

# God's sovereignty & man's responsibility

## John 6<sup>37</sup>

Parallel truths in proper perspective



### 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of year

- good time to revisit some foundational truths for understanding Bible as whole;
- fact : we enveloped in smoke – praying tonight – but v relevant to topic this am.

**Bible** has this way of **revealing itself** to be divine God-breathed word of God;

- awesomeness of incarnation / crucifixion / resurrection;
- also profound presentation of deep truths – stretch us to core of being;
  - often appear as **paradoxes**;
  - 2 parallel truths put right next to each other – like railway tracks
  - both clearly stated / propounded;
  - but we struggle to fully reconcile;
- we looked at one at Christmas time w incarnation – fully God & fully man;
- not intrinsically contradictory – but take us beyond ourselves.
- God says we need these to make sense of living in complex / convoluted world
  - God intrudes into mess of human sin w salvation / redemption;
  - foundational to life.

## God's revelation of two perspectives

Our **primary case** of side by-side paradoxical truths:

**John 6(37)** "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,  
and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.

So is it decided by the Father OR is it decided by each of us?

Is salvation decided by whoever the Father elects / gives to the Son?

OR is salvation decided by everyone who decides themselves to turn to Jesus?

Is it God's sovereignty OR man's free will?

We could delve deep into the **context** in **John** – follow thread of argument;

- but we've already done that;
  - been working thru series in **John's** gospel – covered this text in context;
- so what I think would be more helpful for us now:
  - **compare** this Scripture w **wider Scripture**;
  - see how same / similar paradoxes are presented elsewhere;
- help us to see: this not isolated aberration – common / consistent presentation of God;
  - brings us into communion / fellowship w divine God.

I want us to look now at **3 ways** in which similar parallel truths are presented to us:

Matt 11(27) Jesus: All things have been handed over to Me by my Father,  
and no one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son  
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

(28) Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.  
- gloriously open invitation to anyone weary under burden of sin to come  
- yet immediately following declaration : no one can know God  
unless He chooses to reveal Himself to that particular person.

Back in our John chapter:

John 6(65) No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

Come / can't come paradox

(28) All people are sincerely invited to partake of everlasting life  
BUT (27) God elects some to everlasting life – unless God elects won't / can't come.

Here's another example from Rom 9, 10

Rom 9(11-13) (speaking of twins in womb - **Jacob & Esau**)  
though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad  
- in order that God's purpose of election might continue,  
not because of works but because of his call-  
she (Rebecca) was told, "The older will serve the younger."  
As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."  
- turn page – next chapter - same verses (11-13):

Rom 10(11-13) For the Scripture says,  
"Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame."  
For there is no distinction between Jew & 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."

God's sovereign election is stated up front in ch 9,  
- no inconsistency as far as God is concerned  
to follow this us w free offer of gospel  
- everyone who calls on name of the Lord will be saved.

Now let's look at **another take** God gives on paradox of His sovereignty / our responsibility:

Ezek 18(30-31) "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel,  
every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD.  
**Repent** and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.  
Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed,  
and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!  
Why will you die, O house of Israel?

- v clearly **man's responsibility** to turn to God / repent – get new heart  
-yet ...

John 6(44) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.  
- we cannot do it at all.

## Repent / can't repent paradox

Summarise as:

All people are responsible to repent & believe

BUT No one is able to repent & believe until God enables them

- a paradox – parallel truths / railway tracks

For 3<sup>rd</sup> category:

- here's another one of those verses where we have **both railway lines in 1 verse**:

- where God has seen fit to ensure that we need to see them both together:

- Peter's sermon at **Pentecost** to Jews:

**Acts 2(23) This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan & foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**

- crucifixion was plan / purpose of God

- even from before foundation of world / before sin even existed;

- set-up by God / orchestrated by God;

- yet crucifixion was performed by men w guilty hands / hearts;

- fully responsible for murderous intent / evil inflicted upon Jesus.

## Guilty / set-up paradox

All people are fully guilty for all their sin

BUT God is in control of all that happens

This is what relates v much to our current situation w **catastrophic bushfires**:

Is God absolutely sovereign – in control of everything that happens? – Yes;

Is man responsible to be good steward of creation – this planet? – Yes;

Do calamities happen as a result of our sin / neglect? – Yes;

- coming back from Melbourne yesterday;

- visited friends at Table Top just E of Albury last night;

- new fire there – deliberately lit – clearly sin of man;

Does that mean God is not in absolute control? No

So there we have some of **raw paradoxes** presented to us by God in His Word.

## Man's attempts to reconcile two into one

Natural inclination is to seek to resolve paradoxes;

- our mind must be measure of reasonable reality;

- we must be able to fully fathom – reconcile.

2 ways in which this is done:

### God is not really sovereign

Or God freely / **voluntarily limits** His sovereignty –

- so as not to violate man's complete freedom;

- God in His sovereignty abdicated throne:

- lets man decide freely for himself - either to believe to reject Him.

- where Bible speaks of **election** – it is just God's vote:

- devil gets vote too – against God – so casting vote is us to you.

Or sometimes people say: **God only does good things:**

- if ∃'s calamity in world – bushfire catastrophe / car accident /
  - that's man / or that's devil – God got nothing to do w it;
- ⇒ crucifixion is man's evil – God *not sovereignly in control* masterminding all things.

Summarise as:

**Man's free will can override God's will**

- ∃ name for this theological approach – called **Arminianism** (after James Arminius 17<sup>th</sup> C)
  - rejecting idea of accepting Biblical paradox – parallel railway track truths.

Other way of reconciling 2 into 1:

**Man is not really responsible**

Argument is something like this:

- **since man is unable** to repent & believe of himself
  - ⇒ he should not seek to repent & believe in his own strength;
  - he should **wait** until he senses working of God's spirit w/i his heart
    - = indication: God has regenerated him – given him new heart;
    - ⇒ then he should repent & believe.

Summarise as : **Man should not try to do what only God can do**

- but we would say : God's work is secret & silent;
- man should seek to repent & believe as he is commanded to do;
- he cannot tell when God has given him a new heart until he uses it;
- when he does repent & believe it is evidence to him
  - that God has worked a miracle w/i.

Another outworking of this denial of man's responsibility **applies to believers**;

- we cannot really exhort someone to repent & believe upon LJC
  - until God has awakened their mind & renewed their heart;
- we **dare not offer salvation** to those who are not spiritually prepared;
- we can preach law indiscriminately - but not grace;
- lest we guilty of casting pearls before swine.

This leads to a **lack of enthusiasm** / zeal in evangelism;

- Christians tend to fall back on sovereignty of God alone:
  - if God wants to convert these people
    - ⇒ He will do it in His own way at his own time;
    - He not need me to do His work for Him.

**I dare not** seek to **do what only He can do**;

- He alone can effectually persuade sinners to become Christians
  - by sending His Spirit to renew hearts;
- ⇒ I had better not seek to be too persuasive
  - lest it be human wisdom that persuades him,
  - whole thing is work of the flesh.

∃ **label** given to this view – ***Hyper-Calvinism***

- man's attempt to reconcile parallel truths ⇒ leads to train going nowhere / wreck.

**Biblical view** stands in stark contrast to both these attempts to turn / twist railway tracks;

- we are called to simply accept Scripture as it stands:
  - accept parallel truth – accept profound paradox;
  - refuse to allow one to deny the other
  - refuse to allow one to override the other
  - refuse to allow one to subsume the other
- maintain both – ∃ label for this too - known today as ***Calvinism***
  - yet Calvin himself would hate fact : we use that term;
  - to him it is no more / no less than straightforward Biblical Christianity.

## Conclusion

**How can we maintain** these parallel paradoxical truths?

- here are 4 things to help us

Remembering that God is infinite & eternal

Isa 55(9) God says, **For as the heavens are higher than the earth,**  
**So are My ways higher than your ways,**  
**and My thoughts than your thoughts.**

- God sees **whole picture**;
- He lives in space that has more than 3 dimensions;
- He lives outside of the linear dimension of time;
- He is infinite & eternal.

What seems a paradox to us – is **no paradox to Him**.

- faith receives & rests in what God has revealed;
- trusting that He can hold everything together in way we can never do.

Remembering that we are finite & fallible

Whenever we are **tempted to query & question** what God has revealed,

⇒ we meet w God's response in:

**Rom 9(20) But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?**

**Will what is moulded say to its moulder,**  
**"Why have you made me like this?"**

- if God's ways do not seem to fit in w our processes of human reason,
- ⇒ God declares that our process of human reason are finite & fallible;
- incapable of fully fathoming multi-dimensional truth as it is in God.

Our response is not to quibble – rationalise tensions away;

- but to **bow in worship**;
- to be lost in awe, adoration & praise.

Remembering that we are called to be faithful not fanciful

Peter acknowledges : ∃ some things in the Bible which are **not easy** to reconcile:

2 Pet 3(15-16) Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you  
 according to the wisdom given him,  
 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.  
 There are some things in them that are hard to understand,  
 which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction,  
 as they do the other Scriptures.

- ∃ temptation to fanciful rationalisations of things we find difficult.
- but that is not our calling;
- we are simply called to receive them in faith.

## Remembering that we have not yet arrived

Takes us back to this **picture (on outline)**

### Where do parallel lines meet?

- at infinity – in eternity;
- meet in God.

- = Where we are **headed**;
- all will be revealed to us one day.

1 Cor 13(12) For now we see in a **mirror dimly**, but then face to face.  
 Now I know in part, then I shall know fully,  
 even as I have been fully known.

- in Paul's day:
  - **mirrors** were not made of silver-backed glass – but polished metal;
  - image was somewhat blurry & dim;
  - even in our own day – mirrors give a mere 2D image;
  - not as good as 3D reality;
  - ∃ realm coming when we will burst beyond confines  
 of this 4D space-time universe;
  - see & experience things never dreamt of before.

I leave you w this wonderful thought:

- on this **perplexing subject** of God's sovereignty & human responsibility;
- ∃ more light – dazzling light to come,
- when we see God face-to-face;
- and know things as He knows us.

## Pray

**Sing** Grace unmeasured, vast & free that knew me from eternity ...

**Benediction** 2 Cor 13(14) The grace of the LJC.

The love of God

The fellowship of the HS be w you, now & for evermore.