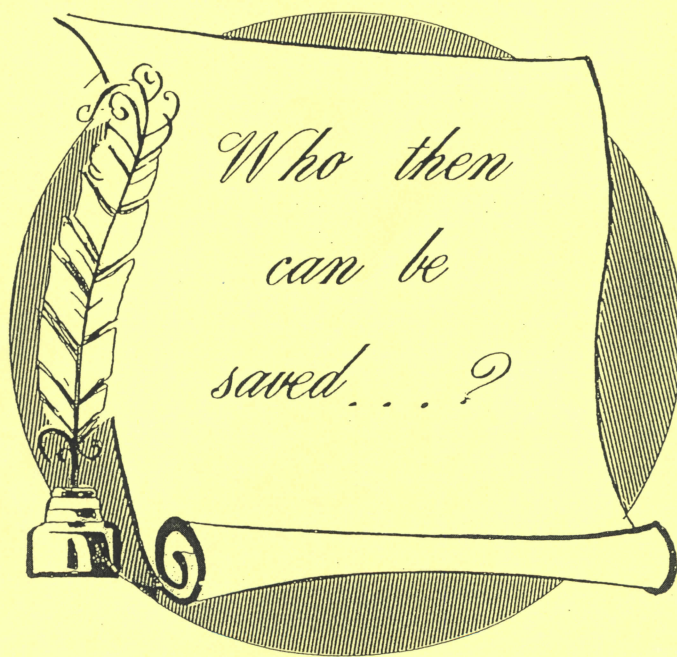


CRUCIAL ISSUES IN SALVATION

Divine Election Or Human Effort?



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1A. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY:

Both the Calvinist and Arminian subscribe to the sovereignty of God and yet when sovereignty is applied to specific situations, the difference between the two systems becomes very pronounced. J. K. S. Reid, in his introduction to Calvin's treatise, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, rightly observes:

The point at issue between Calvin and his opponents is thus simple, but it is of course fundamental. Substantially what they do is to wrest the ground of salvation out of God's own hand where alone, Calvin holds, it rightly belongs, and to deposit it within the contingent realm of human volition and freewill. Clearly this is to derogate from the sovereignty of God (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 1961, p. 11).

Arminians vehemently deny this, of course, but it is true nonetheless. The Scripture teaches that the ultimate destiny of every individual is decided by the will of God. Arminians assert that God permits man to exercise his own freewill in the matter of salvation.

Two passages of Scripture especially emphasize God's sovereignty in salvation and as long as they remain part of the inspired canon, God's absolute sovereignty must be maintained. The passages are Romans 9 and Ephesians 1.

1b. The teachings of Romans 9:

Paul points out that God's selection for salvation is not according to natural generation (9:7-9); or human merit (9:10-13) but rather according to His mercy (9:14-18) and power (9:19-24). Election is never related to man's wish or desire but to God's omnipotence.

Two individuals, Jacob and Esau, experienced God's sovereign activity. Jacob is loved by God, but Esau is hated by Him (Rom. 9:14).

1c. Objections expected by Paul:

1d. God is unrighteous:

Paul anticipates immediately the charge against his assertion, that therefore God is unrighteous. It is interesting to note that Paul does not reply as the Arminians would have him reply, that God simply foreknew what they would do, and therefore the charge of unrighteousness is false, but rather he answers with a strong expletive, "God forbid," and then continues to anchor God's elective decree in His sovereignty, not

man's free choice. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Paul introduces this objection to God's election with good reason. Were election based on the foreknowledge as to which man would believe once the gospel was presented, then such an objection of unrighteousness would be totally inane. And it cannot be too strongly emphasized that unless the Bible student today gets a similar response to his preaching, he is not preaching the true Biblical doctrine of election. The Arminians, unlike the Apostle Paul, would never be charged with preaching that God is unrighteous, for if God simply foresees what man would do and acts in accordance to this foreknowledge, then of course God is not acting unrighteously.

2d. Why does God find fault with the non-elect?

A second important objection that Paul anticipates is that God cannot find fault with those whom He bypassed with His elective decree, those who are reprobate. The objection is formulated thus: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" (Rom. 9:19). Paul answers very simply but firmly, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:20, 21). To paraphrase verse 20, Paul is saying, "It is none of your business." Creatures do not have the right to ask why their Creator has elected some and bypassed others any more than a symphony by Beethoven has the right to ask, "Why have you written me thus?" Charles Hodge has some pertinent comments on Romans 9:19:

If the fact that one believes and is saved, and another remains impenitent and is lost, depends on God, how can we be blamed? Can we resist His will? It will at once be perceived that this plausible and formidable objection to the apostle's doctrine is precisely the one which is commonly and confidently urged against the doctrine of election. There would be no room either for this objection, or for that contained in the 14th verse, if Paul had merely said that God chooses those whom he foresees would repent and believe; or that the ground of distinction was in the different conduct of man. It is very evident, therefore, that he taught no such doctrine (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1968, 317).

2b. The teachings of Ephesians 1:

The basis of election, the reason why God chose some to eternal bliss, is shrouded in eternal mystery. But Paul relates it to God's will, purpose, and good pleasure (Eph. 1:4-5, 11).

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

He works all things after the counsel of His own will. He does nothing arbitrary. **If the believer asks about the motive behind his election, then he is brought to the goodness and love of God, the good pleasure of the kind intention of His will.** But why God foreloved some and gave others over to their just punishment is not revealed. We know from Ephesians 1 that the source of our election is the Father (1:4), that the sphere of election is Christ, and that the time of election is before the foundation of the world (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3).

2A. HUMAN EFFORT

A. W. Pink, in his significant volume, *The Sovereignty of God*, has correctly placed the emphasis where it belongs. God makes the effort to save man. Man never decides on his own to come to God.

Why is it that all are not saved, particularly all who hear the Gospel? Do you still answer, because the majority refuse to believe? Well, that is true, but it is only a part of the truth. It is the truth from the human side. But there is a Divine side too, and this side of the truth needs to be stressed or God will be robbed of His glory. The unsaved are lost because they refuse to believe; the other are saved because they believe. But why do these others believe? What is it that causes them to put their trust in Christ? Is it because they are more intelligent than their fellows, and quicker to discern their need of salvation? Perish the thought, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). It is God himself who makes the difference between the elect and the non-elect, for of His own it is written, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20). (*The Sovereignty of God*, 1961, 46).

Two passages of Scripture which completely refute the Arminian assertion that each man has been given sufficient grace to believe and that therefore man on his own makes an effort to come to God are John 1:13 and Romans 9:16.

1b. The teachings of John 1:13:

John writes, ¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This verse refutes Arminianism once and for all, because here, in unmistakable language, is told what is excluded in man's salvation:

- (1) **human means**—"of blood," i.e., salvation is not a physical process;
- (2) **human urge**—"of the will of the flesh"—not an emotional response;
- (3) **human decision**—"of the will of man"—salvation is not due to man's mental activity.

Man is not saved because he decides to be saved, because he wants to be saved, but because of the effort on God's part on his behalf.

2b. The teachings of Romans 9:16

¹⁶So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

In this well-known passage, Paul shows that salvation is not by the will of man. Man is saved because God shows mercy, not because man decided to be saved or wanted to be saved. The verse excludes any human volition or active assertion for salvation.

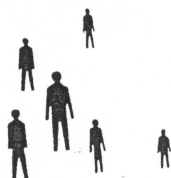
THE BASIS OF ELECTION

ROMANS 9:16

"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

"NOT OF HIM THAT WILLETH"
(Human Volition)

"NOT OF HIM THAT RUNNETH"
(Human Effort)



JOHN 1:13

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

"Blood"--Human Means--Physical Process

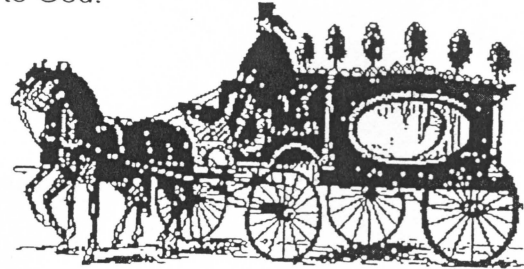
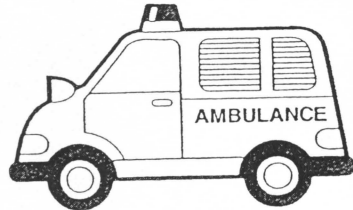
"Will of the Flesh"--Human Urge--Emotional Response

"Will of Man"--Human Will--Mental Decision

If these two verses mean anything, it is that man does not have a free will when it comes to the matter of salvation. Man is so totally depraved and so dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-5) that he is a spiritual corpse. This state, as any concept of death, includes the two ideas of separation and inability. Every man born into the world is separated from God and eternal life and is unable to respond in the area of the spiritual. And so Jonah was correct when he prayed from the belly of the fish: **"Salvation is of the Lord"** (Jonah 7:9). Total depravity makes human efforts impossible in salvation.

The defense of total depravity:

In Ephesians 2 the Apostle Paul asserts that every man before redemption is dead in spiritual and moral ability. The natural man does not need, figuratively speaking, an ambulance but a hearse. In their dead state, humans are totally given over to sin without the power to return to God.



The well-known Baptist pulpiteer of England, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, has preached extensively on the matter of human depravity and divine sovereignty. It would be good to consider what he said about human ability, freewill and God's sovereignty:

Now, the reason why man cannot come to Christ, is not because he can not come, so far as his body or his mere power of mind is concerned, but because his nature is so corrupt that he has neither the will nor the power to come to Christ unless drawn by the Spirit.

But let me give you a better illustration. You see a mother with a babe in her arms. You put a knife into her hand, and tell her to stab that babe in the heart. She replies, and very truthfully, "I can not." Now, as far as her bodily power is concerned, she can, if she pleases; there is the knife, and there is the child. The child can not resist, and she has quite sufficient strength in her hand immediately to stab it to its heart. But she is quite correct when she says she can not do it. As a mere act of the mind, it is quite possible she might think of such a thing as killing the child, and yet she says she can not think of such a thing; and she does not say falsely, for her nature as a mother forbids her doing a thing from which her soul revolts. Simply because she is that child's parent she feels she can not kill it.

It is even so with a sinner. Coming to Christ is so obnoxious to human nature that, although, so far as physical and mental forces are concerned (and these have but a very narrow sphere in salvation) men could come if they would;; it is strictly correct to say that they can not and will not unless the Father who hath sent Christ doth draw them. Let us enter a little more deeply into the subject, and try to show you wherein this inability of man consists, in its more minute particulars.

(1) First, it lies in the obstinacy of the human will. "Oh!" saith the Arminian, "men may be saved if they will." We reply, "My dear sir, we all believe that; but it is just the if they will that is the difficulty. We assert that no man will come to Christ unless he is drawn; nay, we do not assert it, but Christ Himself declares it—'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;' and as long as that 'ye will not come' stands on record in Holy

Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will."

It is strange how people, when talking about free-will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. "Now," says one, "I believe men can be save if they will." My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained toward Christ (*Spurgeon's Sermons on Sovereignty*, 1959, 123, 124).

3A. ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION:

Even the Apostle Paul expected opposition to such a doctrine from men who were deceived by the impulses of their depraved minds. Both the natural man and the old nature in believers have no regard for divine things and ever oppose God and His plan. Thus it should not come as a surprise that the Biblical doctrine of election is assailed on every hand.

Ness' words are not too strong when he asserts:

The Arminians deal with this doctrine as the heathen Emperors did with the primitive Christians in the ten first persecutions, who wrapped them up in the skins of beasts, and then exposed them to be torn to pieces by their fierce ban-dogs; so do the Arminians with this great truth. They first dress it up in an ugly shape, with their own false glosses upon it, and then they let fly at it one cynical sarcasm after another, saying, "This doctrine of absolute predestination goes to accuse and charge God with injustice, dissimulation, hypocrisy," etc., etc. (*An Antidote to Arminianism*, 1964, 34).

1b. God is unjust:

This objection has already been partially answered under the section of Romans 9. Ness observes:

God's decree is not an act of justice, but of lordship and sovereignty. Justice always presupposes debt; but God (who was perfect in Himself from all eternity) could not be a debtor to man, who had his all from God; the decree is not a matter of right and wrong, but of free favour: grace is God's own, He may do what He will with it. "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15). If He gives grace to some and not to others, it is no wrong in Him that is not bound to give it to any (*Ibid.*, p. 36).

While election secures the salvation of some, preterition or the bypassing of the non-elect does not procure the damnation of others. Sin is the cause of damnation, but reprobation is not the cause of sin. God, as the sovereign of the universe, does as He

pleases. Supposing there are 100 women equally suitable for marriage. Is it unjust to marry one unless a man marries all? Does Christ have the right to choose His bride from the larger mass? The poet has well expressed this truth:

*God's ways are just, His counsels wise,
No darkness can prevent His eyes;
No thought can fly, nor thing can move,
Unknown to Him that sits above.*

*He in the thickness darkness dwells,
Performs His works, the cause conceals,
But though His methods are unknown,
Judgment and Truth support His throne.*

*In heaven, and earth, and air, and seas,
He executes His firm decrees;
And by His saints it stands confess'd,
That what he does is ever best.*

*Wait then, my soul, submissive wait,
Prostrate before His awful seat,
And, midst the terrors of His rod,
Trust in a wise and gracious God.*

26. God is arbitrary:

It is true that we do not know the reason why God selected some and bypassed others. But to charge God with arbitrariness is to do Him an enormous injustice. Does not God say of Himself, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). His is a well-thought-out, wonderful plan rather than an arbitrary act of will.

*May not the Sov'reign Lord on high
Dispense His favours as He will;
Choose some to live, while others die,
And yet be just and gracious still?*

*Shall men reply against the Lord,
And call his Maker's ways unjust?
The thunder of whose dreadful word
Can crush a thousand worlds to dust.*

*But, O my soul, if truths so bright
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet still His written will obey,
And wait the great decisive day!*

3b. Calvinism quenches missionary zeal:

This objection to predestination is the least substantial of them all. No one was a stronger believer in election than the Apostle Paul. And no one was engaged in more zealous missionary activities than Paul. The Calvinism of Spurgeon and Whitfield certainly did not quench their zeal for the salvation of the lost. The Calvinist knows that while not all will be saved, at least some will come to the Savior. The Arminian really has no assurance that any will be saved, for all may actively resist the will of the Lord.

A Calvinist will not fall into despair when he preaches his heart out and none will respond. An Arminian will blame himself and his message for the lack of response. "If God wishes to save every person on earth, then it is up to us to see that they are converted. When they do not come to Christ it is our fault," says the Arminian. The Calvinist, on the other hand, realizes that while he is commanded to preach the gospel to every creature, no one will be lost because of his personal failure. "All that the Father hath given me will come unto me" (Jon 6:37). Election gives purpose and direction to one's ministry. A Calvinist will not use gimmicks or tricks to coax men to Christ. He realizes that the Holy Spirit will effectively draw those to the Savior whose names are written in heaven.

It should be perfectly plain by now that one's view of election determines one's methods of evangelism. The latter is a direct result of the former. Sound practice is always based on sound doctrine. Orthodoxy precedes orthopraxy, even in Soteriology.