

SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE WILL (As Explained in Romans)

This subject has often been a platform for debate within the Church.

To appropriately discern the "truth" certain things must first be established in order to rightly divide and sagaciously apply God's truth in a way that edifies the Body of Christ. It is imperative that

- 1) All labels and man-made classifications be thoroughly discarded as they will only create & lead to:
A) Division & Discord (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)
B) Foolish and ignorant speculations (2 Timothy 2:23)

This will ultimately take us away from the true goal which according to 2 Timothy 2:22 is the "pursuit of righteousness, faith, love and peace...."

- 2) Understand that there are certain things which are not comprehensible. There are Divine truths and things higher and far greater than wisdom or spiritual enlightenment would allow us to perceive. Passages like Deuteronomy 29:29 and Isaiah 55:8,9 affirm this truth. And although 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 will emphasize the fact that we can know the depths of God as we have the mind of Christ, it is not the full comprehension of a subject matter that is in mind but rather the knowledge of God's loving and gracious disposition toward us that gives us confidence that whatever He does we completely understand His motives, plan and power (Romans 8).

Hebrews 11:3 says, "by faith we understand" that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. Thus, I do not scientifically or empirically understand creation but by faith I understand that if God said it, He most certainly did it!

- 3) Finally, because faith is the "conviction of things not seen..." (Hebrews 11:1) much of what we believe falls into the realm of paradox. That is to say, things which seem contradictory or absurd but in reality, express a truth. Phrases in Scripture such as, "the least will be the greatest" or "the one who loses his life will gain it" or the "Lord your God is One" ... "Let Us create man in Our image" speak to this fact.

The sovereignty of God and man's free will, on the onset, will appear contradictory and unacceptable to the human mind. This is because man tends to think that if he can't comprehend something, it must not be true or he feels he must adjust or reformulate the information in a way that makes sense to him. "Maybe God isn't completely sovereign" one might say. Or another might limit or deny the possibility of man having a free will altogether. The point is that both truths exist completely without compromise simultaneously! Man has a free will 100% and God is 100% sovereign in His choice of who He calls.

This enigma is disturbing to those not walking by faith. But it is something to rejoice over to those who are.

This is Paul's reason for placing such a debatable subject in the middle of the book of Romans (i.e. Romans 9 & 10) which is a book that emphasizes "the just shall live by faith." "Are you walking by faith?" Paul would ask. Let's see!

Chapter 1- Do you believe in the power of the Gospel even though it may go against your lifestyle?

Chapter 2- Do you believe enough to change from condemning others to examining your own life?

Chapter 3- do you believe that God alone is righteous to the exclusion of all others?

Chapter 4- Does your faith cause you to see and hope for the impossible?

Chapter 5- Do you believe you're justified by faith?

Chapter 6- Is your faith real enough to free you from sin?

Chapter 7- Do you believe that no matter how hard you try you have not the power to do the right thing?

Chapter 8- Do you believe only through the power of God's Spirit and His matchless love can everything be made right?

Now Chapter 9 comes into play- Do you believe God sovereignly "chooses"?

Chapter 10- Do you believe "whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved"?

IF you say, wait, let me figure this out, you place reasoning above faith.

IF you say, God doesn't seem fair or loving, you deny God's righteousness and love.

IF you say, man doesn't have a choice, you deny God is just and graciously desires a true relationship. You may also say it's impossible for God to be sovereign both in the realm of nature and design as well as in the realm of free will and choice.

Will you believe only what is believable or comprehensible to you or will you believe the incomprehensible trusting solely in Who God is rather than what you can understand?

Scriptures such as Ephesians 1:4-6 declare we were chosen before the "foundation of the world" and 1 Corinthians 12:3 says that "no one can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit." However, it also says whosoever believes in Him will not perish. Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess... if you believe in your heart." Isaiah 30:18, "How blessed are all who long for Him." God wants you to love Him, long for Him and believe Him of your own volition and free will and not under duress or compulsion.

For this reason, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 8:5, "But they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of the Lord." How wonderful to see free will and sovereignty at work building up the Body rather than dividing it! A source of peace & comfort rather than confusion and debate.

This then as Paul points out (in Romans) is why:

Chapter 10 & 11- You and I can rest assured that God will not be unfair to anyone though we don't understand how God can save in ways which seem prejudicial or exclusive.

Chapter 12- We should not think too highly of ourselves or try to vindicate ourselves but simply seek to love and build up the body of Christ even though we cannot always see the benefits nor how justice could possibly be served.

Chapter 13- We can confidently submit to all authority knowing He controls all though we see authority as often wrong and untrustworthy.

Chapter 14- We should quit trying to convince people that they must acquiesce to our opinions in order to be right with God though people have many strange habits and traditions.

Chapter 15- We should help the weak and accept one another though some are hard to like and think very differently.

Faith doesn't act superior. It does not need to know or make sense of everything. (In fact, Chapter 2 demonstrates that knowing doesn't help!) It does not worry or argue over things impossible to understand or control but rather will focus on pleasing God by "living by faith."

God most certainly desires man to freely love and accept Him thus He gives man a choice (Deut.30:19,20; Joshua 24:15 & John 1:12) yet God is not limited or controlled in any way by man's free will but rather will unilaterally do right and accomplish all His good pleasure. (Isa 46:10)

Take great comfort in these two paradoxical and yet harmonious truths.