

# Salvation: God's choosing or our belief? (Part 2)

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This evening, I want to continue our look at the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Last Sunday night we began looking at the area of our salvation, and asking the question, "Is our salvation as a result of God's choosing, or as a result of our belief?" And as we began to discover, the answer is: Yes! :-). It is both, God's choosing and our belief. Before we jump into to any new material then, this evening I want us to re-cap, perhaps some of the thoughts that we looked at, last time we were together. The sermon last Sunday evening, consisted primarily of, or I should say, exclusively of scripture. And there are many scriptures in which, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility appear simultaneously. And we looked at some of those as a representative, of this idea, last time we were together. So as we begin then, tonight to look at the rest of the story -as Paul Harvey would say, and point one, we see these dangers to avoid. And this is what I wanted to flesh-out, last time we were together. I think this topic has engendered a lot of emotion, it has engendered much more heat than light, and I think one of the reasons is because this touches to the core of us. We are Ok, I think, with God being in control of things external to us, we're all-right with the fact that he controls the weather, there are times when we wish that he would change the weather perhaps, but we're Ok with the idea that he controls it. We are perhaps, less Ok with the idea that he is in control of natural disasters. This is one of the things that society looks upon to prove that God is not good, therefore he does not exist. Yet we would understand and recognise that he is in control of this world, even though it is under the curse of sin. And so these things are also under his control. However, I think were we begin to get a little nervous, is when God sort of steps into "our house" so to speak, comes into "our back yard", and the idea that he's in control of us. And that sort of, is something that we're not really comfortable with. And as believers in Jesus Christ, it's always intrigued me, why - Why we're not Ok with that because, our salvation depends on it. If God is not in control of all things, including us, then he's not God. And if he's not God, then we do not believe in him, as least not how he's portrayed to us in scripture. In fact, I would further say, if God is not actively involved in choosing us, and in choosing me, I would not be saved this evening. Because I know, both from his word and from experience, that I did not choose him. I believed, when I heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but the choice was his. We are born with the nature of sin and this sin nature we saw when we looked at man. Therefore it is not in our nature to choose God, we rebel against him, and it is our nature to desire to replace him with ourselves. And so, I don't know why this is so problematic to us, but it is, and ever since Pelagius and Augustine, in the early part of church history on up through the present. As Solomon said, "that of the writing of books, there is no end", and on this topic that is certainly the case. If avoided using the terminology, that is typically associated with this topic, that would be Calvinism and Arminianism - I don't think that that, at the end of the day is helpful, primarily because both of those terms are extremely loaded with baggage. That having been said, I don't want to you to feel like I don't know my way around those things - all right, I have done an immense amount of study and research in this topic throughout my own personal spiritual journey. Yet I want to focus on the biblical text, and not on a system of theology that is designed by an uninspired man - and by uninspired, I mean not one of the authors of scripture. So what are these dangers to avoid? There are three that we looked at last time we were together and I just want to remind ourselves of these this evening.

The first danger we need to avoid is, "having God all figured-out". There is a certain arrogance that comes with those that believe that they have God "pinned-down", they can kind of "figure him-out", they kind of "know how he works, how he operates, how he thinks". And both those on the side of a defence, or a supposed defence of God's sovereignty (not that that needs to be defended), and those that are in defence of man's will,

and man's responsibility, and the genuineness of his response as well as his culpability, would believe that they have God figured-out. That their system of belief and their system of thought, allows them to be Ok with the biblical material. Despite the fact that regardless of which side you land on, if you take that, to the exclusion of the other, you find yourself in contradiction to, and in denial of clear biblical passages. But because we need things to be understandable to us, we don't like mysteries, we like things to make sense - and so as it relates to this particular topic, we kind of feel that we have to sort of understand it in our minds. And so men have constructed these systems, and people have followed them for a very long time, and I don't think that that is helpful primarily because, if God is able to be figured out, he ceases to be God. He is not us. He does not think the way that we think. He does not respond and act the way that we act. He is not us -we are made in his image, but he is not us and we are not him. And so when someone comes to you and says, "well I've got it all figured out", especially as it relates to God -automatically that should rise a red flag. And believe me, in my personal spiritual journey, as well as my academic journey, I have encountered many, especially I would say, and I don't want to caricature anyone, or stereo-type anyone, but those on the side of the sovereignty of God, often times, carry with themselves a lot of this arrogance. It may be conscious or sub-conscious, I don't want to indict anybody in particular, but because they think that they have it all figured out, there is a certain "swagger" -I guess you could say -about them, because their position has answers. And I don't believe that that is the case, on either side of this debate, to the exclusion of the other. So we need to be careful, that we don't feel that we ever get to the point where we fully understand God. Can we commune with him? Can we have a relationship with him? Yes! But are we ever going to fully understand him? I don't think so, he is God, he is not us and we are not him.

The second danger that we find ourselves getting into is this idea that logic is going to answer all of our issues - that as long as things are logical, then they are Ok. Logic though, is something that is done on our level. Now clearly, God is not illogical -all right, logic is, after all his idea :- ) as is everything that is created. He is extremely logical; his son when he was here was logical and used logical argumentation with those that were against his ministry. The ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ used logic and we ought to as well. Christianity is not illogical. However, logic only goes so far, logic can only take us so far. And I believe that there are paradoxes, there are things that appear to be contradictory, yet are true, and last time that we were together we saw at least two. The first would be the trinity. Christians could be said to be poor mathematicians, because we believe that three equals one, or I should say better - when we were in the material, one plus one plus one equals one. We believe in the trinity and we're Ok with that. And there have been many heresies and many people on either side of this debate. Either God is three -but he's not three, he's one- or God is one. And you have Arianism and these other heresies that say that the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are not God. You have Modalism, where God appears in different forms at different times, yet that's also destroyed by scripture in many places, but in particular at the baptism of Jesus Christ -all three members of the Trinity in the same place at the same time. And so we're Ok with that. It's not logical, it doesn't really make sense, there are other metaphors, there are other illustrations and analogies that we try to construct. An egg has a shell and a yoke and a white, and so that's kind of a trinity. Or I am a husband and a pastor and a father, but that's me with three responsibilities. The egg thing, and there's also water, it has gaseous, and liquid and solid. But all of the analogies that we construct really don't actually help us, at the end of the day, to understand the trinity. The trinity is a paradox. How can one plus one plus one equal one? I don't know, but that's what scripture teaches and that's what I believe - and think, everybody here in this room tonight is Ok with that. The second paradox that we know exists, and these are just representative, there are others, is the person of Jesus Christ. How can there be a single person with two natures? And I'm not talking about a sin and a non-sin (nature), all-right. I'm talking about someone who is both divine and human at the same time. How does that work? Again, I will be very happy to tell you I don't know, I don't know how that works, but I know that's what scripture teaches. I know that Jesus Christ is fully God. If he's not, I'm not saved and neither are you, because he's not perfect, and he needs to be perfect, to be a perfect sacrifice. Yet, he's also fully human, he's one of us - if he's not, he can't be our representative and we're not saved either. And again, throughout church history, and even today, there are heresies and there is debate on both sides of this issue about the nature - natures, I should say, of the person of

Jesus Christ. It's a paradox. It doesn't seem to make sense that these two things could both be true, yet they are. And so I would submit to you that in this debate over the will of God and the will of man, and the reason why we're dealing with it here, is because here is where it's primarily discussed, as this matter of salvation, as we start our look at salvation. I believe that both are true. We are responsible, we are responsible to believe. We are held responsible for not believing. As we looked at last time, Judas was pre-determined to betray Jesus Christ. That was something that God designed. Yet, Judas is held fully responsible for his choice! Notice the terminology - to betray Jesus Christ. And you can ask, this evening, "How is that fair?" and "How does that work?" and I will tell you, "I don't know". But the Bible teaches that that is the case. Judas made a choice and he was judged - and I would submit to you, is currently being judged for that choice. Yet it was God's will that he do so. How does that work? I don't know, but that's what scripture teaches. That's what God teaches. It's a paradox.

Thirdly then, the last thing that we need to be careful that we don't do, is to rely on either God's sovereignty, or man's responsibility, to the exclusion of the other. Here is what typically happens in literature that is written about this topic. The side that is defending the sovereignty of God loads up the scripture references that display God's sovereignty, and lay them out as defence of their position. And this is legitimate, but then the other side brings together their verses, and I will be frank, they are far less to defend the will of man, and the responsibility of man, and they extract those from scripture and exegete those; and neither side interacts with the others verses, they just continually shoot their power verses at each other and in the end you have a big mess. And I think we have gotten into trouble, when we have promoted one to the exclusion of the other. As I mentioned, last time we were together, if you take the idea of God's sovereignty too far, God becomes the author of sin - and we know that cannot be the case from all of scripture, but in particular James says that God cannot sin, neither can he tempt any man to do so. And so there is a sense in which the reality is, man makes choices, real legitimate choices and God is not in the background making those things happen in the sense that he sins, or causes somebody to sin - we know that cannot be or else God is not God. And so we have to be careful how far we take the sovereignty of God. Yet on the side of the free will of man - and would argue about how free that actually is...because of our nature, but if you say the will of man - if you go too far down that road, then God becomes not God, he's not actually in control of all things - man is...man makes choices and God reacts to those. And that's not how it is in scripture. Clark Pinnock, who is a Professor at the McMaster Divinity School, down in Hamilton - not too far away from here, is the progenitor of the idea of "Open Theism" that God is growing, changing, expanding, learning. And his argumentation is this, "since the free will choices of man are not even known to the man themselves - in other words, you don't even know what you're going to choose to do in the next five seconds, let alone tomorrow, then God does not know those either." And so, he's changing, he's responding, he's learning, he's growing... And that's not God. And so there is a road of biblical truth, and if you go too far off on either side, you're in a ditch. Let me very quickly illustrate this as well, with the idea of evangelism. If you take the idea of God's sovereignty too far, and become fatalistic in a philosophical sense, then really what is the point of evangelizing? Because the question could be asked -logically speaking, if all that God has chosen, are going to be saved, then why do we need to bother to witness? Because God's going to see that it's going to happen anyway. So why would you evangelize? In fact, if you want to take it even further logically, why would bother praying? Because really all things are going to happen the way that God said they were going to happen before time began, and so what's the point of even going to God in prayer? Does the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man really avail much? -or is that just to make us feel better? However, if you go to the opposite extreme, evangelism becomes all about us, it's all about human effort. We are the ones that must bring people into salvation, and into the kingdom of God -and you see this fleshed-out in many ministries. And I would submit to you, that on either side of this spectrum -as it relates to evangelism, and so many other areas of life, if you are unbalanced, on either extreme, then you are going to get yourself into trouble. And these are dangers that we need to avoid.

As we then begin to look at the biblical material, in the time that we have remaining, if I can sum up what I believe that the Bible says about this topic, in a single phrase, this would be it: God has ordained both the ends, and the means. God has ordained both the ends, and the end -All things end in him (Romans chapter 11), and

the means. And so if you were to ask me, in evangelism, "Is it that God has chosen people to be saved or that we evangelise?" - YES. "Is it that God is doing his will or that we pray?" - YES. It is both. And you can ask me, as many questions as you want, and for how long you want, "How does that work" and I am going to tell you, "I don't know, but that is what scripture says". God has ordained both the ends and the means. In fact, if you are to read Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20, you'll find a very interesting verse. Joseph tell his brothers, at the tail-end of his life –because as you can well expect, they are still feeling just a little guilty about how all that "went down" :- ) with Joseph. And what does he tell his brothers? "You designed this action –and these series of actions..., for evil, God designed it for good". Does that mean that God caused Joseph's brothers to sin? NO. Does that mean that God said, "Oh, No, Joseph's brothers just threw him in a well and sold him into slavery! Now what am I going to do?" –Okay... NO! God was behind the end result, which was that Joseph would rise to a place of prominence in the nation of Egypt and be there to save many people alive, including his own family –and we know that God had ordained the ends, because he told Joseph about it, in a dream before any of this even happened. "One day", God said to Joseph, "your whole family will bow down to you..." –you can imagine how that when over...when he woke up the next morning and told his family, but we know that God had ordained the end, that was going to happen, there's no question that what God has designed to do, was going to happen. But God also, ordained the means. Joseph's brothers were not engaged in plotting his death, and his eventual sale into slavery, and wondering, why they were doing so... –as if it was against what they wanted to do. They were acting according to their will. They were making choices that were in accordance with what they wanted to do. And yet, over it all, in it all, through it all, behind it all you see God. And that's what scripture tells us. That's the biblical data that we have –both are true. So these are the dangers we need to avoid.

Let's look into God's word and discern the biblical material. In the first place, we see that God chooses, and enables men to be saved. We're going to look at a number of verses, I don't have a lot of time left, but turn with me if you would, fairly rapidly, John chapter 6 and verse 39 and then 44, ***"and this is the Father's will, which hath sent me, that all of which he hath given me, I should lose nothing. But should raise it up again at the last day."*** There are two things there, at least, that we can see from that verse. First of all, God gave disciples to Jesus Christ –It was God's work that did that. Secondly, God is going to see that work through till the end. I can say with great confidence this evening, I'm glad God's will is greater than mine –because if it wasn't, not only would I not be saved, but I would not be glorified, one day. Yet, I can have great confidence in the fact that one day God is going to change me –and I'm very glad for that. I don't see it as an imposition on my freedom; I see it as a glorious truth of scripture, that God has a plan for me. And that plan he's going to see through to the end, and if he were not doing that, the plan wouldn't be seen through to the end –because left to my devices, I would fail. Notice verse 44, ***"no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him. And I will raise him up at the last day"***. It is God's work –God the Father chooses his followers –his children, and he draws them to Jesus Christ. Turn with me, if you would to Romans chapter 9 and verse 16 –and I've attempted to put these in chronological order, at least, as the books appear in scripture, and hopefully that will help us get there quicker. Romans chapter 9 and verse 16. We don't have time to exegete this passage or this series from 9 through to 11, but in verse 16 it says, ***"so then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy"***. No one is going to stand in heaven and say that they had anything to do with their presence there. It has nothing to do with our abilities. It has nothing to do with our looks. It has nothing to do with our striving or with our efforts. And again, this ought to be an extremely glorious truth to us. I mean look... remember Naaman, he comes to Elisha, and Elisha says, "Go bathe in the Jordan river" and he says, "Man this is disgusting.." and he goes away and his servant comes to him and says, "it's going down to the river man! Like, what if he had asked you to do something huge and great, that you couldn't accomplish? Why are you upset by the fact that it's a little thing that you need to do? Why does that cause you great consternation? But this is how he thinks, he's a commander in the Syrian army –this is what he does, and this seems beneath him in so many ways. And I don't know why it's not a comfort to us to realize, that is not of us, it's of him. God is the one that chooses. What did he say in Deuteronomy 7:7 about his nation Israel? He said, -to paraphrase it: "It has nothing to do with you. It's not because you were a better nation than anybody else, it has nothing to do with the fact that you have more attractive people in your nation, or you have those that are more skilled in their craft. I

chose you. Why? Because I chose you! And that's why. And that ought to produce in us a feeling of –not in a glandular sense,- but this great appreciation. Have you ever wondered why you were given the gospel? And why you responded positively to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and others do not? It is nothing to do with us. We are no better than anybody else; it all has to do with God.

Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4. And for those of you that are getting nervous, we are going to show you the other side... You're saying, "I though this was a paradox" – it is, I believe. Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4, **"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"**. Here we have both the fact that God has chosen those that are going to believe, and also that he did it before he created. And you don't find anything in this verse about God knowing ahead of time who would trust in him, and then choosing him based on that pre-knowledge. That is not scriptural –that has been added by a system. We don't have time to get into all of that, but in this verse you see nothing in here where God looked down through the annals of time and said, "Ok, you're going to believe in me, so I'll choose you before I create". All-right, this is not scriptural. He chose, and he did so before he created.

Lastly then, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13 –very similar idea. Now this verse we looked at the last time we were together, and in this verse we have both human responsibility and Gods sovereignty. **"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 through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth"**. And so again, these are just representatives, there are numerous verses in scripture that show us this truth –that God is sovereign, God is in control and it is God's choosing, God is the one who is in control of all things –even our wills. Now, does that mean then that we are fatalists? Does that mean that we are robots? Does that mean that there is nothing whatsoever to the fact that we have a will? Does that mean that God's image is just a sham? NO! Because on the flip-side, we see that ALL men are called to repent, and to believe on Christ for salvation. John 3:16 **"For God so loved... the elect?"** No? Who did he love? **"...the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life"**. And then in verse 36 of the same chapter, **"he that believeth on the son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him"**. There is nothing in this verse that says anything about God doing his work, this is man's responsibility –if you believe on the son, you have everlasting life. If you don't believe on the son, not only do you not have everlasting life, but God's wrath is abiding on you.

Turn with me, if you would, to 1st Timothy chapter 2 and verse 4. 1st Timothy chapter 2 and verse 4, Paul is saying to Timothy that we need to pray for everyone, and then in verse 4 very clearly, **"who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"**. Who will have all kinds of men? Who will have all types of men? No... **"who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"** This is Paul telling Timothy, God's desire for humanity.

Lastly then, 2nd Peter chapter 3 and verse 9. In the context there, there are those that are disbelieving the truth of Christ's return, because of the fact that he hasn't returned yet, and Peter lets us know why Christ has not returned yet. **"The Lord id not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"**. It does not say "that any of the elect should perish, but that all the elect should come to repentance", that's not what the verse says. Is says that it is God's will that no one perish and that all come to repentance. Now I know that your brains are hurting... because you're asking the question, "How can this possibly be? How can it be, that God's does his work, and yet that we're responsible to believe?" How can it further be, that God desires everyone to be saved, and yet we know clearly from scripture that he chooses? And I am going to tell you here this evening, "I don't know"

But I believe in both. I have read numerous literature, that try to take these verses and change what scripture says... and that is very dangerous! This is what scripture says. I have seen on the other side, those that attempt to deny the idea that God elects and God chooses. And I cannot see how you can do that, without doing damage to scripture. And so, what I believe we have here is a paradox. It seems that both of these things cannot be true at

the same time and yet, scripture says that they are. We have a responsibility –our responsibility is to believe, and yet God also does his work. And I don't understand how that works. But I know that's what scripture says. And again as I said, if we go too far one way, we make God out to be something that he's not. And if we go too far the other way, we make man out to be something that he is not. God does what he does, we do what we do, and that's what scripture tells us. And I cannot go farther than what God says. My role here at this church, is to say, "**thus sayeth the Lord**", and I take that responsibility extremely seriously. One of the things that drives me, is that I do not want to stand before my maker one day and have him say to me, "Why did you tell the people that I said that? I didn't say that". And so I cannot adhere to a system, I cannot adhere to man's wisdom, I must allow scripture to speak for itself –and this is what scripture says. Do I have it all figured-out? No! But I don't have the Trinity or Jesus Christ figured out either. I know both of these things to be true.

So thirdly then, what is the truth –discovering the truth? In the first place we see that God is in control of all things. Job 42 verses 1 to 6, a very familiar passage at the end of the book of Job. Job never receives an answer to his question, "Why?" but he does receive great truth, and the truth is that God is in control and God is able to do whatever he desires to do. In Daniel chapter 4 and verses 34 and 35, Nebuchadnezzar comes out of his boanthropy –all right, his madness where he thought he was an animal, and after he experienced that, he comes out and he says, "Now I know that the God of heaven is the one that is in control of all things". As you see history, Nebuchadnezzar was the leader of one of the greatest nations of history, and he as a leader had the most power of any world leader. That's why he's the head of gold in Daniel because even the next nation that takes over the Babylonians, when Darius wants to release Daniel from the Lions den; he's unable to do so. Why? Because of the law. Nebuchadnezzar "is the law" in Babylon –there is nothing that restricts his power, and because of that, what does he do? He steps out on the hanging gardens of Babylon –and all these things... and he looks out and says, "look at this great Babylon that I have made", and God said, "no you didn't" and Nebuchadnezzar learns an extremely valuable lesson. All I want to do with this particular point then, you can read those passages at your leisure. Turn with me, if you would quickly, to the 115th Psalm and the 3rd verse. Psalm 115 verse 3, "**But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he pleased**" This is the God of scripture folks, this is the God that we serve and it's not, then he's not God. He does whatever he wants –He's God.

Now, that can be a scary thought perhaps, if we didn't realize the second point: That God is love.

Notice if you would, 1st John chapter 4 and verse 8, "**he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love**". There are few things in scripture that say that "God is this..." and one of those is love. This means that God does not chose to do things that are loving, God does something –therefore it is loving because he's the one who did it. God has no standard outside of himself, to which, he must conform. God is the standard. So when scripture says that God is love, it is not saying that God is loving. It is saying that if you want a definition of love, if you want to understand love, if you want the standard of love, it is God. And so when we understand this, I hope and pray, that we can have our minds at ease knowing that the God we serve is a God who is sovereign, but is also a god who is love.

Lastly then, I believe understanding both sides of this equation will allow us to see that obeying God, will bring success. Turn with me, if you would, to the book of Romans chapter 8 verses 28 and 29. Let's read through verse 30. Now 8:28 is a very familiar verse to us, but often time, I think that we don't understand it, the good this is talking about here is not out definition of good. Paul is not saying to the Roman church, "and we know that all things work out as we think they ought to" as one's that love God –someone has said... He said, "**and we know that all thing work together for good to them that love God**" –What is that good? That "good" is conformity to Jesus Christ. That's what he says in the very next verse, "**to them who are the called, according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified**" (past tense). What gives me confidence in the ministry that God has called me to? What give me confidence is, that it's not about my eloquence, it's not about the amount of time I take to study Gods Word, it's not about my

powers of public speaking, it's not about how beautiful my word fall on ears, my confidence in the ministry that God has given me, and that same ministry is given to all of you is, that if you faithfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone around you, some will believe. I think one of the things that holds us back often times from witnessing is that we believe that it's up to us, and we are afraid. We're afraid we won't have all the answers. We're afraid we're going to mess up. We're afraid that we won't say it right. We're afraid that somehow we'll misrepresent things, and so we stop and we don't even get started with sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only because God had commanded it, because he has, because he has also ordained the means. That's how it's going to happen. **"How shall they call on him, in whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher?** God has one method of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that's you and I. There's no "Plan B" with God. And for us to sit back and say, "well, God's elected everything and so everybody that's going to get saved, is going to get saved and so we don't need to witness", is rankly unbiblical and completely against what we know from scripture, because God has, yes – ordained the ends, he is God. He sits on his throne and does all things according to his will, but he has also ordained the means. He has also ordained "How" that is going to happen. And "how that is going to happen" is you and I. We're not puppets, we are not robots. We are made in the image of God, we make real choices. And we have real responsibility. How do those two thing mesh? I don't know, but God does, and his Word shares both.

Now before we wrap up with four questions, I want to take you to a passage that has always intrigued me: Jeremiah 18. And I wish that all the fellows, and ladies, who spend a lot of time elevating their particular ideology and philosophy, to the exclusion of the other –I just wish they would go and read this passage.

***"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."***

Clearly, a demonstration of the sovereignty of God. Friends, we are created beings, and part of God's creation includes our will. Therefore, it's also under his control. We are clay –and this is not the only passage where God uses this analogy. We are created beings and God is the Creator. And so this potter is at the pottery wheel and it's spinning around and he's forming it. And then something happens and he doesn't really like it, and so he just takes it down to a lump of clay and starts again. And God says to the prophet Jeremiah, hey –can I not do this with the nation of Israel? "I am the potter and you are the clay". But God doesn't stop there. Notice verses seven to ten, ***"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them, And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them."*** This is not a theological message, we don't have time necessarily to go into the fact that, "Does God change his mind?" but the simple answer is NO. But here we have clear biblical data that tell us, that the choices of humanity matter and that Gods plan is also concerned with the means as well as the end. He says, "if I say to a nation, I'm going to destroy you and you repent, then I will not destroy you." Look at Nineveh, Jonah preached the shortest on recorded history –with the worst attitude any preacher has ever had, and he had the greatest revival. "Go figure" –and it's all God again... But he says, "yet forty days and I will destroy Nineveh. Is God a liar? NO! And Jonah is really hoping that it's going to happen, because in chapter four –we often time stop at chapter three, because chapter four is where the real stuff comes. He's up on the cliff, watching Nineveh, ready for the fire to fall... and it doesn't. And Jonah's upset, he's disappointed. "God I knew it! I knew that if these people repent, God you're long suffering, and you wouldn't destroy them and I was kind of getting used to the idea that they would be burned up... They are, after all, our mortal enemies." And God says, "Jonah, Jonah, Jonah... there are so many people in that city, that don't

even know the difference between their right hand and their left –and you have more compassion, you think more about a plant, than you do about the souls of men." And, he says in verses 9 and 10, "*if I say about a kingdom*, (and Israel would certainly be in view here...) *that I am going to build it, I am going to plan it, I am going to make it prosper, and it does evil in my sight*," He says, "*then I will judge it*."

Now, how can God ordain both the end and the means to that end? How can God ordain what is going to happen, yet not be the author of, or even the tempter of sin? How can God be sovereign, yet also ordain the choices of men? And have those choices matter, and not just here, but also in prayer? You can ask the question, because in James he talks about Elijah and the famine that came, and the drought –and he says, "*Elijah prayed, and for three years the rain didn't fall*" and you can ask the question, "Was it that God wanted the rain to stop?" or "Was it that Elijah prayed for the rain to stop?" and the answer is, YES! And that doesn't fly in our brains, and that doesn't make us feel like we've got it all figured out, but that's the biblical text. God knows what is going to happen, and it's not just a knowledge, as if he knew the score of the game, and then went back and watched the video tape of it. God knows what's going to happen, because he's the one that ordains it to happen. But he also has created us with will, and we have will, we have responsibility and we have choice. And not only do we have choice, but God is going hold us responsible for our choices. How does that work? I don't know, but I cannot land on one side of the argument, to the exclusion of the other, because God's Word doesn't.

So, as we wrap up then, this evening. Four questions about this:

1) Are we willing to let God be God?

I think this debate touches a nerve, primarily because of the proximity to us...I mean, as the pastor went through, there are a lot of things that we argue about, and debate about, but they're external to us. This debate raises so much emotion, and so much debate unfortunately, instead of discussion –debate, by the way, seeks a winner, discussion seeks the truth. But it raises so much emotion, because it has to do with us. But are we willing to let God be God? I don't about you, but I know from scripture, as well as from my own experience that there was a point in time in my life, when I was four years old (1982) where I heard a message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and I responded to it in faith. And I did not feel coerced, and I did not feel like, "Why am I walking down the isle? I really don't want to do this –all right, that didn't happen –I made a choice to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ –but I also know, that had God not chosen me, I never would have chosen him. Because my nature is completely and totally sinful, and what I want, is the glorification of me. Not only that, but even after God has saved me, I continue to act the way I used to act, before I was saved. And I will submit to you this evening, that if God's will was not stronger than mine, there's no way that one day I would be glorified. But Paul can say, "those that he called, he justified –declared legally righteous, and all those that he declared legally righteous, are glorified" –past tense –done deal. How can we say that? Because are any of us in here this evening, are we perfect? No! "If any man says he does not sin, then he's a liar, and the truth of God is not in him" –we sin, even though we are saved. So what is our hope? Our hope is that God one day will do what he has said that he will do. What about his nation –Israel. Israel today, as a nation ethnically Israel –are God haters. What does God say, he's going to take their heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. I don't know how else you can get around the fact that God's going to override; he's going to trump their will. I don't know how you can get around that. And the reason why we have hope for God's chosen people, and hope for ourselves, and hope for the future, is because God is in control and in charge of all things. But does that make us robots? Does it make us puppets? Does it make us fatalistic? Does it mean that we throw out all of the things in scripture that talk about our belief? Talk about our responsibility? Talk about the things we must do and that we need to do? We looked even at our sanctification, and how both, God does his part and we do ours –Philippians 2:12 and 13– Back to back verses. We cannot deny the biblical text, we are made in the image of God and part of that image is will. And to elevate God's sovereignty to the exclusion of man's will is unbiblical. To elevate man's will to the exclusion of God's sovereignty is also unbiblical. But are we willing to let god be God? We say that we believe in him, and yet in the one area... ah! "That's a little too close to home and that's problematic to me". God is in control of everything external to ourselves, he's also in control of us, because we're created, and he's the Creator.

## 2) Are we willing to let the Bible speak for itself?

To me, after... –and I'm only young, and very young in the ministry, but in the amount of thing I've studied and looked at, I think this to me is one of the key questions. You read those that argue for the sake of the sovereignty of God, to the exclusion of the will of man, and they change scripture, and that is... that's beyond dangerous, all right, that's blasphemy! And yet, on the other side, those that are proponents of the will of man, they do the same thing with scripture about Gods choosing –they change what it says. And to me, the only way to do it is to say, "this is what scripture says –it says that both are true". How does that work? I don't know, but that's what the Bible says.

## 3) Are we able to be Bib-logical and not just logical?

We like things to be logical, we like things to make sense, we like things to work-out. But are we willing to allow the Bible to trump our logic? And believe me, this is not easy... Because I stand before you, personally as one who found himself on one side of this debate –and God, through his mercy, and his grace, has shown me what I believe is the truth. I used to be arrogant, especially about this issue. I used to believe that I had it all figured out, and I have come to realize that I do not. I am not God. And I do not understand how God can be sovereign and man responsible. I do not understand how God can determine things, and yet hold men responsible for the choices that they make. I don't understand how that's going to work. I don't understand how that currently works. All I know is: that's what Gods Word says. And if we exclude either side, we do so to our own detriment and we are on very dangerous ground. Last question then...

## 4) Do we trust god? Really...?

Because I think when we see the biblical material, we get a little nervous. And I don't know why we get nervous. Because I don't know about the God that you serve, but the God that I serve has his glory and my best interest, always in mind. He is love. He is concerned about his creation, so concerned that he sent his only son to die to redeem it. That's the God that I serve, and I trust him. I don't have the answers, he does, and I'm Ok with that. Let's look to the Lord in prayer this evening.

Father I thank you for your Word. I thank you for the patience of the people this evening Father. This not easy material to work through. Father I thank you for your patience with me, thank you for your grace and your mercy that you show. Father I do ask for your forgiveness if I have made this material too difficult. Father I also ask for your forgiveness if I have caused more confusion than clarity. Father you know my heart and you know that was not my intent. Father I pray, that our desire, as believers in you, would always be to be biblical and not just logical. Father may we not follow a human system of reasoning and logic, and may we follow your Word. Father your Word leads us sometimes, to places that we are not comfortable with. But Father I pray that we would understand that both sides of this equation, are true –You have made us in your image, you have made us to reflect you. We, of every other creature on the planet, most closely represents and resembles you, and Father, part of that is our will, our ability to choose, to reason. Father you created us that way. Why? I don't know. You are the creator, we are the creation and Father how can two beings with will, coexist in the same universe? And Father again, I do not know. But I do know that we make choices, I do know that not only are we commanded to pray, but that you hear our prayers, and you respond to our prayers. Father we have seen that within our own body here at Northside. Father, I also take great comfort and confidence from the fact that it is your work, it is your will, it is your way, and your plan. Father personally, as I desire to live the Christian life, I know that you are doing a work in me that I cannot do on my own, and Father that is the only thing that gives me the confidence, that one day I will be what you have said I will be, and I will bring full glory to you. Father also, as I go about the challenge, of evangelism and discipleship, I have full confidence and full comfort in the fact, that you are at work in the hearts, wills and minds, of those that I come into contact with, and Father at the end of the day, while I am responsible for how I share your Word, it is not my eloquency, but it is the work of you Holy Spirit. Father I pray, that as we leave here this evening, that we would have great confidence and great comfort –we would also be encouraged that we must be about your will and your way. We must be faithful to

do the things that you have called us to do, because these means are that which by, you will accomplish your ends. Father help us to trust in you, help us to let you be you. Help us to trust your Word, allow it to speak for itself, and help us to do your work as long as you allow us to do so. We love you Father, change us we pray, in Jesus name, Amen.