

**Core Seminar**

**Evangelism**

**Class 2: God’s Sovereignty & Human Responsibility**

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Welcome to the Evangelism C.S., Introduce yourself / co-teachers, Handout, Pray

**Introduction** (Tell the College Football/Anthony Frye Story)

This is the second of a thirteen classes on evangelism. This class is intended to help you understand the theological truths about evangelism, but equally as much, it is designed to equip you and encourage you to evangelize in your everyday relationships

*Last week*, Blake walked us from Genesis to Revelation and helped us reflect on what God is doing in history. We saw that from eternity past to eternity future God is bringing glory to Himself by saving sinners through His Son Jesus Christ. At the end of our time we focused on three basic principles…anyone remember? (show of hands)

1. The purpose of history is to bring **glory** to God.
2. God is the ultimate **evangelist**, He delights in saving sinners.
3. We have been entrusted with the honor and responsibility of proclaiming the **gospel**.

*In today’s session*, we will be discussing the theology behind God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility and how these two things fit together. The reason we want to spend time thinking about this is because it’s extremely important that we understand our role and God’s role in evangelism. Why do you think knowing the differene is so important? [take answers]

1. **What Does the Bible Teach About God’s Sovereignty in Salvation?**

We have a lot of Christianese we throw around in church like the word sovereignty, I’ve said it a few times now, what does it mean when we say that God is sovereign? [take answers]

**God’s sovereignty is basically His use of His power over His creation. It means that God has supreme authority over all things and is in complete control at all times and in all situations.** God’s sovereignty can be seen in every aspect of life, including our salvation. In light of this, we’re going to take some time to think biblically about God’s role in bringing sinners to faith and repentance. There are a bunch of verses that we could look at for this study, but we’ll focus primarily on **Romans 8:28-31.** [turn there, Jonathan read’s]

In these verses we see what’s been called the “glorious chain of salvation.” We see God’s sovereign work to save sinners from eternity past (foreknowledge) to eternity future (glorification, which means when those who have trusted in Christ will be made perfect).

For the sake of our discussion, we’re going to focus on three key words in this passage. They are *foreknowledge, predestination* and *calling*.

 Let’s ***first*** consider the doctrine of God’s foreknowledge. The word for foreknowledge is used 7 times in the Scriptures. In **1 Peter 1:20** the word is used to speak of Jesus who was “foreknown before the foundation of the world.” In **Acts 2:23** the word is used to describe God’s eternal foreknowledge of the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus. In **Romans 11:2** Paul describes the fact that God foreknew His people Israel. In **1 Peter 1:1-2** and **Romans 8:29** it is used to describe God’s foreknowledge of His elect.

 Now, as we think about what foreknowledge means in these passages and more specifically regarding salvation, there are two basic options.

***First* is the idea that God merely knows what we will do**. This view basically means that because God is all-knowing, He looked down through history and saw who would believe in Him and then, because of their choice, chose and predestined them. God knew what we would do, so He elected us. Think about it like this, imagine throwing a dart against the wall and then going and drawing a bull’s eye around it. Because you saw where it landed, you chose where the bull’s eye would be. That is basically how this view regards divine foreknowledge. **While we would agree that God knows all things past, present and future, we would not agree with this view of foreknowledge because it makes God’s actions a reaction to what man chooses to do.** WE act and then HE acts.

 **The *second* option as to what divine foreknowledge means is that God knows what He will do. In this position, God, who is all-knowing, simply chose, according to His own will, certain people whom He would show mercy to.** This basically means that God knew what He would do, and His decision has nothing ultimately to do with anyone else’s thoughts or opinions. An example of this would be an architect who walks up to an open lot or an artist who stands before a blank canvas. They both can foreknow a building or a painting based solely upon what they choose to do. **This is what we believe the Bible teaches about divine foreknowledge**. God does not only have foresight, where He knew what we would do, but he also has foreknowledge of what He would do and whom He would sovereignly choose to save.

 What’s amazing about this is that God doesn’t simply foreknow a decision or action that people might do, but rather He knows the saints themselves. For instance, I’m not a Christian today because I’m better then anyone else. Good men hear the Gospel every day and reject it. I am a Christian because God graciously chose me.

1. God **foreknows** those He chooses to give the gift of salvation. (Jer. 1:5, 2 Tim. 2:19\*)

I’m sure some of you might have questions about this, but I’m going to ask that you hold them until we make it through the rest of this section so that we can take them all at once. This is for the sake of time

 **The *second* key word I would like us to consider is predestination**. Look again at Romans 8:29 where it says, “those whom He foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” The word “predestined” simply means to mark out beforehand. **The chosen ones (elect), the onese who God knew intimately before the beginning of the world, they are marked out in His perfect plan to come to know Him in His perfect way in His perfect timing.** The concept of predestination is pretty simple: God marks out people to come to know Him. The toughest part is the fact that God predestines some and not others. Though this idea is challenging to us, it is very clearly taught throughout the Scriptures (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11)

1. God has **predestined** those whom He has chosen to receive salvation. (Eph. 1:5\*)

**The *third* key idea we should consider is the calling of the chosen to faith in Christ.** In Romans 8:30 we see that “those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified.” **Divine calling is the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit as he softens the heart of a sinner to respond to the good news of the Gospel.**

1. God sovereignly **calls** sinners by opening their hearts through regeneration to believe the Gospel. (John 6:44; Acts 16:14)

Before we discuss what God’s sovereignty means for us when we think about evangelism, I’ll stop and see if we have any questions so far. But before I do, I want to be clear about the fact that I will never be able to answer all your questions, so I will do my best, but in the end this subject is worth spending the rest of your life reflecting upon.

 One more thing. In my own time thinking through these difficult realities and implications of these doctrines see three conclusions: 1) I am not more loving than God. 2) I am not more merciful than God. 3) I am not wiser than God. If I can rest in these things, it helps me to trust Him in the things I do not understand.

[Take questions from the class. Watch your time. Attempt to answer 3-4 questions well.] [[1]](#footnote-1)

**What does God’s Sovereignty Mean for Evangelism?**

God’s sovereignty certainly does NOT take away our responsibility to be active, intentional, and persistent in sharing the Gospel. Instead, it should cause us to rest in God’s power and ability to save.

1. God’s sovereignty teaches us to fully trust in His **power** to save sinners.
* God is the Savior not us. All pride should be eliminated…we can’t and don’t produce results.
1. God’s sovereignty reminds us that we should have no **fear** in evangelism.
* The fact that God has set apart people to believe removes all need to fear.
1. God’s sovereignty should **encourage** faithful evangelism, not serve as an excuse to neglect it.
* Some people object to teachings about God’s sovereignty in evangelism because they think it leads people to not share the Gospel. If your theology leads you to sin, its bad theology.
1. **What Does the Bible Teach About Man’s Responsibility in Evangelism?**

**As we mentioned, God’s sovereignty does not in any way get rid of our responsibility to be active, intentional, and persistent in sharing the Gospel.** So if this is true, then what role do we play in evangelism? What is our responsibility? What does it look like to be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel? **I would argue that when we read through the bible there are three primary things we are called to do: Pray, Pursue, Proclaim. [repeat]**

**First**, let’s take a look at prayer and how it applies to evangelism. To do this, turn with me to Colossians 4 [repeat]. **Colossians 4:2-4** [read]. In these verses we find *three principles* about praying for the lost.

The *first principle concerning prayer* comes from Colossians 4:2 where we see that we are to be devoted to prayer.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The word “devote / continue steadfastly” means to busy oneself with, to attach oneself to. **This means that in regards to evangelism, we ought pray.** We should pray before we share, pray while we share and pray after we share. Notice also, what the call for devotion is followed by…it is followed by a call to attention. Look again at Colossians 4:2 “keeping alert in it / being watchful.” As you pray you must watch. **Live with the expectation that God loves the lost and is opening doors for us to speak to those who need to hear the Gospel.** When we do this we will begin to see that God is at work around us in ways that we just never noticed before. This opens our eyes! Also see here that we are to do it with thanksgiving. Celebrate opportunities God has given and ways that He has worked in situations. (Testimonies of Grace) **This keeps our focus on His faithfulness and His power rather than on ourselves.**

 **The *second principle concerning prayer* is in Colossians 4:3 we see that we should pray for open doors.** Look at the text with me, pray that “God may open up to us a door for the word.” This means that we should plead and beg God to give us opportunities. Ask the Lord to open doors for me to share your Gospel. Open doors wherever you find yourself.

 ***The third principle about prayer* is that we should pray for discernment as we share the Gospel.** Colossians 4:4 says “that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” When we pray, we should ask God to give us discernment in our sharing. Pray that He will help us to remember verses that would be helpful. **Pray that He will help you to know when to share and how much to share.** Pray that He will help you to know if you are trying to force something or if He is indeed opening a door for the word. The more we pray for this and the more actually share the Gospel, the more we will learn how to discern many of the things we have questions about.

 This is why we gave you homework last week. Remember that? We asked you to pray. We asked you, and will continue to ask you be devoted to

1) asking God to give you a heart for the lost;

2) asking God to open doors;

3) asking God to show you three people to share with before this class is over.

Prayer is one of the most important parts of evangelism.

**Secondly, in addition to prayer, we have the responsibility to pursue the lost with the Gospel.** What I don’t mean by this is that we make evangelism some kind of sanctified stalking or holy hunting. People are people. They aren’t targets, like deer or elk. They are made in the image of God and are loved by God. Don’t forget this! In light of this, we should pursue opportunities to talk with them about who Christ is.

For the sake of time, I will simply reference several passages to consider. In **Luke 19:10** Jesus says that “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost.” Jesus’ purpose in coming was to glorify the Father by seeking out sinners. As His disciples we follow Him in this same purpose. This same idea is seen in **John 17:18** where Jesus prays “as you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” Again, as Jesus’ disciples, we have been sent by Him. Same thing in **Matthew 28:19** where Jesus says “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” From this passage, it is clear that disciples of Christ have been commissioned to make more disciples. This is done, literally “as you are going.” A final example comes from the whole book of **Acts**. After the disciples received the Spirit they weren’t just sit’n around twiddling their thumbs. No, the entire book of Acts is a recounting how they intentionally went out with the Gospel looking to proclaim the message of Christ to the world. These examples show us that our responsibility is to pursue the lost with the message of Christ. **God has commanded us to follow Jesus by pursuing the lost with courage and compassion. Not optional.**

**Thirdly, as we pray and as we pursue the lost, the Scriptures are very clear that we must open our mouths. We must proclaim the Gospel.** This is certainly the model of the disciples in Acts as they proclaimed the message of the Gospel everywhere they went. In **Acts 2** Peter says in Jerusalem “wicked men put him to death by nailing Him to a cross. But God raised him from the dead…therefore…repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:23-38**). He proclaims what God did and what they must do (how they must respond)**. This same approach is found in nearly every chapter of the book…disciples are called to proclaim the Gospel. In **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** we are told that as God’s ambassadors, we have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. God has given His Son as a substitute for sinners and now He “implores” people to be reconciled to Him. One other place we see this clearly is in **Romans 10:13-15** where Paul, the same one who told us about foreknowledge, predestination and calling, now clearly teaches the need for us to proclaim the Gospel when he says, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on 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 bring good news.’”

Now, even among those who would claim to be Christians, a famous quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi comes up when we talk about the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel. The quote goes something like this “preach the Gospel at all times, use words if necessary.” Two things on this. *First*, it is a misquote of what Francis said. In chapter 17 of his rule of 1221 Francis told his friars not to preach unless they had received proper permission to do so. After this he says “let all the brothers, however, preach by their deeds.” ***Second*, you can’t preach by your deeds.** **You can affirm and reflect your message by your deeds – which you must do, but you can’t communicate the message clearly enough to help people know that you aren’t just a moral Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or Mormon.** The way people know who Christ is, what He requires of them and why we live the way we do is to proclaim, with words, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To close us out: **our responsibility in evangelism is to pray [devoted, doors, discernment], pursue [intentionally, compassionately] and proclaim the Gospel [clearly, boldly, purely]. Our job is to share the Gospel, God’s job is to save sinners. [repeat]** Evangelism is the sovereign act of God that we participate in. [repeat] This helps us big time in understanding that success in evangelism isn’t found in how many times we share, how many conversions we see or any number of other things. Instead, success in evangelism rests solely on us speaking the Gospel to the lost. Which is so much less pressure! That is what we have been called to do, tell people and trust God. Dr, Bill Bright once said Success in evangelism is “to clearly share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God.”

*Any final questions before I give you your homework?*

1. Pray: 1) asking God to give you a heart for the lost; 2) asking God to open doors; 3) asking God to show you three people to share with before this class is over.

2. Write down in once sentence what you think the Gospel is. It can be a run on sentence, but clearly write down what you believe the Gospel is. We’ll discuss next week.

1. You will likely get a bunch of questions. Make sure you watch your time here and answer 3-4 well. Invite people to talk with you more later about them. A document is available that has numerous Scriptures and statements to help people study through this subject.

The most challenging question that may be coming your way goes something like this:

*Does God create some people specifically to go to hell? Do they really have no real chance to do anything about it?* In the scenes of judgment we see in the Scripture, God is never the one who is blamed for sin. Adam tried it in the garden, but in the end, he and all other people are condemned for their personal rebellion (**Rev. 20:12**). God does not make us sin. He does however harden some and allow them to go the way they wish…which is the way of rebellion. In the end, people are condemned to hell because they willingly reject God.

Some other questions that you might get are:

*Why did they believe?* **Acts 13:48** “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed”**, 16:14** “the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken of by Paul. ” We believe because the Holy Spirit opens our hearts through regeneration. Not because of how smart or morally sensitive we are.

*Why were they chosen by God?* “in love He predestined” **Eph. 1:3-5**; “loved by God, He has chosen you” **1 Thess. 1:4**…God loved them b/c God loved them.

*Doesn’t God love all?* yes **Mt 5:44-45** “enemies”, **Jn 3:16** “world”, **1 Jn 2:2** “world.” But God has a particular love for His elect **Dt 7:6-8** “not b/c…but b/c the Lord loves you.”

*Why did God only choose some?* **Rom 9:14-16** it pleased Him to. Eph 1:5 “kind intention of His will.” Bigger question is why did God choose any? We are not more loving or merciful than God. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A potential question here will be whether or not we should pray for lost people to believe. Yes we should. Another question might be will our prayers change anything since God has already elected who will believe and who will not. The answer is ultimately that our prayers do not force God to do anything, but instead we ought come to Him with our burdens and pray in faith that He will save those who repent and believe. Another question might be whether we should pray for lost people since Jesus says in John 17:9 that He doesn’t pray for the world. I would suggest that in this section Jesus is clarifying who in particular He is praying for in that situation. >>> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)