

Salvation: God's choosing or our belief? (Part 1)

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We have been studying the basic doctrines of God's Word, we have worked our way through the person of God, the trinity, and through man, and sin, and angels, and now we find ourselves looking at salvation, and so we come to this evening's message, which is, "Salvation: God's choosing or our belief?" I may not get through all of the material tonight, and may indeed, need to split this message into two parts, but I do want to at least begin our look at this matter of salvation and who is responsible for what. I think this issue perhaps above all, in the church, causes division. And I think as I understand the issue, I think it's interesting to me, that as believers in Jesus Christ, we're Ok with God being in control of all things external to ourselves. So while the world has issues with a good God being sovereignly in control of an evil world (and that's certainly another topic, for another time), we understand and recognise the God of heaven is in control of the weather, he is in control of the movements of nations, we're even perhaps comfortable with the fact that he's in control of the heart of the king, He puts in power those that he wishes to and brings those down those that he wishes to, we're Ok with God having sovereign control as long as it's not over us. But when it comes to God having sovereign control over us, we're a little skittish about that. And really what it boils down to is: How do two wilful beings co-exist in the same universe? We are the only created being, that bears the image of God and part of that, I believe, is this matter of will. We have the ability to make choices. So how then, does a God who chooses, and man who chooses, co-exist in the same universe? Logically, we have three choices:

- 1) Either, God's choices are greater than man's or in other words, if the choices come into conflict, God wins. :-)
- 2) Either man's choice is greater than God's, or in other words, if the choices come into conflict, man wins out.
- 3) Or they are equal. This is logic. However, as I hope we're going to see as we look at scripture, logic is only going to get us so far.

What we need is Bib-logic, or Theo-logic. There are in scripture things that are difficult to understand, and this is certainly one of them. So what I'd like to do this evening, to begin, is to go into the text. I typically do this anyway (all right, I hope that I don't preach my opinion :-)) on a fairly regular basis..) but I just want to look at scripture to begin. And that may be all that we get to, this evening.

Turn your Bibles with me if you would, to Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 9, Isaiah 55 and verse 9. Now certainly if you want to get a sense of the sovereignty of God, the book of Isaiah would not be a bad place to start. Here in the 55th chapter of the book and verse 9, the prophet says (this is God speaking through the prophet), "*for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*" When we, if we were to go out this evening, after the sun were to go down and look into the night sky and see the magnitude of the heavens, the immensity of creation, we would have a small glimpse of the bigness of God. Louie Giglio, who is a traveling evangelist, has put it this way: "man thinks that he is the centre of the universe, and because of that thought, he believes the universe is a 'tad big" therefore, that's why he's looking for life on other planets (and no less than Stephen Hawking believes in aliens, as does Richard Dawkins and many others). But if we are the center of the universe, if indeed we are the apex of evolution, the universe is a tad larger than it needs to be. If however, the universe is designed to show us God.., it's just about the right size. And so, if we were to look into the night sky and just attempt to grasp the magnitude of the heavens, God says, as far as the earth is from the heavens, that distance (which is

infinitesimally large), that is how far I am removed from you, and my ways from your ways, and my thoughts from your thoughts. The day that we believe that we have God 'figured-out', is the day he ceases to be God. And I think as it comes to this particular topic and this particular debate, we must be careful, because we like things packaged together, we like things to make sense, we like things to be all laid-out, and we can understand them. And I think if we believe we can do that with God, then he ceases to be God. And so in this discussion, we need to recognize and understand that God is not us, and we are not him, and he is far above us. Turn over then with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 29 and verse 29. Moses is giving the law to the people of Israel for the second time (that's where the book gets its name) and here in the last verse of chapter 29, Moses tells the people ***"the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"***. I think in the context, primarily Moses is speaking about the issues of the future, but I think the context can certainly be broadened. There are things about life that we are not going to know, that God has not revealed to us, there are questions that we are going to have, that do not find their answers perhaps specifically in scripture. However, that is not what we need to concern ourselves with, and this is Moses' admonishment to the people of Israel. What we must concern ourselves with is, what has been revealed, and that must govern us, govern our thinking and govern our lives. So there are mysteries, there are things that we are not going to understand about God, and about his ways. And really, it could not be any other way. If it was, then we would be Gods' equal - he would cease to be who he is. And so there are things that are beyond our comprehension and this is necessarily so, I would submit to you this evening. And so we need to be careful again, as we look into God's Word and God's way and his plan. There things perhaps, not perhaps but there are things that are definitely beyond our comprehension. Now let's go over to the New Testament - Romans chapter 11 and a bit more of a lengthier passage, but Romans chapter 11 verses 33 through 36. It is interesting that these verses should come at the end of the section that they do. In (chapter) 9, 10 and 11, Paul is dealing with Gods plan and program for the nation of Israel. And (chapter) eight, he begins this discussion of the predetermination of God (8:28 and 8:29 and following as certainly verses that are difficult to understand perhaps). Romans chapter 9 would probably be the most famous passage, as it relates to this particular discussion. But Paul comes at the end of all of this, and it's almost as if he is overwhelmed by the magnitude of Gods plan, and God's will, and Gods ways, and he just puts his pen to paper and comes out with these four verses ***"oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out, for who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him? And it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever! Amen!"*** Paul quotes Job fairly liberally in this short passage. Job went through what he went through, and if you're here this evening, you probably know the trials of Job. What we know, that Job did not (he does now), was that this situation that he found himself thrust into, came as a result of his loving heavenly father. It is God that points Job out to Satan. It is God that allows Satan to do what he does to Job, and at the end of it all, Job's question of "Why?" is not answered. It is left unanswered in this material (the book of job). And yet Job learns from this experience, that God is so far above him, that it's incomprehensible. And so he says, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" Who knows how God operates? (the inner workings of God) Who has been his counsellor? Who does God take his advice from? And of course the answer to that rhetorical question is: no one. God does not require advice from anyone - He has all knowledge within himself :-) And then Job says, "Who has given to God that God would be obligated to repay back?" Job learns that lesson, or has already gotten that lesson down when this trial starts, because he says "I come into this world with nothing, and I will leave it the same, and blessed be the name of the Lord". Everything I have, including my own life is from God, therefore everything is of Him, I have nothing that is of my own" and Paul ends-up by saying, "that from Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things". God is the originator of all things, He is the sustainer of all things, He is the end of all things. So I hope that as we move through this (scriptural) material, this indeed will be the foundation of our look at the contents of Gods' Word, especially as it relates to this particular issue. I would submit, this ought to be the foundation for our look at any issue – all-right..., but certainly this one, because since the early church - the time of Augustine – that's where the debate sort of formally started – but it was certainly going on before then, down through until now, this debate has raged. Is God the one who divinely elects and chooses? Or is man the one

who chooses? And, the sides have been formed, the debate has raged... the churches have split..., brothers and sisters in Christ have ceased to speak to one another and I do not propose to that I am going to, with this message and perhaps another one, solve all of these issues. But I would say this... I believe a lot of this debate has come out of human pride. The idea that we can have this all figured-out, and we can have this, "systematic theology" that packages everything nicely for us, and allows us to "breathe easy", because we understand the ways of God. And I would submit to you this evening, that if that is the case, God ceases to be who he is. Does that mean then, that we are left with no knowledge whatsoever about this topic? Certainly not.

What I would like to do next then, is look at five... four verses, sorry, within which both sides of this debate, of this discussion, find themselves in a single verse. These are only four representative verses, there are others. But before we do that, I want to kind of, frame the discussion for you. I am not here to promote an ideology, or a theology, but - because this is how the debate is usually framed, and this is how we usually understand things, let me be brief... but let me explain both sides of this equation.

The one side would be what we typically know as Calvinism. – named after John Calvin, who formulated some of these thoughts. His students then went on from there. But if you bring Calvinism down to its core, it is a promotion of, and a defence of, the sovereignty of God. God is the one who chooses, God is the one who is in control, and that not only relates to things that are external to the human will, but that relates to the human will itself.

On the other side you have what has been called Arminianism – named after Arminius, and this would be the counter, so to speak, to Calvinism. Where the thought is, in order for love to be genuine, in order for choice to be real, man's will must be free and he must be the one who chooses. If indeed God has elected, they would say that he has elected based on his foreknowledge of who would choose him. In other words, God looked down through the passages of time, saw who would be saved, and before time began, chose those ones to accept his Son for salvation. And so on the one hand of the discussion we have those that are defending God's sovereignty, on the other, we have those that are defending man's freedom, man's will, and the genuineness –at least in their minds– of love and of choice.

I would submit to you further, that if you go too far in either direction, you are going to fall into a ditch. If you take Calvinism as a system to its logical extreme, you find at the end of that, that God indeed is even the author of sin. If in fact all things are a result of his active will, God then, created sin –and that of course, is anti-biblical. As well, there are those that have taken Calvinism as a system, to its logical extension, and have ceased mission activity... "Why would we witness, if everybody who God wants to be saved, is going to be saved?" Prayer does not seem to really be that much of an issue, because indeed, if all things that are going to take place as God determined that they would... What's the point in praying? And so on, and so forth... because of the "logic" of the system.

If you take Arminianism on the other hand, to its logical extension, you find a system that would be very closely parallel to brother Clark Pinnock (I call him brother, I don't actually know if he is a brother in Christ), Professor Clark Pinnock, who teaches at McMaster University in Hamilton, who is the progenitor of the idea of 'Open Theism'. That is that "God is learning, changing, growing along with us". So God learns new things... His argumentation would go something like this, "since the free-will choices of man are not known, even to the man himself, –in other words, you don't even know what you're what going to choose to do tomorrow, let alone what you're going to do in five seconds–, therefore that is also outside the realm of God's knowledge. And so God's omniscience then is framed in different language, according to Mr. Pinnock.

And so you see the problems that we have when we follow man :-), instead of God's word, and when we follow systems instead of following scripture. I would submit to you this evening that if we examine the biblical material, we can see that both indeed are correct. If you were to ask me how that works, I would respond to you, "I don't know... But I'm Ok with that..." and I hope you will be after we're done looking at this (scripture) material. So let's go into the text this evening –for the time that we have left– and we'll probably just get to these four verses tonight and then, next time I have the opportunity to speak, we'll get into some of the details. Now

that may disappoint some of you. I don't know if you came tonight to get some juicy details... It's not my intention to leave you hanging so you'll come back and hear me speak, but the time constraints are there.

Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Luke chapter 22 and verse 22. Luke 22:22. On the screen, as these verses come up, you are going to see if part of a verse is in bold and underlined, that is the part that God does, if a part of a verse is italicized, that is the human responsibility side. What I'm attempting to show this evening is that in within the same verse –in this four representative verses...there are others– you have both divine determination and human responsibility. In the same verse, in the passages we're going to look at this evening. Luke 22:22, "and truly the Son of Man goeth, **as it was determined**, but *woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed*". Now this verse does not talk about salvation, but it does talk about God's divine determination and man's responsibility. That question could be asked, "If Judas, had not betrayed Christ, would Christ still have been crucified? And I don't know that we need to enter in the realm of the "what ifs"... I think that's the point of this verse. Jesus Christ came to die - that's why he came. I mean a bigger question could be asked, "What if the nation of Israel would have accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah?" And that's just not a question we can pose of scripture. It's kind of like, "What if Elijah had not prayed, would there still have been a drought for 3 years?" But we know in James, "*...the effectual firm prayer of a righteous man availeth much...*" - God was going to bring a drought on the land, it was his judgement because of Ahab and Jezebel and their debauchery, but Elijah also prayed and it happened...Was it Elijah's prayer or God's will? –Yes! All-right, it was both. How does that work? I don't know – but I'm Ok with that. So Jesus Christ says "it was determined beforehand", before even creation was spoken into existence, Jesus Christ was going to come to die. This was not something that was sort of, a plan that came sort of late to the scene. This is integral to the history of the universe. Christ came to die that's why he came. But Jesus Christ himself says, "Judas Iscariot bears full responsibility and complete culpability for his choice. He chose to betray the Son of God, yet God determined – predetermined, that the Son of God would be betrayed and would be crucified. What is Judas' betrayal, or God's pre-determination? Yes. And this verse goes even further, because we could ask the question, and this question is asked by Paul in Romans chapter 9. If Judas, Judas' betrayal of Christ was God's will, then didn't Judas do God's will? Because this is the question that Paul poses. If God determined that some will not obey him, and they disobey him, aren't they obeying him? I don't know if you follow that – it's a little convoluted. And the answer is NO. God does his work, man makes his choices, and they both co-exist in the same universe. Judas Iscariot made his choice. He chose to betray the Son of God. Yet we know that God was behind that choice, and behind the whole betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But both human responsibility and divine determination find themselves linked here, in this same verse and Judas is actually held responsible in this verse for his choice, even though God had predetermined that it would be so.

John chapter 6 and verse 37. John chapter 6 and verse 37, "**All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me**, and *him that cometh to me* I will in no wise cast out." God has given those that will believe in Jesus Christ to Christ, he has given Christ his disciples, yet in the same verse Jesus Christ turns it back and says, "the one that comes to me, I will not cast out". There is God's will, and there is human choice and human will. And they are here co-existing in the same verse. I'm doing this because I want scripture to speak for itself and what typically happens when those that say they're defending the sovereignty of God, and those that say they're defending the will of man get together, what they typically do is load up the verses that they say agree with them, and shot them at the other person. The other person responds in kind, by loading up their Bible bazooka with their verses and shooting them back, and really all that happens is two people get bloodied and nothing really gets resolved. But here, again, we see that we have God's election, God's choice, God's will, and man's responsibility, man's choice, and man's will. And both are present in the same passage of scripture. Let's go over to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 13 and verse 48. "...and when the gentiles heard this (the gospel), they were glad and glorified the Lord", and notice the last part of the verse, "**...and as many were ordained to eternal life believed**", - those that were to be saved, were saved. This is God doing his work. Yet notice the last word of that verse, they "*believed*" They did what they were to do, and again, in the same passage of scripture we have God's divine determination and man's responsibility coming together.

Last passage, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 13 and 14. I saved this verse for the end, because in the middle of verse 13, you have both human responsibility and God's determination wrapped-up in the same phrase - which is interesting. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 13 and 14, "...but we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, **because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation**". Here you have God's work, this is what God does, and notice the time frame, "from the beginning" this predates - I believe - creation; at the very least it predates their existence. This is God doing his work, but notice it says "through (what?) *sanctification of the spirit*", now I've bolded that and italicized it because sanctification, as we know from scripture, is both God doing in us, making of us, what we are to be, and us participating in that. In Philippians, I believe it's chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, that we've talked about before, and back-to-back verses. It says that God is making of us what he wants us to be, and then we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. So we have both in the same phrase and then finally how does that come about, and he says, "*belief of the truth*", there is a requirement there. The requirement is that we are to believe, "where unto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ".

We need to wrap-up for this evening, next time that I am given the opportunity to speak; we will look into some more of the details of this. But I just wanted to show you some of the biblical material. This is representative, there is more. Certainly throughout the writing of Paul you have both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. But let me leave you with this thought. I believe what we have here in scripture is what is known as a paradox. It is a truth that appears to be in contradiction. But we have these and we accept them readily. The first one would be the Trinity, how is it, that God is three in one? Everybody else, other than Christians, realize that that's bad math. You either have three gods, or you have one God, but you can't have one God, who's three. And as we've talked about God, and we've talked about the Trinity before, there's different illustrations and metaphors that are attempted to be used, but really, they're both true. God is three and God is one. But if we are to say that God is only one then we come into either a cult (like Jehovah's witnesses and Mormons or others that do not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit), or if we are in the realm of three gods, then we are polytheists and we've been charged with being that as well, but are not - we are monotheists and we are also trinitarian. Now, if I were to ask you this evening to explain that to me, I don't believe you could. I can't explain that fully to you, and I preached a whole sermon on it. :-) It's a paradox, but we live with it and we accept it by faith. A secondary paradox would be the person of Jesus Christ himself, how is it possible that he is the God-man? And heresies on both sides are abundant in the early church and even today, there are those that stretch the humanity of Jesus Christ to the exclusion of his deity, there are those that express and believe in the deity of Jesus Christ to the exclusion of his humanity. If Jesus Christ was not God, he was not perfect; if he was not perfect, we are lost in our sins. If Jesus Christ was not fully human, then he's not one of us and so we're also lost in our sins. So he's both fully human and fully divine. Now you explain to me how that works, because I can't explain it to you..., but I believe it. I believe both are true, I believe he is both man, fully one-hundred percent just like me, just like you, but that he's also at the same time, one-hundred percent fully God. How does that work? I don't know, but it's true and I believe it. How is it then, that God can choose, and yet we can also choose? I don't know, but the Bible teaches both and I believe it and next time we're together, hopefully we'll be able to wade-through some of these details. But I hope that you understand, that God's ways are beyond our ways, and throughout scripture we have both sides of this equation, and often-times, as we've seen even tonight, in the same verse of scripture. How can they both be true? I don't know, but I believe they both are, and we'll look at some more of those details, next time that we are together. Let's look to the Lord in prayer, this evening.

Father forgive me tonight if I have been too deep. Father your word ought to be simple, and Father I pray that you would forgive me if I have made it too difficult. Father I thank you that your word is clear, and although it is not always easy, it is in fact simple. Father, you have made it clear to us that you are sovereignly in control over all things - If you are not, then you are not God. And yet Father, in your divine wisdom, you have made us, made me, with a will and with the ability to choose. You have called me to believe in you through Jesus Christ, to love you as much as you have loved me. And that relationship is based on that love and that freedom of choice. Father, how do these two things co-exist in the same universe? Father, I do not know.

But I rest in the thought that you do. Father, I do not know most of what you have revealed, and I certainly know nothing about what you have not. And Father I pray that we would be humbled by you, humbled by your greatness, humbled by your word. Father I believe that far too often in our pride, in our focus on intellectualism and academia, we believe that we have a corner on truth, and that we have it all figured out. And Father, in order for us to take one side or the other, on this debate, on this discussion, we are going to have to do damage to both your word and to your character. And Father, I am not prepared to do either. And so I pray, as we continue to look at your word on this topic, that Father we would understand the truth of it, that although we will not be able to reconcile it logically, Father beyond our logic, not that you are illogical -Father you are extremely logical...you invented logic and your son used it much when he was here on the earth- but Father, there is that which is beyond logic; because logic at its best is finite, and you are not.

And so Father I pray, that as we just get a glimpse of your infinity once again on this topic, that we would be blessed, we'd be encouraged and also to be challenged by it. Father I pray that this week, and in the weeks and months to come, we would rest in you, and rest in the knowledge that although we will not figure these things out, you already have. And Father, you are good, you do all things for our benefit, and for you glory - we thank you for that in the name of your Son, Amen.