

# **The Doctrines of Grace**

1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday Lecture; August 2012

## **I. Introduction**

- A. Tonight we will attempt to climb the very heights of Christian theology.
1. You chose boldly when you said you want to talk about predestination.
  2. It is impossible, of course, to cover all the issues but we will seek to establish Scripture's primary teachings on this matter. I will refer to many authors and writings tonight, in an attempt to give you the flavor of how great spiritual leaders have understood this and, perhaps, point you to others to read for more information.
  3. Understand from the outset that we will talk about challenging paradoxes tonight, which is not uncharted territory (hypostatic union, trinity, etc.).
- B. *Doctrines of Grace* is a theology category for the primary teachings of the Bible relating to how people are saved and how they stay saved.
1. Other titles exist (Reformed theology, Calvinism, etc.), but I prefer this designation because it keeps us centrally focused on grace and cannot be confused as being about a particular theologian.
  2. The 'categories' or 'labels' are not the most important things; rather, the truth behind them is. We will look at the core of the doctrines of grace but certainly not all of them.
  3. This topic may be challenging for some.
    - a. We are approaching the very essence of how we think about God, so please be gracious, kind, and patient with one another.
    - b. Charles Spurgeon said that all of us are born by nature Arminian.<sup>1</sup> This was certainly true in my case. I had a natural and strong aversion to what I will share with you tonight. If Spurgeon is correct, we cannot expect in one night to resolve this issue. But let's pray and be hopeful for a great movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.
    - c. Let's approach tonight with humility, allowing the very topic to provoke self-reflection before our heavenly Father.

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*, 8.

## II. Sin is the Primary Issue

Most of you are here tonight because you want to learn about and discuss the topic of election. This is a vital topic in the Bible; therefore, it is one we must cover and cover well.

The primary, driving issue in the study of election really is *not* election: it's what necessitates election (sinfulness). So, we'll start there.

- A. What you believe about the nature and extent of sin has a massive impact on what you believe about the gospel.
- B. What is sin?
  - 1. Sin is what we do
    - a. Worshiping created things rather than the Creator (Rom 1)
    - b. Missing the mark, falling short of God's glory (Rom 3:23)
    - c. Turning good things into ultimate things (1 Jn 5:21)
  - 2. Sin is also what we are / the condition of our fallen nature (Rom 3:9-18)

## III. What is the Nature of Humanity?

To put that another way: are people basically good or are we basically bad? We are not asking here how we were created originally (Adam and Eve), but how humanity exists now.

- A. There are three dominant views on the nature of humanity.
  - 1. People are well.
    - a. People are, by nature, morally good.
    - b. The world is improving. Things are getting better and better.
    - c. This is basically humanistic idealism or optimism.
  - 2. People are sick.

- a. People are, by nature, morally good.
- b. BUT – Various conditions of life cause people to become morally sick.
- c. If people were really well, there would be no war, no rape, no poverty, no starvation, and no crimes against one another. But there are. This is proof we are not well, but sick.
- d. And yet people do all kinds of great things for one another. We can have great hope for a good outcome in humanity.

3. People are dead.

- a. People are, by nature, bad / sinful.
- b. They are not as bad as they could possibly be, but every part of their being is affected by evil.
- c. Sin is not primarily a learned behavior, but an innate propensity.
- d. Spiritually speaking, people are like corpses. They are physically, mentally, and emotionally alive, but spiritually they are dead.

B. Which view do you think is the most common:

- 1. Among the world?
- 2. In the church?
- 3. How we answer this question: are we well, sick, or dead, has monumental significance on how we view salvation and ourselves.

C. People are spiritually and morally dead.

Let's hone in on one biblical text and then briefly read several others.

1. Ephesians 2:1-3

Eph 2:1-3 And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

- a. In this one passage we see that sin is both something we do and sin is also who we are
- b. People are dead in trespasses and sin
- c. People actively practice evil lifestyles and live worldly lives (vs. 2 “in which you once walked”, vs. 3 “lived in the passion of our flesh” and “carrying out the desires of the body and mind”)
- d. People are by nature objects of God’s wrath, because we are sinful from conception: if you have had kids, you know this
- e. Therefore, we know scripturally and experientially that people are not well or sick, but dead

## 2. Other passages

Ps 51:3-5 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.  
<sup>4</sup>Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. <sup>5</sup>Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Ps 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

Rom 5:12 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—

D. Theologians call the teaching of these passages: *total depravity*.

The term can be a little misleading, so let me explain.

1. Total depravity does not mean:
  - a. We are as bad as we could possibly be
    - Not everyone is a rapist, a murder, or a child-molester
    - Depravity does not mean all people have reached the pinnacle of their ‘evil potential’
  - b. A complete absence of good exists in those without Jesus

- Of course some good exists in those without Jesus: common grace
  - We are created in the image of God. This image is not erased because we are now sinful: it is tainted, fractured, and marred – but still there
  - The good that we choose now is the good that is preferable to the bad (ethical goodness, common sense), not “spiritual good” that would make one acceptable to God
- c. People will always choose evil in every possible circumstance.
- d. People lack the mental capability to understand the gospel.
- Total depravity does not mean people are stupid and cannot mentally understand the gospel message. It means they will not.
  - Depravity prevents one from spiritually discerning the goodness of the truth of gospel and desiring it.
  - D. A. Carson states, “This universal sinfulness manifests itself in an unwillingness to come to Jesus [John] (5.40). It presupposes a self-love which makes men morally incapable of belief (5.44).”<sup>2</sup>

2. Total depravity means:

- a. We are morally inclined towards evil: we are born this way and willingly follow Adam in sin (Ps 51:3-5, Rom 5:12)
- b. Every part of our lives is affected by our sinfulness
- “Sin has pervaded every part of our physical, mental, and emotional makeup so that there is nothing about us that remains untouched by sin.”<sup>3</sup>
- c. Even our best deeds, apart from Jesus, are tainted by evil (motives, heart-attitudes, etc.)
- d. We are radically sinful

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 165.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 30.

E. What is the result of this sinfulness? Because we are sinners by nature and by choice:

1. We are condemned.
2. We are under God's wrath.
3. We are enemies of God.
4. We are unwilling and unable to take even the smallest effective steps toward God apart from his scandalous, gracious, prior intervention.

#### IV. What about "Free Will"?

You might object to my last statement with something like, "But what about free will?!" One of the most consistently believed *theological* ideas today is that people have free will. Of course we have free will!

The whole fabric of society today screams, "We are free!" In one sense this is correct, but in another it is both incorrect and dangerous.

Initially we must ask: what is a "will"? It's not an entity in and of itself. It is a function of your mind. Your mind creates and generates your will.

##### A. People have free will

1. Do we have moral responsibility before God? Yes. Of course! We are responsible to follow God's law and respond to the gospel message.
  - a. Any theological belief that minimizes or erases our responsibility to follow God, and exercise moral decision-making, is wrong.
  - b. Responsibility to follow the Creator strikes at the very core of what it means to be human.
2. But, do we have *complete* freedom? No. Complete freedom, no; partial freedom, yes. People are free to do what they please.
  - a. The human will, as it now exists, is free in so far as it can choose to do what is consistent with its nature. If we understand sin, we will believe that.
  - b. Our freedom is our ability to act according to our desires without being forced to do so.

“And precisely because the will, in its present fallen state, in virtue of its nature cannot do other than to will freely, it cannot do other than what it wills, than that to which it is by nature inclined.”<sup>4</sup>

- c. We are free to choose to do anything that seems to be a good, desirable idea. In other words, we are free to do what the mind thinks is best.

### 3. Let's apply this to the gospel

- a. All people willfully choose to reject God. He does not force us to do so. We do so because we desire to do so.
- b. Because rejecting God (worshiping creation rather than Creator) is consistent with our nature, we are unable to not do so. Remember, we are dead. Sin has corrupted our hearts, our minds, and our wills.
- c. A lion, we all know, is a carnivore. Lions eat meat.
  - Physically, does a lion have the capability to eat fruits and vegetables? Is a lion capable of chomping down on a big pile of berries? Certainly!
  - Will a lion do so? Never. Why? Because it will not want to do so. No one is making him not eat berries. He will not eat berries because it is not in his nature to do so.
  - Similarly, the non-Christian has the mental and physical responsibility and ability to not sin and to choose God, however, he or she will not and therefore cannot do so. It is his or her nature to not do so.

### B. People do not have free will

1. If by 'free will' we mean that people have the ability to act unencumbered by their sinful nature, we must courageously say that is impossible.
  - a. Many have disputed this issue throughout church history.

For example: Pelagius who, against Augustine, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century stated that Adam's sin only affected Adam, and everyone born

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<sup>4</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol 3, 122.

since Adam was born like Adam was born, in a position of moral (and thus willful) neutrality.<sup>5</sup>

- b. But we must humbly state that this is against the plain teaching of the entire Bible (Read Romans 5 for but one example).

2. We are slaves to sin: we are dead!

- a. George Whitefield put it like this, “Come, ye dead, Christless, unconverted sinners, come and see the place where they laid the body of the deceased Lazarus; behold him laid out, bound hand and foot with grave-cloaths, locked up and stinking in a dark cave, with a great stone placed on the top of it. View him again and again; go nearer to him; be not afraid; smell him. Ah! How he stinketh. Stop there now, pause a while; and whilst thou art gazing upon the corpse of Lazarus, give me leave to tell thee with great plainness, but greater love, that this dead, bound entombed, stinking carcase, is but a faithful representation of thy poor soul in its natural state: for, whether thou believest or not, thy spirit which thou bearest about with thee, sepulchred in flesh and blood, is as literally dead to God, and as truly dead in trespasses and sins, as the body of Lazarus was in the cave.”<sup>6</sup>
- b. We are no freer to choose God than Lazarus could choose to come back to life.
- c. We are no freer to seek the gospel than an apple tree could decide to produce pecans.

3. Many passages state our unwillingness and inability to understand and respond to the gospel message:

Rom 3:10-12 “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Rom 8:5-8 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.  
1 Cor 1:18-31 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...<sup>22</sup> For

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<sup>5</sup> See the discussion on Augustine and Pelagius in Boice and Ryken, *Doctrines of Grace*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> George Whitefield, quoted in John H. Gerstner, *A Predestination Primer*, 20.



Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...<sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 Cor 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

C. This renders us in a terrible and completely helpless situation

1. The beautiful message of the gospel is extended – we are mandated to extend it to all without distinction – and we are commanded to respond:

Matt 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Rev 22:17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Jn 6:35-37, 40 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

2. But we are unwilling and unable to respond.

Jn 6:44a No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

- a. Again, why is it that no one can come to Jesus without the Father's prior intervention? Without the Father drawing them?
- b. Is it because God actively prevents them from doing so? Is he refusing their willful attempts to come? Is it because they earnestly desire to come but he rejects their good desire?
- c. No! The reason we cannot come to Jesus is because it is contrary to our nature to do so. Our sinfulness drives us to run from, not run to

Jesus. As Sam Storms says, “We are delighted not to come. We willingly and freely and voluntarily choose to stay in our sin and unbelief.”<sup>7</sup>

3. We are rightfully responsible before God for our sinfulness, but we are unable to do *anything* to fix our situation: we merely continue in sin.
  - a. The classic debate between Martin Luther and Erasmus was over this very issue.
  - b. Luther stated, “A man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, like a thief ... being dragged off against his will to punishment; but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily. And this willingness of volition is something which he cannot in his own strength eliminate, restrain, or alter. He goes on willing and desiring to do evil; and if external pressure forces him to act otherwise, nevertheless his will within him remains averse to so doing and chafes under such constraint and opposition.”<sup>8</sup>
4. Do we have free will? Are we free? In a way, yes, and in a way, no.
  - a. One theologian said it like this, “As the bird with a broken wing is ‘free’ to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates him?”<sup>9</sup>

## V. Election

How is it possible, then, for *anyone* to receive the gospel? How can anyone become a Christian? How is it that hell is not full and heaven is not empty?

- A. It is simply because God, in his good pleasure, chose to act.
  1. Before the world began, he planned to send Jesus to die as the perfect sacrifice for sin (Eph 1).
  2. And he chose to elect some...to choose to save some out of their pervasive depravity and give them eternal life. If he had not done so, no one would be saved.

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<sup>7</sup> Sam Storms, Freedom and Depravity Pt. II, <http://www.enjoyinggoddministries.com/article/freedom-and-depravity-part-ii/>, accessed 15 May 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 319.

<sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner, *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 62.

- a. Charles Spurgeon stated, “I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen him.”<sup>10</sup>
- b. Mark Webb, “God stands at the door of heaven with his arms outstretched, inviting all to come. Yet all men without exception are running in the opposite direction towards hell as hard as they can go. So God, in election, graciously reaches out and stops this one, and that one, and this one over here, and that one over there, and effectually draws them to himself by changing their hearts, making them willing to come. Election keeps no one out of heaven who would otherwise have been there, but it keeps a whole multitude of sinners out of hell who otherwise would have been there.”<sup>11</sup>

B. A portion of Gospel Coalition’s Confessional Statement is helpful here:

1. “We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result of sin, all creation is cursed and all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.”<sup>12</sup>

C. Many, many scriptures teach unconditional election by God.

Jn 6:37 ESV All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

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<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon, *Defense*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Webb, “What Difference Does it Make?” *Reformation and Revival Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1994, 53–54.

<sup>12</sup> Gospel Coalition, *Foundation Documents*, adopted by the Council of The Gospel Coalition on May 22, 2007, and revised on April 12, 2011. Used by permission of The Gospel Coalition ([thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)), Deerfield, IL 60015.

Rom 9:15-16 "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>16</sup> So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Eph 1:4-6 Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

2 Thess 2:13-14 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

D. The essence of election is love.

1. Election is God saying, "I love you *because I love you.*"
2. God does not love us because of anything good in us. It is pure love.
3. We are saved by grace because God loves us. We believe because we are chosen, not chosen because we believe. We are totally, completely, utterly saved by grace and grace alone. It is pure love.
4. And this is produce worship, devotion, humility, security, and community.

E. Perhaps an analogy will help us grasp these complicated ideas.

1. Long lines of people are headed into a fiery furnace. You stop them and say, "Don't you realize where you are headed? Don't go there!" The person replies, "What are you talking about? I'm headed on vacation. Life is great. Leave me alone!"
2. Election is God removing the blinders, taking off the blindfold, in order that the person may then see where they are going and willingly chose a different destination.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Keller, "Election", Sermon preached Sept 12, 1993, available [http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?fuseaction=category.display&category\\_ID=6&Name](http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?fuseaction=category.display&category_ID=6&Name)

3. Divine election and human responsibility work hand in hand.

## VI. Answers to 7 Common Questions

1. *Does election mean that God looked down the corridor of time and saw who would believe the gospel and then chose them?* I used to believe that but I was wrong. First, we have established no one would do this. Second, God is above time. Finally, God's foreknowledge is actually foreordination. Speaking of **προγινώσκω** in Rom 8:29, a Greek linguist states, "The salvation of every believer is known and determined in the mind of God before its realization in time."<sup>14</sup>
2. *How is this just?* Paul anticipated this objection in his great teaching on election in Romans 9. First, in a sense, it's not! Justice would be God choosing to save no one. No one deserves salvation. So, how is this just is the wrong question. A far better question is, "Why would God be merciful to anyone?" Second, however, I have an appreciation for the question. When we have relied on a default understanding of justice, love, and free will, the doctrines of grace are very hard to accept. Ultimately we must pray for the ability to trust that, as the Bible says, God is both a good King and a just Judge. As John Piper says, "It [election] is one of the best ways to tell whether we have reversed roles with God."<sup>15</sup>
3. *Doesn't the Bible say that God desires all people to be saved?* Yes, and I believe that means God really does desire all people – every single one – to be saved. But, for some reason, God chose to save some not all.

It is important to note that the doctrine of election does not imply that there are people in hell who wanted to repent and follow God, but were forced against their will from doing so. Those persons do not exist. Everyone who repents is God's child and those who do not are not. C.S. Lewis put it like this, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"<sup>16</sup>

4. *If total depravity and unconditional election are true, why bother witnessing?* This is one of the most common objections to the Bible's

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<sup>14</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, "Pastoral Thoughts on the Doctrine of Election", Sermon preached Nov 30, 2003, available <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/pastoral-thoughts-on-the-doctrine-of-election>.

<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 75.

teaching on election. Frankly, I do not understand it. There are many answers to this question.

- a. Fundamentally we witness because God tells us to. God has ordained not just the objects of salvation but the means of it too. In other words, if we do not share the gospel, people will not be saved. So, we witness because God tells us to do so.
- b. But, rightly understood, the grace of God and the amazing goodness of the gospel, will compel us to earnestly desire to see people come to Christ. We witness because we want people to have what we have. Evangelism is the natural overflow of the heart that loves God and people.

Except for Jesus himself, the greatest missionary the world has ever known wrote, "I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh... Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Romans 9:1-3, 10:1.

- c. The doctrines of grace provide the fuel for the fire of evangelism. They convince us that the work is destined for success. J.I. Packer is helpful, "...far from making evangelism pointless, the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility – indeed, the certainty – that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen..."<sup>17</sup>
5. *What about personal responsibility?* All people are responsible to and held accountable for their choice of accepting or rejecting the gospel.
6. *Don't we have to actually respond to the gospel to be saved?* Yes! The biblical doctrine of election is not meant to provoke fatalism: what you do has eternal significance. The Bible affirms both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. You must respond to the gospel to be saved. You were not saved before you were born. You were lost – dead in your sin – until you willfully responded to the gospel message. You had to choose to follow God. This was a willful, conscious choice you made. But how and why did you make it? You made it because God chose you and enabled

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<sup>17</sup> J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 106.

you to believe. He gave you life and caused the gospel to make sense and it, therefore, become desirous.

7. *How do we reconcile divine election with human responsibility?* Charles Spurgeon was asked to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He responded, “No, I never reconcile friends.”<sup>18</sup> Somehow, divine election and human responsibility are not at odds. The Bible teaches both.

How exactly do the two work together? I do not know. Much like the Christian faith necessitates believing Jesus is both God and man, and the Godhead is both one God and three Persons, we must affirm the scriptural teaching that both divine election and human responsibility are equally true.

1. Anthony Hoekema aptly states, “The decisive factor in determining who is to be saved from sin is not the decisions of the human beings concerned, but the sovereign grace of God—though human decision does play a significant role in the process....We must therefore affirm both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility; both God’s sovereign grace and our active participation in the process of salvation. We can only do justice to biblical teaching if we firmly hold on to both sides of the paradox. But since God is the Creator and we are his creatures, God must have the priority. Hence we must maintain that the ultimately decisive factor in the process of our salvation is the sovereign grace of God.”<sup>19</sup>
2. In J.I. Packer’s classic, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, Packer calls the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility an antinomy. He states, “It is an *apparent* incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable.”<sup>20</sup> His suggestion on how to handle this antinomy, “Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real...teach yourself to think of reality in a way that provides for their peaceful coexistence, remembering that reality itself has proved actually to contain them both.”<sup>21</sup> He continues, “We shall not oppose them to each other, for the Bible does not oppose them to each other...What the Bible does is to assert both truths side by side in the strongest and most unambiguous

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine”, sermon available <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols28-30/chs1762.pdf>, Accessed July 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Packer, *Evangelism*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

terms as two ultimate facts; this, therefore is the position that we must take in our own thinking.”<sup>22</sup>

## VII. Concluding Thoughts

- A. Give yourself time and devote great energy to coming to understand the biblical teachings on the doctrines of grace.
  - 1. I came to understand these doctrines in reverse order – and it caused me massive confusion and angst!
  - 2. Exercise patience with God, yourself, and others.
  - 3. When we study and talk about depravity and election, we are tinkering with peoples’ fundamental understanding of God himself. Tread carefully and cautiously.
- B. In closing, we would do well to follow John Calvin’s, J.I. Packer’s, and Charles Spurgeon’s advice on this topic:

Calvin, “Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the Word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness....The best rule of sobriety is, not only in learning to follow wherever God leads, but also when he makes an end of teaching to cease wishing to be wise.”<sup>23</sup>

Packer, “When [Paul] introduces [election] into his teaching, it is for one end only—to help Christians see how great is the grace that has saved them, and to move them to a worthy response in worship and life.”<sup>24</sup>

Spurgeon, “The system of truth is not one straight line, but two. No man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. I am taught in one book to believe that what I sow I shall reap: I am taught in another place, that ‘it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.’ I see in one place, God presiding over all in providence; and yet I see and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions to his own will, in a great measure. Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act, that there was no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to Atheism; and if, on the other hand, I declare that God so overrules all things, as that man is not free enough to be responsible, I

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin quoted in J.I. Packer, *God’s Words*, 158.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 157.



am driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring ...You ask me to reconcile the two. I answer, they do not want any reconciliation; I never tried to reconcile them to myself, because I could never see a discrepancy ... Both are true; no two truths can be inconsistent with each other; and what you have to do is to believe them both."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Spurgeon, Sermon 'Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility', preached 1 August 1858; <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0207.htm> , Accessed 6 June 2012.