it will come into being at a given moment, in time..."

In another part of the commentary, Godet's *"A multitude of expositors have endeavoured to find a formula whereby to combine the action of man's moral freedom with the divine predestination...we are convinced that it is only in this way that the true thought of the apostle can be explained...as to the speculative question of the relation between God's eternal plan and the freedom of human determinations, it seems to be probable that Paul resolved it, so far as he was himself concerned, by means of the fact affirmed by him of divine foreknowledge. He himself puts us on this way (Rom.8:29-30) by making foreknowledge the basis of predestination. As a general who is in full acquaintance with the plans of campaign adopted by the opposing general, would organize his own in keeping with the certain prevision, and would find means of turning all the marches and counter marches of his adversary to the success of his designs so God, after fixing the supreme end, employs the free human actions which He contemplates from the depths*

of His eternity, as factors to which He is assigns apart, and which He makes so many means in the realization of His eternal design."

Campbell Morgan writes *"Foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son - God's election of certain persons to constitute His church is not capricious, but has regard to character. He foreordained those whom He foreknew, in order that they might be conformed to the image of His Son. The purpose of election was character, and its principle was the mercy and compassion of God. God exercises that mercy towards those who believe...the Gentiles are chosen to become a people of God because they attain righteousness by faith, while Israel failed as a nation through seeking to establish righteousness apart from faith. Thus the choice of God is of such as believe. The test is the Son of His love"*.

"Many are called but few chosen"

Harry Ironside explains, "When our Lord tells us that many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16b, Matt.22:14), He means that, while the call goes out to the multitude, only those are chosen who definitely accept Christ." In his message on Matt.22:1-4, Alexander McLaren concluded by saying *"They who do not choose to receive the invitation are or to put on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, to show that they are not 'chosen' though 'called'.*

The lesson is not of interminable and insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but of earnest heed to His gracious call and earnest believing effort to make the fair garment our very own.

"No man can come to Me except the Father draw him".(John 6:44) Godet says *"To draw", does not necessarily denote an effectual drawing. This word may refer only to the preaching of the cross through the whole world and the action of the Holy Spirit which accompanies it. This heavenly drawing is not irresistible". The same word "draw" is used in John 12:32 of Christ drawing all men to Himself through His being lifted up on the cross"*.