

Human Responsibility

This article follows the one on “*Sovereignty of God*” and there is a good reason for this.

This initial reaction to teaching of God’s sovereignty can often be:-

- a) What does it matter to me?
- b) Why bother?
- c) If God is sovereign, there is nothing we can do, so why try to do anything – it will not change the outcome?

Such a reaction is wrong.

God’s sovereignty and human responsibility are two parallel principles that appear to be irreconcilable here on earth but will meet in eternity [*Quote C.H. Spurgeon*]

If God is all powerful and sovereign and at work within His Creation, it would seem to suggest we just sit back and do nothing.

But within God’s planned reconciliation of humanity to Himself and man’s salvation from himself, human responsibility is always an essential part of the plan.

We must work as though everything depended on our own efforts.

The truth of this statement will be revealed from God’s Word in this article.

There are certain attitudes we must avoid when confronted with God’s sovereignty

These are attitudes that Satan would love to foster in order to destroy us.

Bitterness

Many react in a hostile way to the Biblical teaching about God’s sovereignty.

Not perhaps hostile to God Himself but hostile towards the teaching, assuming it is false teaching not in harmony with a God of love.

But if the teaching of God’s sovereignty is true [and it is according to God’s Own Word] the hostile feeling towards the teaching is hostility towards God Himself.

This attitude is something that needs to be confessed and cleansed by Christ’s sacrifice.

What causes bitter hostility to the teaching of God’s sovereignty?

- a) **We feel betrayed** when the God we worship turns out to not be **from our perspective** the loving, compassionate, merciful God we thought He was.

If we had not been taught this truth before we feel betrayed by the ministry.

- b) **We like to be in control of our lives** but this teaching of God's sovereignty takes away our control of our lives.
- c) **This teaching is alien to our natural feelings**, forgetting that feelings are a product of the "*flesh*" not the "*spirit*".

Becoming Passive

Matthew 25:24-25 [NIV] *"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'"*

This man may have had a high view of God's sovereignty, his response indicated this, but his response was passive and was condemned by God.

We can become passive in two major areas

a) **Evangelism**

If God is sovereign and no-one can come to Him unless called by Him.

John 6:44 [NIV] *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Why then should we become evangelistically minded?

b) **Holy living**

If God is sovereign and determines all that happens, why try to live a holy life?

It is sound doctrine to believe in the teaching of God's sovereignty and yet be an evangelistic and obedient Christian.

Why?

- a) The same Bible which confirms the absolute sovereignty of God also gives us commands to obey!
- b) We worship a sovereign God by taking seriously what He commands us to do.
- c) It is foolish to accept the teaching of God's absolute sovereignty and ignore or neglect the scriptures that urge us to fulfil our human responsibilities to that sovereign God!

Why is this teaching on human responsibility important?

It gives us practical and Biblical balance. God's Word has many examples of this balance.

The deity of Jesus Christ – the humanity of Jesus Christ.

The sovereignty of God – the need for personal evangelism.

The belief of salvation on acceptance of Christ's sacrifice – striving to live holy lives.

God's sovereignty – man's free choice [God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice – but **not** the outcome of that choice!]

God's promises usually assume our obedience.

Example of Gideon

Judges 6:36-40 [NIV] *"Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised, look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew."*

God made it doubly clear that He was with Gideon in defeating the Midianites.

But when we read Judges 7:1-25 we see that Gideon still had to act both in obedience to God's command [reducing the size of his army dramatically] and being shrewd in his attack tactics.

Example of Abraham

Genesis 15:4-6 [NIV] *"Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*

God made this bountiful promise to Abraham concerning his seed when he was already elderly and without any direct heir.

Abraham's part was to believe and obey the result of such faith was it being counted as righteousness.

Example of Moses

Exodus 3:7-8, 10 [NIV] *"The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey-- the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites." ... "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

God gave this promise to Moses and the children of Israel.

But Moses and the people had to follow God, trusting in Him, during a long time of disillusionment and trials before the promise was fulfilled.

Example of Wisdom and Knowledge

Proverbs 1:7 [NIV] *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."*

The fear of God is "beginning" of knowledge or wisdom. Does this mean that we are automatically endowed with wisdom if we fear God?

Proverbs 9:10 [NIV] *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

The proof that we fear God is that we seek to know Him through the discipline of studying His Word. That means effort and the sacrifice of time on our behalf.

Example of guidance in life

Proverbs 3:5-6 [NIV] *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

We have the promise of God’s guidance but only on the condition that we *“acknowledge Him in all our ways”*.

The more details of our hopes, fears and future actions we put before God in prayer the better our life will be.

Example of material or spiritual blessings

Proverbs 3:9-10 [NIV] *“Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”*

When we honour God with the tithe, there is a promise of blessing, both physical and spiritual are implied.

God is able to bless us, whether or not we tithe, and has done many times. But to presume on God’s mercy is not honouring Him.

Example of protection

Matthew 4:5-6 [NIV] *“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”*

The devil quoted these words of Psalm 91:11-12 when he was testing Jesus.

Matthew 4:7 [NIV] *“Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Christ’s reply shows it would be irresponsible to claim a promise and not act responsibly.

Ezra 8:22-23 [NIV] *“I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”*

Although it was personally embarrassing for Ezra to ask for a military guard for the journey, after seeking God’s protection he did all he could to make his journey safe.

Example of seeking fellowship with God

Psalms 27:7-9 [NIV] *“Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour.”*

A close walk with God does not come without effort on our part.

Note David sought *“God’s Face”*, by this he meant a desire to know God’s character which only comes with regular fellowship.

Matthew 6:33-34 [NIV] *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

David did **not** mention seeking **God’s hand** which is asking for God to hand out physical blessings. They may come when we first seek to become a child of God.

In context of a close walk with God we have certain things we have to do.

James 4:7-10 [NIV] *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

- 1) Submit to God.
- 2) Resist Satan’s temptations.
- 3) Walk towards God.
- 4) Ask for the cleansing of our sins by the blood of Jesus Christ [after confessing them].
- 5) Request that the righteousness of Christ be credited to us.
- 6) Be single-minded, putting God first in our lives.
- 7) Really repent, we will show in our physical response if our repentance is genuine.
- 8) Humble ourselves before God, because pride and self-righteousness stop our enjoying the special presence of the Holy Spirit [God] for they grieve Him.

Example of receiving the desires of our heart

Psalms 37:4 [NIV] *“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”*

To delight in the eternal is to be pliable in His hands [Hebrew “*ânag*”].

Isaiah 64:8 [NIV] *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*

As we yield to God’s moulding us into new beings what is pleasurable and desirable to us will gradually change to become what is pleasurable and desirable to God.

The supreme model of human responsibility to the sovereignty of God is Jesus Christ

Matthew 11:25-26 [NIV] *“At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”*

Nobody acted more submissive, loving and responsible than Jesus the Son of Man and Son of God.

Revelation 13:8 [NIV] *“... the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”*

In one way the statement implies that Christ's part in our salvation was "cut and dried", that God could not lose, but Jesus had to fulfil everything to the last detail.

Galatians 4:4 [NIV] *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,"*

Jesus became a baby at the exact time foretold.

Philippians 2:5-8 [NIV] *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"*

Jesus humbled Himself to an agonising and humiliating death on the cross.

In His daily life Jesus acted in faith but with common sense and responsibility

In resisting Satan and sin.

Matthew 4:1-10 [NIV] *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

Jesus was tempted in disbelief, pride and irresponsible actions.

Hebrews 4:15 [NIV] *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin."*

Jesus faced and overcame every type of temptation.

1 Peter 2:22-23 [NIV] *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*

Christ led a perfect sin-free life.

In His prayer life

Mark 1:35 [NIV] *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."*

In the early morning.

Matthew 14:23 [NIV] *"After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,"*

In the evening.

Luke 6:12-13 [NIV] *“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:”*

Jesus prayed all night prior to calling the twelve disciples. From this statement we can conclude He prayed for guidance. Although Jesus was the God/Man He prayed as though needing strength and guidance from outside of Himself!

Again Jesus is the perfect example for us to follow.

Example of the life of the apostle Paul

1 Timothy 1:16 [NIV] *“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”*

Paul regarded himself as an example for those who would believe in Jesus.

Acts 9:1-6 [NIV] *“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

Paul knew that his conversion was wholly and absolutely an act of sovereign grace.

Paul knew he had done nothing to deserve it, in fact much to discredit any mercy from God in persecuting God's Church.

Acts 26:19 [NIV] *“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.”*

Paul knew he had a responsibility to his Saviour and was faithful to that commission.

Paul knew great hardships during his Christian life and must have felt at times that God was far from him but Paul never relinquished his responsibility to his Saviour and Master Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 5:23 [NIV] *“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.”*

Paul encouraged others to act responsibly to remain an effective instrument in the hands of their Saviour Jesus Christ.

Paul the evangelist

Acts 17:16-17 [NIV] *“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.”*

Paul never missed an opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:20 [NIV] *“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.”*

Paul was always trying to reach people in every facet of society, seeking constantly to make all people disciples of Christ.

Conclusion

God is sovereign in all He does, from salvation to physical healing

But we are commanded to do all in our power to reach the world with the gospel message and to pray earnestly for the sick.

Matthew 28:19 [NIV] *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*

James 5:14 [NIV] *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.”*

John 8:12 [NIV] *“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

Jesus is the light that has come to the darkened world and the Saviour of the world, but we are to walk in that light.

Acts 13:47 [NIV] *“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

And we are to bring salvation to everyone in this world.

God is powerful, sovereign and at work in this world, yet we have a responsibility to work and act as if everything depended on us to bring the light and salvation to this world.

We do this by being in the light, our daily fellowship with God, and walking in the light, bringing the light of the world, Jesus Christ, to all we meet.

If we neglect this our responsibility to our Saviour then it does not matter how “*high*” our view may be of the sovereignty of God, we are failed fools in God’s sight.