

What does the Bible teach about? Man's Free Will and God's Sovereignty

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

I must confess to you that I have wrestled with this subject for over three months. It is a subject that many have discussed over the years and it will continue to be debated until the Lord comes. So, with absolute dependence and reliance on God I pray that what I have been led to say will be in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are two things that we need to be reminded of:

1. Truths in the Bible must be balanced. What I mean by that is that you cannot over emphasise one whilst ignoring another.
2. Anyone who is not a Christian **cannot** understand the truths in the Bible; it is impossible. It is only the Christian who can understand because they are taught by the Holy Spirit, who lives in them.

Here is a simple illustration of balancing the truths of God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will. Just imagine two train tracks that always run parallel to each other but never cross. Both tracks are required for the train to run on. If they cross the train will derail. One truth works alongside the other perfectly together.

To understand the two, we need first to define the terms.

On one side of the track we have:

God's Sovereignty

God is the creator of the universe. The Lord Jesus sustains and controls the world we live in. Psalm 135 tells us about God's wonderful works, and in vv.5-6 we read: "For I know that the LORD is great, and that our LORD is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps." He is in total control of everything in the world as we know it, the wind, the clouds, the lightning, the rain, the sun and the moon. He has authority over everything, from the greatest king to the smallest atom. Kings, rulers, landowners, property magnates and oil barons, only have riches and power where God allows. Ultimately everything and everyone will bow to His power and to His name. Romans 14 v.11 tells us: "For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'" He is God overall and blessed forever. One day God will take full control of this world, the world He made by the power of His voice. He will reign and rule in righteousness through His son Jesus Christ. Then the whole earth will be filled with His praise.

All too often Christians look at things from a human view and judge things by worldly standards, viewed in time and sense. But Christians need to look at things from God's viewpoint in the light of eternity. God is all knowing, all seeing; He has all wisdom, and nothing takes Him by surprise! As I prepare this talk, we are in lockdown because of this coronavirus that is sweeping the world. God knows the consequences of this virus. God has allowed this to happen. God has almost stopped this world in its tracks. Families are having to spend time with each other. The tourist spots are being given a rest. The seas are being given time to regenerate. The atmosphere has less pollution. Is God speaking to this world reminding it that He is in control? The verse that keeps coming to me is Psalm 46 v.10: "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!" The Bible also says in Romans 11 vv. 33-36: "Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." You and I cannot understand God's ways and thoughts, but through faith you can trust them. Remember He loves you and me and He wants us to have every blessing that He offers in Christ Jesus. There are many other passages of the Bible that make it very clear that God is sovereign. There is no doubt about this!

On the other side of the track we have:

Man's free will

The term free will is not mentioned in the Bible. It is a reference to man's ability to make choices. Each one of us as we go through life, make choices. We are responsible for the choices we make. Some choices we make, we live to regret! They have bitter results. Others, as we look back, we see that we have made the right choice, and we are thankful for this. Every choice we make has consequences. Sometimes the consequences happen right away or sometimes later in life. But the choice of accepting or rejecting the salvation that God is offering you has eternal consequences. Whether you like it or not, the creature (you and me) is accountable to the Creator (God). You cannot swerve from the fact: you are responsible to God for the choices you make in life.

Let me go through some verses in the Bible that make it clear that man has free will.

John 3 v.16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Roman 10 vv. 9-10: "Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." These verses tell us that **WHOEVER**, that means everyone who believes, will be saved. They also tell us that we must use our mouths to confess and you must believe in your heart. It is from the heart that the mouth speaks. You are the only one who controls what you believe and say! You can't pin this on anyone else. In Genesis 3 Satan said to Eve: "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" Satan twists what God said. Eve knew exactly what God said! She repeats what God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." God was very clear. But Satan puts doubts into Eve's mind: "You will not surely die." Eve looked at the tree, it was a delight to her eyes: it was something she desired to make her wise. She decided in her own heart that she would reach out and take the fruit and eat it and give some to her husband who also ate. The consequence for them, and for us, was catastrophic. Romans 5 v.12 tells us, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." The deliberate choice of our forefathers to disobey God had eternal consequences for us all.

Many years ago, I regularly shared the Gospel with a work colleague of mine. Many times, I pleaded with him to accept the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. But every time he told me, "If I am to be saved, I will be". As far as I know, he still has not accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He has made a choice that will have eternal consequences. God is knocking at your heart's door, but He won't force Himself in. He needs to be invited. My colleague, and like many of us, are being blinded by Satan and they are making this an excuse. They are not prepared to make a choice; therefore, they are rejecting a God who loves them and wants to bless them.

Both truths working together in parallel

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 vv. 1-10 is a good example of both truths working together in parallel. First, we see God's sovereignty. Jesus entered Jericho. He was on His way to Jerusalem, to lay down His life on the cross of Calvary. Why did He enter Jericho? I believe He entered Jericho because He knew that Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. We then see man's free will. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and he decided in his heart that he wanted to see Him. Zacchaeus did not think, if I just sit in my house, Jesus will come to me. Zacchaeus decided in his own will to make a move to see Jesus. He could easily have been put off because he was a very small man and he knew there would be crowds lining the streets. He was determined to catch a glimpse of Jesus as He was passing by. He made a huge effort. He ran, something that Jewish men did not do. He climbed up a tree, something else you would not expect a man of his position to do. He wanted to see Jesus, but he was hesitant about Jesus seeing him. He chose a sycamore tree because it had lots of foliage. Jesus, however, knew where Zacchaeus was, and He knew Zacchaeus' heart. Jesus stopped right underneath the tree where Zacchaeus was and looked up. It was a wonder that Zacchaeus never fell out of the tree at this point! The Lord invites Himself to Zacchaeus' house. He tells him to come down quickly. At this point Zacchaeus had a choice. Would he refuse to come down? Would he refuse to welcome Jesus into his house? His choice had consequences. Would he regret his choice forever? Or would he joyfully respond to the call of Jesus? Thank God he joyfully responded to the call and he came down and welcomed Jesus into his house.

So, Jesus knew all about Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and made every effort to do so. Zacchaeus knew he was a sinner; he knew he had done things wrong; he knew that he needed to confess his sins to Jesus. Once he repented of his sins, Jesus was free to come into his house. The Lord Jesus gave him salvation because of his repentance and faith. Then Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The Lord makes clear His way of salvation. Jesus seeks the lost; we who are lost, respond and He saves!

How many times will Jesus pass your way? Remember the story in the Bible when the Lord sees His disciples in trouble in a boat on the lake of Galilee, He walks on the water towards them. The Bible states that Jesus would have passed by. Meaning that although He was near, He was not going to force Himself on them. He waited until there was action from His disciples. In the book of Job 33 v.14 we read: "For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it." God is maybe speaking to you today. Maybe you feel that Jesus is drawing you to Himself. Please do not let Him pass by, and do not turn Him away. This may be your last chance to invite Him into your heart and be saved for time and for eternity.

The story of the sower in Matthew 13 vv.1-8 is another example in a broader sense of the truths of God's sovereignty and man's free will. The sower is the Lord Jesus. He sows the word in the world to produce fruit in the hearts of men. V.19 tells us "when anyone hears," not just the Jew. Each one of us hears the Gospel in different ways, but mainly through the word of God, the Bible. But something hinders the word taking root! What? The activities of the devil, the fickleness of the flesh, the cares and riches of this world. But the word is received by some and fruit is produced in varying measures. Many will not believe the Word of God and their eyes will be closed to the truth. But thank God, some will.

Let me go through a few Bible verses to confirm God's thoughts and our responsibility. 2 Peter 3 vs. 8-9: "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." In Joshua 24 v.15, Joshua gave the people a choice as to whom they would serve, and they chose to serve the Lord. In Mark 8 v.34, Jesus asks the crowd to deny themselves and take up the cross and follow Him. Once more they had a choice. As we have already mentioned in Genesis 2, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they did. They chose to eat! Isaiah 55 vs. 6-9 tells us "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he might have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Proverbs 16 v.9: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." Revelation 3 v.20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." So, we can see clearly that the call, the voice, the knocking, the opportunities come from God to the sinner. But there needs to be a response from each heart of acceptance or rejection. I pray that you will warmly invite Jesus into your heart now.

The view from the believer's perspective.

When we come to the book of Ephesians, we are taught truths about the believer's position before God in grace. [As I said at the beginning of this talk, only believers who are taught by the Holy Spirit can comprehend these deep truths. The three main lines of truth in Ephesians are the believer's exalted position through grace; the truth concerning the body of Christ; and walk in accordance with that position.](#) Paul addresses the faithful, that is the believers in Christ at Ephesus. He begins to unfold to them seven elements of the believer's position. That is how God now looks on them after their salvation. In Ephesians 1 v.3 we see that God our Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. [The heavenlies may be defined as the sphere of the believer's spiritual experience with Christ in nature, life, relationships, service, suffering, inheritance and future glory in the kingdom.](#) From verses 4–14 we see the seven elements. We are chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, given an inheritance and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Having heard that list you may be thinking, "Wow! hold on a minute, how can I understand these things?" Or maybe you are saying, "How thankful I am to be a Christian, help me to be in the joy of these blessings today."

We are chosen in Him. The believer, when he comes of his own free will, as a sinner to the Lord Jesus looks back through the door of grace and sees written on the lintel: 'Chosen in Christ!' The believer now sees himself in Christ, saved by grace alone, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Now I understand that God knew I would be saved before the beginning of this world. You say "Why?" Because He is the Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end.

God predestined, me, you, every believer in Christ Jesus that we would be adopted as sons. The believer's relationship to God as a child results from new birth. We have been born again through the blood of Christ and God accepts us all as adult children. And it is for the pleasure of God. It's such a blessing to be a member of the family of God.

In God's grace we have been accepted in the beloved. We have been accepted because of the blood of Christ. There is nothing that we have done or can boast in.

We are redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus. He has paid our debt to God by giving up His life in death as the sacrifice for our sins. We are not redeemed with things that are corruptible like silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ.

We are forgiven. The slate has been wiped clean. Our sins and iniquities God will remember no more.

We have been given an inheritance, an inheritance that is undefiled and cannot be taken away. It is an inheritance that will not be passed on when we die. It is an individual inheritance that is for eternity.

We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is the evidence that we have been saved. The Holy Spirit enters our hearts. God puts His stamp on our lives. His seal is the assurance of our salvation. The Holy Spirit leads and guides us in our Christian lives.

Dear friend, I pray that you accept this message in faith. Do not allow anyone or anything to hinder you from taking the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. Dear believing friend, I pray that you will rejoice in the spiritual blessings God has poured on us through His grace. May God bless you all. Amen.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on What does the Bible teach about; Man's Free Will and God's Sovereignty: talk number T1153.

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