

Spirit-Filled Pastor Unpacks the Divine Mystery That's Divided the Church for Ages

Although salvation is a supernatural act of God that cannot be fully comprehended, the Scriptures offer many insights. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44), but He also encouraged people to turn from sin and turn toward God (repent). Jesus often "marveled" at the unbelief of people because of their failure to respond.

With that said, I believe that there should be a healthy tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. This issue should not create a spirit of division, elitism or theological superiority. When it comes to salvation, it is my very firm belief that God gets all the glory and all the credit. Salvation is His work. We are never outside of God's sovereignty and control.

A healthy tension revolves around the question, "Could God have created man to receive His offer of salvation or reject it?" Jesus said in Mark 10:15, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter it." Without question, the ability to exercise faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). But does this mean that man does not have the ability to receive or reject the gift that is being offered? This ability (if it did exist) does not make man good, quite the contrary, it makes him utterly dependent, desperate and without hope unless he receives what God has offered (see Mark 10:15).

1 Corinthians 2:14 states, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The word "receive" (*dechomai*) means to

take hold of or to welcome. The natural man definitely does not welcome the things of God, but can he accept or reject them? I do not welcome visitors at 1 a.m., but it does not follow that I cannot receive or welcome them. I understand that this is a weak comparison in regard to salvation, and that human analogies come from our limited understanding, but it offers a picture that we can understand.

In Romans 1:20s, we learn that we are without excuse: "Since the creation of the world and are understood by the things that are made, so that they are without excuse." Our "will is in bondage to sin and therefore sins of necessity, but that this necessity is, as it were, voluntary" (Calvin, *Institutes*). But can a person be "without excuse" who does not have the ability to perform what is being asked? I don't think so. It would be like punishing a 1-month-old infant for disobeying a command to walk and conclude that she is "without excuse" even though she cannot walk? This makes no sense. How can a God who "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) only choose an elect small minority?

In Matthew, Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter heaven. Why is it more difficult for a rich man to enter heaven than a poor man? Because riches draw us away from God and His call to repent and believe: "But when the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful. For he had great possessions" (Matt. 19:22). It appears that his possessions, not his non-election, prevented Him from following Christ.

Regardless, these questions do not sway my firm belief in God's sovereignty and the foundational doctrines of the faith. Knowing God is in full control brings tremendous peace and joy, especially through trials. My goal is to be faithful to the command to preach and witness while understanding that God does the drawing, saving and sealing. He uses us to accomplish His purposes. He doesn't "need us," but chooses to use us for His glory. I believe that Scriptures provide a healthy tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. I will

seek to do the same.