

## **Some Suggestions for Those Struggling with Divine Sovereignty (including Predestination and Election)**

**Do not feel alone**, even the great Jonathan Edwards struggled with it too.

There are reasons we struggle with absolute sovereignty. Many of those reasons are not flattering. It seems that only in rare cases God opens the heart immediately to accept this difficult doctrine. However, for the vast majority of us, we have struggled and wrestled and fought and kicked against sovereignty. Some of us have even cried. Take heart, we are in good company. The greatest American mind, the most profound English speaking theologian to ever grace the church and the world, Jonathan Edwards, not only struggled with Divine sovereignty, he hated it!

*From childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty .... It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God. . . . But [I] never could give an account, how, or by what means, I was, thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections. And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against it. . . . The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God.* (Jonathan Edwards, Selections [New York: Hill and Wang, 1962], pp. 58-59).

**Be humble**, we are talking about a God who is greater and more glorious than we could ever imagine.

The biblical imagery of the Potter and the clay (Rom. 9:20-21; Isa. 29:16; 45:9) should give us great pause before we resist and reject the absolute, unrivaled sovereignty of God. Are we “turning things around” and “quarreling with our Maker (Isa. 29:16; 45:9) or are we keeping the cosmic perspective: God is God and I am not.

God is infinite, we are finite. That alone should make us tread cautiously. And yet, oftentimes our pride resists Divine sovereignty because it makes us small, disposable and not in control. We usually don't mind giving God lip-service when it comes to His greatness and glory, but are we really humbled before a God who is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases and whose will is determinative above our own (Psa. 115:3; Rom. 9:16)? True humility shouts with Luther to Erasmus, “Let God be God!” Let's ask God if it is simply failure to truly humble ourselves and crucify our pride and let go of our falsely perceived control that prevents us from embracing His absolute sovereignty. Have we learned to make our peace with both the dignity and disposability of being clay made by the hands of a sovereign God? As we struggle with the doctrine, let us remain humble, remembering who the Potter is and who is the clay.

**Be open to biblical truth**, we are talking about truths that do not fit into our heads *naturally*.

The Christian faith is filled with truths that are incomprehensible. The Trinity and the two natures of Christ in one person stand at the top of the list. John Piper notes, “Some of the most crucial and precious truths of the Scripture are *counter-intuitive* to the fallen human mind. They don’t fit easily into our heads.” Isn’t it interesting that for many of us, truths which have no pre-existing natural categories, like the Trinity, are embraced, and yet Divine sovereignty is often resisted because it does not fit a pre-existing category? Why not at least begin to explore the possibility that there is something true about God that is bigger than any other thought you have ever entertained? The pre-existing natural category is my freedom to will and do what I want. Is it possible that our natural thinking (intellectual autonomy) is blocking the acceptance of biblical thinking? Is it possible that because the vastness and immensity of Divine sovereignty is counter-intuitive that we are rejecting it? If we used the same standard to accept or reject Divine sovereignty with the Holy Trinity, would we be Trinitarians? Beware of only believing what fits into our heads naturally. Beware of the autonomous restrictions our fallen natures put upon our minds, creating resistance to truth, which emerges not from a renewed nature, but a natural thought process.

**Put the Bible above your emotions**, remembering we are emotional beings and sometimes our feelings can prevent us from accepting truth.

“That just feels icky” is not a good reason to reject something. We not only resist truth because of an intellectual autonomy, we also reject it because of emotional autonomy. It is possible to put emotional restrictions on what we believe. Infamous theologian Clark Pinnock repudiated the doctrine of eternal punishment because it became “emotionally unacceptable” to him (see his journey in the book on Four Views on Hell). Our minds and our emotions must be subject to the authority of God’s Word, not vice versa. Emotional resistance to the idea that God might be sovereign over your child’s eternal salvation is no reason to reject Divine sovereignty. This is significant because when we use intellectual autonomy to determine what the Bible *must* mean, and we use our own emotional limitations to qualify what the Bible *can* mean, we sit as judges over the Word. We should seek to be lovers of truth and embrace everything that is biblical (Psa. 119:97; Jer. 15:16; 2 Thess. 2:10).

## **Conclusion**

My plea to those who are struggling with this doctrine is to continue to struggle with your Bibles open and the honest prayer that God would open your eyes (Psa. 119:18; Jn. 16:13). Don’t give up until you are convinced you have come to know the Word of the Lord (1 Thess. 2:13). So many give up the struggle quickly because of the hard work involved and the potential pain of a life-changing paradigm shift. Take up as your rallying cry, “Buy truth and do not sell it” (Prov. 23:23) and search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Pastor Brian Borgman, Grace Community Church, Minden, NV (09/03/07)