

Specials – LESSON 1 Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility (6-6-23)

Romans Chapter 9 is used to a large extent by those who subscribe to Reformed Theology. David R. Anderson, PhD. wrote a book entitled, FREE GRACE SOTERIOLOGY [salvation], third edition that address the issue of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility which is the name of one of the chapters in his book. Excerpts from his book will be used in conjunction with passages in Romans Chapter 9 for the purpose of accuracy and clarity.

FREE GRACE SOTERIOLOGY **DAVID R. ANDERSON**

Chapter: Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

page 297

There are very few subjects in the Christian realm as controversial and divisive as divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The issue at hand is not trivial. Perhaps, that is why the emotional storm whirling around these issues ranks as a Grade 5 hurricane...Like most divisive issues, there are two poles: 1) Those who claim the sovereignty of God is undermined if man has any part in the salvation process, and 2) Those who say the personhood of man is undermined if sovereignty is stressed to the point that human choice is eliminated.

So, one group says the personhood or attributes of God are at stake, while the other group says the personhood or attributes of man are at stake.

Definitions:

determine verb

1. a : to fix conclusively or authoritatively

c : to settle or decide by choice of alternatives or possibilities

Merriam Websters Col. Dic.

1. cause to occur in a particular way; be the decisive factor in.

Concise Oxford English Dictionary

Determinism versus Indeterminism

Determinism – accepts efficient causes. (an agent that brings a thing into being or initiates a change).

Indeterminism says there are **no** efficient moral causes (*an agent that brings a thing into being or initiates a change*).

For believers in a Supreme Being who has conveyed certain moral absolutes to our finite world, ***indeterminism*** is not a viable option. Indeterminism says there are no efficient moral causes (*an agent that brings a thing into being or initiates a change*). As such, everything that happens is the product of chance.

Some people claim that life began on earth by spontaneous generation through the chance coalescence of certain chemicals necessary to form a DNA chain. (*They believe that a creation can be created without a Creator.*)

Thus, it is important to recognize that those who believe indeterminism do just that: they *believe*. The “chance” world-view is a religion, a faith. But as already noted from some of its own adherents, this faith defies reason. Faith without reason is fanaticism. Christianity is not fanaticism. →

Within the world of determinism there is what we might call “**hard**” determinism and “**soft**” determinism; or “**absolute**” determinism and “**relative**” determinism. What do we mean by all this?

HARD DETERMINISM

Regarding Evil

Hard determinism takes man completely out of the equation. The sovereignty of God is presented in such a way that He is responsible for everything. He is the first and final efficient cause for everything that happens. Though lip service may be paid to human choice, it is just that – lip service. →

Regarding Love

The Arminian says God elects men **based on** His foreknowledge, the hard determinist says God elects men **in spite of** His foreknowledge. In other words, the former believes God looks down the corridors of time and knows (foreknowledge) who is going to believe in Jesus. **Based on** this foreknowledge, He then elects those who are going to believe in Jesus (1 Peter 1:1-2).

According to the hard determinism, God elects men **in spite of** His foreknowledge. In other words, regardless of the desires or choices of man. God elects some and reprobates others. He does this **in spite of** His prior knowledge that the elect do not even want to know Him. He drags them kicking and screaming into the Kingdom. He forces them against their will.

Although we can probably relate to this imagery to some degree since many of us probably stubbornly resisted God's call for some time before trusting Christ. There is a great deal of difference between *coercion* and *persuasion*.

LESSON 2 Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility (6-8-23)

We have already seen how R.C. Sproul teaches the meaning of *helkuo* in John 6:44 is to “drag” instead of to “draw.” The key, as usual, is context. In a hostile environment such as persecution, the verb does mean to drag (such as into a court of law). However, in a love context (such as a father or mother for her children or a lover for his beloved) the verb invariably means to draw or woo.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

draws – HELKUO, ἐλκύω, v.aas; ② to draw a person in the direction of values for inner life, draw, attract,

Notice how R.C. Sproul teaches the meaning of *helkuo* in -

John 6:44 No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me drags him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* [said] “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those (believers) who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those (unbelievers) to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.”

Herein lies the rub. For God to drag us kicking and screaming into His kingdom is a violation of the love principle - force is not

love. As Lewis said, “He cannot ravish (to seize and carry off by force).” Nor does He want to. One of the reasons for creating man was to answer the question concerning God’s character, “Is God worthy of being loved?” The only way to answer that question was *to give man a choice*. That is precisely why we can God and Satan contending for the allegiance of Job. When Lucifer rebelled he opened both the love aspect and the sovereignty aspect of God’s character to question. In God’s genius both questions can be answered with the same response: obedience to His commands. John 14:21 – *He who has My commandments and keeps them , he it is who loves Me.* Deuteronomy 8:2 says God tested the Israelites in the Wilderness for forty years to see what was in their hearts, that is, to see if they would keep His commandments. →

LESSON 3 Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility (6-13-23)

Vessels of Wrath

But what about Romans 9:22-23, objects the hard determinist, which says God has prepared vessels of wrath for destruction in contrast to the vessels of mercy which He has prepared for glory. So, let’s look at this passage in context to see how some translators may have inadvertently or otherwise muddied the waters.

Read: ***Romans 9:14-23***

Before we can understand this particular passage we need to get the overall context. At the end of Romans 8 Paul claimed that nothing could separate one of God’s children from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The imaginary objector says, “Wrong. Look at Israel. They were chosen, but now God has rejected

them.” So, Romans 9-11 tries to answer this objection. It concludes by saying, Romans 11:29 - *the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable*”. In Romans 9 the focus is on divine sovereignty: the People of Election (vs. 1-5); the Principle of Election (vs. 6-13); and the Privilege of Election (vs. 14-33). →

We first need to remember that the emphasis in Romans 9 is on His election, not reprobation. The emphasis is on His mercy, not His justice. Another question in the mind of the objector besides what happened to Israel is, “How can a righteous God associate with these scummy Gentiles?” Paul goes on to discuss the Principle of Election (vv6-13). The first thing he says is that God has not gotten off course (*ekpipto*) is used of a ship getting off course). He never intended to include each and every one of Abraham’s children just because they were his physical seed.

To prove his point he cites Ishmael and Esau, both the seed of Abraham, but neither one was included in the kingdom program. Paul is trying to establish the Principle of Election here, **and that principle is that God elects (chooses a people for Himself for spiritual reasons, not physical)**. Does this sound unfair? Paul anticipated that kind of reaction. So, in 9:14-29 he defends God’s right to elect whomever He wishes. As the Creator it is His privilege. So we call this section “Privilege of Election.

There are two objections raised against the Principle of Election in Rom 9:14-29. In 9:14, the objector simply says, “God is unfair.” Paul says “No way.” Actually, the fact of the matter is this, if God were only just and not also merciful, we would all be destroyed. For there is none righteous, no, not one. If we got what we deserved, then God would be just. Actually, the only “injustice” with God is His mercy. His mercy stops the guillotine of God’s justice. “Mercy triumphs over Judgment” (*James 2:13*).

James 2:13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

The quote here comes from Exodus 33 (Mt. Sinai) after the Israelites have made the golden calf. They all deserve to be wiped out. This is clearly speaking of temporal judgment, not eternal destiny. But instead God shows mercy. And 9:16 makes it clear that human will and human works can make no demands on God's mercy. God sovereignly bestows His mercy as He sees fit. That is His right, His prerogative, His privilege.

God had mercy on the Israelites, but not on the Egyptians... In Pharaoh's case justice was carried out. Pharaoh got what he deserved. That was justice. In Moses' case and in the case of the Israelites who were allowed to live, they got "injustice" – they got mercy, something they did not deserve.

But now we get the objector's second objection (9:19). In the first one, he said God is unfair. In this one, he says God is responsible for sin. The argument goes something like this:

If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then how can God hold Pharaoh responsible in the final judgment for his actions and his disbelief? Actually, God is responsible. Since He's the most powerful force in the universe, no one can oppose His will. And if God wills my mind to be hardened, then He's responsible, not I.

Does this sound familiar? God is being accused of being a "hard" determinist (God does everything so He is responsible for everything.) This sounds exactly like the view of E. H. Palmer in his defense of Dortian (Five Point) Calvinism:

Foreordination means God's sovereign plan, whereby He decides all that is to happen in the entire universe... He decides and causes all things to happen that do happen... He has foreordained everything....

the moving of a finger, the beating of a heart, the laughter of a girl, the mistake of a typist – even sin.

So if God has so willed it and His will is irresistible, then God is responsible for sin and all the evil in the world. This is the thinking of the objector in v. 19.

Romans 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

What is Paul's answer? Actually, the answer comes in the next chapter but for the time being Paul does not answer the objector. Instead, he admonishes him for his brashness in even asking such a question for bringing to his own level. Does a pot have the right to question how it is being made? The potter has the sovereign right to make the pot anyway he sees fit and can use it for whatever he wishes. If he wants to use one vessel as a dog dish and another as a salad bowl, that is his privilege. The pot has nothing to say about it (vv. 20-21).

Romans 9:20-21 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21) Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?

Then Paul applies the analogy to God's relationship with men. Some are prepared for glory and some for destruction. In short, let God be God. It is blasphemous for us to challenge Him. Actually, the man in v.19 is saying, "We humans have a better sense of fairness than you, God." In so saying, we have tried to place ourselves above God. It is really many saying to God,

Look, God, step down from that throne a bit. I have a few things I want to say to You, a couple of questions I want to ask. Sit down here - I want to give you the third degree. Now tell me this: what right do You have making me this way?"

Paul's immediate reaction is that of the parent who has just been reprimanded by his impudent, disrespectful child. He wants to grab him by the throat and say, "Listen to me, you little squirt. I'm your father, and you're just a little child. You have no right to talk to me that way." Of course, that is a small-scale model of what is taking place when the created being confronts the Creator. **Paul concludes that we have no right to question God's ways with us, whereas God, on the other hand, has every right to do with us as He pleases.**

And in **9:25-29**, Paul says, "None of this present setting aside of the Jews in favor of the Gentiles should surprise you. It was all clearly prophesied by Hosea and Isaiah. As a matter of fact, if God had acted in justice (v. 29), the Jews would have been wiped off the map like Sodom and Gomorrah long ago. God owes nothing to the Jews. Indeed, it is only by His mercy and grace they still exist." That is what Isaiah concludes.

So, this certainly looks like "hard" determinism here, doesn't it? But we must point out once again, the emphasis here is not on God's rejection, but on His election: not on His reprobation, but on His mercy. He has mercy on whom He has mercy, and He has compassion. Yes, but isn't the objector right? How can Pharaoh be blamed if God hardened Pharaoh's heart? How can Esau be blamed if God rejected him even before he was born?

And what about these vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. How does this harmonize with a God who claim to love all without respect of persons?

Romans 9:21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay (mankind), **to make from the same lump** (volition) **one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?**

God is the **potter** and He has authority over the clay.

The **clay** is **mankind** which is the building material used to form vessels.

The **lump** represents **volition** which will determine the way that the finished product (**vessels**) turns out.