

# The Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man - Part 1

by Bob Hoekstra

---

*The sermon examines the complex relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, encouraging a balanced understanding of both concepts.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 18:23, Luke 9:23, John 3:16

**Topics:** "Sovereignty Of God", "Human Responsibility"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker explores the theological debate between Calvinism and Arminianism, which centers around the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The speaker acknowledges the apparent contradiction between these two truths and presents verses from the Bible to support both perspectives. They emphasize the free choice of man and the call for individuals to respond to God's invitation for salvation. The sermon concludes with a prayer for spiritual growth and a renewed mind to understand God's plans and purposes.

---

## Transcript

Surely, Lord, this is our opportunity. It's humbling to try and correlate and integrate these two glorious realities that the Word speaks of. And yet we thank you for your Holy Spirit.

We thank you for the revelation of your Word. We pray you'd speak to us in a very powerful way. We do want insight, but also we want comfort because we know this is going to stretch our minds and there's going to be some loose ends hanging out no matter how we come at it.

So we're just appealing to you by your Holy Spirit to bring this great subject to build us up in the faith, give us more of a perspective of your majestic, incomparable wisdom, and help us too, Lord, to have a good heart attitude that's ready to receive and yet willing to keep learning on this one. Lord, we lift up our own hearts to you. We really want to hear from you in a way that magnifies you and edifies your people.

We pray for those joining with us, Lord, on the internet and those later out of the archives and audio videotape. As your Word goes forth, we pray for the God of eternity, the timeless Lord God, to bless the Word in every one of these settings. Bring spiritual profit from this study, Lord.

Above all, let us grow in the knowledge of yourself, just getting more of a view into your heart, your mind, your plans. And Lord, renew our minds. We know you'll stretch our minds through this study.

Renew our minds. Give us enlarged capacity to think with you. And we just trust in you.

We sit down, Lord Jesus, at your feet. You're the master. You're the teacher.

We're the disciples. We're the learners. Teach us, we pray, by the work of your Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name, amen. Study number eight, the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. A little summary statement to catch it all in parentheses like we're trying to do in all these classes, acknowledging two apparently contradictory truths.

That's a pretty good summary, isn't it? Acknowledging two apparently contradictory truths. By way of introduction, theologically speaking, this would sort of be the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Not Arminian, Arminian.

Some of you have an Arminian physical heritage, that area of the country over there, up above Turkey and all, Armenia. No, Jacob Arminius, Arminian theology and Calvinistic theology. John Calvin and some of the Reformers contrasted with Jacob Arminius, Arminian theology.

John Calvin's theology, powerfully strong in seeing and declaring rightly, in so many ways, the sovereignty of God. But on the other hand, Jacob Arminius and Arminian theologians, who have their own long series of Bible verses, who stand strong on the responsibility of man, the choices of man. This is not a defense of either of those theologies, because the conviction of many of us, most of us in the Calvary Chapel teaching and leadership, and my own personal conviction, is that neither one of those systematic theologies or theological perspectives comprehensively deal with all the verses of the Word of God on these two issues.

It's a tough subject, and you kind of naturally gravitate for the Calvinistic or Arminian viewpoint, because if you land on either one, it seems to resolve the dilemma. Personally, I believe biblically that's unacceptable, because the scriptures leave the virtual paradox in our mind. I don't wrestle with this even a fraction to what I did 25 years ago, and maybe along the way I can share some of the reasons why and how God has comforted, encouraged my heart in this whole area.

I used to have fits, almost theological nightmares over this one. But once again, one's view on any issue, including this one, should be based on the Word of God, on the whole counsel of God, not selected passages, and not a defense of one's tradition. These are two strong traditions in the church world.

Calvinism, most often found in Reformed Christian churches, though you can find Reformed Baptist churches and others. And then Arminian theology, strong on the free will of man, as it were. You find that very present in the American church, probably more Arminianism than Calvinism, but they're both strongly present.

Really, in the Calvary chapels, just to set a bit of a testimony, because Calvary chapels, we're not the standard of measure on these things. Surely we understand and agree on that. The Word of God is the standard of measurement and evaluation.

The Calvary chapels are neither committed to Calvinism, Arminianism, either one. Really, we're partially both, and yet we partially reject both as a systematic theology. Not that we think we're better than John Calvin and those who've been disciplined through the years by him, or Jacob Arminius and those who've grasped and embraced his emphases and correlation to this issue.

It's not that. It's just when we look at the Word of God, we can see both these men and those who followed after them saw a lot of important things in the Word of God. We respect them for that.

We don't embrace the comprehensive conclusions they come to or how they get there. That's all. But in the whole body of Christ, we should be helping each other that way, learning from one another, but always measuring it back here, and let our allegiance be here, not to our tradition or theological heritage.

We're going to look now at, A, the election by God, and we'll note terms like chosen, elect, predestinated. These are strong terms that emphasize the sovereignty of God. God's in charge.

God has the right to lay things out the way His perfect wisdom and love lay them out, and it includes the election by God, our theme verse there, 1 Peter 1-2. Maybe spend more time on that later, but we can just read it right here, 1 Peter 1-2. The theme verse for this section, the election by God, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, addressing Christians as the elect, the chosen, the selected ones.

We'll come back to that verse later. Deuteronomy chapter 7, the election by God, the sovereign electing right of God. Deuteronomy 7, 6-8.

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth, God speaking to Israel. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than other people.

God didn't look on you and go, oh, look, there's just the greatest family of man ever. I'll take those. Actually, the sentence ends, for you are the least of all peoples.

He was looking for, you know, just the hottest going number in nations. He wouldn't have picked Israel. They're the least of all people, but because the Lord loves you.

The Lord wanted to exercise His great love on the children of Israel. But immediately, it wasn't some arbitrary exclusive club. God was going to reach out His love to all the Gentile nations too.

But why Israel? How Israel? God chose them. Why did He do that? Because He wanted to demonstrate His love toward them. Not because they were just so great He had to have them.

No, He just wanted to exercise a special demonstration of His love. And yeah, that love and relationship was to shine light to the nations, but He chose Israel as His own special treasure, a relationship that was going to be very intimate and unique. Matthew 24, the election by God.

Matthew 24, verse 22 and verse 24 and 31. Jesus teaching in the Olivet Discourse, prophetic revelation of the last days, tribulation and all that. And unless those days were shortened, verse 22, no flesh, no humanity would be saved.

But for the elect's sake, for those whom God had chosen, for their sake, those days will be shortened. For false Christs and false prophets, verse 24, will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect, the chosen ones, verse 31. And He will send His angels with the great sound of

a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The elect, those God has selected, chosen, picked out. John 15, verse 16. John 15, verse 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. Pretty strong statement, isn't it? You did not choose me, but I chose you. Now, we are going to see in a while, that though this is true, there's still some choosing left for man to do.

But bottom line, you can't say, the reason I'm in the kingdom of heaven is unlike most people, I just made a wise choice. Oh, that's involved. But there's more to it than just that.

Strong statement about electing and choosing God. You did not choose me, I chose you. Let's go a little further.

Romans 9, 10, and 11, of course, very strong chapters on the sovereignty of God and His freedom to choose and select. Romans 11, 5 through 7. Romans 11, 5. Even so then, at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

God just being gracious to elect. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

But if it is of works, it's no longer grace. Otherwise, work is no longer work. It has no meaning if you can earn it.

If it's by works, that's not what grace is about. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened, or could be translated, blinded. Perhaps like Pharaoh.

If you remember the story of Pharaoh, the initial reports on his response to what God was doing was Pharaoh hardened his heart. But by the time you're ended with the story, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. What was that? Judgment.

It's one thing when people harden their hearts. It's sad. It's tragic.

But the implication is if they won't respond, God will harden their hearts in judgment. Kind of the Romans 1 pattern. One of the most radical judgments God can give to man is let him have what he wants if he won't take what God offers.

But again, the election of grace. Ephesians 1, 4 through 6. Ephesians 1, 4 through 6. Just as He, God, chose us in Him, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the beloved. The election by God clearly here.

God chose us in Christ when? Before the foundation of the world. Wow. Pretty significant prior selection process.

Not, let's create a world, get some people out there. Let me see. Let's see.

No, no, no, no, no. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I'm sorry.

You know. Oh yes. No.

But before the foundation of the world. Wow. The election by God.

Then Colossians 3, 12. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering. The elect of God are called to live appropriately as the elect of God, but very straightforward, the elect of God.

Second Thessalonians 2, we'll get a lot of scripture out before us and then start to do some interrelating and commenting. Second Thessalonians 2, verse 13 and 14. But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Some of these verses already start to correlate some. God's sovereignty, our responsibility. You see it there? God's sovereignty chose us from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

That was part of the process. People believing the truth. To which He called you, the invitation, come by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But again, God from the beginning chose you for salvation. Then one more. We'll start to look at different kinds of verses.

First Peter 2.9. First Peter 2.9. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special or could be translated peculiar people. It's a nice word, isn't it? We probably prefer special people. The word could also be translated peculiar people.

I used to like that special people. I kind of lean now toward the peculiar people. I'm more, I'm willing to be more honest now.

Special kind of, and there's nothing wrong with translating it as special if you get it in a biblical context. Not special as in, oh wow, are you great? God couldn't wait to get you. No, that's not the implication.

But the flesh kind of likes the word special. Yeah, yeah, it's me. Just God's special person, you know.

Well, there's a lot of that in the church world today, you know. In Sunday school, they give the kids, you know, I am special to God. Well, you could have given them a sticker.

I am peculiar before God. You are a chosen generation. Well, these verses are strong on the election by God.

The elect, you do not choose me, I chose you. The election of grace chose us in Him before the foundation of the world according to the good pleasure of His will. As the elect of God, God from the beginning chose you for salvation.

These are strong statements. No wonder John Calvin and many others anchored a lot of their theology in here. These are gloriously important statements with great reality and substance and import.

But let's listen to verses quite unlike these. Let God exercise our mind a bit. Stretch it till it pops.

The Lord says, come let us reason together. You like to think? I'll give you something to think on. Put this together.

B, after the election by God, A, B, the free choice by man. That is, the responsibility of man. Or maybe a good biblical word to kind of make up the responsibility of man.

Put John 3.16 here as kind of a theme verse for this section, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. We'll spend some time on that in a minute. The free choice by man.

Ezekiel 18.23. Ezekiel 18.23. Now we've looked at some powerful verses on the reality of the electing, selecting, choosing sovereign right of God. How about Ezekiel 18.23? God speaking. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, says the Lord God, and not that He should turn from His ways and live? If you just look at some verses in the Scripture, you almost get the impression God just wanted to choose a few and He doesn't care what happens to the rest.

Hey, I've got mine. You know, put in kind of human vernacular terms. Oh, but wait a second.

God Himself says, do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, says the Lord, and not that He should turn from His ways and live? Now, not in focus is God's sovereign electing right, but now the perspective of men turning from their ways and living, and God taking no pleasure if they do anything but turn from their ways and live. Ezekiel 18.32. For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God, therefore turn and live. You might think, I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, so I'll just choose them.

Well, it would fit previous verses, wouldn't it? But what does this verse say? God's saying, therefore, speaking to you, people, turn and live. Some human choice involved here. You want to live? Turn and live.

Turn from your ways to My ways. Turn from your righteousness to My righteousness. Turn and live.

Ezekiel 33.11. Ezekiel 33.11. Say to them, God giving instructions to His prophet, say to them, to the nation, as I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn. Turn from your evil ways.

For why should you die, O house of Israel? This is a whole new kind of language from the verses we've been reading. And though at first glance, it seems like there's no way these could coexist side by side. Oh, yes, they do.

The sovereign right of God to be electing, selecting, and choosing, certainly proclaimed in the Word. And yet these words, from God to man, are words involving a response of choice. God's not pleased when the wicked die.

He's not just going to say, well, you know, I didn't elect them, so what's the difference? You know, I'm trying to put it in human thoughts. You know, God would never talk like that. And He doesn't.

Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? No. It doesn't please God. And not that He should turn from His ways and live.

Oh, I'm so glad they didn't turn to live. No way. God says His heart is this.

I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies. The point being, dies without the Lord. Therefore, therefore you, God speaking to people, therefore God addressing humanity, therefore humanity, turn.

Turn and live. Very blatantly, God says, so clear that it's talking about the wicked. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn.

What pleases God? What gives God pleasure? That the wicked turn. That pleases Him. So where does He leave it? Turn, turn from your evil ways, for why should you die? Calls for man to respond, that man might live.

That's why I like to kind of make up that word, responsibility. Yeah, man has a responsibility. What is that? Respond.

The sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man. The Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, Matthew 11, verse 28. Jesus speaking, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Let's chew on this word by word, phrase by phrase. Jesus speaking, God the Son, the Sovereign One, who has the right to choose and elect and select, says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.

Not a selected or predetermined few. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. Who would be included in those who labor and are heavy laden? All of humanity.

Everyone labors and gets loaded down here on earth. Everyone. With responsibility, with weariness, with challenge, with inadequacy, with guilt and condemnation and inner conviction, everybody labors and gets heavy laden.

And Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You come, I'll give you. Another invitation.

A command necessitating a response. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Come on, yoke up with me.

Come on, hitch up and let's walk together the rest of the way that you might learn from me and you'll find out I'm gentle, I'm lowly in heart, I'm not harsh, rough and aloof, and you will find rest for your souls. Come, who come? Anyone who's weary and heavy laden. And if you come, what will happen? Jesus says, I will.

I promise right now, you come, I will give you rest. Then those who come, He invites them to yoke up, walk with Him, stay with Him, learn of Him, and you'll find rest for your souls. So there's both an initial rest, undoubtedly the rest of regeneration, but then there's an ongoing rest in yoking up and walking with Him, the rest of sanctification, transformation.

Come, take. Come to me, take my yoke. If you come to me, I will give you rest.

If you take my yoke, stay with me, learn from me. As you're getting to know me, you'll find rest for your souls, a growing spiritual tranquility and peace and confidence in me. But both of these are a call for a responsive man.

Come to me initially and also be willing to say, yes, I want to yoke up with you, Lord. I come, and I want to walk with you right through life. Here's another one, Luke 9, 23 and 24.

Luke 9, 23 and 24. Then He, Jesus, said to them all, parallel passage in Mark 8, there was a the crowds, the curious, the casual, and the 12, the committed. He said to them all, everyone needs to hear the same thing.

I know we tend at times to package up the message and design it this way for that person, but really all need to hear this same message. He said to them all, the ones who were following Him already, the ones who were seeking Him out, the ones who wondered what the crowd was about, the ones who maybe just thought, hey, maybe today another free meal, or the interested in something spectacular, wonder if he'll walk on water today. And in the crowd were the religious, the self-righteous, Pharisees, Sadducees, the liberals, the intellectuals, the doubters.

They were all there. Then He said to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, anyone, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. Boy, these terms, all, anyone, and whoever, oh my goodness, this is a completely different language from the verses we've already looked at, which are limiting, it seems, selecting, narrowing down. He said to them all, and He says to us, if anyone desires to come after Me, wants to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, here's what's involved.

Let him deny himself. Let him say no. Here's some real responsibility issues, responsibility issues, personal choices.

Let him say no to the self-life. And take up his cross, another choice. Take up his cross, cling to the cross of Christ as that which alone can deal fully with the self-life.

And notice, do that daily. It's a way of life, not just a step onto the path of life. And follow Me.

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it. Boy, how many people are losing it all because they're always about protecting self, saving the self-life, improving it, trying to make it acceptable to God. They lose the whole thing.

But whoever loses his life, whoever, that's as broad a term as you can get, loses his life. Just let it go. Lord, my life will never be acceptable to You.

I let that life go for Your sake. They save it, what a life. They find a new life in Christ.

Boy, here's a very interesting one. This one is, in my personal study notes, I've got stars all around this one. This is an amazing one.

Luke 13. Luke 13, 34. Jesus is speaking, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.

How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood. You know, how often I wanted to gather you to Myself like a hen with her brood under her wings. But you were not willing.

Boy, that's one to chew on. What was the heart of the Lord Jesus for Israel? What was His heart for Israel? I wanted to gather your children together. I wanted to bring them under My wings as My own.

That was His will. That was His heart. Then why didn't He? But you were not willing.

You were not willing. Boy, that's an interesting one, isn't it? It was the will and heart of the Son of God to gather them under His wings as His own, like a hen would her chicks. But in light of the previous verses, you'd almost think the verse would end, but you know, I didn't choose you back there, so what can I do? I mean, that would fit in a human logic, wouldn't it? Once I got here, I wanted to gather you, but back there before the foundation of the world, I didn't choose you, so you know, hands off.

No, that would kind of fit human logic, but that's not at all what it says. Jesus says, I wanted to, but you weren't willing. Wow.

You know, just when you think that the whole issue is the sovereignty of God and His choosing and selecting, another major factor pops up. I wanted to gather you, but you wouldn't come. If you want to jot down in the space in your notes there, John 5, 40, kind of fits here.

John 5, 40, Jesus teaching again, and He said in verse 39, You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Me, but you are not willing to come to Me that you might have life. Yeah, you get in the Word, and the Word's telling you all about Me. It's like, there I am, I'm offered, but what was their problem? You are not willing to come to Me that you might have life.

Amazing verses, especially Luke 13, 34. Luke 13, 34. Let's go a little further.

John 3, 14 and 15 and 16. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

In these three verses, three terms, whoever appears twice, and the term world appears once. God so loved the world that whoever believes. His love is for the world.

Believing is offered to whoever will. John chapter 4, verses 13 and 14. The woman at the well, Jesus answered and said to her, whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water, springing up into everlasting life.

The language again is very strong, whoever. It's about the most comprehensive term you could get to point out any individuals among a complete whole group, whoever. Acts 2, 21, and it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Whoever calls, those are the ones who shall be saved. Romans 10, 8 through 13. You know, you've noticed haven't you, Romans 9, 10 and 11, some of strongest statements in all of the Bible on the sovereignty of God and his right to choose and select and all that? Romans 9, 10, 11.

Notice though in Romans 10, 8 through 13, but what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith which we preach. It's right there for you.

The gospel, which is the word to be trusted in, the word of faith, a word to believe in, which we preach to you, that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the scripture says, whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.

For there's no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It's amazing in these chapters that are so strong on the sovereign right of God to choose and select. The language of whoever believes, whoever calls and is rich to all who call upon him. Astounding.

Let's go a little further, then we'll have a good chance to reflect on a lot of these. 2nd Peter 3 9. 2nd Peter 3 9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, look at this, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The promise of the Lord to come back and bring a new heaven and new earth and all that and things never be the same again.

Some people think God's slack on that promise. Oh come on, things are always like they've always been. What's this cataclysmic change? No way.

God promised to do that? Sure is slack on his promise, isn't he? Oh that's a total misapprehension of what's happening. It's not that God is slack on his promise, it's he's longsuffering. It's not that he can't get around to doing or can't do what he said he'd do.

That's not the point at all. Why hasn't he done all these things he promised to bring everything to conclusion, new heaven, new earth, and all that? Because he's longsuffering. He's putting up with us.

He's hanging in there more time. Why? You might say, well just so that little elect group can get saved. Well you can build a picture somewhat like that with some of the scripture, but what do you do with this? He's longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish.

It's not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. One more verse, Revelation 22, 17. Revelation 22, 17.

And the spirit and the bride say, come. And let him who hears say, come. And let him who thirsts, come.

And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

---

Audio: [http://archive.org/download/SERMONINDEX\\_SID18288/SID18288.mp3](http://archive.org/download/SERMONINDEX_SID18288/SID18288.mp3)

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/bob-hoekstra/the-sovereignty-of-god-and-the-responsibility-of-man-part-1/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**