Lion and Lamb Apologetics
Divine Sovereignty vs. Human Responsibility
KEN BOA

I. Introduction

Mysteries are forced upon us by the facts of God's Word; we are not inventing them ourselves. Since His written revelation teaches concepts that appear to be mutually exclusive, we must realize that with God both truths are friends, not enemies. In God's higher rationality, things that we think must be either-or can in reality be both-and.

Thus, *when the biblical facts warrant them*, we can embrace incomprehensibles in the Bible and relate them to the omniscience and omnipotence of God. There is no need to abandon rationality for nonsense as the White Queen does in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass:*

> "I can't believe *that!*" said Alice.

> "Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

> Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said, "one *can't* believe impossible things."

> "I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."[1]

Neither do we need to adopt Tertullian's position: "I believe it because it is absurd." Christians should say instead: "I believe it because God says it in the Bible."

II. The General Problem

God has revealed to us in the Bible that He not only created all things but He also preplanned everything that would happen in His creation. He both knows everything that has happened and everything that is yet future. He actively decreed every detail of this reality, and He is sovereign over all. But here is where the mystery comes in: even though God is sovereign, man still has real responsibility and freedom in the choices he makes. These choices are his; he cannot blame God for them. And they will genuinely affect and modify the rest of his life.

Because this mystery more intimately affects us than most of the others, it is one of the most difficult to accept. When people face it, they tend to overemphasize one truth (God's sovereignty) or the other (human responsibility). This produces a lack of balance.

This mystery manifests itself in different ways. For instance, it relates to the issue of election and faith in the doctrine of salvation, as we will see later in this chapter. It also relates to the problem of evil, that is, how evil could enter the creation without God being responsible for it. We will examine this age-old problem in chapter 5.

But first we need to demonstrate from the Word of God the truth of the two basic propositions in this mystery. Do the Scriptures really say that man is completely responsible for what he does even though God planned everything that would come to pass?

III. Divine Sovereignty

God is able to do anything He desires. "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2 NET Bible). "He does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the ocean depths" (Ps. 135:6). The Lord carries out everything exactly as planned.

"Certainly you must have heard! Long ago I worked it out, in ancient times I planned it; and now I am bringing it to pass" (2 Kings 19:25). "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should

---

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not establish it?" (Num. 23:19). All that God has preplanned is as good as done. Nothing can change it, for there is no authority above God. As He says through Isaiah, "To whom can you compare me? Whom do I resemble?" (40:25).

Because of His complete uniqueness and sovereignty, God is able to declare, "Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, 'My plan will be realized; I will accomplish what I desire ….'' (Isa. 46:9-10; see also Isa. 14:24; 43:13).

God directs the history of the universe along the course of His foreordained plan. This involves His ability to choose individuals and groups for special purposes in the outworking of this plan. For instance, Jeremiah and Paul were chosen by God to have special missions even before they were formed in their mother's wombs (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15).

God also elects individuals for salvation. Christ speaks of those elected for salvation (Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7), and Paul clearly endorses this concept (Rom. 8:29-33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; see also 1 Peter 1:1-2; John 1).

Ephesians 1:4-5, 11 is particularly striking. God's election of those who would be saved is pretemporal, "before the foundation of the world," according to verse 4. This choice involved love and it was based on God's kindness. He predestined us "to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will" (v. 5).

God's sovereignty is self-determined, and this fact is emphasized three times (v. 5, 9, 11). In God's loving purpose, all things have been designed to lead "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (v. 6, 12, 14). It is best that God works in all things, for only in this way will all things ultimately glorify God. This glorification is consistent with God's love and kindness because He alone is worthy of ultimate glorification. (Nevertheless, God will also glorify all believers at the resurrection when He finally conforms us to the image of His Son. But even God's act of glorifying others will bring greater glory to Himself).

God's sovereign purpose extends to all things in His creation and is not limited by space or time. This plan is so complete that Scripture declares, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). Consider the implications of a statement like this! Ultimately there is no *chance* in this universe because even the workings of probability and statistics are controlled by God. There are no real accidents and God is surprised by nothing.

We have seen that God's eternal plan is all-inclusive, extending even to His election of those who will be saved.[2]

But what about those not elected for salvation? Most theologians would naturally prefer to limit the bounds of God's sovereign plan at this point. The word *preterition* is often used here, meaning that God "passes by" the nonelect.

However, several passages in Scripture seem to support a more active role on God's part. If this is so, *reprobation* may be a more appropriate word than *preterition*.

Romans 9:10-24 is one passage that should be carefully studied. God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires--both verbs are active (v. 18). God's choice is not based on human merit, but on His mercy and inscrutable purposes. But if God hardens some, how can human responsibility be real? How can He blame the non-elect for not doing His will (v. 19)? God answers that *the question is out of order* (v. 20). We know that there is no injustice with God (v. 14), and therefore, as vessels we must trust the Potter. For man this issue is a mystery.

Another passage along this line is 1 Peter 2:8. Speaking of those who reject Jesus Christ, Peter says that "They stumble because they disobey the word, *as they were destined to do."* Scripture also says, "The Lord works everything for its own ends--even the wicked for the day of disaster" (Prov. 16:4; also compare Ps. 92:6-7). Other verses also reveal how God hardens hearts (Is. 6:10; 44:18; John 12:40; Rom. 11:7-8, 25).

© The Biblical Studies Foundation (www.bible.org)   Summer 2006

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

IV. Human Responsibility

Just as biblical a doctrine as divine sovereignty is human responsibility. For instance, Romans 9 (God's sovereignty) is not complete without Romans 10 (human responsibility): "For the scripture says, '*Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame*.' For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. For *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Rom. 10:11-13).

King Saul furnishes a good example of the reality of human responsibility. His disobedience cost him a kingdom that would have been everlasting: "the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Sam. 13:13). God later said of Saul, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned away from me and has not done what I said" (1 Sam. 15:11).

The Bible makes it clear that we are not pawns in the hands of a deterministic and fatalistic universe. Every command in the Old and New Testaments is proof of the reality of human responsibility from God's perspective.

A number of passages neatly juxtapose the truths of God's complete sovereignty and man's responsibility. Consider, for instance, the Crucifixion of the Son of God. Men were responsible for putting Jesus to death even though He was "handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Those who were gathered together against Jesus simply did what God's hand and God's purpose predestined to occur, according to Acts 4:27-28. This mystery also relates directly to Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Christ: "For the Son of Man is to go just as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed" (Luke 22:22)!

God is the divine Potter who has "right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use" according to His own purpose (Rom. 9:21). Yet this "clay" has a will and is responsible for the choices it freely makes. (Read Jer. 18:1-12 to see how the prophet subtly intertwines both of these concepts.)

God is omniscient. Even when He "changes His mind" (as in Jer. 18:8, 10), it is because He had planned to do so from eternity. In His omniscience He also knew the Jews would not turn back from their sins (indeed, He had even hardened their hearts; Isa. 63:17). Yet His appeal to Judah was no sham (Jer. 18:11); it was a valid offer. Another Old Testament passage that combines the two themes of God's control and man's responsibility is Isaiah 63:15-64:12 with 65:1-2.

Philippians 2:12-13 is a very practical passage in which we may observe a perfect balance of these two truths. Paul is talking about the outworking of the Christian life. He emphasizes the aspect of human responsibility in this process (v. 12), and he also emphasizes God's sovereign control (v. 13). God is controlling and man is responsible. Neither of these two verses should be quoted without the other because the Bible keeps both truths in perfect balance.

V. Synthesis of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

God is the supreme Ruler over this universe He created. His plan affects every detail of this creation. This plan is eternal, and there never was another plan. Thus, terms like purpose, foreknowledge, predestination, and election are logically related, and they are equally timeless.

God's complete control over His creation is based on His omniscience and omnipotence. Since God has knowledge of all things actual and possible, His eternal plan is not based upon blind choice. Instead, God has wisely chosen a plan in which all details will finally work together to bring about the greatest good (the glorification of God). Since God is the absolute of truth, goodness, and love, His plan is a reflection of His own being and nature.

Not only has God chosen the best possible plan; He also has the power and authority to bring it about (omnipotence). When God promises to do something, there is no question that it will be done. This is why every biblical prophecy will be perfectly fulfilled.

Nevertheless, God carries out his all-inclusive plan by a variety of means. God may directly intervene or He may achieve His purpose by an indirect agency (*e.g.*, the laws of nature). He may even fulfill His plan by taking His hands off in a given situation (the phrase "God gave them over" appears three times in Rom. 1:24-28). But God is in control regardless of what means He chooses to use.

The Bible makes it clear that God's work in predestination and election is loving (Eph. 1:4-5; 1 John 4:7), wise (Rom. 11:33; 16:27), and just (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 3:4-6). "The Lord is just in all his actions, and exhibits love in all he does" (Ps. 145:17).

In some inexplicable way God has seen fit to incorporate human freedom and responsibility into His all-inclusive plan. Even though the Lord is in sovereign control of the details in His creation, He never forces any man to do anything against his will. The fact that He judges sin means that He is not responsible for the commission of the sins He judges. When a person sins it is because he has freely chosen to do so. Similarly, when someone is confronted with the terms of the gospel, he can freely choose to accept or reject Christ's offer of forgiveness of sins. Because it is free choice, he will be held responsible for the decision he makes (see John 12:48).

In my view, personal and moral responsibility require free will. While I disagree with those who say that our wills are in total bondage, I am not implying in my use of the terms "freedom" and "free will" that humans are autonomous. We do not control the fundamental realities of our lives (e.g., our time on earth and our abilities), and yet our choices are ours.

In biblical terms this whole mystery can be summed up by saying that God is both King and Judge. "Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human action among them, in accordance with his own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues."[3]

Finally, *God's plan is not always the same as His desires.* Although His plan controls what men will be, the product often is not what He desires. This is partly because God has chosen to allow human will to operate. For instance, God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4; see also 2 Peter 3:9). Yet He has not elected all men: "… The elect obtained it. The rest were hardened" Rom. 11:7).

Thus, God's plan and desires are two different aspects of His will. He has revealed His desire (what men *ought* to do), but His plan for what specific men *will* do has for the most part been hidden. This is almost a mystery within a mystery, because there is no way we can conceive of how these two aspects of God's will relate together in His mind.

VI. Illustrations

J. I. Packer captures the essence of this mystery when he writes, "Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is *also* divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is *also* a responsible moral agent."[4] Many have attempted to illustrate the interrelation of these two truths, but because this is a mystery, their attempts have proved inadequate.

All too often, people try to apply illustrations of foreknowledge to predestination and election. For instance, they may compare God with a man standing on top of a mountain, looking down at a road that curves around the base of the mountain. The man can see into the future because he knows which cars will pass by one another before they become visible to each other. But God's plan involves more than foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is passive, but divine control is active.

Another illustration involves a person engineering a situation in such a way that it creates a desire in another person to make a certain decision. Courtship is an example. When a man wants a woman to become his wife, he designs his courtship in such a way that she will respond with a willing "yes" when he proposes. He plans the situation and perhaps knows she will accept his proposal; yet she has a free choice to accept or reject. But even this illustration breaks down. It implies that when we sin, God seduced us in this direction. But that simply is not so (see chap. 5).

Summer 2006

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

VII. The Alternatives and the Extremes

As with other biblical mysteries, three alternatives are possible. One can accept the mystery, reject it as untrue, or rationalize it. To rationalize it, one must overemphasize one truth and minimize the other, and this leads to the two extremes.

The correct approach is to learn to live with the mystery by accepting both truths involved and holding them in tension because of the authority of God's Word. This means that the principles should be regarded as *apparent* contradictions and not ultimate contradictions. God's revelation in the Bible is always self-consistent. The only problem is that human understanding is sometimes deficient. If we could raise our thoughts to the level of God's thoughts, there would be no mysteries.

But because so many people refuse to let God be wiser than men, they insist on rationalizing the principles of the divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery. Some are exclusively concerned with the former, others with the latter. Either error can lead to very practical problems. Those hung up on human responsibility may overemphasize methods and develop guilt feelings about not witnessing to everyone they meet. Their counterparts may minimize missions and evangelism, saying, "Why bother? The elect are going to get saved anyway."

Prayer also depends on balancing both principles. If God is not sovereign, there is no point in praying because He is unable to answer most prayers. And if men have no responsibility, there is no point in praying because nothing we ask or do will affect God's plan in the least.

From a practical standpoint, it seems more objectionable for a Christian to overemphasize the divine sovereignty and minimize human responsibility than *vice versa*. Since human responsibility relates to our role, we need to attend to it. God will take care of His own sovereignty! Yet, either error is harmful, and neither error needs to be embraced.

Some confuse divine sovereignty with fatalism. Christianity is not fatalistic, however, because it teaches that human responsibility is just as real as divine sovereignty. Furthermore, what is behind fatalism (fate) is not what is behind divine sovereignty (a living, wise, sinless God).

Another objection that keeps people from accepting this mystery is the problem of evil. Many feel that it is an insult to our intelligence to assert that all things occur for the best as the result of a human providence. If God is sovereign, is He not the author of the evil all about us? This objection is important, and we will deal with it in the next chapter.

It comes as no surprise that this mystery has precipitated heated controversies and extreme viewpoints throughout the course of church history. One notable example was Augustine's controversy with the Pelagians. Pelagianism emphasized human freedom to the exclusion of divine sovereignty, and this led to a concept of self-salvation without the need of divine grace.

In recent centuries, the two extreme viewpoints have been ultra-Calvinism (divine sovereignty carried to pure determinism) and certain extreme forms of Arminianism (human responsibility overemphasized).

As mentioned, people often have more problems with this mystery than with others because it is close to where we live. But we should remember that it is really no more mysterious than the God-man or the Trinity mysteries, which Christians are more likely to accept.

VIII. Emphases of Historic Arminianism and Calvinism

Arminianism Man's Responsibility in Salvation	Calvinism God's Sovereignty in Salvation
1. Man is a sinner, but able to do good and to respond to God.	1. Total Depravity – Man is unable of himself to respond to God.

Summer 2006

2. God elects on the basis of foreseen faith.	2. Unconditional Election – God elects according to His own good pleasure.
3. Christ died for all men.	3. Limited Atonement – Christ died for the elect only.
4. Man can, because of stubborness and rebellion, resist God's call to salvation.	4. Irresistible Grace – The elect are irresistibly drawn to Christ.
5. The believer may, through persistent sin, fall from grace and be lost.	5. Perseverance of the Saints – The elect can never perish; they will surely persevere.

IX. The Specific Problem of Salvation

The general divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery can be applied in a specific way to the nature of salvation. From the standpoint of God's sovereignty, a person is saved because he is elected by God (chosen for salvation). But from the standpoint of our responsible freedom, a person is elected because he receives Christ.

The first truth finds support in a number of biblical passages. For instance, the apostle Paul writes of the power of God "… who saved us http://www.bible.org/netbible2/index.php?book=2ti&chapter=1&verse=&submit=Lookup+Verse - note_14#note_14 and called us with a holy calling, not based on our works but on his own purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before time began …" (2 Tim. 1:9).

Paul also wrote, "… because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified." (Rom 8:29-30).[5]

> It is clear that in His sovereign grace, God took the initiative.

> We are not to think of Jesus Christ as a Third Party wrestling salvation for us from a God unwilling to save. No. The initiative was with God Himself. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Precisely how He can have been in Christ while He made Christ to be sin for us, I cannot explain, but the same apostle states both truths in the same paragraph. And we must accept this paradox along with the equally baffling paradox that Jesus of Nazareth was both God and Man, and yet One Person. If there was a paradox in His person, it is not surprising that we find one in His work as well.[6]

Because God is sovereign in salvation, none of us can say that we saved ourselves; this is God's work (see Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Nevertheless, the second truth still holds; we are elected because we receive Christ (remember that we are speaking of election as an eternal or timeless event). No one can be saved without willingly trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

> "'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved …'" (Acts 16:30-31).

> "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

The words *believe* and *faith* are active, not passive terms in the Bible. Believing in Christ is equivalent to receiving Him: "But to all who have received him – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God's children …" (John 1:12).[7]

The two truths of this mystery (one believes because he is elect and he is elect because he believes) are sometimes side by side in the same passage. John 6 is an example. Divine sovereignty is emphasized in verses 37, 44, and 65: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him …" (v. 44). Human responsibility is emphasized in verses 29, 35, 40, and 47: "For this is the will of my Father – for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life …" (v. 40).

Thus the biblical doctrine of salvation perfectly combines divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God must call and men must respond willingly. This is a unique picture, for only in Christianity is God declared to be the initiator and author of salvation. The only thing we can do is respond by receiving Christ's free offer.
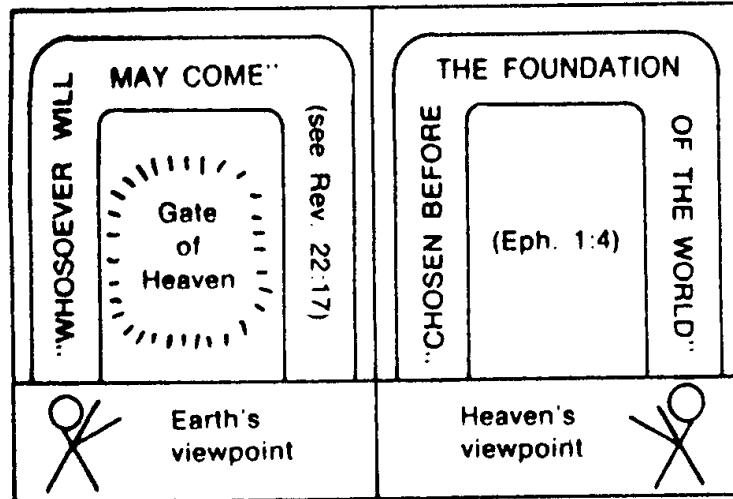
A person standing outside the "gate of heaven" sees the inscription "Whosoever will may come!" Passing through and looking back he sees written on the other side, "Chosen before the foundation of the world!"

Because of the sovereignty of God in salvation, everyone who has trusted Christ for the forgiveness of sins can have assurance of salvation. This certainty comes from the fact that salvation is neither obtained nor maintained by human effort. Since no one deserves it or earns it, eternal life must come by grace through faith. Nevertheless, God will never force anyone to believe in His Son. Free will is still a reality, and all of us are responsible for accepting or rejecting the revelation we have received. As wonderful as the gift of salvation is, if God forced it upon everyone, He would eliminate human freedom.

X. The Special Case of History

History itself is completely bound up in the divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery. Because of it the Christian view of history is unique, since it allows for both determinism and free will. "Both apply, but always in such a way that the evil of history is man's work and the good of history, God's."[8] History itself is both a divine and a human product.

From the divine perspective, "History is not just what happens, but what the living God does"[9] God's relation to history is more than a sequence of interventions; He is always active in usual and unusual ways. God is active in the affairs of all nations and men to bring about His sovereign purpose (see Ps. 33:10-11; Isa. 10:5-15; Dan. 2:21; 4:17; Hab. 1:6).

History, therefore, has a clear goal, and it is moving toward a definite consummation in the Second Coming and glorious reign of Jesus Christ. Yet at the same time, God has seen fit to give us genuine freedom of choice.

The biblical picture of history offers two crucial elements: the goal of the historical process and the reality of free will. No historian who works from an unbiblical base can logically arrive at either of these elements.

Without a revelation from the God who created history, no one could uncover the goal of history. We are all minute parts of the process, and it would be presumptuous for any part to think he could step out of the process and objectively comprehend the whole.

Neither can the secular historian avoid the problem of determinism. Apart from a personal God, man is left with a deterministic universe driven by forces and laws beyond his control. Only the Bible offers a genuine purpose for history without sacrificing human freedom.

XI. Some Practical Implications of This Mystery

The divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery has implications for almost every aspect of the Christian life.

A. Evangelism

The fact that God sovereignly elects those who will be saved in no way eliminates the Christian's responsibility to share the gospel with those who do not know Christ. God has told us to pray for and witness to non-Christians. It is not our business to guess who are elected, and they are not walking around with special signs.

A realization that God is on the throne can give us a confidence in evangelism and should make us bold, patient, and prayerful. Our job is simply to build friendships with unbelievers, share the gospel with them, and pray for them. The results must be entrusted into God's sovereign hands.

B. Prayer

If God controls all things, why pray? The answer, of course, is that God commands us to pray, and we are responsible to be obedient to this command. We are also responsible to meet the conditions for answered prayer (some of these conditions are found in John 15:7; 16:23-24; 1 Peter 3:7, 12; 1 John 5:14). Otherwise, our prayers will be hindered.

Though God is sovereign, the prayers of His children contribute significantly to the outworking of His program. This does not mean that we are pushing buttons or forcing God to answer, for He does not grant all requests. Prayer should instead remind a believer of his complete dependence upon God for all things. When great things happen, God is the One who should be glorified, not the person who prayed. So at the same time that God is in control of all things, our prayers can and do profoundly shape reality.

C. The Will of God

God has a plan for every life, but the details of this plan are carried out by the free choices of each person involved. As we said before, however, God's plan is not always the same as His desires. *The degree to which God's desires are carried out in His plan for our lives is our responsibility.* God, for instance, desires that we come to love Him for who He is and what He has done for us. But we are not robots programmed to say, "Praise you! Praise you!" No one can truly love God (or anyone else) without the power to choose.

The diagram pictured next shows a portion of an individual's life. As time moves in the direction indicated, he makes many choices (represented by the dots) that affect other choices. At any given decision point (point C), there is a varying number of options or contingencies. The range of options is always limited as indicated by the two lines of x's in the figure. For example, a person who does not wish to be seen has no option to become suddenly invisible or walk through a wall. These possibilities would only be open to someone in a resurrection body (chap. 6).
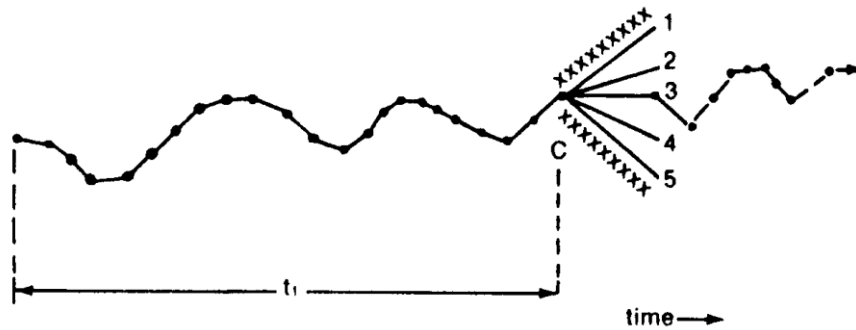
Our person has just come to point C. He can freely choose among five genuine options. Here is where the wonder comes in: *the five contingencies are real, and yet whatever is done is God's plan.* This is true for all of us. Because the contingencies are real, we remain responsible for the choices we make.

God sees the whole line at once because He is not limited as we are to the temporal sequence of events (chap. 7). Since we cannot see our lines of life as God sees them, no one can live his life as though there were a blueprint in front of him. A Christian should instead place his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the decisions of each day. One can be quite sure about what lies in that past (in the diagram, whether a day or twenty years), but there is a reasonable doubt about what lies ahead.

In general, a non-Christian has fewer options at each decision point because without the indwelling Holy Spirit he is not free to choose those things that would be consistent with God's desires for his life (see Rom. 8:8). Until he allows Christ to liberate him, he is a slave to sin (Rom. 6:17-22; 2 Peter 2:19).

D. The Christian Life

The Christian's walk with God is a divine-human process. God is always at work in the believer to produce the fruit of righteousness and Christlikeness, but the believer is also responsible for acting. It is not a matter of "let go and let God" on the one hand, or of living in the power of the flesh on the other hand.

Paul communicates this balance clearly, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20; also compare Phil. 2:12-13). God is at work in us, but we are also to *act* in obedience.

E. Security and Comfort

God is on the throne. He is in complete control of all creation. Even though all things are in constant flux, nothing escapes God's constant notice. "Even all the hairs on your head are numbered" (Matt.10:30). Every time a hair falls out, every time you comb your hair, the Lord takes it into account! Here is Christ's application of this truth: "So do not be afraid …" (Matt. 10:31). The fact that God knows you through and through should be a source of great security and comfort. Here is where human responsibility comes in - we respond with trust.

When inexplicable things happen - the untimely death of a loved one, a serious accident - a Christian can find great peace and comfort in the knowledge that a loving God is sovereign in all things.

Next time you are in an airplane try an experiment. Look down at a city and watch all the tiny cars and houses below. Then meditate on the fact that God intimately knows and cares for all of those people. He is concerned and active in the complex web of their decisions, hopes, and trials.

Each of us is significant because the living God places us in high esteem. "By this the love of God is revealed in us:http://www.bible.org/netbible/1jo4_notes.htm - 423 that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him" (1 John 4:9).

E. "Fate" and "Luck"

"The dice are thrown into the lap, but their every decision is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). In view of the overwhelming scriptural evidence for divine sovereignty, terms like *fate* and *luck* lose their significance. In an ultimate sense, nothing happens by pure chance.

Nevertheless, the biblical doctrine of human responsibility is just as clear, and the lives of all people bear this out. No one can live as though he were a machine programmed by the forces of fate. He must make choices.

F. The Avoidance of Responsibility

We have an ability to contemplate the future and a desire to affect it. The problem is that we want to exercise free will, but we do not want the responsibility that goes with it. People try to avoid responsibility in a number of ways.

One effort has been to set up a random universe in which the casual agents are time and chance. Atheistic evolutionism is an attempt to kick out the Owner of the universe. If we don't have to answer to a personal Creator, there is no need to worry about responsibility for our sinful actions and thoughts.

Another effort in some psychiatric schools of thought is the idea that determinism plays an important role. For instance, "Freudian psychoanalysis turns out to be an archeological expedition back into the past in which a search is made for others on whom to pin the blame for the patients' behavior. The fundamental idea is to find out how others have wronged him."[10] A person's behavior is determined by factors beyond his control (God, religion, parents). But the Bible makes it clear that regardless of the past, no one can blame another for his own bad behavior.

The fatalism of astrology is another deterministic escape hatch. Enthusiasts of astrology desire the power to control their destiny in spite of the fatalism of the system. In a practical sense the fatalism is useful to the extent that it offers an escape from moral responsibility.

XII. Conclusion

In this last section we have considered only a few of the implications of the divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery. The biblical truths involved in God's sovereign purpose and control of His universe should lead us to a greater appreciation of God Himself. The more we meditate on these things, the more we can picture His loving concern, wisdom, holiness, and greatness.

> Make me understand your ways, O Lord!
>
> > Teach me your paths!
>
> Guide me into your truth and teach me.
>
> > For you are the God who delivers me;
>
> > on you I rely all day long.
>
> Remember your compassionate and faithful deeds, O Lord,
>
> > for you have always acted in this manner.
>
> > (Ps. 25:4-6).

WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG

LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

"My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. The Father and I are one" (John 10:27-30).

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

_____

Endnotes

[1]Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960), p. 251.

[2]Here are some other passages that support divine election and sovereignty: Exodus 14:17; Deuteronomy 29:4; 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:25; 9:15-10:9; 2 Samuel 12:11; 1 Kings 22:23; 1 Chronicles 10:14; Job 14:5; 38:1-42:3; Psalms 33:10-11; 47:7-8; 75:6-8; 102:18; 104:1-35; 139:16; Isaiah 14:24; 40:12-26; 53:10; 55:11; Jeremiah 10:23; 15:2; Daniel 2:21; 4:17; Amos 4:7; Matthew 10:29-30; Luke 10:21; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 17:17.

[3]J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), p. 22. Compare James 4:12.

[4]Ibid., p. 23 (italics his).

[5]Also compare Matthew 24:31; 25:34; John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48 ("and all who were appointed for eternal life believed"); 16:14; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2; Revelation 17:8.

[6]John R. W. Scott, *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), p. 94

[7]Some other passages that emphasize the human responsibility to respond to the offer of salvation include Acts 13:38-39; Romans 1:16; 3:22, 26, 28; 4:5; 10:9-10; Galatians 3:22; Revelation 3:20.

[8]John Warwick Montgomery, *Where is History Going?* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969), p. 160.

[9]Kenneth G. Howskins, *The Challenge of Religious Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 24.

[10]Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), p. 6.