

A RANDOM COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS

ON THE TOPICS OF "HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY"

AND "GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY / ELECTION"

AS THEY RELATE TO A PERSON'S "WORKS"

[Is that title long enough?]

FIRST, a few comments and notes...

It is recommended that the following articles be read, in order to better understand what is written below:

- The "Boundaries" of Truth
- God's Sovereignty / Human Responsibility

In the following comments, these two topics (sovereignty and responsibility) are NOT interpreted as incompatible or as being in conflict in any way. Instead, they complement each other. They are "friends," not "enemies."

Though it has a slightly different focus, the following article may also be helpful:

- God: What is He Like? How Does He Interact With Us?
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** Don't confuse obedience to God's moral law with the slavish following of Old Testament rituals or of man-made rules.

- The Old Testament rituals were intended to *teach* us about Christ and about God's ways. They were *never* intended to be a means of gaining salvation. (Galatians 3:24)
 - The following of man-made rules, in an attempt to gain salvation or holiness (or using those rules as a basis for judging another person's spirituality), was always strongly condemned by Jesus (as well as by the apostles).
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NOW for the article...

A RANDOM COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS...

Some people have the idea that if a person is "elect," he is free to sin and to not worry about it. The Bible, however, says that if a person is elect, he is NOT free to sin, and that those who have such an attitude have good reason to wonder if they really are elect! If your lifestyle is characterized by constant willful sin (or by constant neglect of what God requires from you), you had better do something about it. Repent!

It's sad how sin so greatly warps our perspectives. We are free to NOT sin, rather than free to sin.

There are many things that Scripture says the elect WILL do. How is it that people come up with the idea that they *don't have to do them*? Election involves a change of HEART. We have a new nature, so we WILL act different - at least in some way!

Even animals demonstrate this. Does a cat act like a dog? There may be some similarities, such as each has four legs, but there will be characteristics that a dog has, which a cat *cannot* imitate. This is because it has a different nature. Scripture says it in a similar way:

By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:16-20)

Does a spring send out from the same opening fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, yield olives, or a vine figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh water. (James 3:11-12)

Note: This does not mean that we will have sinless perfection. In this present life, we face a constant battle between our old ways and our new nature. And though we will not always win every battle, WE WON'T CHOOSE TO JOIN THE ENEMY!

The following are some of the verses that say the righteous will LIVE by faith: Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38. How can we say that we *don't* have to have a faith that expresses itself in LIFE? Don't forget that faith without works is useless and dead - *not* living (James 2:14-26). Such faith CANNOT save anyone!

2 Timothy 2:19 tells us:

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

There are *two* parts to this *one* inscription. The first part involves God's election: "The Lord knows those who are his." The second part involves our responsibility: "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." BOTH PARTS ARE EQUALLY TRUE. The "responsibility" part, which mentions the NECESSITY of turning away from wickedness, is just as much a part of the inscription, as is the "election" part. It is a gross perversion of Scripture to say that "turning away from wickedness" is merely one of several "options."

Because both of these concepts are equally true, there are many passages in Scripture, in which we are told: 1) we MUST be a certain way, *and* 2) we WILL be that way. [Examples include: 1 John 4:20-21 (command to love) and 1 John 3:10 (statement of fact that we will love); Philippians 2:12 (command to "work out" our salvation) and Philippians 1:6, 2:13 (statement of fact: God will finish the work he has begun in us).] The first is from the perspective of what *we* must do in our life, and the second is from the perspective of what *God* does in our life. They go together.

If you don't understand how they go together, that's O.K. You need to do YOUR part and let God "worry" about his! Just remember to give HIM - rather than yourself - the credit whenever you succeed in doing the things Scripture says you must do! After all, you know that the ability to do it came from him.

Perhaps this idea of two parts of one inscription could also be illustrated by the two sides of one coin. Both sides are necessary. The coin cannot exist without both.

Another passage that joins the "sovereignty" and "responsibility" parts is John 6:37:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

Scripture also tells us that even when evil is prevalent...

Yet the righteous holds to his way, and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger. (Job 17:9)

If we continually AREN'T holding to the ways of the righteous, and continually AREN'T growing stronger, what right do we have to claim that we are among the righteous?

Again, the reason Scripture can say that the righteous WILL do so is because the righteous have a changed nature. They CANNOT keep living the way of their former nature; they CANNOT enjoy doing the things they once did.

Since Scripture says that the elect *will* be this way, we have no basis to claim that we are "elect" if we keep choosing to NOT be this way. We need to remember that although the "complementary" concept involves the issue of "sanctification" (which includes *learning* to follow Jesus), the righteous have a new nature. Learning to live according to our new nature involves growth and maturity, but having a need to grow *doesn't* mean that we have *an excuse for sinning*. After all, learning to follow the ways of life (and failing as we learn) is radically different from willfully choosing to follow the ways of death!

Scripture says much about people who have a "temporary faith." These people look "saved" for a while (maybe even for a long while), and then they fall away. These are the ones who, as Jesus says, "fall away" when things don't go their way, or who are overcome by the "thorns" of life (Matthew 13:20-22). These are the ones who, as John says, "never really belonged to us" - though for a while they seemed to (1 John 2:19). These are the ones who "turn back and are destroyed" (Hebrews 10:39). They may have even "once been enlightened, ... tasted the heavenly gift, ... shared in the Holy Spirit," and "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4-5), but they do not have the "things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6:9). Even "apostates" (people who have turned away from the truth) can know something about the righteous way they should live - but it sure doesn't do them any good. As 2 Peter 2:20-22 says:

And when people escape from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up with sin and become its slave again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the right way to live than to know it and then reject the holy commandments that were given to them. They make these proverbs come true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "A washed pig returns to the mud."

Since "the righteous person holds to his way" (Job 17:9), do I dare to choose to NOT do so? Do I dare to willingly choose to NOT be like the righteous? When (or, "if") I keep making such a choice, I am placing myself in the category of "people who do NOT hold to the ways of the righteous." If I CHOOSE to do this, why should I expect to survive the Day of Justice?

But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your stubbornness in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world, will judge all people according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who persist in doing what is good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and practice evil deeds. There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on sinning—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. (Romans 2:5-11)

You may ask, "What about the person who 'backslides'? What about the times people are inconsistent in the way they live? Everyone has such times!" There is a radical difference between the following two situations:

- 1) Someone who is willing to pursue the way of righteousness, even though doing so is a constant struggle; sometimes (perhaps frequently) stumbling - yet with a willingness to get back on his feet and to continue the struggle.
- 2) Someone who stubbornly refuses to follow the ways of God; or chooses to give-up and to stop struggling in the pursuit of righteousness.

These two types of people are going in OPPOSITE directions. We can say that the righteous WILL be the way that God says they will (that is, they will cling to the ways of righteousness) because - from the "sovereignty" perspective - God guarantees it. He has changed their hearts. They have a new "seed" in them.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

(In modern terms, perhaps we could say that they have a new spiritual "genetics" in them, which they received when they were born again.)

What about a person who claims (or claimed) to be a "Christian," but who becomes persistent in going the wrong direction? If that person is truly saved (in other words, "elect"), God will convict and discipline him until he does return to the way of his true nature (Hebrews 12:5-11). Or God will put him to death (1 Corinthians 11:30). BUT EITHER WAY, IF HE BELONGS TO GOD, HE WON'T PERSIST IN HIS "BACKSLIDDEN" LIFESTYLE.

Don't forget the warning God gives us in Galatians 6:7-9:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

The elect will not "give up."

Here is another passage, from 1 John, which tells us something that the righteous WILL do:

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:3)

"Purifying oneself" - becoming like Christ - is an on-going process that takes time and effort. It is never easy, and sometimes it is quite painful. Yet those who have the hope (expectation) of being like Christ in *eternity* will want to become like him *now*. Once again, it is *because of* the effect that salvation has had on their hearts.

A person who DOES NOT belong to God can be influenced in a good way, by God's righteous law (the moral law). As an "external" standard of conduct, it can have a wonderful restraining effect on sin in his life. (Let us thank and praise God for that!) In contrast, the person who DOES belong to God has the law imprinted on his heart. It is "internal" - a part of his nature. He - by nature - WANTS to live by it. He can hear the same external encouragement - and this external encouragement is important (Hebrews 3:13; 10:25) - but his obedience comes because he *desires* to obey. He does not need external *compulsion* to force him to do good.

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
And they shall not teach one another
or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more."

(Hebrews 8:10-12, quoting Jeremiah 31:33-34)

God's grace, when it is present, TEACHES us to live in a way that pleases God. And as God accomplishes his teaching work, those who are learning become eager to do what is good.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

Don't forget that God has the power to make sure we learn!

Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? (Job 36:22)

[NOTE: The term "corrupt nature" is being used below, in reference to the sinful habits and inclinations we have, which we reinforce throughout our lives, before we come to God. Some translations use the term "sinful nature" and others use the word "flesh." The Greek New Testament uses the word "flesh," but the term is often misunderstood today. The apostle was *not* implying that it is bad to have a body! The problem is that sin has had evil effects on us - both on our bodies and on our hearts - mind, emotions, will, etc.]

FROM THE "HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY" STANDPOINT - the *need* to fight the habits that originated in my corrupt, sinful nature:

- My "corrupt nature" tries very intensely to "pull" me down. This nature wants me to follow the ways of death. I **MUST** fight its pull and "put to death" (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5) the things that belong to my corrupt nature, **OR IT WILL KILL ME**. If I "feed" that nature and cause it to grow, if I reinforce it by doing what it desires, my corrupt nature will grow stronger and become more intense in its "pull." Then I will be *less* able to fight it. It will require a fiercer struggle for me to overcome it, once I have strengthened it. In the end, I am in danger of being overcome and destroyed.

FROM THE "GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY" STANDPOINT - the *power* to fight it:

- I can succeed in overcoming the sinful habits and inclinations of my "corrupt nature" **ONLY** *because* of what Jesus Christ has done in my life. Therefore, when I succeed, I give **HIM** the credit for that success. If I took the credit for myself, I would be a liar.

Humility, not pride; dependency, not self-sufficiency - this is the proper human attitude.

FROM THE "HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY" STANDPOINT - the *need* for diligence / perseverance in becoming Christ-like:

- I know that those who are lazy in their obedience (or who quit it altogether) will **NOT** have any inheritance in the Kingdom of the Son. [After all, those who have a new nature within them will have a desire to *live* according to it.]

FROM THE "GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY" STANDPOINT - the *guarantee* that change will occur:

- I know that if God is truly present in my heart, there **WILL** be change. On the other hand, those who become lazy, or who turn aside completely, never had God present in their lives, in the first place. (1 John 2:19)

From the "Sovereignty" perspective, I know I **WILL** change; from the "Human responsibility" perspective, I know I **MUST** change. Sadly, many people try to use the one truth as an excuse for "canceling" the other!

What about me evaluating someone else?

Since I cannot perfectly evaluate another person's conduct, I cannot always make a definitive statement about that person's salvation. Scripture says, "by their fruits you will know them." But there are instances in which little or no fruit is visible (either good or bad). And when basically nothing is visible, we will not be able to "recognize" them either way. **BUT GOD CAN** recognize them for what they are - and this is what counts.

Our obligation, in such a situation, is to encourage and exhort them to do the things God requires of them, for as long as there is no evidence that they ARE saved, they are potentially in a *very* dangerous position. It is foolish to passively assume they are saved, when evidence of salvation is lacking. For if our assumption is wrong, it will be eternally too late to do something about it later.

WARNING: By "fruit," God does NOT mean that the person will be doing everything based on *our own personal preferences*. Scripture, not people, defines what "fruit" is. For further study, see: "The New Testament Concept of Fruit."

FROM THE HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY STANDPOINT: The things which are necessary for salvation *must* be present.

- Therefore I focus on obedience. I am willing to "work out" (not "work for") my salvation (Philippians 2:12).

FROM THE "GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY" STANDPOINT: The things which are necessary for salvation *will* be present.

- Therefore, *as I see an increase of such things in my life*, I can be encouraged by my knowledge that God is working in my life (Philippians 2:13), and that what he *began* in me, he will *bring to completion* (Philippians 1:6). Also, I can give God credit for the presence of those things. (After all, I was originally "dead" in my sins. He is the one who gave me life!)
 - On the other hand, *if I see a decrease of such things, or no change at all*, I will NOT choose to become lax in my obedience (and assume that I can worry about obedience later), but rather (because the human-responsibility standpoint is also true), I will be spurred on to increased obedience.
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FROM THE HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY STANDPOINT:

IF the fruit of salvation is increasingly present (2 Peter 1:1-11):

- I do not have to worry about the "sovereignty" aspect of salvation, or the matter of "eternal security." The fruit of salvation (and its increase in my life) is possible *only* if I do belong to God.

On the other hand, IF I "fall" and choose to *refuse* to get up and continue in my "journey" of becoming more like Christ:

- I have lots to worry about. This is because "not getting up and starting again" is a characteristic of the non-elect. The elect will have an ongoing increase in "fruit"; the non-elect won't, but will either: 1) never believe in the first place, or 2) not "get up and continue again" when they "fall." (At best, their "faith" would be considered a temporary - and probably misguided - faith.)

When you "fall down" in sin, don't GIVE UP, but GET UP!

How should we respond to all this?

- Some will *choose* to reject it, ignore it, distort it, or get angry at God about it. They will *choose* to make this *choice*, and will reap the consequences of such a *choice* - even those who try to excuse their sins by blaming God for their *choices*. [Note the emphasis on the word "choice." On the Day of Justice, these people won't be "worrying" about the issue of *sovereignty*, but will be acknowledging that it truly was *their* choice. And they will bear the *responsibility* for it.]
- Others will respond in a much more honorable way... praising God for his greatness, being filled with joy and trust, with the "fear of God" (in the sense of reverent awe) and love. They, too, will be held responsible for their choices.

Either way, the choice is yours!

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

"Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again?"

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.

To him be the glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

This is the end of the matter. All has been heard.

Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every work into judgment,

with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (Revelation 22:12)

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. ...and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-12, 15)

This was originally written using the NIV translation. However, due to copyright restrictions (and the quantity of Scripture being quoted), the article was rewritten so that Scripture quotations are from several translations.

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