

## God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility (Acts 2:22-24)

© 2013 Tony Garland<sup>a</sup>

---

### Previous sessions and context

1. Jesus tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the “Promise of the Father,” indicating they would be “baptized by the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5).
2. When questioned about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, Jesus redirects focus to the Great Commission.
3. God is shifting gears from what had been the presentation of the kingdom to Israel (in the form of their king) to the gospel presentation to all nations which is to follow.
4. The Great Commission is to be facilitated by a change in the nature of the body of Christ upon earth: literal body of Christ departs (chapter 1) and the spiritual body of Christ is formed (chapter 2).
5. The Promise of the Father: a new ministry of Spirit baptism by which believers are joined to the body of Christ (Rom. 6:3; 1Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).
6. Body of Christ == the Church, which finds its beginning on the Day of Pentecost
  - A. Mabana Chapel statement of beliefs: *We believe that the universal church, the Body of Christ, is comprised of all believers from the Day of Pentecost to the "Rapture." At the point of salvation every believer was baptized into the Body of Christ and received spiritual gifts for service (Acts 1:5; Acts 2:33-47; 1 Corinthians 12:11-13).*<sup>1</sup>
7. Jews from surrounding countries hear wonders of God proclaimed in their native languages, but locals could not understand and mocked.
8. A subtle sign of judgment — the wonders are not proclaimed in the local language of the mockers, but in Gentile languages of the dispersion.
9. Peter explained the miracle of speaking in unlearned languages as a sign of the pouring forth of the Spirit, compatible with previous predictions of the prophet Joel.

---

### Gospel presentation

1. **Today's passage: Peter begins to present the gospel (Acts 2:22-24).**

*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.<sup>2</sup>*

- A. **Peter interprets the events of Pentecost in light of the gospel.**
- B. **The events of Pentecost flow from the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and demonstrate Christ's victory over death.**
- C. **Notice the evangelical aspect of the passage Peter quoted from Joel which ends with *And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.* (Acts 2:21 cf. Joel 2:23)**

2. **Peter presents the gospel in the known, common tongue of his listeners.**

- A. **Tongues not used for communicating the content of the gospel to foreigners (in chapter 10 it will be the *recipients* of the gospel message who speak in unlearned languages).**
- B. **A miraculous sign with two primary functions in this setting.**
  - I. **Disciples: knew promise arrived**
  - II. **Visiting Jews: attention getting, explanation led to gospel presentation to Jews from Gentile lands (to the Jew first, but gospel taken back to Gentile locations)**

3. **Focus on two aspects from Peter's presentation of the gospel**

- A. **God's sovereignty vs. man's responsibility (today)**
- B. **Christ's victory over death (next time)**

---

## **God's sovereignty and man's responsibility**

1. **Is this a seeker-friendly message? (No and Yes! No: offensive, yes: communicates the truth)**

- A. **Christ was “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God”**

- B. **“you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death”**
- C. **Which is it? Was the crucifixion brought about by God's purpose? Or was it caused by the lawlessness of man?**
- D. **If it was God's determined purpose, how can it be considered lawless (a violation of God's law)?**
- E. **If men are morally responsible for the crucifixion, doesn't this infer they must have had the potential capability of accepting Christ. If they had, what would have become of the cross and redemption?**

2. **Does this passage really say what it appears to be saying?**

A. **“determined purpose” (NKJV) = ὠρισμένη βουλή [hōrismenē boulē]**

I. **“determined” = ὠρισμένη [hōrismenē] from ὀρίζω [horizō]**

- a. **“to ordain”, used of Christ as ordained of God to be a Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 17:31)**
- b. **passive voice - determined by the Father upon the Son**
- c. **perfect tense - the determination was completed in time past**
- d. **The death of Christ was a “done deal,” something *settled*, *appointed* and *decreed* by the Father before it ever took place in history. <sup>3</sup>**
- e. **The same word is used in a similar passage concerning the role of Judas in the crucifixion, a passage which also juxtaposes God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.**
  - i. *But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!* (Luke 22:21–22)
  - ii. **Jesus knew His betrayal was inevitable, but this fact did not reduce the complicity or guilt of Judas one iota.**

II. **purpose = βουλή [boulē], can also be translated as “plan” (NASB, NIV)**

III. **Phrase translated as “predetermined plan” (NASB), or “set plan” (NIV)**

IV. **Similar pairing of words occurs in the prayer of Peter and John in Acts**

## 4

- a. ***For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27–28)***
- b. **Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, People of Israel - all gathered against Jesus**
- c. **Yet what they did was according to God's foreordained purpose!**

B. **foreknowledge (most translations) = προγνώσει [prognōsei] from πρόγνωσις [prognōsis]**

I. **Compound word: “before” + “to know”**

II. **Some attempt to limit this word to mere knowledge without any determinative influence.**

- a. **Some Arminian explanations of God's election: as if God sees ahead of time, *but doesn't determine*, who will choose God . . . and then chooses them in time past before they choose Him!**

III. **But the Greek term can also convey a determinative element, as in “pre-arrangement”.<sup>4</sup>**

IV. **Used “of God's omniscient wisdom and intention.”<sup>5</sup>**

V. **In any event, we cannot restrict God's role in the crucifixion to simply “knowing,” but not influencing or determining what took place because the preceding phrase explicitly mentions His “determined purpose.”**

C. **lawless (NKV), godless (NASB95), wicked (NIV), Gentile (NET) hands = χειρὸς ἀνόμων [cheiros anomōn]**

I. **Compound word, “without” + “law”**

II. **People without the law (e.g., Gentiles — Roman hands literally drove the nails) or people in general who violated the law knowingly (wicked, godless Jews and Gentiles)**

D. **Conclusion: yes it really does say what it appears to be saying!**

1. Independent "free will" agents acted in ignorance of or against the law of God yet fulfilled God's redemptive purpose in history
2. The responsibility of this horrific act of crucifying Jesus remains entirely with man
3. God is not the author of sin, yet sin is unable to thwart His sovereignty.

**E. If God were to be represented by a cartoon super-hero with a cape . . .**

- I. His cape would have a large "S" on it representing His SOVEREIGNTY
- II. The reverse side of the cape, which would be less visible, would have a large "R" on it for the moral RESPONSIBILITY of His creatures for their own behavior

**3. As believers, it is imperative that we learn to live with the Scriptural balance between two extreme views.**

**A. Overemphasize God's sovereignty: man is reduced to a deterministic robot who cannot voluntarily respond to God or be held responsible for his actions.**

- I. In the extreme, everything is God's fault, "for who has resisted His will?" (Rom. 9:19)

**B. Overemphasize Man's "free will": man must be able to autonomously and independently make voluntary decisions or he can't be held responsible for his actions.**

- I. In the extreme, man becomes the determining factor in what happens in history and God's ultimate will can be thwarted.
- II. God, Whom Scripture reveals as the omniscient and omnipotent One who guides the purpose and out workings of history, winds up subservient to his creatures.
- III. A 'God of contingencies' who responds with a new plan to try and achieve his ends in the face of human unpredictability.
- IV. "Plan A" was Eden, but then God had to come up with "Plan B" (the cross) when The Fall into sin came along.

**4. Distorting Biblical truth**

**A. How must we think about such teaching in order to avoid distorting the truth?**

- B. **God is not illogical: no truth of God contradicts the laws of reason established by God.**
- C. **God is the very fount of reason and logic. Man is made in His image and is expected to apply rational thought to God's revealed truth.**
- D. **At the same time, God's ways are higher than ours.**
- E. **The truth of God's revelation gets distorted whenever we force it to bow to man's limited power of comprehension.**
- F. **Example: limited or particular atonement: the 5-point Calvinist position that Christ died only for those who actually come to faith — the elect.**
  - I. **Proponents of this view deem it 'illogical' that the work of Christ could atone for the sins of the world without all individuals actually being saved.**
  - II. **After all, "Would God make a plan to save everyone, then not carry it out? Would He be so foolish as to have His Son pay for the salvation of all if He knew that Christ would not be able to obtain what He paid for?"<sup>6</sup>**
  - III. **Passages which clearly teach unlimited atonement are 'reinterpreted' to limit their application in favor of an understanding that conforms to the limited logic of the interpreter.<sup>7</sup>**

---

## Responding to apparent contradiction

1. **Biblical truth often involves tension between related concepts.**
2. **There are teachings in Scripture which *appear* contradictory, but only in view of what God has chosen to reveal to man and the limitation of the human intellect.**
  - A. **Concerning Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden: "how could Adam and Eve be held responsible for The Fall if Christ was preordained as the sacrificial Lamb of God from the foundation of the world (1Pe. 1:20)? Was it possible for Adam and Eve to avoid sin by their own volition and obey God forever?"**
  - B. **Concerning the presentation of the Messiah to Israel: "what would have become of the cross if Israel had accepted Jesus? If that was an impossibility, why did Jesus He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mat. 10:6; 15:24)? And how could Israel then be held morally responsible for rejecting her king and crucifying her Messiah (Acts 2:23)?"**

- C. Concerning the crucifixion: as skeptics are fond of asking, “didn't Judas help God and do the world all a big favor by betraying Christ thereby accomplishing our redemption (Luke 22:21–22)?”
- D. Concerning the God-man Jesus: “how could a man be fully God (Col. 1:19; 2:9; Heb. 1:3; 1Ti. 3:16; 6:16)? How could Jesus be born of a woman, in the line of Adam, yet untainted by the sin of Adam (Luke 3:38; 2Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1Pe. 2:22; 1Jn. 3:5)? How could God, Who is independent of time and space, step into His own creation to live within in (John 1:14; 1Ti. 3:16?) How could God die (Rev. 1:17-18?)”
- E. Concerning the Trinity: “is God one or three?”<sup>8</sup>
- F. You've probably heard simplistic formulations which purport to make these teachings of Scripture understandable, but I submit that it is impossible to eliminate the mystery from these topics without also seriously distorting them.
3. It is a serious mistake, even a form of idolatry, to elevate human understanding over the revelation of God.
4. We must not force “either/or” where Scripture teaches “both/and.”
5. Immaturity and idolatry
- A. A continued unwillingness to accept divine tension in the deeper teachings of God is a sign of spiritual immaturity and pride.
- B. It can also indicate a tendency on the part of the individual to implicitly accuse or judge God for His revealed truth.
- I. God doesn't answer to us, we answer to Him!
- II. In Romans 9, where Paul is dealing with the same topic of divine sovereignty in combination with human responsibility, he anticipates our tendency to question God and accuse His sense of justice.
- III. Paul writes to the church at Rome: *Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"* (Rom. 9:18-20)
- C. As Kevin has observed, we should expect such mysteries. After all, if the enormity of God's thought could be reduced to fit into the thimble that is

**the mind of man, what kind of God would He be? And would he still be worthy of our worship?**

6. **Mabana Chapel statement of belief recognizes the dual teaching of Scripture concerning God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.**
- A. **"God the Father planned it as He sovereignly chose some, apart from foreseen human merit or response, to be recipients of His grace from before the foundation of the world. God's election does not negate man's responsibility to believe, the Christian's responsibility to freely offer the gospel to every person, or the fact that God desires salvation to all men (John **1:12-13**; **6:37-44, 65**; Acts **13:48**; Ephesians **1:3-5**; 2 Timothy **1:9**; **2:3-4**)."**<sup>9</sup>
- B. **Indeed, our security is ultimately tied to the sovereignty of God!**
- C. **Rather than complain about it, our response should be that of Paul: *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* (Rom. **11:33**)**

Sun Sep 15 15:27:41 2013



SpiritAndTruth.org<sup>b</sup> Scan Code

---

Endnotes:

1. <http://www.mabanachapel.org/beliefs.html>
2. NKJV, Acts 2:22-24
3. Ref-1343, 453
4. Ref-1343, 538
5. Ref-0227, 703
6. See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/questions/155.htm>.
7. John **1:29**; **6:51**; 2Cor. **5:18-21**; 1Ti. **2:1-7**; **4:10**; 2Pe. **2:1-3**; 1Jn **2:1-2**.
8. "No man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious Biblical teaching. But despite the worthy efforts of these scholars, the Trinity is still largely incomprehensible to the mind of man. Perhaps the chief reason for this is that the Trinity is a-logical, or beyond logic. It, therefore, cannot be made subject to human reason or logic. Because of this, opponents of the doctrine argue that the idea of the Trinity must be rejected as untenable. Such thinking, however, makes man's corrupted human reason the sole criterion for determining the truth of divine revelation." — Walter Martin, *Essential*



*Christianity* (Santa Anna: Vision House, 1975), 21.

9. <http://www.mabanachapel.org/beliefs.html>

---

#### Sources:

**NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**Ref- 0227** Arndt, William, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, c1979. ISBN:0-226-03932-3<sup>c</sup>.

**Ref- 1343** Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wile's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1889).

---

#### Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-226-03932-3>.