

**ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**  
**THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN,**  
**AND THE HEART OF GOD AS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL**

**By C.H. MacKintosh**

Matthew 20:16, sets forth the grand principle of divine sovereignty. "The last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." God has a right to do what He will with His own. Will anyone dare to question this? If so, it is plain he has never felt his true place as utterly lost. The only resource for a lost sinner is God's sovereign grace. There is no man who can stand before God on the ground of his own righteousness. All are guilty; and hence the only resource is in divine mercy; but this mercy must be sovereign. To deny God's right to be sovereign is to deny His existence. Does this touch, for a moment, the truth of man's responsibility? By no means. Both are true, and it is utterly impossible that two truths can ever clash. To attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility is gratuitous labour. They are reconciled already, being both set forth, with equal clearness, in the divine word. It is wonderful how simple everything becomes when we fling aside the dogmas of one-sided theology, and come like a child to holy scripture. Would that all the Lord's people could but do this.

There is a very lovely passage at the close of the book of Revelation, to which you have not referred. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 20:17.) This is but one of a large number of passages which give us the other side of the subject. Your letter is entirely one sided. The writer of the article to which you call our attention, rejects utterly the notion of man's free will. He believes that man is perfectly powerless; and not only so, but in a state of positive enmity against God, so that, if left to himself, he never would come to Christ. All who come to the supper are compelled to come, else they never would be there.

Moreover he most fully believes in the sovereignty of God; and that the names of all who are saved were written in the Lamb's book of life, before the foundation of the world.

But then, on the other side—for we must take both sides—let us ponder such words as these: "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." I Timothy 2:1-6.

And again, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to

repentance." 2 Peter 3:9.

Now, if it be said, that, in the above scriptures, the words "any" and "all" refer to the elect, we reply that this is an unwarrantable liberty to take with the word of God. If the inspired writer had meant, "any of the elect," or "all of the elect," he would, most assuredly, have said so. But he says nothing of the kind. It is not according to the desire of the heart of God that any should perish.

But man is a responsible being; although your letter is totally silent on this very important question. In short, you seem to lose sight altogether of two weighty truths: first, the largeness of the heart of God—the fulness and freeness of His grace—the wide aspect of His salvation—that His righteousness is unto, all—that the gospel is to be preached to every creature—that God commandeth 211 men everywhere to repent. Mark 16:15; Acts 27:30; Romans 3:22.

And, secondly, man's responsibility. Is the sinner responsible or is he not? If he be not responsible, then what mean such words as these—"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels; in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" And again, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 2:11, 12.

Are men responsible to believe the gospel? Yes, verily, inasmuch as they shall be punished with everlasting destruction for rejecting it. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? People find difficulty in reconciling man's powerlessness with his responsibility. It is none of one business to reconcile things that are revealed in Holy Scripture. It is ours to believe. They are reconciled, inasmuch as they are distinctly taught in the word of God. It is remarkable that we do not see the same difficulty in reference to the things of this life. Suppose a man owes you a thousand pounds; but he has by unprincipled extravagance, rendered himself wholly unable to pay you. He is quite powerless. Is he responsible? And are you not perfectly justified, according to worldly principles, in taking legal proceedings against him? How much more will God be justified in His judgment of all those who reject the glad tidings of a full and free salvation sent to them on the ground of the atoning death of His only begotten Son!

We cannot at all agree with you in your remark that, "It appears a yea and nay gospel" to call upon men to believe. Our blessed Master called upon men to "repent and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15.) And when asked by the men of His time, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" His reply was, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) Again, He challenges the Jews with this pungent question, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8:46.) Then, when we turn to the Acts of the Apostles we find Peter calling upon the Jews to repent and be converted. We find Paul telling the Philippian jailor to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." He tells the Athenians that "God commandeth all men, everywhere to repent." We read in 2 Thessalonians that our Lord Jesus Christ will take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel, and further that "God shall send

them strong delusion that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth."

Now, we must confess it seems to us a very serious thing, in the face of all these passages, to call it, "a yea and nay gospel" to press upon men their responsibility to believe. But the fact is, dear friend, your difficulty is occasioned by the influence of a one-sided theology—a system which we can only compare to a bird with one wing or a boat with one oar. When we turn to the sacred page of God's word, we find the truth, not one side of truth, but the whole truth in all its bearings. We find, lying side by side, the truth of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Are we called to reconcile them? Nay, they are reconciled already because they are both set forth in the word. We are to believe and obey. It is a fatal mistake for men to frame systems of divinity. You can no more systematize the truth of God than you can systematize God Himself. Let us abandon, therefore, all systems of theology and schools of divinity, and take the truth. There is not a single theological system under the sun that contains the truth. All may contain some truth, not one contains all. And very often you find that whatever little truth the system contains is misplaced and turned the wrong way, to the serious damage of truth as a whole, and the stumbling and injury of souls. Every day we live we are more and more struck with the vast difference between the dogmas of divinity and the heart—the world—the Christ of God.

The rendering of I Timothy 2:4, in our excellent authorized version, is perfectly correct. Your difficulty arises from your not seeing the immense difference between theology and the heart of God. Theology consists of the conclusions of men's minds drawn from the facts of scripture; and you may constantly find souls harassed and perplexed by the dogmas of conflicting schools of theology, instead of resting, in child-like simplicity, upon the plain statements of the word of God. In point of fact, what is called the high school of doctrine is right in what it holds, and wrong in what it rejects; and, on the other hand, the low school of doctrine is right in what it holds, and wrong in what it rejects. The former holds predestination, election, divine sovereignty, and the eternal security of all true believers; and herein it is right: But it denies the full offer of salvation to all men, and human responsibility; and herein it is wrong. The low school of doctrine holds the freeness and fulness of salvation, and the moral responsibility of the sinner; and herein it is right. But it denies the sovereignty of divine grace and the security of the believer; and herein it is wrong. You will bear in mind, dear friend, that when we use the terms "high school," and "low school," we do not at all mean to give offence; far from it; we merely speak of things as they are. For ourselves we desire to be taught exclusively by scripture, and not by any school of divinity. We are quite sure that God never meant to puzzle, to repulse, or to discourage poor souls—no never. God is love, His grace has brought salvation unto all. "He willeth not the death of a sinner." "He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Such is His gracious aspect toward all; and hence if any perish, it is not in pursuance of the will of God. But there is another side to this great question. Man is responsible. What mean those touching words of the weeping Saviour, "How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, but ye would not!" And again, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Do you not see, dear friend, that scripture as distinctly teaches divine sovereignty as it teaches human responsibility—and the permanency of salvation as distinctly as its freeness? Are we called upon to reconcile these

things? Nay; they are reconciled by God Himself inasmuch as they are taught in His holy word; we have only to bow our heads in believing and adoring reverence. It is a great matter to make one's escape from the labyrinths of systematic divinity, and yield ourselves to the formative power of the whole truth of God. We shall merely add, ere we close this reply, that scripture clearly teaches the doctrine of election, but sedulously excludes the repulsive doctrine of reprobation. It teaches that all who reach heaven will have to thank God for it; and all who find their place in hell will have to thank themselves.

2 Corinthians 5:14, and many other passages of scripture, teach in the most distinct manner, that Christ died for all. The aspect of the death of Christ, as also of the righteousness of God, is unto all; but when we came to the practical application, it is "upon all them that believe." All who hear are responsible to believe, for the message is sent into all the world, and to every creature. "*Whosoever* will, let him take the water of life freely." But what stumbles and perplexes so many people is that they are occupied with the dogmas of theology. Instead of the love of God, the atonement of Christ and the record of the Holy Ghost. The moment you take any doctrine of scripture, whether it be election, predestination, final perseverance, or any other doctrine whatsoever, and detach it from the Person of Christ, and the living and eternal reality of what God is, you instantly turn it into a stumbling-block. You may set it down as an absolute truth, dear friend, that our gracious God would never have people to be puzzled about their souls' salvation. Theology often puzzles people, but God never does. As to cavillers, it would be far more honest of them to declare plainly that they do not want to have anything to say to God, than to be seeking to find out flimsy objections against His word.

You must distinguish between Genesis 45:23 and Malachi 1:2, 3. The former was uttered before the children were born: the latter, hundreds of years afterwards, when the conduct and character' of each were fully manifested. It is important to -mark this difference. And not only so, but we must seek to understand the object of the Holy Ghost in His use of the above scriptures in Romans 9. The apostle is establishing the absolute sovereignty of divine mercy—God's right to do as He will. He Proves to Israel that to argue against divine sovereignty is to surrender all their privileges. For how did they get in? Was it by birth? No; for on that ground Ishmael and Esau had the precedence. Was it by birth? No; for on that ground Ishmael and Esau had the precedence. Was it by works? No; for they made the golden calf. How then? Simply by God's sovereign mercy. Well, then, if God is sovereign He can have mercy upon whom He will; and blessed be His Name, that opens the door for us poor Gentiles.

Like many others, you confound two distinct passages of Holy Scripture. "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated" was not said before the children were born but hundreds of years after, when the real character and practical ways of each had been fully manifested. All that was said before the children were born was that "the elder shall serve the younger." It is more than a sad mistake to represent God as hating a man before he was born. In the first chapter of Amos we read "For three transgressions of Edom [Esau] and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever." Have we not here ample grounds for the divine hatred? If you will carefully compare Genesis 45:23 with Malachi 1:2, 3, you will see your mistake, and you will better understand the apostle's use of both passages in his

magnificent argument in Romans 9—an argument so little understood by theologians.

You are fully warranted by the word of God to entreat any sinner to come to Jesus at once. It is very evident that your mind is perplexed by the mis-application of scripture. If you will only submit to the authority of the word, and not labour to reconcile things according to your own thoughts, or the creeds of men. You will find that human responsibility is as distinctly taught in scripture as human impotency. We must bow down, with unquestioning submission, to the teachings of divine inspiration.

We could not think of confining Matthew 11:28-30 in the way you suggest. We believe it refers to every weary, heavy laden, laboring sinner, Jew or Gentile. All such are made welcome to the "rest" which Jesus gives to those who come to Him.

We do not consider that John 9:31 has anything to do with the matter to which you refer. The Holy Ghost records what the blind man said to the Pharisees; but we believe that God is ever ready to bear the cry of any poor needy soul that looks to Him through Jesus. We are, each day, more and more convinced of the vast differences between the cold dogmas of theology and the loving heart of a Saviour-God. There is a rigid, repulsive manner of using the letter of certain texts of scripture, with which we have no sort of sympathy; we believe it to be contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and the mind of Christ. "God is love." Precious words! True, He has His counsels and purposes; but the activity of His nature is love, and therefore all are welcome to come. He is a Saviour-God; and "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Go on, therefore, beloved, to press upon your fellow-sinners, with all possible earnestness, their solemn responsibility to flee, now, from the wrath to come, and lay hold upon eternal life.

You must remember that there are two sides to every question; and hence, while it is blessedly true that salvation is free to all, and the righteousness of God is to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly (see Rom. 4:5 and Titus 2:11), yet is the sinner most solemnly responsible to flee from the wrath to come, and strive to enter by the strait gate—the open door. To make use of the freeness of God's grace, and of the gift of righteousness, in order to set aside man's responsibility, and the need of intense earnestness in the matter of the soul's salvation, is, in our judgment, a fatal mistake. Hence the exceeding value of the passage to which you call our attention. (Luke 13:24.) In it we have the Lord's reply to a curious enquirer whom He would fain make anxious. He, as was His wont, answers the man, not his question.

2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9 contains an answer, distinct and clear, to your query, "What will become of those who reject the gospel?" We most assuredly believe there will be no further offer of mercy to those who deliberately reject the gospel now preached—no mercy for baptized Christendom, the vine of the earth. "The everlasting gospel" shall go forth, previous to the opening of the millennial kingdom and a testimony shall be given to those nations who have not heard the gospel; but all this leaves untouched the solemn fact that unmitigated warrior judgment shall overtake that terrible thing called Christendom—that dark and awful mass of baptized profession—the most dreadful moral blot in the universe of God. There is nothing for the false professing church save the deep and dark delusion which God, in His judicial dealing,

shall send upon all who obey not the truth, and after that the deeper and darker doom of the lake of fire. Dear friend, should not the thought of this make us more solemn, more earnest, more real in our dealing with our fellow men? Ought we not to be more alive to the awful condition and destiny of those who die in their sins? Are we doing all we might to rescue our fellows from impending danger? Is it right to fold our arms and say, with chilling indifference, "God will save the elect, we can do nothing?" We believe it to be simply absolute cruelty—heartless cruelty—cruelty to souls—cruelty sanctified by being tacked on to the dogmas of a one-sided theology.

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