

HOLDING TO A “MYSTERY VIEW”

Throughout the centuries, theological battles have raged around God’s SOVEREIGNTY and human RESPONSIBILITY. The battle is over how to harmonize these two realities, which are both clearly presented in Scripture. At the end of the day, I emphasize God’s sovereignty above all, but at the same time, I acknowledge the reality of human responsibility.

I am with those who hold to a “mystery view” which lends itself to a BIBLICALLY-BALANCED theology that is consistent with the whole counsel of God.

“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.”
--**C.H. Mackintosh**, Short Papers on Scripture Subjects, Vol. 2, p. 267

“Divine sovereignty and human freedom are alternately emphasized in Scripture, and no attempt is made to harmonize them. The fault with all theological systems is that they attempt a scientific harmony and adjustment of what the Word of God leaves an unsolved problem and a hopeless paradox.” – **A.T. Pierson** – SEED THOUGHTS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKERS, p. 271

“...every word and thought of man, every fluttering of a sparrow’s wing, every flight of a fly...that everything, in fact is foreknown and foreordained. But I do equally believe in the free agency of man, that man acts as he wills... Where these two truths meet I do not know, nor do I want to know. They do not puzzle me, since I have given up my mind to believing them both.” – **C. H. Spurgeon** – MTP, Vol. 15, p. 458

“God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are taught us side by side in the same Bible; sometimes, indeed, in the same text. Both are thus guaranteed to us by the same divine authority; both, therefore, are true. It follows that they must be held together, and not played off against each other. ... We ought not in any case to be surprised when we find mysteries of this sort in God’s Word. For the Creator is incomprehensible to His creatures. A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mysteries whatsoever, would be a God in man’s image, and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all. ... The antinomy which we face now is only one of a number that the Bible contains. We may be sure that they all find their

reconciliation in the mind and counsel of God, and we may hope that in heaven we shall understand them ourselves. But meanwhile, our wisdom is to maintain with equal emphasis both the apparently conflicting truths in each case, to hold them together in the relation in which the Bible itself sets them, and to recognize that there is a mystery which we cannot expect to solve in this world.” - **J.I. Packer**- EVANGELISM AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, pp. 22-24

“Any man may get himself into a terrible labyrinth who thinks continually of the sovereignty of God alone, and he may equally get into deeps that are likely to drown him if he meditates only on the free will of man.” – **Charles Spurgeon** – TREASURY OF THE N.T., Vol. I, pp. 340-342

In my view, only a God-centered theology that is consistent with the tensions of an inductive Bible study can be called ‘Theology Proper’.

The story is told of a soldier during the Civil War who could not make up his mind about which side of the conflict he supported. So, he dressed in a blue coat (the color of the Union) and gray pants (the color of the Confederates), and walked down the center of the battlefield thinking he would receive the approval of both sides. He was wrong and was immediately shot by both sides.

This illustrates the position of the “Biblicist” who seeks to properly hold to the tensions of Scripture regarding God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. He gets shot at from both sides and yet in the end is faithful to the whole counsel of God as one who rightly divides the Word of God concerning the ways of God that are “past finding out”.

Romans 11:33 is a verse that some (in practical reality) refuse to accept, but it too is part of the whole counsel of God and in CONTEXT comes at the conclusion of Paul’s prolonged discussion regarding God’s sovereignty and human responsibility as seen in Romans 9-11. Some get hung up on the “sovereign emphasis” of Romans 9, others make their focus the “responsibility emphasis” of Romans 10; but in biblical balance I want the truth of both with the inspired conclusion of Romans 11 which emphasizes all is of God, but His ways are past finding out.

“I’m in the middle and I can’t solve the riddle.”

There are various shades of Calvinism, various shades of Arminianism, various shades of Molinism, various shades of Corporate Election, and on and on. All of these systems do their best to try and figure out the seeming antinomy that exists between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility,

and yet in all these systems there is what I call a “***blessed inconsistency***”. There is some truth (or perhaps much) in these various systems of thought and yet the FULL truth is deeper than any of them.

I start with the presupposition that God is always RIGHT! Even if I don’t understand it – God is RIGHT! Who are we to argue with God (Rom. 9:20)? At the end of the day, we bow in humility before God and His truth. His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are infinitely higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8-9).

He plainly tells us that “His ways are past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). Faith is taking God at His Word. Whatever God says is true and I take Him at His Word, even though I freely admit there are many things I can’t completely comprehend (cf. Job 42:3).

Ultimate reality/truth rests in God, and whatever He says, I fully agree with it. That is why I call myself a “Biblicist,” desiring to follow the whole counsel of God wherever it leads, including the truth that some things are past finding out. The pinnacle of truth is that “of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Rom. 11:36)