

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY + HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

JEREMY FREEMAN

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to clarify and explain my position regarding both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in salvation. From the beginning, it needs to be understood that I affirm both affirm wholeheartedly. I believe completely in the sovereignty of God in salvation; that He is in 100% control of every person's salvation. I also believe and affirm the reality that man must respond by faith to God's saving call; that man is 100% responsible for his salvation. These are two realities that Scripture emphasizes and thus are two realities I will forever emphasize as a proclaimer of the Gospel! Just as Jesus was 100% God and 100% man at the same time, so is God 100% sovereign and man 100% responsible at the same time. I think Charles Spurgeon said it best,

"If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is foreordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded together into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues 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."

My desire is that anyone who reads this document, will see the tension and mystery regarding these two issues and let it lead them to a certain joy in the Gospel and a personal ownership of spreading the Gospel to every tribe, tongue and nation.

A FEW HELPFUL THOUGHTS

One of the great passions of my life is knowing and understanding the Word of God. I have dedicated my life to studying and preaching God's Word and I believe His Word is divinely inspired, without blemish, defect, or error. It is perfect because God is perfect. However, as imperfect human beings, our interpretation of God's Holy Word is not always perfect. The reason church denominations exist, is because humans interpret Scripture differently on certain issues. Sometimes those differences in interpretation are major and sometimes they are minor. Every faithful, Bible-believing Christian needs to be able to defend the "non-negotiable" doctrines present in Scripture. When I say non-negotiable, I am referring to doctrines that are primary and clearly explained in Scripture; doctrines that do not change the meaning of the unchanging Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. While some might think this list would be

long, I would contend that the list of primary doctrines, doctrines over which no debate and argument can happen, is rather short. I am speaking of doctrines such as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; the divinity and sinless humanity of Jesus; the doctrine of original sin; the exclusivity of Jesus as the only means of salvation; etc. Primary doctrines are doctrines worth dividing over and fighting for. If someone comes to me and says, "I do not believe Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation," that is a battle I will fight and a hill on which I am willing to die. Secondary and tertiary doctrines, doctrines where there can be some debate and disagreement, would include things such as the specifics regarding the return of the Lord Jesus; number and use of spiritual gifts; organization of church government; etc. These are doctrines where healthy debate can happen, but should not cause a brother and sister in Christ to divide.

A problem arises when someone takes a secondary doctrine and attempts to make it a primary one. For instance, the greatest theological minds in the world do not agree on the specifics of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When someone says there is only one way to interpret certain passages regarding Christ's return, and any interpretation other than theirs is unbiblical, a problem arises. I have certain leanings and beliefs regarding the return of Christ, but I am not arrogant enough to think that my view is perfect and someone else's view is unbiblical. There simply has to be grace shown on portions of Scripture where a primary or foundational doctrine is not at stake. What is not to be debated in regard to the Lord's return is the undeniable fact that He is returning. The fact that the Lord is returning is a primary, non-negotiable doctrine, but the time and specifics of His return are secondary and up for discussion.

OVERVIEW

It is with this mindset that I approach the important subjects of God's sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. The MEANS of salvation is non-negotiable, but the DETAILS of salvation are negotiable. Let me explain: The Bible is 100%, crystal clear, that salvation happens exclusively through the Lord Jesus Christ. As Acts 4:12 states, "Salvation is found in no other name, but the name of Jesus." John 14:6 states, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me (Jesus)." There is no debate whatsoever regarding the exclusivity of Christ as the sole means of salvation. As Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus Christ is the only WAY; the only MEANS of salvation. However, the "details" surrounding a person's conversion are a little muddy in Scripture. For instance, is faith a gift of God or an action

of man, or is it both? There are passages indicating that even our faith is a gift from God (Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8; etc.) and passages indicating faith is something we do (John 1:12; 1 John 5:1; etc.). What are we to do when there is a tension like this? Many people would say, "See, the Bible contradicts itself." What I say is, "No, there is no contradiction in Scripture or in the mind of God. The only contradiction is in the fallen mind of man." We are finite, fallen human beings who will never understand the depths of these things this side of heaven, and when we get to heaven, we will not even care about such things because we will be in the very presence of God. As we study and explore the depths of God's most Holy Word, we need to keep the big picture in mind, which is that God is perfect and we are not. Faithful, Bible-believing Christians need to major on the things Scripture majors on and minor on the things Scripture minors.

Christians, especially Southern Baptist Christians, are notorious for defending things and arguing about things they know very little about. What we do NOT need to do is argue with each other based on our emotions and passions, but rather discuss with each other and meditate on specific passages that are difficult to understand in Scripture. Satan loves to get brothers and sisters fighting over silly, meaningless things, and when we fight over minor items in Scriptures, Satan gets the glory. 1 Timothy 6:3-4 says it well,

"If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He had an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of truth..."

I have met many people in my life who are so passionate about secondary matters that if you do not see eye to eye with them on every issue, they just write you off like you are some kind of ignorant person. What we have to look for in people is faithfulness to the Gospel, or as Timothy said, "To the words of Christ." That is what should unify God's Church, not agreement on every secondary and tertiary issue, but full agreement on the primary doctrines of Scripture.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

One truth that is absolutely clear in Scripture is the undeniable fact that God is sovereign. The Word of God screams God's sovereignty from cover to cover. Every believer in Christ should agree that God is 100% sovereign and rejoice that we have a God who is in complete control of all things. The reality is that we should want a God who is sovereign. We should want a God

who is in complete control, who never makes mistakes or acts unjustly. We should want God to be supreme and in charge of all things. Whenever we are dealing with ANY theological subject, we must always see things in light of God's sovereignty, and as we deal with the subject of sovereignty, we must be careful not to let our humanity get in the way. We need to avoid drawing conclusions about God that Scripture does not support. Rather, we simply need to embrace God for who He is, letting God be God.

I have heard countless people say, "Well, I know God is sovereign, but He has chosen to limit His sovereignty and give man the freedom to choose." While I understand where that comment comes from, it is not a clearly defined biblical truth. We have no biblical evidence to indicate that God has limited Himself in any way. When we say God has limited His sovereignty, we are making a speculation based upon a human and fallen understanding of God. I see nowhere in the Bible where God limits Himself and gives man the freedom to make choices "outside" of His sovereign control. Now, please hear what I am not saying: I am not saying that God cannot do that, or has not done that, I am simply saying that there is no DIRECT biblical support for that kind of thinking. We must be very careful not to impose our human views on God when we are attempting to understand His sovereignty. There are countless verses I could point to, but here are a few that remind us that God is completely sovereign in all things:

- "Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases." -Psalm 15:3
- "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps," -Psalm 135:6
- "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." -Isaiah 55:8-9
- "For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." -Romans 9:15-18
- "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for His glory." - Romans 9:20-23

There are numerous other examples about God simply being sovereign and accomplishing

His purpose in this world and in our lives, but the bottom line is that we must view everything in light of God's sovereign plan. At the heart of God's sovereignty is His glory. God's greatest passion is His own glory. Yes, God loves you and me, but what He does, He does for His glory. The prophet Isaiah said it best, "For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another." God will do whatever is necessary to bring Himself the most glory and He is completely just in all that He does. Jesus understood this and provided the best example when He said, "I came not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me." At the heart of any discussion regarding God, especially His sovereignty in salvation, should be the understanding that the ultimate goal is for HIM to get all the glory.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

As I said at the beginning of this paper, I completely affirm that man is responsible for his salvation. God deals justly with any person who accepts or rejects Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The reward for trusting in Christ is a relationship with God and eternity with Him in heaven; the punishment for rejecting Jesus Christ is separation from God and a tormenting eternity in hell. Even though God is sovereign, the Scripture indicates that man makes real choices that have real consequences. I can locate nowhere in the Bible where it supports the conclusion that our choices are robotic or dictated by God. But, I do find support for the conclusion that what we do is always in perfect step with the sovereign plan of God; a plan that cannot be thwarted. When a person gives his or her life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that is a decision they are making, and it is a real decision. I personally avoid using phrases like "free will" or "free choice," because I think those phrases are confusing and misleading. They often mean different things to different people. The Bible never uses the phrase free will. The Bible does talk about choice, faith, belief, decision, etc., and those are the things on which we should focus. Here are a few verses that come to mind when the Bible talks about human choice:

- "...choose this day whom you will serve..." -Joshua 24:15
- "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring might live." -Deuteronomy 30:19
- "Let us choose for ourselves what is right; Let us know among ourselves what is good." -Job 34:4
- "Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will He instruct him in the way that he should choose." -Psalm 25:12

DEALING WITH THE TENSIONS

I have only scratched the surface thus far in this paper and there is no way I could delve into every issue that pertains to this subject matter, but what I think will be most helpful at this point is to tackle the main issues people wrestle with regarding sovereignty and responsibility in salvation. I have chosen to deal with the important issues by asking five questions:

Question #1: Does man have a choice in salvation?

The answer to this question is yes. Any person who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior does so by making a real choice; the choice of placing their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. As John 1:12 says, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, to them He gave the right to become the children of God." However, as I said above, all of our choices are in perfect alignment with the sovereign plan of God. John 1:13 says, "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." All human salvation decisions are in perfect alignment with the perfect God of this universe. There will be none who wanted to repent of their sin and trust in Christ that God kept out of heaven and there will be none that wanted to go to hell and reject Christ that God drug into heaven. Those people do not exist. God does not have wishes and dreams like humans do, rather He has solid, definite eternal plans that are fixed in the heavens and cannot and will not be thwarted by man. I have heard many people say, "God's wish is that the whole world would be saved." If God wished that the whole world would be saved, they would be saved. God is not in heaven sitting on the edge of His seat hoping, wishing and dreaming that people will respond to His saving call. God has a perfectly sovereign and just salvation plan that He is working out to flawless completion for His glory. Yes, a person chooses God, but that choice is directly in line with the sovereign will of God. As Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." God's purposes always prevail and man's choices fall in perfect line with His will.

Someone might read that and say, "What's the problem then? That all sounds good to me." A challenge arises with passages like the following:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and

things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." - Ephesians 1:3-14

If you noticed in that passage, there is a strong emphasis on God choosing us according to the purpose of His will, but if you also noticed, it mentioned that a Christian must believe in Him. Ephesians 1 reflects the tension that is present in the Bible. A tension we must embrace by faith and cannot fully understand. Even Jesus spoke of this. He said in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." Jesus also spoke of both sovereignty and responsibility in John 6:44-47. He said,

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."

Jesus spoke that no one can come unless the Father draws Him and whoever comes must believe. This is what I call a tension or a mystery in the Bible. God clearly chooses and obviously has done so before the foundation of the world and draws people in accordance with His plan, but man is also charged to believe and respond by faith.

One of the biblical concepts that is hard to accept, but clear in the Bible is that God is a choosing God. Why did God choose Abraham? Why did God choose Israel? Why did God choose the disciples? Why did God choose Paul? We do not know the answer to these questions, but we do know that God does what He does for a reason and is perfectly just in His decisions. It is critical that western, North American Christians not let their obsession with democracy and freedom skew their understanding of the Bible. North Americans have no concept of what it would be like to live under the rule of a real king, where the king declared the law with no argument to the contrary from his subjects. Historically speaking, kings exercised complete rule and dominion over the people and the land. They declared the law and decided the fate of every subject. The masses were at the mercy of the ruler. No one had standing to demand anything.

In the Bible, people were much more used to living under the rule of a king and I believe they understood God as King and as sovereign in a much more proper light than we do today. We need to remember that God is the King of all Kings and as the perfect King of the heavens and the earth, He can do whatever He pleases, and what He does is always perfect and always

good. However, and as I have said before, God's sovereignty somehow works in perfect harmony with the choices humans make and does not violate the reality of those choices. As a pastor and theologian, I simply long to embrace both concepts fully: God is 100% sovereign and man is 100% responsible. I realize there are some who lean more toward sovereignty and some who lean more toward human responsibility, and as long either side does not wander off into extremism, I can accept both with grace because this is an area where Scripture supports both ideas.

Question #2: Did Jesus die for the whole world or just the elect?

This question is more difficult to answer than most people think. The answer is not as simple as quoting John 3:16. Yes, Jesus does love the whole world, and not just the people, but all of creation. He loves the "whole" world. However, when one thinks about the church, it is clear that God has a special love for His bride, or His Church. As Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the "church" and gave Himself up for 'her'." The Scripture is clear that God loves His bride in a special way. It is similar to the love we have for our family. While we do love other people, we have a special love for our own family members. The Bible indicates that God does indeed love the world, and all the people in it, but He also loves His Church with a special love. This brings up the issue of election. Some people would say that God only redeemed His elect; meaning those chosen by God to salvation before the foundation of the world. What is unclear in the Bible is what is meant by the term "elect." The word elect is used all throughout Scripture, but without much explanation. The Greek word for elect is *eklektos* and it simply means "chosen." The Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter used the word elect freely and frequently in their letters. Here are two simple examples:

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has elected you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."
- 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood..." - 1 Peter 1:1-2

I have already mentioned Ephesians 1 earlier in this paper, but that chapter is a strong passage where Paul tells us that people were chosen unto salvation before the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge and will of God (Ephesians 1:1-14). The word elect is also used of the people of Israel. God calls Israel "Mine elect" (Isaiah 45:4). Paul says in Romans 8:33, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" In most instances, the term elect is simply used. There is no defense or extensive explanation given. However, we do know that the elect were not just the people of Israel because both Paul and Peter called believing Jews and Gentiles elect in their letters. One thing is definitely clear, the elect were and still are Jew and Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is interesting about the word elect is that it is similar to the Greek word for church, which is ekklesia. Ekklesia simply means "the called out ones." I personally like to say that the elect is God's Church; the chosen ones of God who have responded to Christ in repentance and faith. We do not know who the elect are because we are not God, and should not busy ourselves attempting to discover who the elect might be. God nowhere tells us we are to do such things, rather we are to preach the Good News to all people. This begs the question though, "Did Jesus die for the whole world, or just the elect?" Another way of asking this question is, "Did Jesus die for the whole world in the same way He died for those who would believe?" When you start down this road, it raises other bigger questions like, "What did Jesus actually accomplish on the Cross? Did He die as a potential sacrifice for sin, or an actual sacrifice? Did He redeem the whole world when He died, or did He redeem only those who would believe? What actually happened on the Cross?"

To answer this question, many people want to quote passages such as 1 John 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." However, if you take a verse like 1 John 2:2 at face value, you might say, "Well, if he is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for the sins of the whole world, then the whole world will be saved." The Bible is crystal clear that not everyone will be saved though, so it is obvious that 1 John 2:2 does not mean that. So what does it mean? I believe that Scripture teaches that those who believe, those who repent of their sin and place their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, were fully forgiven by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. I do not believe that Jesus died on the Cross for the potential forgiveness of sin, but rather for the actual forgiveness of sin, and those forgiven are the ones who repent of their sin and believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in John 17:1-2, "...Father the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him."

Jesus also said in John 6:37-40, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. 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."

As one can see, there was a certain understanding that Jesus had, which was that He came to gather and not lose any that the Father gave Him. I believe that those who come to the Father by faith, are the ones the Father gave Him, and are therefore the ones for whom Jesus died. The Bible teaches that Jesus loves the whole world and salvation is available to the whole world, but the ones who come and repent are the only ones who are forgiven. With that understanding, it could be said that Jesus did actually die only for those who would believe; or as some might

say, the elect. This is why grace must be shown on this issue. The Scripture gives plenty of evidence indicating that God does indeed love the world, but it also tells us clearly that not everyone in the world will be saved. Only those who repent and believe in Jesus will be saved. As long as people, regardless of their belief on election, are passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all people, there should not be any division among God's people. The only time I will take issue with a person on this issue is if their belief causes them to grow cold regarding gospel proclamation. As I often say, "Any doctrinal conviction you hold that does not compel you to fulfill the Great Commission is unbiblical." As C.H. Spurgeon said, "It is the whole business of the whole church to preach the whole gospel to the whole world." Let me say this before I close this section: I think much of this kind of discussion can be somewhat pointless. We are not charged to wonder about and think about who God is drawing or who God is going to save, we are simply called to share the love of the Lord Jesus Christ with every human being, knowing that those who repent and believe are the ones the Father is drawing and fully redeeming. We simply must busy ourselves with the Great Commission.

Question #3: Does God draw everyone, or only some to salvation?

Romans 3:10-12 says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Ephesians 2:1 says that all people are dead in their sins and trespasses. Romans 5:12 says, "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." These Scriptures and many more tell us that ALL human beings are in the same state when they are born into this world. Every human being is born dead in sin, completely cut off from God and separated from Him because of our imputed sin nature from Adam. However, Romans 1:19-20 says this,

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

In other words, everyone is in the same boat because they are all born sinners, but God has made Himself known to ALL people and no one has an excuse. There will be none who stand before God and say, "I never heard" or "You never revealed Yourself to me." God has made Himself known and the problem is that man has rejected God. As Romans 1:25 says, "Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." However, it does not end there. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrated His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God did not leave us dead in sin, He sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for sin, and as the Scripture says, "...everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life." Did you hear that? "Everyone and anyone who looks to the Son will be saved;" so God's salvation offer is available to all people. But how are people saved? How has God chosen to bring in His precious bride from

every tribe, tongue and nation? Romans 10:11-17 says:

“Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.”

That passage tells us that the means by which God has chosen to save people is through the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. Everyone can be saved, but everyone must hear the Gospel, and because God has a special love for His bride, He is calling and sending His followers to all places at all times to bring the Good News to all people. God has and will continue to make Himself known, and He will accomplish His perfect redemptive plan. Yes, God does love the world, but it is His Church, His Bride, that He is redeeming! Only God knows who will respond to His salvation offer by faith. Instead of worrying about whether God is drawing all or some, Christians need to focus their energy on getting the Gospel to every living human being. Our mission is to join Him in declaring His Gospel and be a part of the exciting redemptive journey of our great God.

Question #4: Can man resist God's saving call?

It is obvious that a person can. The unpardonable sin is a willful, final and complete rejection of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32). So, yes, the Holy Spirit can be resisted. In Acts 7:51, Stephen accused the religious leaders of “resisting the Holy Spirit.” We also know that the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) and quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The Bible gives indication that all those things can happen and do happen. However, the Bible also speaks of God completing and finishing what He starts. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus is the “author and finisher” of our faith. Philippians 1:6 also tells us that what God starts in us, He will finish in us: “And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.” Jesus spoke of this in John 6:37 when He said, “All that the Father gives Me WILL come to Me...” The Bible indicates that God’s saving purpose will be completely accomplished in those who are being saved. I believe the Bible teaches that you can resist God for a season, but those that God foreknew who would be saved, will eventually repent of their sin and place their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, they will not respond robotically or forcefully, but as I have mentioned earlier, in accordance with their will and with the sovereign plan and purpose of God. As I have said, “God drags no man into heaven,” only those who repent of their sin and place their life fully in His hands. Again, I do not think Christians need to get bogged down with this issue. Instead, they need to focus on the fact that

people resist God all the time and must be called continually and faithfully to repentance and faith in Christ.

Now, there are some who would argue that the Bible teaches that regeneration comes before faith. This simply means that God awakens a person dead in sin, regenerates them by His saving call, and then they naturally respond in faith due to their new nature in Christ. However, much like those who insist that God has limited His sovereignty, those who insist that regeneration happens before faith are speculating about something that cannot be definitively proven in Scripture. There are some Scriptures that indicate this might be true, but the Bible does not place great emphasis on this and neither should we. The Bible clearly emphasizes faith, and that is what God's Church should emphasize as well. We are to simply call people to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, we major on the majors and minor on the minors.

Question #5: Can a person ever lose their salvation?

Eternal security is at the heart of the Gospel. To say one can lose their salvation is to say one can earn their salvation. If salvation was not a person's to earn, then it is not a person's to lose. One of the most beautiful realities of God's saving grace is that His grace covers us and keeps us for all eternity. In other words, what God starts, He will always finish! As I mentioned earlier, Philippians 1:6 tells us that He who began a good work will be faithful to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:13-14 also tells us that the Holy Spirit seals us until the day of redemption. There are countless Scriptures pointing to the reality of the security of the believer. As I like to say, "IF saved, always saved." If a person truly is born again, they cannot be "unborn." Once the Holy Spirit fills a person, He will never leave them. What is important regarding this issue is the fact that "true" believers will do two things according to the Word of God:

1. They will produce fruit. As John 15 tells us, "...it is to the Father's glory that you bear much fruit." A branch that is genuinely grafted into the vine will indeed bear fruit and demonstrate its belonging. Fruit, to some degree, is an essential for genuine believers.
2. They will endure. Without question, the Bible tells us that those who truly belong to Christ will persevere to the end. In other words, those who are truly born again will slip up from time to time, but they will never quit and bow out of the race. As James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." Perseverance is an essential for genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why I often say, "It's not how you start, but how you finish." Those who finish simply show themselves to have truly been born of God.

It is essential that all believers in Jesus Christ have a proper understanding of the biblical truth that they are eternally secure in the salvation gifted to them from God. It is essential because this truth fully explains the significance of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross. All

believers must understand that Jesus actually and fully paid for all sins of those who would believe and that they are covered for all eternity by His atoning work on the Cross. As Romans 8:39 says, "...nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Those who are genuinely saved by Jesus, are saved for all eternity!

CONCLUSION

Even though this paper is roughly fourteen pages, I have merely touched on the surface of these issues. Thousands of pages and countless books have been written on this subject matter, but I have simply sought to give a concise overview of some of the key issues we face. More than anything, I hope you have heard my heart on this matter, which is that Christians must busy themselves proclaiming the Gospel to all people. I firmly believe that it is the Gospel and a passion to share the Gospel that unites God's Church. There is no way that a church of significant size will have members who agree on every issue. Agreement must center on the Gospel. As I have said repeatedly, we will always have people who lean certain directions regarding sovereignty and responsibility. Some will lean heavier toward sovereignty; some will believe in a literal elect; some will believe in regeneration before faith...BUT...some will lean more toward human responsibility; some will believe in free will; some will believe God limits Himself in order for man to choose, etc. What is essential is that both sides agree on the Gospel and both sides are equally passionate about spreading the Gospel. If those two things happen, there should never be any reason to divide over these issues. God's Church cannot afford to get bogged down in speculation and meaningless argument over things that will never be reconciled this side of heaven. We must stay focused and centered on the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. I will ask and continue to ask that all people embrace the true reality and mystery that Scripture teaches that God is 100% sovereign in salvation and that man is 100% responsible in salvation. I will never advocate that it is a 50/50 split...God is sovereign; man is responsible...end of story! We must embrace both FULLY!

This is why I am so passionate about preaching God's Word verse by verse. When you preach expositionally, every issue and doctrine will be covered; nothing can be skipped or overlooked. This is part of the reason the church at large is in the mess it is in today, simply because men have not preached the fullness of God's Word. Because preaching has not been done verse by verse and book by book, people's doctrine has been pieced together bit by bit, making it somewhat disjointed. If the Lord will allow me to pastor First Baptist Church Newcastle (FBCN) for 40+ years, I believe we will not only have a biblically sound church, but we will also have a church full of people well equipped with a solid, cohesive theology that compels them to

defend their faith and share the Gospel with power, passion and precision! In the meantime, we cannot be led by our emotions regarding sensitive issues. On every issue, we must all ask, "What does the fullness of Scripture teach?" Mature believers will always seek answers in the Word of God through prayer, careful study and meditation on these rich scriptures. They should also seek common ground with other brothers and sisters in Christ through healthy dialogue and discussion. As long as I am the pastor of this great church, we will always be consumed with and passionate about the Great Commission. We simply cannot let anyone or anything get in the way of that mission. As God's Church, we must rise together and stay focused on the task at hand, which is making disciples of all nations. May God use FBCN to be a shining light of His glory and Gospel to every corner of this earth...even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!