

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

That God has an eternal purpose is beyond dispute (Eph. 1:9; 3:11). This purpose is based upon His infinite wisdom (Eph. 1:11; Job 12:13). It is a purpose that includes "whatsoever comes to pass." Psalm 135:6 is clear on this point: "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." God's purpose even includes the wicked actions of sinful men (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Psa. 76:10; Prov. 16:4). We cannot understand how such actions can be according to God's purpose while men are yet responsible moral agents who are held answerable for their own sin. However, we believe that no act or event in all creation falls outside the decree of God. God's purpose is, therefore, universal. Theologians have spoken of some decrees being decrees to permit such things as the fall and subsequent sins. This explanation helps our understanding, but it still leaves a mystery beyond our comprehension. God's purpose is also unchangeable (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:10) and absolute--that is, unconditional. It does not depend for its fulfillment on anything not decreed by God. He works "all things" according to His purpose (Eph. 1:11).

ELECTION

The sovereignty of God is seen in creation (Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11; Prov. 16:4). It is equally seen in providence (Psa. 103:19). He controls the elements (Luke 8:25) and the animal creation (Gen. 2:19; 6:19, 20), as the plagues He sent upon Egypt powerfully prove. He controls all men (Prov. 21:1; Jer. 10:23). Angels and even demons obey His pleasure (Psa. 103:21; Mark 1:27; Job 1:6-12; Matt. 4:11). Isaac Watts properly said:

There's not a sparrow or a worm, but's found in His decrees;

He raises monarchs to their throne and sinks them as He please.

What is true in creation and providence is also true in salvation: God is sovereign. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9).

The Bible is clear that God chose a people unto salvation (Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 1:9). This divine choice is unconditional; that is, God did not choose some because He foresaw they would believe. Faith is not the cause, but the result of God's choice in election. Peter makes this clear when he says that Christians are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:2). Obedience is the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5), and election is unto it, not because of it. Also, foreknowledge is not merely foresight or prescience. The syntax of Acts 2:23 indicates that God's foreknowledge is His "determinate counsel." Thus repentance and faith are gracious gifts of our sovereign Lord given to us on the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8, 9; Phil. 1:29).

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

God's sovereignty does not destroy man's moral responsibility. Man is God's rational creature. He is a sinner willfully. He is a willing slave to his depravity. He does not sin because of God's election. He sins because of his own willful wickedness. God holds every sinner responsible for his actions and attitudes.

Such is the depravity of man that he is incapable of spiritual good (Rom. 8:7; 3:10-19). Left to himself, he would never choose God or obey the gospel. His carnal mind is enmity against God. His only hope lies outside of himself in the God of all grace.

ELECTION AND EVANGELISM

That is why we believe a Biblical emphasis on the sovereignty of God is essential to true evangelism. It certainly does not hinder evangelism. Romans 9:1-3 shows that a strong belief in God's predestinating and electing purpose goes hand in hand with a burning passion for souls.

We have no time for a dead, intellectual Calvinism that refuses to offer Christ freely to sinners with the assurance that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Some of the greatest revival preachers in history have been strong asserters of God's sovereignty in salvation, men like John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Asahel Nettleton, George Whitefield, Robert Murray McCheyne, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

We stand in that historic and honored line that is traced directly from Scripture through the most glorious ministries God has ever given to His church. We refuse to "democratize the gospel," as one writer put it, by saying, "God did His part; now it is up to you to do yours." Salvation is not a joint effort. It is a divine work received by faith without works.

MAY I COME TO CHRIST WITHOUT KNOWING I AM ELECT?

Scripture never instructs a sinner to try to discover if he is elect and then come to Christ. In fact, it forbids prying into the secret counsel of God (Deut. 29:29). God's instruction to a sinner is, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). He assures all that obey this instruction that He will in no wise cast them out (John 6:37), but will give them eternal life (John 3:16).

Every sinner's duty is to obey God. That means every sinner should come penitently to Christ. Once he has come and received eternal life as a free gift, he has a Biblical ground of assurance that he is one of God's elect (I Thess. 1:4).