

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND EVANGELISM

Mark Sprinkle

We're going to think about God's sovereignty, then evangelism, then how one should affect the other.

God's Sovereignty

Psalm 103:19 "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all."

One of the best succinct descriptions of God's sovereignty in the Bible is given by Nebuchadnezzar. See Daniel 4:34-35 "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; And no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

God's sovereignty is taught in the Bible from cover to cover. Too many verses to list declare sovereignty. Here are a few: Acts 17:24-26; Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 40; Isaiah 43:13; Isaiah 46:9-10; Psalm 115:1-3; Psalm 127:1; I Chronicles 29:11-12; Proverbs 21:30.

Evangelism

Converting sinners is God's work: drawing out from their sins a people for His possession, a people who will call on His name and worship Him. How can we say we love Him and He lives in us if we won't be about His business? Evangelism must be our business, too.

Bill Bright's definition of evangelism: "Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God."

Biblical basis for evangelism: Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:16; Ezekiel 34:6

Horatius Bonar said, "When we can tell our people, 'We beheld His glory, and therefore we speak of it; it is not from report we speak, but we have seen the King in His beauty' – how lofty the position we occupy! Our power in drawing men to Christ springs chiefly from the fullness of our personal joy in Him, and the nearness of our personal communion with Him. The countenance that reflects most of Christ, and shines most with His love and grace, is most fitted to attract the gaze of a careless, giddy world, and win restless souls from the fascinations of creature love and creature-beauty."

"He that saved our souls has taught us to weep over the unsaved. Lord, let that mind be in us that was in Thee! Give us thy tears to weep; for, Lord, our hearts are hard toward our fellows. We can see thousands perish around us, and our sleep never be disturbed; no vision of their awful doom ever scaring us, no cry from their lost souls ever turning our peace into bitterness."

"How canst thou tell people that sin is such a thing, and that so much misery is upon them and before them, and be no more affected with it? Shouldst thou not weep over such a people, and should not thy tears interrupt thy words? Shouldst thou not cry aloud, and show them their transgressions; and entreat and beseech them as for life and death?" (from "Words to Winners of Souls," Chapel Library)

Your burden for seeing the lost come to Christ must exceed the pride in your life or you will not witness!

Sovereignty and Evangelism

So, which should impact the other? Should evangelism affect God's sovereignty, or vice-versa? Clearly, sovereignty impacts evangelism.

First, is God sovereign with respect to men's souls? Yes. Genesis 6:5-6.

Psalms 53:2-3 (and Ps. 14) describes God viewing all humankind, through all history, from Adam to the last human that will ever live. "God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Jeremiah 13:23 "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil."

If no one seeks God, why then is it that Jeremiah 29:12-13 says "Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."?

The answer: God can and does prepare hearts to be willing to hear the gospel. This is the hope of evangelism for us: God can soften a hardened heart! John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."

False Assumption: "No one I meet is interested in the gospel." The truth is, you cannot tell by looking at a person whether they are willing to hear the gospel! The only way to know is to ask!

Rule of Thumb: You should never attempt to share the gospel with a person without first receiving permission from that person. 1 Peter 3:15. This is a direct application of God's sovereignty. If God prepares hearts to hear the gospel, then He can and will prompt those He has prepared to give permission for you to speak with them. This rule should never reduce the sense of urgency to share the gospel. It is not an excuse for failing to share Christ!

When seeking permission:

- Be direct! Really. If God has prepared their heart, they will give you permission to talk to them. If He has not, they probably will not. It is not up to you! That's why, "we don't want to talk to anyone who doesn't want to talk to us."
- Be specific! You want to talk about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Not about your church; not about denominations; not about the weather; not even about ... 'God'.

Do not use evangelistic methods that undermine or disregard God's sovereignty!!

- Do not manipulate or deceive! 2 Corinthians 4:1-2
- Do not take credit for the number of souls saved! Salvation is of the Lord! Jonah 2:9; Revelations 7:10
- Do not force people to pray a prayer! According to Ephesians 2:1, the lost are dead, and you cannot make them rise again – only God can. If you "talk" someone into salvation, someone else will talk them out of it! Ernest Reisinger, in his book Today's Evangelism, writes, "Intellectual arguments will do no good for a dead man. You can try the sugar approach or the vinegar approach; you can entice him by the sweet promise of love and forgiveness; or thunder in his ears about the majesty of God, Mount Sinai and the threats of hell, or you can sit down with him night after night showing him the logic and beauty of the gospel. But if the Holy Spirit does not give him *spiritual life*, he cannot and will not savingly respond to the gospel." P. 51)

"One of David Livingstone's first converts was an African chief, Sechale, who thought he could make his tribesmen believe by force. So he suggested one day to Livingstone, 'I shall call my head man, and with our whips of rhinoceros hide, we will soon make them all believe together.'" Today's Evangelism, p. 51.

-Do not think people will be in hell because you did not convert them. The salvation of souls is not due to your piety, power of persuasion, or eloquence!

Do: plead with the Holy Spirit to convict and draw them to salvation!

Evangelism is like wind chimes. They make no noise unless the wind blows (the wind is the Holy Spirit). We must evangelize, for without it no sound will be heard. But we cannot dictate when the wind will blow. We must pray for it!