

“Am I Really Free or Has God Determined Everything?”

The relationship between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility is a difficult issue to reconcile from the Scripture. We are going to examine two extreme options and then look at the Scripture for some biblical balance.

Option 1: Strongly Emphasize Free Will

Arminian/Wesleyan theology:

- Everybody has a spark of good given by God.
- God elects based upon prior knowledge of our faith.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

—Romans 8:29

- Loss of salvation is possible through sin.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

—Hebrews 10:26 - 27

Problems:

- Underemphasizes depravity (Romans 3; Eph 2).

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

—Ephesians 2:1 - 3

- Overemphasizes the role of man (John 1:12-13)
- Eternal security is Scripturally clear (John 10:28-29)

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
—John 10:28 - 29

Option 2: Strongly Emphasize God's Sovereignty

Calvinist Theology:

- Total depravity (Eph 2:1-3)
- Unconditional election (Romans 9:19-23)

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

—Romans 9:19 - 23

- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace (John 6:44; Romans 8)
- Perseverance of the saints (James 2:14-26)

Problems with Calvinist Theology:

- Biblical support for limited atonement is weak (1 John 2:2; 2 Tim 4:10).

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

—1 John 2:2

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.
—1 Timothy 4:10

- Faith is presented in Scripture as a responsibility (1 Peter 2:6-9; John 1:12-13).

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be

put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
—1 Peter 2:6 - 9

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
—John 1:12 - 13

- There are biblical examples of failure to persevere (1 Corinthians 3).
- Praying (James 5:16), preaching and hearing genuinely affect faith (Romans 10:13-17).

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”
—Romans 10:13 -16

Option 3: Biblical Balance

Biblical Boundaries:

- Total Depravity (Eph 2; 2 Corinthians 4:4)

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
—2 Corinthians 4:4

- Unconditional single election (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.
—1 Peter 1:1 - 2

- The Responsibility of Faith (Acts 16:31; John 1:12).
- Disobedience is possible but tragic for believers (1 Cor 3:10-15).

Conclusions:

- Trust God's promises (Romans 8:38-39).
- Take assurance from Christ's work.
- Worship the mysterious and mighty God!