

# Sovereignty and Volition

## A. Introduction

### 1. Definitions

#### a. Sovereignty

- 1) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
  - a) supreme power especially over a body politic
  - b) freedom from external control
  - c) controlling influence
- 2) Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (see handout)

#### b. Volition

- 1) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
  - a) an act of making a choice or decision
  - b) the power of choosing or determining
- 2) Concise Oxford English Dictionary
  - a) from Latin noun *volitio* (verb *volo* = 'I wish')
  - b) the faculty or power of using one's will

#### c. Foreknowledge

- 1) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
  - a) previous knowledge
  - b) know beforehand (foreknow)
- 2) Bible Word Study
  - a) πρόγνωσις (prognōsis = advance knowledge)  
Acts 2:23; 1 Pet 1:2
  - b) προγινώσκω (proginōskō = know before)  
Acts 26:5; Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet 1:20; 2 Pet 3:17

#### d. Predetermined (Predestined)

- 1) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
  - a) Fixed or settled in advance
  - b) impose a direction/tendency on beforehand
- 2) Bible Word Study
  - a) προορίζω (proorizō = predetermine)  
Acts 4:28; Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5, 11
  - b) ὀρίζω (horizō = determine, appoint, fix, set)  
Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26,31; Rom 1:4; Heb 4:7

#### e. Election

- 1) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
  - a) an act or process of electing
  - b) predestination to eternal life
  - c) the right, power or privilege of making a choice
- 2) Bible Word Study
  - a) ἐκλεκτός (eklektos = chosen ones, elect)  
Matt 22:14; 24:22,24,31 (|| Mk 13:20,22,27); Luke 18:7; 23:35; Rom 8:33; 16:13;  
Col 3:12; 1 Ti 5:21; 2 Ti 2:10; Tts 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:4,6,9; 2 John 1,13; Rev 17:14

- b) κλητός (klētos = called, invited)  
Matt 22:14; Rom 1:1,6,7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:1,2,24; Jude 1; Rev 17:14
- c) ἐκλέγομαι (eklegomai = choose, select)  
Mk 13:20; Luke 6:13; 9:35; 10:42; 14:7; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19;  
Acts 1:2,24; 6:5; 13:17; 15:7,22,25; 1 Cor 1:27-28; Eph 1:4; Jms 2:5
- d) καλέω (kaleō = call, invite, summon, name)  
Matt 2:7,15; 4:21; 9:13; 20:8; 25:14; Mk 1:20; Luke 7:39; Acts 4:18; 15:22; 24:2;  
Rom 4:17; 9:11,24-25; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:15,17-18,20-22,24; 10:27; Gal 1:6,15; 5:8,13;  
Eph 4:1,4; Col 3:15; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Th 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9;  
Heb 5:4; 9:15; 11:8; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:9,21; 3:9; 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3

## 2. Commonly Held Views

### a. Calvinism

- 1) Places emphasis on Sovereignty
- 2) TULIP (The so-called Doctrine of Grace)
  - a) T = Total Depravity  
Man has no ability to respond to the grace of God and come to Christ.
  - b) U = Unconditional Election  
God has chosen some people to go to heaven and others to go to hell and the individuals are not in any way involved.
  - c) L = Limited Atonement  
Jesus Christ died only for the elect.
  - d) I = Irresistible Grace  
Man cannot resist God's grace as saving faith comes from God and man must believe.
  - e) P = Perseverance of the Saints  
The elect will live holy lives to the end. If you fail to persevere, you were not truly elect. (No eternal security)

### b. Arminianism

- 1) Places emphasis on Man's Ability
- 2) Main Points of Arminianism
  - a) Partial Depravity  
Some facets of man's nature have not been corrupted. Guilt not imputed.
  - b) Conditional Election  
God chooses individuals based upon their foreseen merits.
  - c) Governmental Atonement  
Jesus Christ died for everyone and this makes salvation possible for the repentant.
  - d) Resistible Grace  
Man may refuse to repent of sins and thereby not qualify for salvation.
  - e) Perseverance of the Saints  
Individuals remain saved only as long as they persevere. If you fail to persevere, you lose your salvation. (No eternal security)

### c. Biblicism (Truths of the Bible)

- 1) God is Sovereign and Man has Volition

## 2) Main Points of Biblicism

### a) Total Depravity

Mankind was corrupted by the fall and can do nothing to earn or deserve eternal life. Man can and does respond to God's grace.

### b) Unmerited Election

God chooses individuals without regard to merit based solely upon faith in Jesus Christ.

### c) Limitless Atonement

Jesus Christ died for all mankind. His death is sufficient for everyone, but effective only for those who believe.

### d) Instrumental Grace

God's grace enables man to hear the gospel. Some resist and remain condemned.

### e) Preservation of the Saints

God preserves those who believe. Salvation cannot be lost even for those who disobey God and receive His divine discipline. (Believers are Eternally Secure)

## B. Development

### 1. The Foreknowledge of God

- a. Because God, our creator, is outside of space and time, this term is relevant only from the perspective of helping His finite creatures understand how an infinite, omniscient God carries out His perfect, eternal plan.
- b. The foreknowledge of God is merely one view of His omniscience from a temporal perspective.
- c. God's omniscience (and therefore His foreknowledge) is not limited to the things which actually occur in history (1 Sam 23:9-13; Matt 11:21-24).
- d. God knows all of the "what if" scenarios and what would have come about if different choices had been made and different events had occurred.

### 2. The word "that" in Ephesians 2:8-9

- a. The word τοῦτο (touto = this) in Eph 2:8 is a neuter pronoun with no neuter nouns as a possible antecedent.
- b. Grace is χάριτί (chariti) which is a feminine, dative noun.
- c. Faith is πίστεως (pisteōs) which is a feminine, genitive noun.
- d. The word used for saved is σεσωσμένοι (sesōmenoi = saved one) which is a masculine participle.
- e. Similar verses that help us understand what τοῦτο (touto) refers to: Matt 14:2; 16:21-22; 19:25-26; 1 Cor 6:6,8; 7:26; 2 Cor 13:9; Eph 6:1; Php 1:9; Col 3:20; 1 Thess 5:18; 1 Tim 2:3; 5:4; Heb 6:3; 7:27; 1 Pet 2:19-20
- f. It is grammatically incorrect to tie τοῦτο (touto) to a noun of a different gender, but we have seen many N.T. examples where this word refers to verb action in nearby phrases.
- g. The word "that" in Eph 2:8 likewise refers to the action of the verb, being saved.
- h. The subsequent reference in Eph 2:8 tells us that the gift of God is salvation.
- i. Rom 5:12ff speaks of this gift in terms of righteousness and justification and Rom 6:23 in terms of eternal life – all part of the salvation grace package.
- j. Therefore, faith is not the gift in Eph 2:8, but it is "through faith" that we receive the free gift of salvation.

3. Did Jesus really die for everyone?
  - a. In 1 John 2:2 we see that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, not just those who believe.
  - b. 1 Tim 4:10 tells us that He is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.
  - c. Because all sins have been paid for by the blood of Christ, they are not an issue at the judgments (1 Cor 3:11-15; Rev 20:11-15).
4. The blessing of death “in Adam”
  - a. Rom 5:12ff and 1 Cor 15:21-22 teach us that Adam, as the father of all mankind, brought death to the entire human race when he sinned.
  - b. Since our condemnation is based upon Adam’s original sin, no one can claim exemption based upon a perceived lack of personal sins – we are all on equal footing when we enter into this world.
  - c. Jesus Christ died for Adam’s original sin as well as all personal sins (1 John 2:2) providing the basis for our salvation.
  - d. So, if Jesus paid the penalty for Adam’s sin and all of our personal sins, why isn’t everyone released from condemnation? **Because God in His absolute sovereignty established the criterion for our release: Faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18)**
  - e. God, in His perfect and marvelous plan, has allowed death to reign through one disobedient man (Adam), which made it possible for eternal life to be provided through one obedient man (Jesus), and the free gift of eternal life to be made available through one means – faith in His Son Jesus Christ.
5. Does faith add works to salvation?
  - a. The work of salvation was completed by Jesus Christ on the cross (John 19:30).
  - b. Romans 3:27-28 and 4:4-5 make it very clear that faith is not an act of work.
  - c. By placing our faith in Jesus Christ, we add no works to His perfect work, but merely accept the work that He has done on our behalf (John 6:29).
6. God sovereignly delegates authority
  - a. God allows mankind to rule over the animal kingdom (Gen 1:26).
  - b. God gave authority to Adam to name the animals (Gen 2:19).
  - c. God gave authority to the apostles (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10).
  - d. God gives authority to governments to execute justice (Gen 9:6).
  - e. Spouses have authority over one another’s bodies (1 Cor 7:4).
  - f. Man has authority over his own will to make decisions (1 Cor 7:37).
7. What about Romans 9-11?
  - a. Romans 9:1-29 pertains to God’s dealings with corporate Israel.
    - 1) God determined the lineage (9:6-13).
    - 2) God deals justly with Israel (9:14-29).
      - a) He specially favored their leader Moses.
      - b) He used Pharaoh to free them from Egypt.
      - c) God set Israel aside for the Church due to their unbelief.
      - d) God preserves the remnant of Israel.
  - b. Romans 9:30-10:15 proclaims that the gospel is for anyone who will believe, not merely the Jews.
  - c. Romans 10:16-11:32 tells of Israel’s unbelief, God’s protection of the remnant and God’s future plans for the people of Israel.

- d. God's sovereignty and justice are clearly evident in this passage, but nowhere do we find any reference to individual, unconditional election to salvation.
  - e. Man's volition is also clearly evident in this passage (Rom 10:11-13).
8. What about the Divine Decrees?
- a. Scripture references to God's decrees...
    - 1) His creation (Job 28:26; 38:10; Ps 148:6; Pr 8:29; Jer 5:22).
    - 2) His Son (Ps 2:7).
    - 3) His Judgment during the Day of the Lord (Zeph 2:2).
    - 4) His Discipline of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:24).
  - b. Supralapsarianism, Infralapsarianism, etc. (see handout).
  - c. Whatever God has decreed is eternally decreed, so attempting to assign an order to His decrees is contrary to their very nature and serves no purpose except to justify a theological viewpoint.
  - d. A decree is simply an order issued by a ruler (see Ezra chapters 4-7) and some decrees are contingent upon obedience (see Daniel 3:10-11).
  - e. God's decrees have always existed (per His omniscience and sovereignty), but beginning with the creation decrees they have been issued and executed in the sphere of time.
  - f. Divine decrees and commandments are not to be confused:
    - 1) A divine decree is a declaration of what God will do in His sovereignty.
    - 2) A divine commandment is God telling us what He wants us to do volitionally.
  - g. The Will of God:
    - 1) What He has decreed to be (decretive).
    - 2) What He has commanded us to do (directive).
    - 3) What He allows us to do in disobedience (permissive).
    - 4) What He prevents from happening even though we opt for it (overruling).
    - 5) What He lets us choose (discretionary).
  - h. Rather than put together our own list of decrees, we will consider elements of God's A to  $\Omega$  plan later in this study.
9. Is unregenerate man able to believe?
- a. After the fall, Adam and Eve were able to communicate with God (Gen 3:9-13).
  - b. After the fall, man is still described as being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9).
  - c. There are no verses found in the Bible (including Isa 64:6) that indicate that unregenerate fallen man cannot believe.
  - d. There is no shortage of verses in the Bible that state the one and only requirement of unregenerate fallen mankind for salvation – to believe (John 3:15-18,36; 5:24; 6:40; 11:25; 20:31; Acts 16:30-31; Rom 10:9-11; etc.).
  - e. There are verses that clearly state that unregenerate fallen man can disbelieve (Matt 16:16; 2 Thess 2:12; 1 John 5:10).
  - f. There are no passages found in the Bible that answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" with, "Well, if you are not among the elect, then it is not possible for you to be saved."
  - g. Eph 2:4-8a rules out the possibility that regeneration precedes the faith unto salvation.

10. How are we selected and why?
  - a. We are selected according to the foreknowledge (omniscience) of God the Father (1 Pet 1:1-2) who always knew that some would believe in the Savior and others would not.
  - b. We are selected in Christ (Eph 1:4) as a body of believers, not individually.
  - c. We are selected to shame the wise and the things which are strong (1 Cor 1:27).
  - d. We are selected to nullify the things that are (1 Cor 1:28).
  - e. We are selected that we might be holy and blameless before God (Eph 1:4).
  - f. We were selected to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (Jas 2:5).
  - g. We were not selected to be believers; we were selected *as believers* to fulfill all of these things.
  - h. In addition, because we have been selected by God, we should put on an appropriate heart attitude (Col 3:12ff).
11. What about Israel, the chosen people of God?
  - a. Abram (Abraham) was not the only believer of his time (Heb 7:1ff).
  - b. Abram was selected from among the believers of his time to be the father of many nations (Gen 17:4-5).
  - c. The line through Isaac and Jacob was selected as a nation for God's own treasured possession (Deut 4:20; 26:18).
  - d. The Jewish people (the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob according to the flesh) were selected as a nation to be God's representative stewards on the earth for periods of human history and were entrusted with the oracles of God (Acts 7:37-38; Rom 3:1-2).
  - e. The nation of Israel (the chosen people of God) is defined by genealogy, but not all Jews by birthright were born again (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6).
  - f. In contrast, God specifically selected *believers* to be His stewards in the dispensation of the Church.
  - g. A change in stewardship from Israel to the Church took place on the Day of Pentecost.
  - h. The nation of Israel will once again be the stewards of God on earth after the Church is taken up at the Rapture (see Plan of God chart).
12. Calling versus Selection
  - a. All believers are called by God through the gospel (2 Thess 2:14), but not all who are called accept the invitation (Matt 22:1-14).
  - b. God calls us to Himself (Acts 2:39) into His kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12).
  - c. This invitation has been extended to Jews and Gentiles alike (1 Cor 1:24).
  - d. This invitation was according to God's purpose (Rom 8:28).
  - e. This invitation comes by and through the grace of God (Gal 1:6, 15).
  - f. This invitation is both holy (2 Tim 1:9) and heavenly (Heb 3:1).
  - g. This invitation is the basis for our sainthood (Rom 1:6; 1 Cor 1:2).
  - h. We have been invited to a life...
    - 1) of fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9)
    - 2) of hope (Eph 1:18; 4:4)
    - 3) of peace (1 Cor 7:15; Col 3:15)
    - 4) of freedom (Gal 5:13)
    - 5) of honor and purity (1 Thess 4:3-7)
    - 6) with an eternal perspective (1 Tim 6:12)
    - 7) which will ultimately obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 2:14)

- i. Additional callings/invitations...
    - 1) into service (Matt 4:21; Mk 1:20; Rom 11:29; Acts 13:2; 16:10; Heb 5:4)
    - 2) to make a change of residence (Matt 2:15; Heb 11:8)
  - j. Being called and being selected are not the same thing, but our calling is related to our selection (2 Pet 1:10; Rev 17:14).
13. Is there more than simple faith involved in salvation?
- a. Any effort on our part (works) is not a part of salvation (Rom 4:5; Eph 2:8-9).
  - b. Water baptism is not necessary in order to be saved (Acts 10:44-48).
  - c. We do not make Jesus our Lord - when we believe in Jesus Christ He becomes our Lord whether we act like it or not (John 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor 3:1-3).
14. Can we lose our salvation?
- a. Believers possess everlasting life which, by its very definition, cannot end (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 5:11).
  - b. For those who are in Christ (believers) there is no condemnation and no separation from God (Rom 8:1, 38-39).
  - c. The omnipotent hand of God holds us secure as believers (John 10:27-29).
15. What about Heb 6:4-6?
- a. Various interpretations of this passage...
    - 1) These are unbelievers who heard the gospel and rejected it.
    - 2) These are believers who lost their salvation.
    - 3) This is a hypothetical example that cannot occur.
    - 4) These are believers who turned away from God in their negative volition.
  - b. These are people who have...
    - 1) been enlightened (v. 4)
    - 2) tasted the heavenly gift (v. 4)
    - 3) been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (v. 4)
    - 4) tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come (v. 5)
    - 5) fallen away (v. 6)
  - c. It is clear that believers are in view.
  - d. The author of Hebrews has previously warned his audience (believers) about the perils of drifting away (2:1-4; 3:7-19) and this passage (notice the shift from we/us to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person) speaks of believers who did just that.
  - e. The author of Hebrews expresses confidence concerning the diligence of those in his audience (v. 9ff).
  - f. The verses preceding this passage speak of growing toward maturity (5:11 - 6:3).
  - g. The illustration that follows in 6:7-8 refers to Christian production (cf. Luke 8:1-8; John 15:1-6).
  - h. Conclusion: Hebrews 6:4-6 does not refer to salvation, but is part of an exhortation to encourage believers to bear fruit by growing to maturity.
  - i. Many Jewish believers at the time had reverted back to their former way of worship which included the Levitical offerings, ritual sacrifices, etc.
  - j. These believers were effectively "crucifying" Christ every time they made another animal sacrifice since the typology had been fulfilled in Him.

- k. As long as these believers continued in their sinful behavior, putting the Son of God to open shame, it would be impossible to convince them to repent of these “dead works” once again.
- l. Only God the Holy Spirit can bring about the conviction of sin in the soul of the believer that results in repentance.

### C. Conclusion

1. God, in His sovereignty, has laid out His perfect plan from A to  $\Omega$ , a plan which included permitting the fall of mankind, but also provides a way of salvation for all mankind.
2. This glorious plan asks nothing more of fallen man than simple faith (the faith of a child) at gospel hearing to receive the free gift of salvation.
3. The free gift of salvation is available to everyone and is given by God to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ.
4. Believing is a thought process which involves (a) evaluating the message of the gospel and (b) making a volitional decision concerning whether or not to trust in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation.
5. God, in His sovereignty, has provided everything to make the gift of salvation freely available and all man can do is volitionally accept or reject this gift from God.
6. No amount of effort in trying to work to please God will result in salvation for someone who does not believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life.
7. What God accomplishes in salvation cannot be “undone” by anything or anyone (and that includes you), so “once saved, always saved” is true and the new life we have is eternal.
8. As believers we are invited to a new, holy way of living, but each of us must volitionally choose whether or not to glorify God on this earth.
9. Our eternal security rests upon God’s faithfulness to keep His promises, not upon our success or failure in abiding in Christ during our walk.
10. According to His foreknowledge, God, in His sovereignty, has selected the believers of this dispensation to receive unique and extraordinary blessings.
11. These blessings include...
  - a. The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The universal priesthood.
  - c. Spiritual gifts.
  - d. Identification with Christ rather than with an earthly nation.
    - 1) Baptism into Christ.
    - 2) Membership in the body of Christ.
    - 3) Inclusion in the bride of Christ.
  - e. Adoption into the royal family of God.
  - f. Stewardship of God’s word.
  - g. The great commission.
  - h. Freedom from the Law.
  - i. Deliverance from the wrath to come during the Tribulation of Israel.
  - j. And the list could go on...
12. To sum it all up, it is true that God is sovereign and it is true that man has been granted authority and volition in accordance with God’s eternal plan and to emphasize one or the other of these truths in a way that is not depicted in the Scriptures is to prefer a system of theology over God’s own revealed word.