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Let Him Who Thirsts Come

by David Dunlap

The Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility in Perfect Harmony

Our Lord says, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:39). Our Lord’s invitation goes out to all— “if any man”— and our Lord gives everyone the choice and power to come —“Let him come.” Here we see two choices: God’s choice and man’s choice. God made a choice to invite all people to come. And man has the choice to come to Christ or to reject Him. In these two choices, we see the paradox between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of humanity. This subject has been the source of many heated and unprofitable debates. We can never answer all the questions that have been posed nor solve its many mysteries. Nevertheless, the examination of God’s choices and man’s choices are the key to understanding a measure of this great subject. The Bible is filled with God’s choices, and His choices are always just, holy, good, and best for His people. As King David said it best, “As for God, his way is perfect...”(Psalm 18:30).

God’s Perfect Choices

What are some of His choices? First of all, He chose to create man in His own spiritual image. “God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image’”(Genesis 1:26). This meant that man also had a free will and could choose to obey or disobey God. God also chose to love the world, even though man rebelled against Him. “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). When man chose to rebel against the Creator in the garden of Eden, God could have done away with the human race and made a fresh start. Instead, He chose to love and to work for man’s eternal salvation. He is a God without partiality, loving all of mankind equally (Romans 2:11).

Further, God made a plan of salvation, choosing to send His Son into the world to suffer and to die for sinners. This was not limited atonement but rather the provision of redemption for the whole world (Romans 3:23). The agonizing death of the infinite God-man was sufficient to pay for the sins of all mankind. “But God demonstrates His own love toward

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“The power to do(believe) that which is inherent in the Gospel...in the Gospel resides power (dunamis), the mighty, irresistible power of God, the power to open eyes and break chains!”

John Phillips
Exploring Acts, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1986), p. 482

us, in that while we were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

God not only desired the salvation of all but chose to provide for the salvation of all. God is described as One “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of all the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Peter states that He is “not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). No one will be able to accuse God of being unloving or uncaring. Dr. Henry Theissen (1883–1947), the former dean of Wheaton Graduate School, Wheaton, IL expands further on this truth,

*May we repeat: Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to Him. This is the salvation bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:14). In His foreknowledge He perceives what each one will do with this restored ability, and elects men to salvation in harmony with His knowledge of their choice of Him.*¹

God also chose to save mankind by grace through faith in Christ. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any should boast” (Ephesians 2:8). God desires all to be saved and has provided salvation for all. He also has made salvation accessible to all. There are no special works required. Repentance and faith are attitudes of the heart, not a work. The thief on the cross was unable to lift a finger to save himself but was gloriously saved through faith. Thank God! God has done all that is necessary to save sinners, including giving the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin and to draw them to the Savior (John 16:8, 14).

Faith & Choices

But man also has a choice to make, and God sovereignly has provided us with more than enough resources through which to make the right choice. The apostle John writes, “[John the Baptist] came for a witness to the Light, that all men through him might believe” (John 1:7). The Holy Spirit has come, as promised by the Lord Jesus. When the Gospel is preached, the Spirit is present to convict of sin and to exalt Christ as the only Savior. There is also the witness of the creation to the Creator (Romans 1:20) and the witness of conscience (Romans 2:14–15).

There is a unique power in the preached word of God to reach the conscience of fallen man. Peter records, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God that lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

So overwhelming are these reasons to believe that Paul states that man is without excuse if he dies in his sins. In view of God's provision, it is possible for men to repent. In fact, God "now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). God would not command men to do what is impossible for them to do! The Gospel goes out to all. It is a valid offer of salvation. Christ's followers were told that "repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations" (Luke 24:47).

Our Lord told a parable about the owner of a vineyard who needed laborers. He went out early in the morning to hire workers to labor in his vineyard. He called to laborers standing in the marketplace to come and work in his vineyard and he agreed with them for one denarius. Later at the third hour he needed more workers and he called for them to come. At the ninth hour and the eleventh hour he did the same. All were invited to work and many came but many refused to come. The gospel call goes out to all but not all respond. The Lord said at the end of the parable, "So the first shall be last and the last shall be first; for many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16). All are invited, but only those who respond are called the "chosen." Those who choose to come are called the "chosen" and they are choice in God's sight.

Respected Bible commentator William MacDonald explains how a person becomes chosen,

"Many are called is that the gospel invitation goes out to many. But few are chosen. Some refuse the invitation, and even those who respond favorably, some are exposed as false professors. The expression few are chosen does not mean that God is arbitrary in selecting only a few for salvation. All who respond to the good news are chosen. The only way a person can tell if he is chosen is by what he does with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Matt 22: 14, 20:16).²

Amazing Harmony

So whose choice is it? God's or man's? The answer is both! There is a blending of choice and will between the Creator and all mankind. It is God who initiated salvation. He chose to save, rather than to destroy, rebellious man; He chose to send His Son to die for sinners; He sent the Holy Spirit to convict sinners; and He set the terms of salvation: repentance and faith. Man's choice is to respond to God's offer. Each person must repent and believe on Christ as his Savior or reject Him.

In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) the father chose to have children. Once grown, the prodigal son chose to leave his father and live a rebellious life, wasting the inheritance that the father had given him. The father then chose to wait for the son with an open and loving heart. The son, on his part, had to repent and return, trusting in the father's love and acceptance. Reconciliation was dependent on the choices of both.

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Wm. MacDonald
(1917-2007)



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Correspondence should be sent to:

BIBLE & LIFE Newsletter
c/o David Dunlap
3116 Gulfwind Drive
Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
(813) 996-1053

e-mail

daviddunlap100@gmail.com

web site

www.bibleandlife.org

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bible-Life/139555992799868>

A man who is who is courting a woman proposes marriage, affirming his love and choice of her. Then he must wait for her response. Christ makes His love and choice known to the sinner. Then He waits for the sinner's response. When one receives Christ, he can say, "I chose the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior." And, yes, the Lord has already made his choice of the sinner. Both choices are necessary for one to be saved.

Conclusion

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (John 7:39) Who does not thirst? Who has not mind-thirsts, heart-thirsts, soul-thirsts or body-thirsts? Well, No matter which, or whether I have them all—"Come unto me and" remain thirsty? Never! "Come unto me and drink."

Can it be? Can the dry and thirsty one be refreshed—can the parched soil moistened, the arid places cooled—Yes, and more. "From within him shall flow rivers"—rivers, ever deep, ever full. In times of drought brooks may fail, often do, canals may be pumped dry, often are. The river that Christ promises is always a mighty stream, always flowing deep and irresistible! Not short-lived mountain-torrents, full while the rain lasts, then dry again.

The last invitation of the Bible to sinners is, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). It is a genuine offer to all. So then, the Lord says to us: Choose!

Endnotes

1. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns Publishers, 1949), pp. 344-345
2. William MacDonald, *Matthew: Behold Your King*, (Kansas City, KS: Walterick, 1974), p. 249