

Romans 8:29-30 – The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

“The foreordination of God [God’s sovereignty in salvation] in no degree interferes with the responsibility of man. I have often been asked by persons to reconcile the two truths. My only reply is, “They need no reconciliation, for they never fell out.” Why should I try to reconcile two friends? The two facts [the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man] are parallel lines. I cannot make them unite, but you cannot make them cross each other.” Charles Spurgeon

Isaiah 55:8-9 *“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.”*

Deuteronomy 29:29a *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God...”*

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Jonah 2:9b, *“Salvation belongs to the Lord.”* The text indicates God designed and provided all aspects of salvation.

Romans 8:29-30, *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”*

Foreknowledge (v 29a)

It does not mean that God looked down into the future and saw who would on their own choose to receive Jesus.

Dr. John Phillips *“Did God choose me because I chose Him or did I choose Him because He chose me? To say that God chose me because with His ability to foreknow the future he saw me choose Christ, robs God of His sovereignty. It would mean that He has no alternative but to choose those who chose Christ – His choice is governed by ours. It throws the initiative on man. But God is sovereign and acts in accordance with His own will.”*

Other passages in the New Testament where this word *foreknew* is used: **Acts 2:23** *“... this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”* Peter, preaching at Pentecost, is not telling his listeners that God looked into the future and saw that Jesus would be crucified, so because of that Jesus was sent by the Father to be crucified! The truth is God determined beforehand that Jesus would be crucified; it was God’s definite plan. **1 Peter 1:20** *“He [Jesus Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.”*

Predestination (v 29b) *“He also predestined”*

While foreknowledge looks at the beginning of salvation, predestination focuses on the end of God’s purpose for saving us. The word “predestine” means to appoint, determine, or mark off beforehand. Those who are foreknown are predestined to what? They are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

Calling (v 30a) *“those whom He predestined He also called”*

In God’s calling to salvation, there are two kinds of calling. One is the “effectual call” and the other is the external, general, “universal invitation” to all of mankind to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Those who proclaim the effectual call believe it is an inward, supernatural, enabling call. In other words, with the call comes the ability to respond. God enables the person dead in sin to hear, see, and respond. If He didn’t they couldn’t be saved.

The strict Calvinist believes that only those who are the “elect”, or in other words, those whom God has determined to be saved can respond to God’s calling for salvation. Here are the Scriptures Calvinists use to support their view.

John 6:44 *“No one comes to Christ unless the Father draws them”*

John 6:65 *“No one comes to Christ unless granted by the Father”*

John 17:2 Jesus praying for Himself (prior to the cross) – *“You have given me authority over all flesh that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him”*

John 17:6 Jesus prays for His disciples and identifies that the *“... Father has given them to Him ...”* **John 17:24** Jesus prays for all who will believe in Him from the word of His witnesses – *“all whom You have given Me ...”*

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We must understand God's sovereignty in salvation to fully understand salvation. God is sovereign over all things, **John 3:35** "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand." God is sovereign over salvation. Let's look at just a few examples of God specifically calling some.

- **Isaiah 49:1** "The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name."
- **Isaiah 49:5** "And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him."
- **Isaiah 44:2** "Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.'"
- **Jeremiah 1:5** "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."
- **Luke 1:15** "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Prophecy about John the Baptist from **Malachi 4:5-6**

This creates a dilemma: how does one reconcile **John 3:16**, that says, "... whosoever believes shall have everlasting life" and **2 Peter 3:9** "...it is not His will that any should perish, but all come to repentance"? Additionally Jesus said in **John 12:32**, "... if I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me."

That brings us to the second calling or the "universal call." This universal, outward, general call is where we participate in two ways. First, the Great Commission is our first participation. (**Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20**) Second, we participate in the universal call, in **John 6:37** "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." In the Greek context the last part of this verse can literally be translated, "and if anyone else arrives to Me I will by no means drive them out." This "anyone else" is an example of the general call to salvation. When the gospel message is being preached, and the Holy Spirit is convicting a person of sin (**John 12:19; 16:8-11**) and their need for salvation, this person can to surrender to the calling by the Holy Spirit and can be saved.

Does the Unsaved Person Have a Free Will?

When a person chooses, in this case a lost person, their choices are based on the information the mind and emotions receive. For the unsaved person, there is a problem with the mind. We find in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." And in **Ephesians 4:17-18** "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." In these two Scriptures we see the mind and the emotions (heart) blinded. This means on their own, without the help of the Holy Spirit, the lost are incapable coming to salvation on their own. Notice again the last part of **2 Corinthians 4:4**, "... lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." This clearly demonstrates the power the gospel message has on the lost person's mind.

Calvinists would say these Scriptures indicate the lost person is incapable of ever receiving salvation unless God has specifically chosen them for salvation, in which God then opens their mind to receive salvation. That would violate God's sovereignty in two ways. First, that theology disallows for the power of the Scriptures to convert the lost. Notice again, the last part of **2 Corinthians 4:4**, "who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Second, it would also disallow God's sovereignty to allow a lost person to reject salvation. If this were not true there would be no Scripture concerning the unpardonable sin. **Mark 3:29** tells us, "but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation." So that means that "...he who blasphemes" is making a choice. This theological concept of unpardonable sin is also found in **Matthew 12:32**, and **Luke 12:10**. God is sovereign in everything including salvation. Mankind is responsible to repent of sin and savingly believe in Christ. If a person does not repent and believe, he will be responsible for the fact that he will spend eternity separated God in a place the Bible calls Hell.