

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“God’s Sovereign Choice - II”

Romans 9:19-33

2000

Introduction

There was a time when almost everyone believed that the earth was the center of the universe and that all the other planetary bodies rotated around the earth. But in 1543 a Polish Astronomer named Copernicus published a book showing that the Sun, not the Earth, was the center of our solar system. But his theories were scoffed at and rejected as the musings of a “mad scientist.” However, in the early 17th century another astronomer named Galileo, armed with a new invention called the telescope, demonstrated the truth of the Copernican theory and was eventually condemned for heresy during the time of the Great Inquisition. The Roman Catholic Church believed that this new theory was a threat to God and Christianity.

Now, four centuries later, we understand that not only is the earth not the center of the universe, it is merely a very tiny part of an apparently immeasurably vast universe. But rather than threatening our view of God, the more we learn about His creation the greater our appreciation and wonder.

Application:

We often have the perspective that God exists to serve us rather than the other way around. That His job is to revolve around us and our hopes and dreams rather than for us to revolve around Him. Until this issue of the Sovereignty of God is resolved in the life of a believer, our understanding of God, the Bible, the Christian life and Romans chapter 9 will be skewed.

Life is not about us, it is about God! It’s about His glory, His honor, and His praise!

I The Sovereignty Of God Questioned

A. The **questions** of man

1. “Then why does God still blame us?”

In other words, “If God hardens whom He wants to harden, then how can God blame us if we are hardened?”

2. “Who can resist His will?”

If salvation is the sovereign work of God and the result of His divine election and foreknowledge, then how can man be rightly held responsible for unbelief and sin?

B. The **response** of Paul

1. "Who are you to talk back to God?"

Isaiah 45:9 "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands!'"

Now, Paul is not attempting to silence all questioning of God, but rather he is addressing those who are attempting to justify themselves by condemning God.

2. "Who are you to critique God's work?"

Formed = Plasma = "Something molded or formed"

Consider the foolishness of man questioning God:

Man is finite, frail, weak and foolish.

On the other hand, God is infinite, all-powerful and all-wise.

Yet, here is man daring to challenge the justice of God!

a. "Why did you make me like this?"

Illustration: Job

Job was not a skeptic or an atheist arguing against God. He was a devout man who loved God deeply. Yet he was a deeply puzzled and bewildered man who could not understand what God was doing with him. Finally, in despair, Job cries out and says, "Lord, I don't understand it! Oh, if I could just come and stand before you and plead my case, I could show you how unfair it seems to me!"

So, in Chapters 38-41, God appears before Job and says, "All right, Job, you wanted a chance to argue. You wanted to ask me some questions -- here I am. But before you ask me a few, I have some to ask you, to see if you are qualified to ask them of me. Here are my questions: Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Where were you when the morning stars sang together, and I flung the heavens into space? Were you there? Where were you when all these things began to be worked out? Can you enter into the secrets of the sea? Do you understand how the rain works, and how the lightning appears? Do you understand these things, Job? "The LORD said to Job: "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Finally in Job 40:3-5, Job ends up on his face in the dust before God and says, "I am unworthy-how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer- twice, but I will say no more."

That is Paul's argument here: "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God? You don't understand even a tiny fraction of the things to be known, so how can you argue with God?"

II The Sovereignty of God Demonstrated

A. He is the **Potter**, we are the **clay** - Jer 18:1-6

Not exactly support for the idea that we are the center of the universe!

God is a sovereign being. He is not responsible to, or answerable to, anyone. He is totally and absolutely sovereign

1. He has the right to make out of the same lump:

Right = Exousia = “Authority or jurisdiction”

a. Pottery for **noble** purposes

Noble = Time = “Honorable or valuable”

b. Pottery for **common** purposes

Common = Atimia = “Dishonorable or disgraceful”

Nobody questions that, do they? Doesn't a potter have the right to take the lump of clay that he is working with and divide it in half and make of one half a beautiful vase for the living room and out of the other make a dog dish for the family pet? Why yes, he has that right. Men exercise sovereignty like that and nobody questions it at all.

Illustration: Gardening

Last week we did quite a bit of gardening and landscape maintenance at our house. I pulled weeds, mowed the lawn, moved plants around and even pulled out healthy plants – some I repositioned and others I threw away. In spite of this clear demonstration of sovereignty over the plant material in my yard, my neighbors didn't come running over, throw me to the ground and make a citizen's arrest. Why? Because I have the right to exercise certain choices over my property.

If we exercise this kind of limited sovereignty, how can we deny it to the Creator of the universe?

2 Timothy 2:20-21 “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”

B. He is God and we are not

1. He chose to show his wrath and power by:

Wrath = Orge = “Violent anger and punishment”

a. Bearing with great patience the objects of His **wrath**

This is one of the most sobering descriptions of unbelievers found in the entire Bible – “objects of God's wrath”.

Romans 1:18 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”

Amazingly, though God has every right to judge mankind’s sin, He has demonstrated His mercy and longsuffering nature by enduring their unbelief, rejection, hatred, and blasphemy. Why?

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Romans 2:4 “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?”

1. Which were prepared for **destruction**

Prepared = The Greek verb is in the passive form. God is not the subject doing the preparing. They are prepared for destruction by their own rejection of God. And we know that hell was not originally prepared for man, but “for the devil and his angles” (Matthew 25:41).

We often begin with the wrong premise. We start by thinking that everybody is spiritually neutral, and unless they have an opportunity to be saved, they just remain neutral until it is too late for them to have a chance. But that isn't it at all! The truth is, we were born lost. We are already lost. We were lost in Adam.

Proverbs 16:4 “The LORD works out everything for his own ends--even the wicked for a day of disaster.”

2. He can choose to show the **riches** of His glory by:

a. Making known His glory to the objects of His **mercy**

God allowed sin to enter the world not only to display His wrath and to make His power known, but also to demonstrate the riches of His glory.

Ephesians 2:6-7 “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

1. Whom he prepared in advance for **Glory**

Prepared = In this case the Greek verb is in the active voice, meaning that God is the one doing the preparing.

Romans 8:30 “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

The primary purpose of salvation is not the benefit it brings to those who are saved but rather the glory it brings to the God who saves them.

a. Even us whom he called; Jew and Gentile

Paul uses two quotations from Hosea and two from Isaiah to show that Israel’s unbelief and rejection of the Messiah and His gospel fit what the prophets had predicted. Paul’s purpose is to show that Israel’s unbelief was no surprise to God and was in no way inconsistent with His divine plan for His chosen people or for the world.

1. Affirmed by the prophet Hosea - Hosea 2:23; 1:10

1 Peter 2:10 “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

2. Affirmed by the prophet Isaiah – Isaiah 10:22-23; 1:9

The meaning of this text is clear: As numerous and powerful as Israel might be, only a remnant will survive God’s impending judgment.

Up until now, Paul has been highlighting the divine and sovereign choice of God. But now he shifts gears and begins to emphasize human responsibility.

III The Sovereignty Of God Defended

God’s gracious offer of salvation becomes effective only when it is willingly received by faith. The other side of divine sovereignty is human responsibility. From a human standpoint there is a tension and apparent contradiction. By human reasoning these two components of salvation seems mutually exclusive. But both of them are clearly taught in God’s Word, and when one is emphasized to the exclusion of the other, the gospel is invariably perverted.

A. The **Gentiles** who did not pursue righteousness:

Pursue = Dioko = “To run swiftly after something”

1. Have obtained a righteous standing that is by **faith**

The Gentiles responded gratefully to the message of faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ. At the point of belief, they were reckoned righteous simply by faith.

Romans 1:17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

B. The **Jews** who pursued a law of righteousness

1. Have not attained it:

a. Because they pursued it as if it were by **works**

Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

No person, Jew or Gentile, has ever been saved on any other basis than faith exercised in response to God’s gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

2. They **stumbled** over the “stumbling stone” – Isaiah 8:14; 28:16

The Jews stumbled over the Messiah because He did not fit their preconceived ideas of a Savior. And as a result, they failed to believe in Christ and consequently were not saved. Instead they pursued a righteousness of good works and rejected the foundation Stone – Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

1 Peter 2:6-8 “For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message-which is also what they were destined for.”

There is only one way of salvation and that is through Jesus Christ. For those who put their hope in him, He will be a rock of protection and shelter. But for those who rely on their own righteousness, they will be crushed to powder by the Cornerstone of God – Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

“How can we tell whether we are chosen or not? The answer is found in what you do with Jesus. God has laid a Stone in the midst of society and that Stone is Jesus Christ.

Those who are determined to work out their salvation on the basis of their own behavior, their own good works before God, stumbled over the stone and will be crushed. But for those who acknowledge their need for a Savior, and receive the gift of forgiveness simply by faith in His Son, they stand upon the Stone of salvation. God put Jesus in the midst of the world to reveal those whom he has called, and those whom he has not.

The question is, *What will you do with Jesus?*

*Copyright, Bob Hallman, 1996-2021, All Rights Reserved.
Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the
New International Version ©1984 by International Bible Society.*