

The Biblical Harmony between the Sovereign Will of God and the Free Will of Humankind

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction: 1John 2:17

- A. From about 350 years after the first Gospel sermon was preached until the present day, there has been an ongoing and apparently irreconcilable conflict in Christendom: the absolute sovereign control of God and the self-determination or free will of humankind.
 - 1. Pelagianism advocates that free will means human beings do not need grace and can defy and frustrate the plans of God.
 - 2. Augustinianism demands that a sovereign God controls all aspects of human will, and that people are incapable of choosing good without God controlling their will to believe and obey.
 - 3. Both are extreme views not taught in scripture, and require the advocate to dismiss clear Biblical doctrine in order to arrive at those conclusions.
- B. Pelagianism no longer exists in its original form; however, Augustinianism was taken by John Calvin who developed it into Calvinism.
 - 1. Calvinism has five tenets of doctrine, two of which have been adopted by Catholicism, and three that have been adopted by the majority of mainstream Protestant denominations.
- C. It is important to understand what is written in the word of God before we begin to address erring doctrines. Therefore, we will answer two very important matters from scripture first:
 - 1. The Bible mandates a harmonious coexistence between the sovereign will of God and the self-determination or free will of humankind.
 - 2. The Bible doctrine of predestination in no manner interferes with or inhibits the exercise of human free will, a gift given when God created humankind in His image.

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD -- Psalm 90

- A. He existed before anything else - Psalm 90:2; 1Tim. 6:16
- B. He created all things - Gen. 1:3; John 1:3
- C. He sustains all things - Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17
- D. He is above all things - Isa. 46:9-10
- E. He knows all things - Psalm 139:1-4
- F. He can do whatever He pleases - Psalm 135:6
- G. He orchestrates all things - Isa. 14:24; Eph. 1:11
- H. He rules over all things - Daniel 4:34-35
- I. He controls material concerns among human beings
 - 1. Prov. 21:1; Psalm 33:9-11; Amos 3:6; James 4:13-15

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD PROFOUNDLY IMPACTS OUR LIVES

- A. God's sovereignty calls for our submission. God rules in wisdom and love.
 - 1. In His love, He will give us only that which is in our best interests.

2. In His wisdom, He knows what is in our best interests.
3. We humbly trust His love and accept His wisdom - Rom. 8:32-33
- B. God's sovereignty provides us with comfort and security in a terribly uncertain world - 2Cor. 1:3
- C. God's sovereignty compels us to worship Him - Psalm 42:1-2, 24:1, 23:1, 32:8
 1. Compels us to serve Him - 2Cor. 5:14-15
 2. Compels us to come to Him for salvation - John 12:32

III. THE FREEWILL OF HUMANKIND

- A. Freewill was given to humankind from the beginning.
 1. Gen. 4:7; Deut. 30:19; Joshua 24:15
- B. Rom. 6:16 - A choice is demanded, and therefore the exercise of free will is required. We choose to present ourselves before sin or obedience.
- C. Rev. 22:17 - The invitation is extended to 'whoever desires.' The Lord will not force any to be saved, and will not turn away any who desire to be saved.
- D. Acts 17:30 - God does not command what we are not able to do. Thus, 'all men everywhere' may freely choose to repent.

IV. THE FREE WILL OF HUMANKIND IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

- A. God has decreed the conditions of salvation that everyone can meet.
 1. Everyone must believe in Christ.
 - a. Mark 16:15-16; John 3:14-15
 - b. The scriptures teach that faith is a condition of salvation, and that everyone has the capacity to meet that condition.
 2. Everyone must repent of sin.
 - a. Acts 17:30-31; 2Peter 3:9
 - b. The scriptures teach that repentance is a condition of salvation, and that everyone can meet that condition.
 3. Everyone must confess Christ and be baptized -
 - a. Matt. 10:32; Acts 2:38-39
 - b. The message to all, whoever God calls by the Gospel, is that everyone must repent and be baptized for remission of sins.
 4. The Scriptures clearly teach that salvation is conditional, and that every person is able to meet those conditions - Rom. 10:13-14, 16-17, 21
 - a. If salvation is not conditional, why did God state conditions?
 - b. If not everyone can meet the conditions, why did God insist that they be preached to everyone?
- B. God grants to each person the power to accept or reject salvation.
 1. If as Calvinism teaches, there are no conditions man can meet that will affect whether or not God saves him, then man has absolutely no choice regarding his salvation or damnation. If God chooses the man, he will be saved regardless of man's choice. If God does not choose the man, he will be lost regardless of his choice.
 2. Each person is able to choose to meet the conditions of salvation. Why would God say these things if people have no power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions necessary to salvation?

- a. God told them to choose life - Deut. 30:15-19
 - b. God promised blessings to Israel if they obey - Deut. 28:1-14
 - c. And curses if they disobey Him - Deut. 28:15-68
 - d. They were told to choose God - Ex. 32:26; 1Kings 18:21
 - e. They were ordered to choose good - Heb. 11:24-25; Luke 10:42
 - f. God reasons with men; He does not compel them against their will - Isa. 1:18-20
 - g. Some chose evil - Matt. 23:37, 13:14-15; Rev. 22:17; Luke 7:30
3. Each person has a role in determining his own destiny.
- a. 1Peter 1:22; Rom. 6:13, 17-18; 2Cor. 8:5; Phil. 2:12
 - b. 1Tim. 4:16; Acts 2:40; 2Cor. 5:20
 - c. In view of these Scriptures, how can one conclude that we are "totally passive" in salvation?
4. God is not a respecter of persons.
- a. Rom. 2:6-11; Acts 10:34-35
 - b. If God chooses to save some but not others, either the choice must be based on the conduct of the people (hence, conditional) or else God is a respecter of persons.
 - c. For God to grant eternal life to those who do not choose to meet the conditions, or for Him to punish those who do meet the conditions, would constitute respect of persons.
5. One who is saved may later become lost.
- a. If we can show that people, once saved, later so acted as to be lost, then we have proven that salvation must be conditional, and Calvinism is in error.
 - b. 2Peter 2:1 - Those who have been bought by the blood of Jesus can yet deny Him and be destroyed.
 - c. The solution to the problem of falling from grace? - 2Peter 1:10

V. DOES CONFLICT EXIST BETWEEN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND THE FREE WILL OF HUMANKIND?

- A. Does sovereignty demand absolute control? Is it possible for God to be sovereign if people are able to act in ways that are contrary to his will?
1. Certainly not! The conflict was generated by two parties teaching extreme, warped doctrines 350 years after the Gospel was preached.
- B. Theological conundrum: why is not all of God's will inviolate?
1. God's will also features God's determination to give free will to human beings, to not compel or coerce humans into believing in Him, or to be forced to love Him.
 2. Thus, God has determinations for people, but people may not choose to fulfill those determinations.
- C. God's will takes more than one form:
1. Permanent will - Absolute and unalterable by anyone but God.
 2. Revealed will - Revealed, unchangeable instructions for humankind.
 3. Unrevealed will - Unknown, unknowable plans of God.

4. Requisite will - Commands given to humankind that require human will to complete; never without consequences.
 5. Permissive will - God allows a choice without imposed consequences.
- D. Free will implies the ability to make choices within some constraints. For instance, I can choose, among a limited set of options, what I will eat for dinner. And I can choose whether I am going to obey the speed limit. But I cannot choose to act contrary to the physical laws of nature. I do not have a choice in whether or not gravity will pull me to the ground when I jump out of a window. Nor can I choose to sprout wings and fly.
1. We must learn to see God's sovereignty including a permissive element. In God's sovereignty, He allows us to make free choices (at least within certain limits).
 2. A consistent theme running through the Bible is humanity's rebellion against God, and His work of bringing redemption to humanity. Nowhere is God pictured as less than sovereign.
 3. Throughout all of Bible history, humanity is pictured as acting contrary to God's revealed will. Repeatedly they are called to act in a certain way. Yet often they choose to follow their own way.
 4. To accept Divine determinism or control would make God ultimately responsible for their disobedience to His revealed will.

Conclusion:

- A. People can take one of two extremes in regard to this question. Some emphasize the sovereignty of God to the point that human beings are little more than robots simply doing what they have been sovereignly programmed to do.
- B. Others emphasize free will to the point of God not having complete control and/or knowledge of all things.
- C. Neither of these positions is Biblical. The truth is that God does not violate our wills by choosing us and redeeming us. Rather, He changes our hearts by His love, blessings, and word so that our wills choose Him.
 1. 1John 4:19 - "We love Him because He first loved us."