

7. His or yours?

October 17, 2010

Many of you remember one of my comments, "If your opinion contradicts the Word of God, it means that you are wrong. Because God's Word is always correct." Yes, I still stand on that statement without hesitation.

But what if there are two truths mentioned in the Bible that seem to be contradicting one another? Can both be correct? Or one of them is wrong which proves that the Bible is wrong since it advocates both as truth.

Now that I have thoroughly confused you, please allow me to explain it by making an illustration.

Let's say Jon has a distant relative whom he does not know well, but he left all of his wealth of 200 million dollars to Jon Rupp. Since this young man is a super nice Christian, he decided to cover the entire expenses of the trip to Israel for everyone in our church next November. Say, "Thank you, Jon," everybody. It is only an illustration, not real.

Jon made a special charter arrangement for a 737 from the El Al, the Israel Airlines to fly all of us from Tucson International Airport to Tel Aviv none-stop. You all are in the plane now. To make a flight from Tucson to Tel Aviv, Israel, the FAA – Federal Aviation Administration and the ICAO – International Civil Aviation Organization had to be notified and the El Al has to submit the flight plan and receive a permission from them. They are both involved to set the course, the flight pattern, and the schedule when the plane is going to take off and land. It has been decreed and nothing can change it.

However, you all have your own freedom to choose to go to this free trip to Israel. Everything is paid for – foods, hotel, bus tour, airfare, etc. You can say, "No, thanks. I will go to Israel at my own expense, since I don't like Jon." Even on board the plane are passengers with free will. You can eat, sleep, watch movies, listen to music, talk with one another, or pray throughout the entire flight because you are scared to death of flying. While you all are doing your own things on board, the plane continues to fly to Tel Aviv.

This illustration gives us a brief description of the divine sovereignty and human free will. They both are absolutely true and exist in the Bible and they do not contradict. We will witness these two facts in this small portion of Scriptures.

A. JESUS FOUND PHILIP

John 1:43-44 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

From last Sunday's study, we found that two of John the Baptist's disciples became Jesus' by their own free will. Then one of them, Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter to the Lord.

Here in v 43 and 44, we find the Lord Jesus went out and found Philip who was from Bethsaida which means 'the house of fish'. It obviously was a fishing town near the Sea of Galilee.

This is out of norm in typical sense of the ancient rabbi. Usually a man seeks a rabbi to be his disciple. Never a rabbi comes up and invites somebody to be his inner circle.

Another thing we must notice is that Jesus didn't stumble upon Philip at Bethsaida. He purposely went to Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee to meet Philip. This shows the omniscient attribute of Jesus as God. In case you are not familiar with the term 'omniscient,' it means 'all knowing.' Only God can have this ability, not your mom. She just made you to think that she knew everything about you when you were a kid.

By God's sovereign will, the born-again believers were predestined. If I explain this in a simpler way, here it is: God, before the creation of the universe, designated all the born-again believers to be His chosen people.

Then, I know that some will say, "That is completely unfair. What if I was not chosen, but I want to be a born-again Christian? Since He has already designated, it means I cannot be one of them, huh?" I have a perfect answer for that: "Commit your life to Christ, then you will find out that you are one of them." Then, someone else may say, "Wait a minute, I don't like that. It sounds like God is shoving down His way to us. What if I chose not to be one?" Then I will say, "You just prove that you are not one of the chosen ones by God."

Let's stop here and get the definition of 'sovereignty of God'. It is "God's absolute right to do all things according to His own good pleasure."

Romans 9:21-23 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory

B. WE HAVE FOUND HIM

John 1:45-46 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Please note the word Philip used in v45 – 'found Him'. Wow, really, Philip? You mean that the Messiah was lost somewhere in the universe and you guys found Him? Not!

I like a portion of the lyrics of the most popular hymn "Amazing Grace":
"I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see"

Does it mean Philip's comment to Nathanael was wrong? No, he was correct.

Though God's predestination and election of individual believers were done before the creation of the universe, those individuals must make their own choices to follow the Lord Jesus.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John 7:37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."

Scripture after Scripture, we find these commands for the unbelievers to respond to the Lord with their own free will and choice by faith.

I know that what I am talking about now are really heavy theologies – the deep mysteries of election, predestination and free will of man.

Some have tried to solve these complicated theologies with their own opinions for the last five hundred years. Two of the most well-known schools of theologies are Calvinism and Armenianism. We learned about these when we studied the Book of Romans. So I just am providing you an insert for your further study and we are not going to take time on this issue again.

I had to laugh about the comment that Nathanael made in v46, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* You talk about a prejudice.

Long ago, my pastor Robert Furrow of Calvary Tucson was joking about this statement when we were attending there. He said, *“Nazareth was the armpit of Israel like Gallup, NM is the armpit of America.”* That night my wife Karen said, *“When we see pastor Robert again, you should tell him that I am from Gallup.”* That weekend we were invited to a birthday party where pastor Robert also was there. So I told him, *“When you mentioned Gallup is the armpit of America, you offended my wife because she is from Gallup.”* His face got red and started to stumble and frantically apologized. I laughed and told him that it was a joke. You see, for many silly things I do, I was coached by my wife sometimes. She is the brain with a pair of gorgeous innocent-looking blue eyes.

Many smart people have a hard time understanding this co-existence of Divine predestination through God’s Sovereignty and human free will in the Bible. Somehow they think that we should choose one or another. I am so glad that I am not one of those smart people. Because I just believe what the Bible says. This is how I believe: *“The sovereign, all knowing God knew who is going to choose to receive Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord by one’s own free will before the creation, so He simply confirmed it with His predestination procedure.”* What is so difficult about that?

C. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

John 1:47-48 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

In these two verses, we find a very important theology:

- **The providence of God**

God does not cause or approve of sin, but only limits, restrains, overrules it for good. The mode of God’s providence is altogether unexplainable. We only know that it is a fact that God does govern all His creatures and all their actions with His foreknowledge and is consistent with His own perfection, and to His own glory.

Some of you are looking at me like a deer looking at headlights – *“Say what?”* God, with His all knowing capability, supernaturally prearranges natural events according to His will and people’s free will. Does it mean that it is a miracle? No. Miracle is the intervention of God’s supernatural power imposed upon the natural world.

Providence comes from the Latin word, ‘providentia’ which means *“to see in advance.”* God sees in advance and can call the shots.

These two guys are getting schooled in theology in one paragraph like a little crash course.

D. THE RIGHT RESPONSE

John 1:49-51 Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

You may know people like Nathanael who was very analytical. They have to see the procedures, evidences, proofs and do their own investigation before they say, "OK." Those type of people can drive me crazy. Though I am rather organized, I tend to jump in more than evaluate everything. It can be both good and bad.

Nathanael heard what Philip said about this Jesus from Nazareth. In spite of his own prejudice about the town, he chose to investigate about Jesus himself. When he came to Jesus, the Lord told Nathanael about the things that no stranger could know – his character and where he was before he came to see Him.

Nathanael's response to the Lord was the right one. He called Him, "The Son of God and the King of Israel." Many people hear the truth when they come to the Bible teaching churches through the Word of God. But the majority of them do not make the right choice.

You all know I give out altar calls at the end of almost every Sunday service. In many cases, unbelievers walk out the door by refusing the invitation of the Lord. By refusing the Lord's invitation, they are saying to Him, "No thanks. I don't believe what You said. I can do it just fine with my own." What a tragedy he or she is going to find at the end of their lives!

Let me put it in this way. If you are not a born-again Christian, please listen carefully. Let's say you and your friend are in the middle of a sea with violent waves all around you. You are about to drown because you can not see a shore and the waves are too difficult for you to swim. A big ship came near to you and threw a rope to you. At this point, you have a choice: You can grab the rope for your dear life and let them pull you up out of the churning sea, or you can say in your pride, "No thanks. I am a good swimmer. I can make my way to safety. Besides, I don't like the color of the rope and the way you threw it at me." But your friend said, "I will take it." He grabbed the rope and was hoisted up to the boat.

You see, the boat is God the Father in heaven. He knows that without Him you are going to be in hell. So He sent His only begotten Son Jesus – in this case, the rope – to save your life that you may have an eternal life in heaven. Do you get the picture now?

In v51, Jesus described Himself as the ladder where men could come and go up to heaven only through Him.

E. APPLICATION

Even though God's predestination and election are already designated, you won't know if you are one of those chosen ones by God until you say, "Yes" to the Lord Jesus.