

Exegetical Research Paper

# **Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: A Walk Through John**

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest biblical tensions ever to surface in Christianity is the issue of Divine Sovereignty and how it is brought alongside the biblical teaching of human responsibility. Myriads upon myriads of discussions surrounding this topic have occurred with no final solution in sight. How can it be that the Bible so clearly teaches that it is God who not only is the author of salvation, but the initiator of it as well? How can it be that man has absolutely no power in himself to respond to the gospel message apart from God drawing him? Yet at the same time, so many passages in scripture teach that man is responsible for responding to the call of God in Jesus Christ. If man *chooses* to reject the forgiveness of God in the Son of God, then he has *chosen* to reject the only hope humanity has for eternal life. Both of these truths are certainly taught and both are in complete opposition to one another. Or are they? This paper will take a simple chapter-by-chapter walk through the gospel of John, taking a detailed look at the obvious proclamation of both doctrines. As well, a suggested solution will be given as to how both teachings are not only compatible, but necessary in having a proper understanding of soteriology.

### John 1:1-18 – The Prologue

#### John 1:1-5

In the beginning God . . . In the beginning was the Word. Any student of the Bible understands that John 1:1 has within itself an inexhaustible amount of doctrine. My personal slant is to highlight first of all that God created, and more than that, *the Word* was with God when He created. The Word is the revelation of who God is. We

understand the Word to be Jesus Christ, for truly He is the Word of God (Hebrews 1:1; Revelation 19:13). Christ is the Word of God to reveal the Creator of the Universe to the created being with whom He has chosen to set apart to have relations with. God has given man a soul and that soul has the God-given capability to respond to God. However, we are not experiencing the time of creation, but the time of Jesus Christ incarnate. Things are completely different than at the time of creation. John reveals that the Word was in the beginning with God, and that the Word was God. One must read further to understand the context and the meaning behind that statement.

The first indication of the contrast and separation exists in verse five, where John states that the Word is the light of men, and that this light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it. The darkness is given the human attribute of comprehension, yet this darkness did not comprehend this light.

### **John 1:6-13**

We know from later verses that the “John” in these verses is John the Baptist. He came to witness of that light. This light is to *give light* to every man in the world and again there is a statement that the world did not know this light. The light is transformed to “He” in verse 11 saying that He came to His own, yet His own did not receive Him. But as many as did receive Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (vss 12-13). Immediately in the gospel of John we see this incredible tension of divine sovereignty and human responsibility (DSHR – as will be noted from this point on). We understand first of all that the Word came into the

world, not by man's asking or man's pleading, nor by man's goodness, but by the sovereignty of God. The darkness, world, and His own, did not receive Him, but *those who did* were called the children of God. Apparently, even though the world would not comprehend this Word and Light, some would receive Him and gain the privilege of being called the children of God. For any first-time reader this is understandable and acceptable. The profundity of these words does not mar the simplicity of their meaning. However, any pause in reflection of verse 13 would immediately make the reader stop in wondering what is meant.

First we come to the word "born". This word has to be understood as being synonymous with "children of God". The simplicity would indicate that we are *born into the family of God, and we are His children*. However, these were born, not of blood, nor of flesh, *nor of the will of man*, but of God. One has to submit to the teaching that God is the one who "gives birth" to these children and that it is not the will, nor desire, nor effort of man to do so, **it is of the will of God**. Yet we must wonder as we remember that verse 12 taught that as many as did receive this light, God gave them the right to become the children of God! This is God-initiating and God-rewarding.

### **John 1:14-18**

Finally, this prologue ends returning to the initial use of *Word* and how this Word became flesh and dwelt among man. There is again no initiation of the will of man encouraging or asking for this dwelling, it clearly is of God. This passage makes the final transition from the Word to the revealing of the name behind that Word, Jesus Christ. Although no one has seen God at any time, it does not matter, because Jesus Christ will

explain, or exegete, the Father. What will be revealed about God through Jesus Christ? As already stated, Jesus, God in the flesh, has come to dwell among men. Jesus is the Word and the Light. The world did not comprehend this Word nor this Light, yet there are some who received this Light and became children of God, but not out of their own will or desire, but out of the will of God. So soon in the gospel of John can we go to other texts to grab hold of similar phrases:

*10 And not only [this], but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, [even] by our father Isaac 11 (for [the] [children] not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." 14 What shall we say then? [Is] [there] unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then [it] [is] not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. – Romans 9:10-16*

The remaining of chapter one swings the pendulum the other way for we see Jesus calling the disciples and requesting them to “Follow Me”. The call goes out to the disciples and it certainly appears as if they themselves are willingly responding to the call of God in Christ Jesus.

### **John Chapter Three**

The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus has the tension of DSHR in it as well, emphasizing more the responsibility of the human to respond to the giving of the Son. The scent of sovereignty is seen in verse three where a literal translation of the Greek states that one must be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God. Although not apparent on the surface to the average reader, it no less reflects chapter one by stating again that one is born not of flesh but of the will of God.

Probably the greatest passage flooded with the responsibility of salvation being placed within human hands is verses 16-21. Whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life, yet the one who rejects the Son stands condemned because he or she has not accepted God provision for the forgiveness of sins. The issue is that, first, *whoever* believes has eternal life and, second, responsibility lies in the lap of the human for rejecting the Son of God. Why would they? Verse 19: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Further we read in verse 27 that John the Baptist states the will of God when he says that no one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. We understand that John is fading into the background in purpose as the Son of God takes center stage. John was born for a purpose and it is the will and the purpose of God that John has fulfilled; again, sovereignty reigns in the truth that the plan of God will be consummated. Finally, the well known verse wraps up the chapter charging mankind with the responsibility to respond to the call of God: 36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

## Chapters Four and Five

These two chapters continue with the same phraseology as the previous chapters. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that *whoever* drinks the living water that He gives to them will have eternal life. It is presented that because of the signs that He has done, many believe in Him. After Jesus heals a man who has been lame for 38 years, He begins a series of debates with the Jews because He did this on the Sabbath. He starts His rounds

of proclaiming that He is doing the will of the Father. The crucial text that contributes to our discussion is verse 21: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to [them], even so the Son gives life to whom He will." Naturally, we understand that it is ultimately God that grants eternal life, but here Christ states that He gives life to whom *He wills*. Many of the teachings on the sovereignty of God in salvation (better called "election") are almost hidden and not proclaimed with great pomp. Nevertheless, one need not understand Greek to see the simplicity of the language and grammar. The Son gives life to whom He wills and no one becomes a child of God apart from the sovereign will of God.

## John Chapter Six

John chapter six begins to reveal more and more concerning the sovereign will of the Father in salvation. After Jesus feeds the multitudes, He compares Himself with the manna that their fathers ate and calls Himself the bread of life. If anyone comes to Him they shall never hunger (spiritually). In verse 37, we again see another "poke" at sovereignty when Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." As well in verse 39, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." What does He mean when He states that it is the Father that gives to the Son those who believe in Him. Notice, "All that the Father gives Me *will come to Me*". It is obvious that the Father gives before the people come. One may say that after one believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he is now the Father's, and then the Father gives them to the Son. However, this is not what the text says. It is anything

but subtle in verse 44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." I do not need to state the English again, for it is plain: it is impossible for a human being to come to Jesus Christ on his own for salvation, it has to be the sovereign work of the Father. As Romans 3:10-11 state: 10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God." Not only is no one righteous, *no one seeks after God*. Men loved darkness rather than light and the light has come into the world, but the darkness did not comprehend it.

As the narrative develops, Jesus continues the dispute with the Jews by proclaiming that the one who believes has eternal life and this life is in His body and blood. To secure the point, He repeats the sovereignty of God in verse 65: And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." Many cannot accept this statement and choose to follow Him no more. He asks the disciples what their choice is and Peter has one of his better moments and proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Notice immediately in verse 70 that Jesus reveals to them the fruition of verses 44 and 65: Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Jesus tells the disciples that *He* is the one that chose them, and adds the prediction (and proclamation) that although He chose the twelve, one of them has been chosen not for salvation, but for a demonic purpose. We will see later a more fulfilling explanation of the purpose of one of the twelve and the greater purpose of the disciples being chosen of God not only for salvation, but to fulfill the chosen plan of God. The tension between DSHR does not end here, but actually is only beginning.

## Summarization and Explanation

Up to this point, the tension is blatant and obvious. While Christ is telling everyone that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, He is also stating that the only way they can get this life is for the Father to act and grant it to them. I do offer an explanation on the use of *whoever believes* and *if anyone believes*. Does Jesus have to be saying that salvation is open to all? It seems apparent that this is not the case. *Whoever* can also mean, *the one who*, and the statement *if anyone* does not direct the ability or the will of salvation to man, but simply states that every person who does believe in Jesus Christ has eternal life. There is Divine Sovereignty in the issuing of the ability to believe, and there is Human Responsibility in that plain and simple fact that man loves the darkness more than the light and if truly given the choice, man will always choose darkness over that light and it takes a sovereign act of God to change the course of man.

## John Chapters Seven and Eight

As the debate with the Jews continues, there are many who are slowly but surely coming to believe that Jesus truly is the Christ. Many believe in Him because of the signs He performs while still many more seek to destroy Him for these very works. In verses 32-39, we see both instances of DSHR included in this pericope. Jesus states to the Jews that He will be going to the Father, and He says to them in verse 34, "You will seek Me and not find [Me], and where I am you cannot come.". Literally, it says "you are *not able* to come." Again, Christ is very plain in His statement to the Jews: you do not have the ability within yourself to come to Me and My Father. They cannot come because they do not have the ability to come. If we do not have the ability to come to the Father apart

from His sovereign grace, then how can He still find fault with us? Paul dealt with the  
same question.

15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then [it] [is] not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed [it], "Why have you made me like this?" – Romans 9:15-20

Paul did not offer a discourse to sooth the uneasiness of his readers, he just simply told them that it was our Creator's choice what He does with us. Nevertheless, I will not follow Paul's path and continue discussing this tension, trying to resolve it not only in your mind, but mine as well.

The tension between DS and HR lies in the viewpoint that if we are completely powerless to choose salvation and it takes the power of God to bring us not only to the Son, but His power as well to believe in Him, then how can He condemn us? My answer is that this doctrine still does not absolve us from our Human Responsibility. When Jeremiah 17:9 states that "The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], And desperately wicked; Who can know it?", it is speaking of our own hearts that we have chosen to harden. Again, I appeal to John's earlier teaching that states mankind loved the darkness rather than the light. ***IT IS MORE THAN SAYING WE ARE NOT ABLE TO CHOOSE CHRIST, WE WOULDN'T CHOOSE CHRIST IF WE HAD THE OPTION!*** Our responsibility rests in who we are and what we have chosen. If God chooses to save one person, it takes His power to do so and it can only be by His grace that we would choose Him. We are responsible for our rebellion, not God. Plainly, we **DESERVE** hell.

## John Chapters Nine and Ten

There are two points of interest concerning DSHR in these two chapters. The first is not dealing with salvation, but for the purpose of signs. In the opening of chapter nine, the disciples inquired about a man who had been born blind, whether it was his sin or his parent's sin that caused his condition. Verse 3 says, "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.' God caused blindness in this man in order for a specific sign to be shown. Eventually, through the pericope, the man receives Christ as his Lord and Savior after being cast out of the Synagogue. While it was understood and assumed that blindness, along with other infirmities, was caused as a direct result of sin, God was sovereign in causing the circumstance in order for a sign to be shown and for eventual salvation of the man who was healed.

Chapter 10 presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd who protects and loves His sheep. Christ states starting in verse 27: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given [them] to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch [them] out of My Father's hand. 30 "I and [My] Father are one." The words of focus make up the same statement mentioned earlier concerning the will of God in giving the sheep to His Son: My Father, who has given [them] to Me indicates, again, the sovereign act of God. While it may be argued that God has given them to His Son *after* they have responded to the gospel, it would directly contradict the previous statement by Christ in 6:37 that states the pre-requisite of man coming to Christ is the action of the Father, which is also reflected in 6:44 and 6:65.

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## John Chapters Eleven and Twelve

While in the discourse of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is talking with Martha and consoling her about her brother's death. He again makes the statement that would again indicate that the gift of salvation is offered to all men. He says to Martha in verses 25 and 26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. This would definitely seem to indicate that the responsibility of belief in the Son of God lies in the lap of the individual. One must believe in Him and He will hold to His promise in giving everlasting life to those who have faith in Him. The reader of this text, if drawn by the Father, is provoked and convicted that Jesus holds the very words of eternal life. Sovereignty is evident in that it is in the hands of the Father to draw the individual to the Son of God. However, man is responsible to respond to that call and believe in the one and only way of salvation. However the tension is far from over.

One of the most powerful texts in this tension lies in chapter twelve. The gospel writer is commenting on the fact that even though Jesus had done so many signs, people still would not believe in Him. He then quotes Isaiah. The first is from Isaiah 53:1, the second from Isaiah 6:9 and 10. John states in verses 38-40,

*that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" 39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with [their] eyes, Lest they should understand with [their] hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."*

It confounds me how one can read these verses and still disagree that God is totally sovereign in the lives of people. So often we make our theology fit our understanding because we struggle with a proposed truth from the word of God. I have heard some say

that they cannot accept a certain doctrine because they cannot picture “their God” being that way, so they reject the statement. After the great triumph of raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus is receiving the greatest opposition from the Jews. They seek to destroy not only Him, but Lazarus as well! Following another high point, the Triumphal Entry, Jesus knows full well that the time for Him to be glorified on a cross is near. John takes this moment to note the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy.

He asks, “Who has believed our report?” and further, “And *to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” In order for Jesus Christ to be revealed to the heart of man, it takes the sovereign arm of the Lord. Further, the prophecy of Isaiah places the burden of “blame” of blinding the eyes of men and hardening their hearts upon the Lord! They are passive in this action. Why would He do such a thing? Well the prophecy continues when it says, “Lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them” (verse 40). I return again to Romans chapter nine:

*17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed [it], "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"*

In verse 18, God has mercy on whom He wills and whom He wills He hardens. Paul must have known the reaction that this would cause in people (verse 19), but again notice in verses 20 and 21. I think we sometimes forget Whom we serve and for Whose purpose we exist. Does our responsibility get relinquished because ultimately it is God who uses us as He wishes? Remember, we have rejected Him, and because of that rejection, we deserve judgment. He has not caused the rebellion, we have, and therefore we are

responsible. The Jews and the Pharisees did not want to accept the Light of the world both because of the hardness of their hearts and because God hardened their hearts. The book of Exodus speaks clearly that it was God who hardened the heart of Pharaoh and Pharaoh hardened his own heart. For the sake of the feelings produced out of this doctrine do I try to make it understandable. However, let us never forget that if God decided to allow every single human soul to burn in Hell for eternity, He would still be righteous, just, and His holiness would be all the more clear. He has not chosen to do that because He also is a God of grace and love, and He has opened the heart of some to believe in the One whom He has sent, the man Christ Jesus (John 12:42-50).

### John Chapter Thirteen

We see the example of the humility of our Lord as He performs the task of the servant by washing His disciples' feet. It is now time for Him to go to the Father. Jesus begins to reveal the truth of His betrayer in verse 18: "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'" *I know whom I have chosen.* Now whether Jesus is confirming the fact that He has chosen the disciples for salvation or whether He literally has chosen Judas to betray Him is not exactly clear. Either way, He has sovereignly chosen His disciples and one of them is a devil (John 6:70). The scripture is being fulfilled from time past that the one who has performed the intimate act of eating bread with Jesus will be the one who betrays Him.

Later in chapter 13, we see a familiar statement by Christ that previously he has said to the Jews, but now He says to His disciples. Verse 36 says, "Simon Peter said to Him,

"Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." In the former statement, Jesus simply said that the Jews could not follow Him (meaning follow Him to heaven), but here Christ adds to the statement to Peter that he too is not able to follow Him, but he will follow Him afterward. Both the Jews and the disciples do not have the ability to follow Christ, but to the disciples, Jesus grants the knowledge to them that they have been chosen to follow Him later. Peter responds by asking where Jesus will be going and then we enter into the famous passage in the beginning of John chapter 14.

## **John Chapter Fourteen**

Jesus tells His disciples that He will go and prepare a place for them and in order for them to get there, they must go through Him. Verses 11 and 12 are interesting in that Jesus tells the disciples to believe in Him and He again gives the general "He who believes in Me . . .". Again, I am not convinced that this is a general call to the human race but simply a statement by Christ giving the disciples the ability to believe and when he says "He who believes in Me", He is not speaking about "anyone out there who may believe in Me", but those specific people whom the Father has brought to the Son (John 6:44). However throughout the rest of the passage Jesus is telling His disciples that the way they will know they truly love Him is if they keep His commandments. They are responsible for their obedient lives and the way they can show their love to Him is by simply obeying Him. Verse 23 twists the sequential thrust of what I have been speaking about: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'"

Seemingly, Jesus is stating that obedience to His word comes before, and is prerequisite to He and His Father coming to make their home with Him. However, in the context and in the flow of the passage, Christ is not speaking here of the offer of salvation, but of the truth of eternal life. The first epistle of John gives greater light to this entire matter. The issue is that this is one of the tests of life; one of the true tests that one has been regenerated: if we keep the commandments of the Father and the Son. The will of the Father is that we believe in His Son, and how we know we have been regenerated is by keeping the commandments of the Son. Throughout John 14, Christ is talking directly to His disciples, *post-faith*. Now, we cannot point to a direct time when the disciples were regenerated, probably at their calling. But certainly in this passage, Jesus is comforting them with the truth that there remains for them a place where they will dwell with the Father and the Son forever. In the meantime, they will send the Holy Spirit to abide with them forever because He indwells them now. Certainly Jesus is saying that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life, it is simply a matter of how they receive that eternal life. They believe not of their own will (John 1:13), nor are they able to (John 7:34, 13:36). They have chosen to rebel and are on a strict course away from God, heading toward separation from God for eternity. That would be their destiny if God had not graciously intervened.

### **John Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen**

Immediately in opening verses of chapter 15 we are drawn to the Old Testament imagery of God's vineyard: Israel. Israel was continually admonished to obey and remain in the love of God by that obedience. They chose not to and received their due punishment. As often believed, this passage is not discussing the loss of one's salvation

but an admonition for the disciples, the chosen of Israel, to abide in Christ. There are many of Israel who have chosen not to remain and they were cut off and removed.

Human responsibility comes in full force both with Israel and with the disciples. They have been chosen and are told plainly that if they obey His commands, they will remain in the love of God. Again, this discussion is evidential, not instrumental of salvation.

Notice quickly that Christ is placing the disciples another level than that of Israel. They are not His servants, but His friends. Why? Verses 15 and 16 state, 15 "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." Through the providence and sovereignty of God, He chose them to be His disciples and bear fruit. He states ever so plainly: You did not choose Me, but I chose you. Sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty.

Where is the responsibility? Following these verses, Jesus explains to His disciples that they will be hated for His name's sake. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin." – verse 22. Chapter 16 continues with the discourse with Christ encouraging them to be strong because when He goes away, He will send the Holy Spirit to help them. Not only will the Holy Spirit help them, but will as well have a role to play in Human Responsibility. Beginning at 16:8, Christ says of the Holy Spirit "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 "of judgment,

because the ruler of this world is judged.” Humanity is responsible for their sin and rebellion against God. Again, all are destined to hell because of their own sin; *they are responsible*, we all are.

### **John Chapters 17-21**

The high priestly prayer of Jesus communicates a number of things. First, Jesus is praying for His disciples in a tone that would strengthen them to persevere. The prayer discusses again how God has given the disciples to Jesus to be His. They are chosen. Secondly, in this incredible prayer, He does not pray for the salvation of souls. It has been determined from eternity past who would believe; He simply prays for their strength as believers. Notice in verse nine, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." Again, God has given them to His Son, and His Son has not lost any of them except Judas, who was prophesied to be the son of perdition (verse 12). Christ says that He does not pray for the world, but for those who would believe in Him. He ends His prayer with a request for all who will believe in His name, that they may be one, for they are chosen out of the world.

The rest of the book of John contains the narrative story of the arrest, trial, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Worth noting in this DSHR discussion is Christ's statement to Pilate in verse 11 of chapter 19. Christ says, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." Christ was not helplessly given over to the Jews to be crucified, it was ordained from eternity past that the Son of God would die for the sins of the world. Pilate would have no power over Him unless it had been given him by God the Father. Notice the human responsibility of the second half of the verse: the one (Judas)

who had delivered Jesus up to be crucified has the greater sin. Judas is responsible because it was in his heart to betray; it is in each of our hearts to betray. Except it be for the glorious grace of God, we would all be betrayers of the Son of God. D. A. Carson says of this event,

*The saving event of the death/exaltation is specifically preserved within the sphere of God's acts, confirming Jesus' authority to lay down his own life as his Father commanded (10:18). Not less important, it is clear that divine sovereignty in no way mitigates human responsibility, while human guilt in no way contaminates divine holiness; yet the human moral choices are not fenced off from divine control.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Speaking of D. A. Carson . . .**

Prior to this point, I simply desired to pick up the Bible and open up to John 1:1 and begin going through the gospel finding the points which would indicate either a stress toward Divine Sovereignty or Human Responsibility. I, as probably noted, am a firm believer in the sovereignty of God. I chose this topic because I know that with most doctrines, any “over-emphasis” on a certain side of an issue results in imbalance, then wrong doctrine, then flat out heresy! I knew that I was weak on the issue of human responsibility, so I chose this undertaking. However, I only confirmed my original slant on Divine Sovereignty; now I simply have a greater resource of passages to turn to for the poor soul who would even consider thinking they have had even an ounce of opinion in their salvation! ☺

I would like now to reflect upon certain sections of D. A. Carson's book *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*. Being the God-gifted genius Carson is, he can articulate the summation of this whole issue much better than I.

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<sup>1</sup> Page 130

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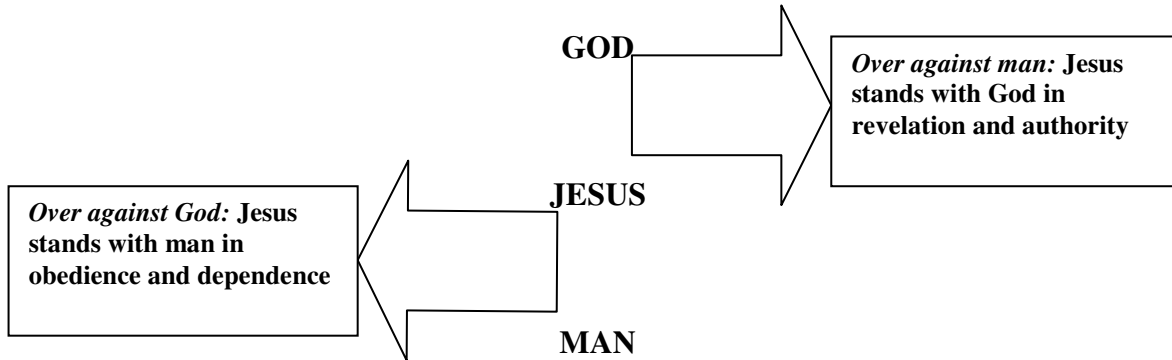
We often contrast the topic of *freewill* with the sovereignty of God. Freewill must be defined before we begin a discussion. I will use the term to describe the ability of man to choose to glorify God. Simply put, we have the choice on whether or not to follow God. As described above, we are completely lost, have deceitful and wicked hearts (Jeremiah 17:9), are not righteous, and do not seek after God (Romans 3:10-11). If this is the case, then any effort on our part to glorify God would mean that we have the ability to seek Him, which is obviously and biblically not the case. We are in the darkness and not only do we not comprehend the light, we flee from it, just like darkness. We have nothing inside of us with which we would desire God, and we each have chosen to rebel against Him (Romans 3:23). If we are completely separated from God in our sins (Isaiah 59:2) and our dead in our trespasses (Ephesians 2:1), then I give you the permission to tell me what could possibly make us *choose* follow God? It must be, as Scripture boldly says, the work of God in our lives. We truly do not have freewill. Carson states it well, “In Jesus, therefore, the certainty of divine predestination and the significant freedom of obedient response meet in a spectacular display. Real freedom for a man is freedom from sin (John 8:34ff.), that is, a freedom which voluntarily performs God’s will, in the way Jesus kept his Father’s word (8:54).”<sup>2</sup> Freewill in its truest sense can only happen *after* regeneration.

Jesus as the God-Man presents a great deal of theology for us. With respect to our discussion, we must remember that throughout the gospel of John, Jesus is continually portrayed as being submissive to the will of the Father. In this paper, it has been stated a number of times that man is responsible because he has chosen to rebel against His creator. Each of us has made that decision. Christ is the perfect example of obedience to

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<sup>2</sup> Page 158

the Father and His deity in no way diminishes the fact that Christ was completely submissive and completely obedient. I will take a diagram from Carson's text to illustrate:<sup>3</sup>



“God’s sovereignty therefore remains intact whatever the response of men may be; but men are not thereby absolved of their responsibility to do his will.”<sup>4</sup> And further,

*Another corollary of the stress on Jesus’ obedience arises from the observation that responsibility is exercised first of all towards God. This does not mean that Jesus does not act graciously towards other men; it means rather that he acts graciously towards them because he acts responsibly towards his father.*<sup>5</sup>

Just as the author of Hebrews says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all [points] tempted as [we] [are], [yet] without sin.” (4:15).

## Summary and Conclusion

My quest to have an even balance between the will of man and the sovereignty of God in salvation has ended to an absolute conviction that we all deserve hell, it is simply that God has chosen for some not to. Man detests the light so much because it exposes them for who they really are. It takes the power of God to grab man and inundate him with the

<sup>3</sup> Page 160

<sup>4</sup> Page 159

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

