

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

To be sure, this is not to say that people don't make a conscious choice to believe in Christ and that we don't try to persuade them to believe, of course we do. People must make a conscious choice to be saved and respond to the Gospel in repentance and faith. Of course they must and this is the response we seek from them when preaching the Gospel to them. It is important to recognize however (not for the hearer but for the Christian witness), that if and when they do respond with true repentance and saving faith, they have done so by the power of God through regeneration and primarily because of His choice for their salvation. The outworking of His election then does have a moment in time and space when it comes to fruition and someone believes and is saved. This *conversion* is what we seek when sharing the Gospel even though we realize it is a supernatural work that God must perform in the hearts. So we seek to sow the Gospel seed, and expect others to water somewhere down the road, but it is God that causes the growth and brings to life. We may see one come to faith and repentance, and we may not.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 - 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even **as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.** 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. NASB

Further, in sowing this Gospel seed we should seek to accurately and vividly portray the Gospel in the most serious yet amiable way that we can. After all, a right response to Christ's Gospel call is the most important decision that anyone will ever make. It will either be the "*fragrance of life*" to them or the smell of death, but they *must* either repent and believe, or perish. There is no middle ground with Christ. Either He is Savior and Lord, or we are at enmity with Him. In His words, either we will repent, or we will perish.

Luke 13:5 - 5 "I tell you, no, but **unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**" NASB

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 - 14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and **manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.** 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 **to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.** And who is adequate for these things? NASB

But as a Gospel witness, even though we seek a human response to our fervent efforts to persuade men of their lost condition and need to repent and believe, we also realize that this ability only comes from God through regeneration and effectual calling, so we are able to be both *bold and patient* with our hearers knowing that God will work His own will in His own good time. We can be bold because we carry the very words of life and we have direct orders from the Sovereign of the universe to do it. We carry the message of the triumphant King coming in to conquer what is rightfully His, and we are ambassadors sent to warn and encourage our subjects to surrender and be blessed or to resist and be destroyed. However, surrender or resistance is not in our power to grant, but we only come as a messenger of the good news of free forgiveness for rebellion and gracious lovingkindness and blessing to all who will surrender. Our job is to be faithful to the message of the King and a good ambassador of His Kingdom. A godly Christian example and clear presentation of the Gospel are the most effective tools we have to point people to Christ, but only He can give them a "*new heart and a new spirit.*"

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - 26 "Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you;** and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful** to observe My ordinances. NASB

Another important thing to remember is that God does all good things in His own good time. Therefore we must be patient in seeing others come to Christ. Many times God uses several people and different means to bring people to Himself and we are just one of these tools in the hands of God to help get them there. Therefore it is important to be patient and loving as we

witness, hope and pray for the salvation of those to whom we preach. Consider these words again from J.I. Packer..... *“if on the other hand, you meet a person who is not thus prepared, a person who as yet has no conviction of the truth of the Gospel and perhaps no idea, or even a false idea, of what the Gospel actually is, it is worse than useless to try and stampede him into a “snap” decision. You may be able to bully him into a psychological crisis of some sort, but that will not be saving faith and will do him no good. What you have to do is take time with him, to make friends with him, to get alongside him, to find out where he is in terms of spiritual understanding, and to start dealing with him at that point. You have to explain the Gospel to him, and be sure that he understands it and is convinced of its truth, before you start pressing him to an active response. You have to be ready to help him, if need be, through a spell of seeking to repent and believe before he knows within himself that he has received Christ, and Christ has received him. At each stage you have to be willing to go along with him at God’s speed, which may seem to you a strangely slow speed. But that is God’s business, not yours. Your business is simply to keep pace with what God is doing in his life. Your willingness to be patient with him in this way is the proof of your love of him no less than of your faith in God. If you are not willing thus to be patient, you need not expect that God will favor you by enabling you to win souls.”* With this knowledge then of the Sovereignty of God and of the inevitable human response that is necessary for anyone to be saved, let us draw several **conclusions** from what we have learned.

God is Sovereign – People come to faith by the *effectual calling* of the Spirit of God because they have been elected by God. God is Sovereign in who the elect are, and He in His own time and in His own divine method saves those whom He has chosen.

Universal Call - We have no ability to discern who the elect are and are not, therefore we are diligent to preach the *free offer* of the Gospel to **all people** in hopes that they are elect and will respond, regardless of race, class, gender or any other distinction. Their salvation remains in God’s effectual call, not our ability to wrangle them with fine sounding words or skillful apologetic arguments. These may help, but in the final analysis it is the effectual calling of God that brings people to conversion.

Prayer - Prayer is a vital part of evangelism as salvation requires the hand of God to move upon an individual and regenerate their soul and give them the ability to grasp the Gospel. God in His sovereignty then, has been pleased to allow us to participate in people’s salvation through prayer and preaching. Praying for the salvation of those to whom we witness is important and necessary.

Gospel content - Our methodology is not the primary issue in evangelism but rather the content of the message of the Gospel itself is primary because it alone is *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”* The *content* of the Gospel message is a matter of grave importance so that we clearly articulate the Apostolic (of Jesus and the Apostles) message of the Gospel.

Human Response – It is of utmost importance that we stress upon people their responsibility to *repent of their sins* and make a conscious choice to *trust in Christ* as their righteousness before God. Their must be a public conscious response to Christ of which *baptism* is the crowning event of ones public confession and identification with Christ as both Savior from death and Lord of our life.

Christian Duty – It is our responsibility to be a *witness* of the Christ and His Gospel, but it is not our responsibility to somehow change people’s hearts. That is God’s work. Therefore let us simply present Christ and Him crucified, and do this to the best of our frail ability and leave the results to God. This should allow us to be bold, patient and faithful in our proclamation of the Gospel as we confidently rest in the fact that God’s Word will accomplish that which He sent it for.