Sovereignty and Freedom
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-399

Well, we are alerted throughout this series that every time you come to a service at Grace Church, you're going to hear about an attribute of God. We want you to know our all glorious God. We want you to know all that you can know about Him, all that is revealed on the pages of Scripture.

And the emphasis that we have for this morning is on the sovereignty of God. Simply stated, Psalm 103 verse 19 says, "His sovereignty rules over all." And we saw that demonstrated, didn't we, in the passages that we read earlier from Isaiah and from Daniel. God is the absolute ruler of this world and the entire universe. God is the one who decrees all things, who purposes all things and who accomplishes all things that He decrees and purposes. He is simply in charge of absolutely everything.

Through the years, of course, we have studied the Scripture long enough and deeply enough to be very familiar with the sovereignty of God. So in order to address that subject in a way that perhaps is not redundant, I want to approach the subject of the sovereignty of God from the standpoint of the question...does the truth of divine sovereignty eliminate human will...eliminate human will, human volition?

When you believe in the divine sovereignty of God, as Scripture lays it out, you face the problem of how does human will fit into that? If God has ordained everything, if God has prewritten history, if God is in charge of everything, if God purposes and fulfills His purposes, then just exactly how do we fit in? How does human will fit in? Or, in fact, does God divine decree eliminate human will? If God has planned it all, purposed it all, defined it all, predetermined it all, predestined it all, then does human will play any part? And what about human responsibility?

Now those are very important questions for a couple of reasons, number one, because that is the question that always bothers people when they first come to an understanding of divine sovereignty. Over the last twenty-five years there has been an explosion of interest in what the Bible says about the sovereignty of God. I can think back years and years ago, decades ago when that was not an issue, but it is a huge issue because by the grace of God we have come to discover what Scripture says about God's absolute sovereignty. And so, there are people emerging out of the shadows of weak theology, discovering this great doctrine of divine sovereignty and inevitably at the entry point in to understanding that doctrine, the first compelling question is..How does this connect with human will and human responsibility?

I tell you, I never do a question and answer session, or rarely do I do one where that question in one way or another is not asked. How are we supposed to reconcile the absolute divine sovereignty with human responsibility and human will? How do we resolve those things? That's a compelling question. It is a compelling question for those who are entering into an understanding of these doctrines. But it is secondly also a nagging question for people who have taken ownership of the great truth of divine sovereignty. It's still in the back of our minds a nagging issue that perhaps we all would say would like to be resolved and it does have potential impact on how we live our lives. If, in fact, we get overboard on the divine sovereignty side, and weaken an understanding of human responsibility, it effects our devotion to spiritual duty, to evangelism, to the way we live our lives. So we need to understand this dual truth of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

I'm going to give you the answer so in the future we'll just give people this message, I hope, and we won't have to always answer the question again and again. Now, if you're..if you're expecting to get new divine light on some way to explain this apparent paradox, or resolve this, I might disappoint you. But...or if you're expecting a philosophical answer, or some kind of convoluted tautology that's going to take us through the machinations of how people try to resolve this in their own minds, you're going to be disappointed. But if you're interested in what the Scripture says about this, I promise you won't be disappointed. We're just going to take the biblical view.

Just to inform myself when I began to think about this, I read a number of books that give a philosophical look at trying to harmonize divine sovereignty with human choice. I read a lot of things. I had a stack of files that high from website input, I had several books and when I got done with all of it, I really didn't find any help. I always find help in Scripture. So that's where we're going to go. Okay?

Open your Bible to the tenth chapter of Isaiah...the tenth chapter of Isaiah. We'll just look at one Old Testament illustration and then a few from the New. These are not isolated illustrations but rather representative illustrations of how Scripture deals with this issue.

Now I want you to look at chapter 10 and verse 5. Understand that the prophet Isaiah is used by God to pronounce coming judgment on Judah and Jerusalem, judgment is coming. That's his message and the judgment is coming because of their idolatry. We read earlier from Isaiah chapter 43 through chapter 48 some selected passages, and it's obvious that the background to those passages is that Israel is engulfed in worshiping false gods, engulfed in idolatry and God is saying to them, there is only one God, I am the true God, I am the living God, I am the one who pre-wrote history, I am the one who does His will in the world, there is no other God. And so Israel is being told that they are following gods that are no gods at all, gods made out of wood. And chapter 44, the prophet Isaiah says you take the same piece of wood, you put it in the fireplace to bake your bread, you take another piece off the same tree and you make a god out of it and you worship the god...how foolish is that?

So it’s the folly and apostasy and idolatry of Israel that’s behind Isaiah’s message. Judgment has already come to the northern kingdom. The Assyrians have come and vanquished the northern kingdom, the capital city Samaria, and hauled off the Jews up there, never to return again. And now Isaiah is saying judgment is going to come to Judah and Jerusalem. And that’s what we pick up in verse 5, chapter 10.

“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury to capture booty ad to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.” That is extremely strong language, obviously, very graphic language, but it is at the same time a rather strange statement because the opening words, “Woe to Assyria” are a judgment against Assyria. Woe means condemnation, destruction, damnation. God is pronouncing a curse on Assyria. Strangely at the same time God pronounces a curse on Assyria, He defines Assyria as the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation.”

What’s going on here? God says Assyria is My instrument of judgment against the people of My fury, a godless nation, as verse 6 puts it, meaning Judah and Jerusalem, the Jews. He commissions...the word commission is used there, verse 6...He commissions Assyria sovereignly, to act as destroyer, to go into the land, the holy land, the land of the Covenant people, seize booty, plunder and trample them down like mud in the streets. Assyria then is under a divine decree. He literally grabs Assyria by the neck and says, “You will be in My hand the instrument of destruction.” This is by divine decree. This is not the will of Assyria, this is not their plan, this is not their motivation. Verse 7 says that. Yet it does not so intend. Assyria has no intention of being the instrument of Jehovah God, they don’t even believe in Jehovah God. They think the God of Israel is just another one of the gods like all the gods of the other nations around them which they had already conquered. In fact, they even think that the God of Israel must be weaker than the other gods they’ve already conquered because they already conquered the northern part of that nation. They have no intention of serving this God that they think is weak. So it says in verse 7 it doesn’t so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart. They’re not motivated to be the instrument of God’s judgment. They have no righteous motivation. They don’t even have a personal will in this that connects with God in any way.

Rather, verse 7 says, it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations. From their standpoint, they’re motivated by one thing. We’ve conquered all the other nations around here with weak gods and in the power of our own god the Assyrian god, we will conquer this weak nation, what’s left of it, Judah and Jerusalem. They already conquered places like verse 9, Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, Damascus and this is just another nation that they’re going to go in and take over. They are in an aggressive, war-like mode, motivated by their own greed, motivated by their own hunger for power, motivated by their own evil hearts. They say things like, verse 10, “As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images just as I have done to Samaria and her

idols?” We already knocked off the northern kingdom, the God of Israel couldn’t defend them there, and they don’t have any God that will be able to defend them in the south either.

So here is this pagan idolatrous nation of Assyria, going to be the instrument of divine judgment in the will and purpose and decree of God against Judah and Jerusalem. That’s now their motive. That’s not their intention. That’s not their incentive. They’re just evil, aggressive conquerors. They just want to kill, destroy, occupy and plunder. They have no such intention. But divine decree overrules their motives and accomplishes the purpose of God.

But in spite of that, verse 5 says, “Woe to Assyria.” God pronounces judgment on them, condemnation on them when they are doing what He wills them to do. The judgment is spelled out in verse 12. So it will be when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, you know, when He’s...when He’s used Assyria to do the damage He wants them to do, He will then say, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.”

Here is Assyria. They’re going to be an instrument that God uses to accomplish His own purpose sovereignly and when they have done that, in the will and purpose of God, He will turn on them and He will judge them. And so here you have, put side by side, a divine decree and human responsibility...a divine decree and human culpability. It’s going to be ugly. I’ll punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness for he said, “By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this, for I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of the peoples and plundered their treasures and like a mighty man I brought down their inhabit ants.” He had no concept that he was an instrument of God, he thought he was the conqueror himself. It’s My hand that reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest. And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth and there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak, or chirped. I robbed all these national nests of all their treasures and not a one of them chirped.

God says, “I’m not going to allow that. I’m not going to allow that kind of pride and haughtiness. Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?” Assyria was the axe, God was the one who was doing the chopping. “Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it.” Assyria was the saw, bu the saw was in the hand of God. That would be like a club wielding those who lift it, or like a rod lifting him who is not wood. That would be giving too much power to the instrument and not to the one who handles it. “Therefore the Lord, the God of host, will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors, the Assyrian army. Under his glory a fire will be kindled like a burning flame and the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame and it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in a single day and he will destroy the glory of his forest and of his fruitful garden both soul and body and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.” God is going to go after Assyria.

On the one hand, Assyria is an instrument under the divine sovereign decree and power of God, doing what God has ordained it to do. On the other hand, fully culpable, fully guilty and to be judged for the very acts that they did.

Now if you're looking in there for an explanation for how that goes together? There isn't one. It just does...it just does. Scripture doesn't say anymore. There are no qualifiers, caveats, explanations.

Turn to John 3 and Jesus is having a conversation with Nicodemus who is a leader and a ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee. He's a teacher, someone who ostensibly knows the Word of God and biblical theology, Old Testament theology. But he's burdened because he wants to enter the Kingdom of God and in spite of his religiosity he's not satisfied that he has attained that, that he has entered the Kingdom of God. So Jesus speaks to him in John 3:3 and says, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born from above, *anothen*, born again, or born from above," but let's look at it as born from above which is an alternative translation since that's what the rest of the passage seems to emphasize. "Unless one is born from above, he can't see the Kingdom of God."

And what is He saying to Nicodemus? "Nicodemus, you're working really hard to get into the Kingdom of God. But I want to tell you something. You don't get in there from here, it comes from above. If you're going to be regenerated, it has to come down from above. You can't achieve it." And, of course, we understand that, right? Because the Jews were trying to work their way into the Kingdom and the message of Jesus is, "You can't do it that way, it comes down from above. Nicodemus, if you want to enter the Kingdom, you have to be born from above." And Nicodemus picks up on the paradigm, understands Jesus is talking in an analogy and says, "How can a man be born when he's old? How can...how can that happen? Look, I didn't contribute to my first birth, nobody does, and how am I going to make myself be born again? How am I going to do that? How can I enter a second time into my mother's womb and be born?" He's talking n metaphoric language, he gets the picture. Jesus is saying, "You need a new birth. You need a wholesale overhaul. You need to be regenerated from above. And his question is, "How can I do that?" And the answer is, "You can't...you can't because...verse 6...that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. You need a spiritual birth and that doesn't come from the flesh. So you can't generate a spiritual birth. You can't regenerate yourself. It's not anything you can do. You must be...verse 7...born from above."

So here's this man coming and saying, "I want to enter the Kingdom of God." And Jesus' answer to him is, "Look, this calls for such a dramatic, total regeneration that it can only happen from above. The flesh can't do it, you can't do it."

Now this is very instructive, isn't it, in terms of how we do evangelism? When somebody comes to you and says, "I want to enter the Kingdom of God," what would you say? You'd probably say, "Well, first of all, pray this prayer." Really? "Say these words, repeat after me." I hear that all the time. Jesus didn't do that. Jesus didn't say, "Here are the three steps, four steps." Jesus said, "Look, you have to

recognize that this is something you can't do. This is a divine work that comes down from above and constitutes a total regeneration, new life, and you can't produce it because flesh can only produce...what?...flesh. You need a spiritual birth from heaven.

And then in verse 8, a most amazing statement, "The wind blows," and He moves the analogy from the analogy of birth to wind. "The wind blows where it wishes, you hear the sound of it, you don't know where it comes from, you don't know where its going." We all know that, right? The wind comes and there it is. We feel it. We see its effect. We don't know where it's coming from, we don't know where it's going. We can't initiate it, and we can't stop it. It operates under power way beyond us. "So is everyone born of the Spirit."

What's He saying? This is a divine miracle that comes down from heaven. This is not something you can generate. This is not something you can produce. This is not something you can manufacture. This is a spiritual thing, a work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit comes to whom He will when He wills. That's su8ch a powerful answer. You're talking about a divine miracle that comes down from above.

Just to seal that, go down to verse 27...27, same chapter. John the Baptist answered and said, he obviously got the message, "A man can receive nothing unless its been given him from...what?...heaven."

So the message here from Nicodemus is, you want to enter the Kingdom? That's a divine miracle. That's something the Spirit does to whom He wills when He wills. He comes and He goes and you see the reality of His arrival but you don't know where or when. It's a divine miracle.

Now you would conclude from that that this is the doctrine of divine sovereignty, would you not? The Spirit comes when He wants, on whom He wants. That's a divine sovereign act. Comes from above, gives life to whom He wills when He wills. You can't manufacture it, you can't make it happen. You can only receive the heavenly gift, divine sovereignty. And yet look at verse 15..verse 15, "Whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."

Huh...really! Whoever believes will in Him have eternal life? That sounds like human will, doesn't it? Sounds like human responsibility. This is in the same conversation. Do you understand this? I'm not going to relieve your pain, I'm just going to make you feel less pain if you just understand these two things go together.

You say, "But how do you harmonize them?" The same way the Bible does. They're both realities, they co-exist, they go side-by-side without an explanation. Whoever believes. "God so loved the world...verse 16...that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life." Verse 18, "He who believes in Him is not judged. He who does not believe has been

judged already." Verse 36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life."

So what do we say about this passage? If you're going to enter the Kingdom of God, it's a divine sovereign work from heaven done by the Holy Spirit to whom He wills when He wills. And it is also true that whoever believes will have eternal life. That's what the Bible says.

Turn to chapter 6 of John and I'm going to show you the consistency...and by the way, these aren't separated by being in a different book, written by a different author, these are in the same conversations in the same context. In John 6 verse 37...well, let's go to verse 35. In verse 35 Jesus says, "I'm the bread of life, he who comes to Me will not hunger. He who believes in Me will never thirst, but I say to you, that you've seen Me and yet do not believe. If you believed, you wouldn't hunger. If you believed, you wouldn't thirst. If you believed, you would have life, but you don't believe." Human responsibility, human will.

Then you come to verse 37, "All the Father gives Me will come to Me and the one who comes to Me, I'll certainly not cast out and I've come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me, and this is the will of Him who sent Me that of all that He has given Me, I lose none but raise him up on the last day."

Wow! So salvation belongs only to those whom the Father gives to Christ. Look at verse44, "No one comes to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." So nobody is going to come to Christ if they're not drawn by the Father, sovereign power. Nobody comes to Christ unless they're given to Christ by the Father. That's divine sovereignty. Jesus says, "I came not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me and His will is that of all that He has given Me, they would come and I would lose none of them." So that's divine sovereignty. The Father chooses, the Father draws, the Father gives to the Son, the Son receives, the Son keeps, the Son raises. Divine sovereignty. And yet, verse 35, "He who believes in Me will never thirst and yet You've seen Me and you do not believe." That's human responsibility.

Look at verse 47, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." Verse 57, "As the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me takes Me in, he also will live because of Me."

On the one hand, nobody comes unless the Father draws him. Nobody comes unless the Father drawing him gives him to Christ and yet whoever believes can come, whoever doesn't believe is lost. At the end of the chapter, near the end of the chapter in verse 63, it says, "It is the Spirit who gives life." We've already seen that. Of course, it's a spiritual work down from above. It's the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. It's a spiritual work. It's divine. It's from heaven. It's from above. But verse 64, "But there are some of you who don't believe." And then verse 65, "For this reason I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it's been granted him from the Father."

How do you harmonize these? I don't know. Nobody's coming unless it's from the Father. Nobody's coming unless drawn by the Father. Nobody's coming unless given by the Father to the Son. And yet He says, "Whoever believes can come."

Turn to Acts chapter 2. Peter gets up on the Day of Pentecost, verse 22, and he's preaching in Jerusalem. And he says, "Men of Israel, listen to these words," this is the great Pentecost sermon. "Jesus the Nazarene, the man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst just as you yourselves know." Parenthetically, Jesus is the subject.

"This man, Jesus, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." Wow! Foreknowledge meaning preordination. Jesus was delivered to be crucified by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. That's a divine decree by God. "You nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

Wow! It was God's plan and you did it. It was God's will and you're guilty. It was a divine decree but you are responsible for your act against Christ.

Chapter 4 of the book of Acts and verse 27, "For truly in this city, Jerusalem, there were gathered against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel." So who were the guilty parties in the execution of Jesus Christ? Well here are mentioned Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles being the Romans who executed Him and mistreated Him, and the people of Israel who sought His death, you're all guilty. What did all of these people do, Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, people of Israel, what did they do in killing Christ?

Verse 28, "To do...speaking to God...whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur." Wow, they did exactly what God predetermined to be done. They did exactly what God planned to be done. God had preordained, predetermined the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for sin. And yet, all the people who were complicit(?) in the execution of Christ stand guilty before God for a heinous crime. Scripture consistently puts divine sovereignty and human responsibility together without any effort to explain how they work together. It was Judas, you remember, in the first chapter of Acts who was prophesied to do what he did because God ordained that he would do what he did, and when he did what he did he was held fully accountable for what he did and went to his own place, the place he should have gone, hell.

Now that's the introduction. Turn to Romans 9...Romans 9. I want to show you the most powerful connection of these two doctrines. Romans 9 and 10. Chapter 1 through 8 is Paul explaining the gospel, and all its glories, all its fullness. Now in chapters 9, 10 and 11, the Apostle Paul who has presented the gospel, unpacked all of its riches, wants to apply this gospel to lost sinners, in

particular the people nearest and dearest to his heart even though he was an apostle to the Gentiles, the people nearest and dearest to his heart were the Jews. He understands the gospel and he wants to let us know about how the gospel is to be applied. This is very instructive for us.

Here's his heart, chapter 9 verse 1, "I'm telling the truth in Christ, I'm not lying. My conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites."

He says...Look, I have a constantly broken heart. I have overwhelming sorrow, I have unceasing grief, I could almost wish that I myself would go to hell if it would mean the salvation of my people, the Jews. That's his passion, for the gospel, the glorious gospel which he's just explained to penetrate his own people. That same passion appears in chapter 10 verse1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer, *deesis*, my begging, my pleading to God for them is for their salvation."

Now here the Apostle then unbares his heart over the application of the gospel to sinners, especially those nearest and dearest to him, the Jews. He is passionate about the salvation of sinners. He gave everything to that end, even his own life eventually. This is an important point, dear friends, because there are people who when they embrace the doctrine of divine sovereignty and get out of balance and don't equally embrace the responsibility of the sinner to believe and the culpability of the sinner for not believing become indifferent to evangelism. They say, "Well, it's all determined, God's going to do what He's going to do, it's all in the plan. What's my responsibility?" That is not the attitude of the Apostle Paul. He has a burning passion for the salvation of both Jew and Gentile and he brings the Gentiles into it in chapter 11. Now that's been the passion of every faithful missionary throughout the history of the church, even those who embrace the doctrine of divine sovereignty did not find their passion cooled by that great doctrine but fired by that great doctrine to know that God had His people out there who would respond to the gospel and that they were responsible to spread the gospel to everyone because everyone was responsible to believe. So Paul is showing us here the passion for evangelism toward the lost, even though he understands these doctrines.

Three points I want you to see. If you're going to do effective evangelism, Paul understood all three. Number one, divine sovereignty, he got it, he understood it. He said, "Look, Israel doesn't believe, I'm broken-hearted over this. Does this mean God's plan has failed? Are men in charge?" Verse 6, "It is not as though the Word of God has failed, no. Israel's apostasy, Israel's unbelief doesn't mean the Word of God, the promise of God, the decree of God has failed, rather they're not all Israel who are descended from Israel."

What does that mean? God never intended to save all Israel. Not all physical Israel, not all Jewish people who are Jewish by race are intended to be in the Kingdom. That's exactly what he's saying. No, not all Israel is spiritual Israel, nor are they all children because they're Abraham's descendants.

Not everybody who came out of the loins of Abraham is going to be a child of God. God is selective. He rejected Ishmael, the first son of Abraham, and brought blessing to and through Isaac.

Then he goes further. Isaac had twins, Jacob and Esau. Before they were born, verse 11 says, for they had done anything good or bad. So that God's purpose according to His choice would stand. It was God who determined the older would serve the younger. It was God who said Jacob I love, Esau I hated. God has always been selective. He rejects Ishmael, He chooses Isaac. He rejects Esau, He chooses Jacob.

You say, "Well wait a minute...verse 14...what are we going to say? Is this unjust? Is this unfair?" And the answer is, there is no injustice with God, is there? "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Is not God the righteous one? No, no, no, may it never be."

God has always operated this way. It goes back to Moses in verse 15. Exodus 33, "He said to Moses, I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy. I'll have compassion on whom I'll have compassion." Because it doesn't depend on the man who wills, or the man who runs but on God who has mercy. This is all divine sovereignty. This is the strongest text in Scripture on divine sovereignty in salvation. He never intended to save everybody in Israel. He never intended to embrace all the people who descended out of the loins of Abraham. He's been selective all the way along. He reiterates that to Moses. It's all about His will, His desire. He even said to Pharaoh, verse 17, "I raised you up to demonstrate My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." God raises up Pharaoh? Pharaoh that oppressed Israel? Pharaoh that chased Israel was an instrument of God? Absolutely an instrument of God, absolutely. But was he culpable for what he did even though he was an instrument of God? Yeah, he got drowned with all the rest of the Egyptians when God folded in the Red Sea on their heads. God makes choices. God determines.

So verse 19, you going to complain? Why does he still find fault? Then how could God blame me for anything? I mean, if He's prewritten it all, how can He blame me? For who can resist His will?

And here's the answer. "Who are you, O man," who answers back to God, shut your mouth. Who do you think you are, you puny, pusillanimous, hammered down, disconnected stovepipe pea brain person? What do you think you're doing? Who you talking to?

Well it doesn't seem fair to me. Really, does the thing molded say back to the molder, "Why did you make me like this?" Does the potter not have a right over the clay to make from the same lump a vessel for honorable use and another for common use? And what if God who is willing to demonstrate His wrath, doesn't He have a right to demonstrate His wrath? Doesn't He also have a right to show the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, verse 23, that He prepared beforehand for glory?

I'm telling you, this thing is the strongest portion of Scripture on divine sovereignty in redemption. So strong. Then he goes on to prove it from some quotes from the prophets Isaiah and Hosea in verses 25 to 29. Paul understood divine sovereignty. He understood that salvation was a work of God, a selective choice by God. He has mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy. You have to understand that. That's what the Bible teaches...divine sovereignty.

But then you come to verse 30 and you learn that Paul also understood human responsibility. "What shall we say then? That Gentiles who didn't pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith? But Israel pursuing a law of righteousness didn't arrive at that law." Here he says something that sounds completely opposite. The Gentiles who were not pursuing God, not pursuing righteousness, but they received that righteousness through faith. And he's talking here about the Gentile believers who constituted the church of which he had been such a catalyst in his ministry. What happened here? Gentiles who didn't even know anything about the true God didn't know about the revelation of that true God in holy Scripture, they attained to righteousness by faith while the Jews, verse 31, kept trying to pursue it by law and never got there because you can't get salvation by law. They didn't pursue it by faith, verse 32 says. Why? Because that faith had to be put in Jesus Christ and they stumbled over the stumbling stone. They stumbled over Jesus Christ.

Then he quotes in verse 33 Isaiah again, "Behold I lay in Zion a stone, a stumbling, a rock of offense." The problem is the Gentiles didn't stumble over Christ, they saw Christ, they believed, they were saved, they received righteousness. The Jews, they wanted to go by works. Christ was a stumbling stone to them. They never arrived at righteousness. They're responsible. He's talking here about what the Gentiles did and what the Jews didn't do.

And then he ends, verse 33, with these words, "He who believes in Him will not be disappointed." The Gentiles believed, they weren't disappointed. They received righteousness and salvation. The Jews did not believe, they were disappointed, everlastingly disappointed with all the rest of the world's unbelievers.

So in verse 30 there's a shift to the second thing that Paul understood, human responsibility, human will. You must believe and if you don't believe, you will die in your sins.

That takes us in to chapter 10, just look at this. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is for their salvation." I want them to be saved, but they've got some problems. "One, they lack knowledge about God, not knowing about God, they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. They have a wrong understanding of God. Two, they have a wrong understanding of their own sin. They don't know how righteous God is and they try to establish their own righteousness so they never subject themselves to the righteousness of God. They have a wrong view of God, they have a wrong view of their own sin. They think they're more righteous than they are. God is less righteous than He is, so they can meet God's standard. They lack knowledge then about God, they

lack knowledge then about sin, they lack knowledge about Christ, verse 4, they don't understand that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. They don't understand that if you just believe in Christ, it's the end of the law's tyranny over you. All men break the law of God. The law of God will then condemn them to everlasting punishment unless the power of the law is broken. It can only be broken when it is satisfied by a punishment and Christ bore the punishment, thus brought an end to the tyranny of the law to all who believe. And there's that phrase again, "For everyone who believes. Everyone who believes."

Come down to verse 9, here's the key. "Confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord. Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you'll be saved for with the heart a man believes resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Chapter 9, the strongest chapter in the Bible on divine sovereignty, God saves whom He wills, when He wills. Just like we saw in John's gospel. And right here next to it in chapter 10, not another book, not written in another time, but in the same discussion by the same writer at the same time with the same pen in his hand, he says, verse 11, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." That's the second time. That's what it said in verse 33, it's repeated again and the operative word is "whoever, whoever." And there's no distinction, verse 12 says, whether you're Jew, you're Greek. Same Lord, Lord of all, abounding in richness for all who call upon Him for all who call upon Him, you have all, you have whoever. Then verse 13, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Isn't that amazing? It's the same place and they're side by side.

Paul understood divine sovereignty. He also understood human responsibility. There's a third thing he understood and I call it gospel duty...gospel duty. Verse 14, this is really important. What's our responsibility? Do we just get caught up in some kind of a esoteric discussion about how we relate these things to each other? Hardly. "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved," then our duty shows up in verse 14, "How will they call on Him in whom they haven't believed? How will they believe in Him whom they haven't heard? How will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they're sent?"

Wow...divine sovereignty, absolute. God chooses whom He wills, saves whom He will. Right alongside of that, human responsibility. If you believe whoever you are, and if you call on Him whoever you are, you'll be saved. But that can't happen unless you hear. And that can't happen unless someone's sent. This becomes gospel duty. This is critical. No wonder people say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things." Of course, every person who has ever heard the gospel and believes wants to embrace the one who brought the message with gratitude.

Verse 17 says, "Faith comes from...what?... hearing.... hearing by the Word of Christ." It's about faith. And if you want people to believe, you've got to take the message to them. Paul understood that, so

does God. Look at verse 21. “As for Israel, God says,” these are the very words of God from Isaiah 65:2, “All the daylong I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.” Wow, God? God, the one who determines and decrees and has mercy on whom He will and hardens whom He will and loves Jacob and hates Esau, God? God who never intended all Jews to be saved, or all Gentiles? God who establishes His purpose in eternity past and chooses who will be saved? God is an evangelist who holds His arms open, stretching out His hands to a disobedient and obstinate people who reject His message? Even God Himself understands the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility and also understands gospel duty, for God is Himself an evangelist.

The Bible never tries to harmonize these things. They’re just there. But the Bible gives us profound...profound resolution. Go to the end of chapter 11...verse 33. Here’s the final word. “Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways.”

What is the final answer? The harmony of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is not available to you. It’s not. It’s unsearchable, unfathomable, inscrutable, incomprehensible, inconceivable.

Psalm 139 says, “It’s too high.” Psalm 92 says, “It’s too low.” You don’t need more information. There it is. That’s all you’re going to get, folks. That’s all you’re going to get. Do you understand divine sovereignty? Do you understand human responsibility? Do you understand gospel duty? That’s enough...that’s enough.

And then verse 34, just seals the deal here. “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” Stop here, folks. Look, that’s taken out of Isaiah 40 verse 13, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” What is that saying? You can’t think the way God thinks. Okay? You’ve already reached your limit, folks. That’s it. Even if you’re using one tenth of your brain, that’s as far as it’s going to go. Even if the other ninety percent kicked in, you’d still be here. This is not available to you. So don’t be disappointed when I can’t answer your question. The reason I can’t answer your question is, I don’t know any more than you know. All I know is what the Scripture says. And I am content to say I can’t know the mind of the Lord, but I can know the Lord and I can trust Him and some day maybe it will all be clear. Not an individual mind, nor the collective mind of all created beings could comprehend these mysteries.

And then there are always those folks who want to make suggestions to God about how it could be handled better. So who became His counselor? Come on, who do you think you are? I mean, the best counsel in the Bible was given when Job’s friends sat there for seven days and didn’t say anything. Learn from that, will you?: Just keep your mouth shut. God is not looking for suggestions. There is no suggestion box at the back of your Bible. You can’t know His mind and you can’t offer Him something that He doesn’t already know.

And thirdly, quoting from Job 41:11, verse 35, “Who has first given to him that it might be paid back again?” You don’t have any leverage with God cause He doesn’t owe you anything. That’s what that’s saying is, you’ve done something for God, now He owes you. Really? He owes you an explanation. He owes you further information. I don’t think so. He doesn’t owe you clarity. He doesn’t owe you a defense of His actions. He doesn’t owe you a defense of His choices. He doesn’t owe you anything. You can’t know His mind. You don’t have anything to offer Him and you don’t have any leverage. But you do understand these truths, don’t you? Divine sovereignty, human responsibility, gospel duty...so let your theology rest there and theology that is at rest inevitably turns into doxology. This is where we end up, folks. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” We end with divine sovereignty, right? In the end it’s all divine sovereignty. “From Him, through Him, to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Would you read that with me just so it puts it in your head? “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” Aren’t you glad you have a God that is so far greater than you that you can’t even comprehend His greatness and His glory7? Psalm 77:19 says, “Your way...speaking of God...Your way is in the sea and Your paths through the mighty waters and Your footprints can’t be known.” Ever find a footprint in the ocean? Ever find a footprint in a waterfall? I don’t think so and you’re not going to be able to track with God either.

Father, we delight in the truth that You have revealed to us. We rejoice in it. It is glorious to us. We thank You that You are the God You are. We thank You that You’ve given us as much as You have given us. We thank You, O Lord, that You are saving sinners who believe and you are calling all sinners to repent and believe and whoever calls upon You, whoever believes in You will be saved. May there be no sinners here who stumble over Christ and are forever disappointed. Would You call to Yourself even now sinners and would You hear the call of sinners who call on You? And remind us again of our gospel duty, be reminded that no one can call on one in whom they don’t believe and no one can believe of whom they have not heard, and no one can hear unless there’s a preacher and there won’t be any preachers unless we go. May we fulfill our responsibility in this magnificent, wondrous, supernatural, all-glorious plan and in the end, it all resolves in You and You receive all the glory. For that we praise You. Amen.

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