

# **IF GOD COMMANDS ALL MEN TO REPENT, DOES THAT MEAN HE *WILLS* ALL MEN TO *OBEY* THAT COMMANDMENT?**

Or, Does God Command Contrary to His Will?

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## **A Response to “Slick Teaching”**

I wrote this letter as a result of hearing a message on the Sovereignty of God. The conflict of whether God ordains who will be saved or whether salvation is freely offered to all has raged longer than I have been alive, and will likely continue until the Lord comes. I dare not expect my writing this will put the issue to rest – better men than I have written better and more persuasive works; and their works are profitable. If only a few are helped by this paper I shall be content.

Although the message mentioned above was most eloquent and smoothly delivered, and to many I expect it was conclusive; I noticed that for the verses used to support one idea, I could use the same verses to support the opposite idea. How could this be? Is God’s word that confusing? The confusion and misunderstanding the scripture comes many times from one assuming an error is truth, and then reading that error into the verses. We all have that tendency. We can read the Bible with “colored glasses,” so as to speak, if we are not careful to learn based on truth, rather than error. For example, if one man believes water baptism is necessary for salvation, he will read that into many verses that mention baptism. One man who knows water baptism indeed does not save, will in turn read the same passages showing the truth.

So, I preface this paper by admitting we all read and study the Bible with “pre-dispositional understanding.” That is the way God intended the word of God to be read, if that “pre-dispositional understanding” is correct. One has certain understanding, and then reads or studies the Bible to increase his understanding.

## **Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth**

Accordingly, Isaiah 29:9-11 states:

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

From this passage in Isaiah one can learn that before a person can rightly be taught knowledge and therefore rightly understand doctrine, one has to be spiritually mature and know well the precepts (first commandments of God). The doctrine of God is made up of the commandments of God, and the two cannot be separated. After learning and doing the commandments, then one has to read the Bible through at least twice. When one has *both* obedience to the commandments of God *and* knowledge of every line of the Bible; then one is in a position to topically study and rightly divide the word of truth (here a little, and there a little).

When a person knows and obeys the commandments of God, he will have much better understanding of what God has written. Imagine some one attempting to teach what salvation is but he himself never obeyed the commandment to believe the gospel (I John3:23; Romans, etc.).

One either uses the commandments of God as his key to study the scriptures, or he uses other things, such as historical Bible passages, types and prophecy, or statements made by men in the bible; or, most notably, one's own experience or the teaching of some other man. These other things, including experience and man's teaching can be profitable, but the weightiest of all scripture passages are the commandments of God (precepts). Psalm 111:10 says a good understanding comes from obeying the commandments. Simply, God does not give good understanding to those who do not obey. In like manner, we glean the best understanding of the scripture when the commandments of God are used as a basis for that understanding.

Some of the most basic truths we need established when reading the scriptures are these:

1. The Bible is inspired of God, and that God gave us his word for our benefit and to learn the knowledge of God. It is an open book for mankind.
2. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and gave himself for us (the gospel), and is King and will come again. Along with this, one should know the Savior, and the other truths in respect to Jesus Christ.
3. The New Testament is God's plan for mankind, and we should understand the Old Testament in light of the New.
4. Man needs the atonement, and that salvation of God is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am sure there are others. The point of this paper, however, is to consider whether approaching the passages of scripture with the mindset that God elects those who will be saved is the right way to rightly divide the word of truth. It comes down to whether the "predestinational intents of God" in respect to the salvation of man should be an inductive practice for study, or a deductive truth consistent with the commandments of God.

I choose the latter. Here is a little illustration:

#### Reading Scripture with Pre-Dispositional Understanding

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Using the Commandments of God	verses	Using Ideas of Man
Doctrine of God	verses	Tradition of Men
Truth building upon truth	verses	Lie built upon lie
Considers all texts in light of the Commandments of God	verses	Considers all verses in light of an error

One would rightly argue that once we know something is true, we build on that truth to understand more from the Bible. Amen. But all truth begins somewhere. Where does the idea (I do not say truth) that says God elects who will be saved, come from? Is it easily gleaned deductively from the Scriptures? I say no. I believe that idea is first taught of man, and then one reads into a variety of passages – indeed looks for passages, that support the idea.

When one assumes God has determined who will and will not be saved, his understanding of scripture will be tainted with this overarching principle, and he will assume certain verses support the idea, when indeed they do not.

### **Without the Commandments, We Have No Compass**

My contention is that our understanding of the scriptures should be based upon the commandments of God. Consequently, if God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) and is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), I think we should take this to mean God's will is that all be saved. *If God chooses who will and who will not be saved, it is clearly evident by the two verses mentioned above that God would choose **everyone** to be saved, and that all **would** be saved.* [Note: Now some people *do* believe that *all* will be saved, but Jesus said that narrow is the way that leads to life (Matthew 7). It is not within the scope of this paper to address the false concept of universal salvation. I take for granted the reader knows already that some people will be saved and the others will be lost.]

We know not all will be saved. Therefore – since God commands all men everywhere to repent – man must have some responsibility in determining his eternal fate, and can *indeed even go contrary to the will and commandments* of God. How else could the Bible speak of the disobedience of man in respect to gospel. If man is or can be disobedient to the commandment of God, we must conclude that he is behaving contrary to the will of God. Now, it seems to me, if, as some would say, God did *choose* some to be lost, then those who do not obey the gospel are not really disobedient, but obedient to the will of God. This makes a mockery of common sense, and makes God a fool and a liar to command folks to do one thing, but really wanting them to do another. Any teaching like this is not of God, but is confusion. God is not the author of confusion. The idea that God chooses who will be saved, and the idea that God commands all men to be saved, are mutually exclusive ideas, unless all will be saved. Since we know that is not the case that all will be saved, we must choose one idea or the other. And how shall we choose? Safely, by using the commandments of God. To conclude otherwise really shows a lack of common sense.

Logically then, most would agree thusly:

1. What God wills he commands, and his will is shown in his commandments.
2. What he commands to man, he wills man to do. And what he *commands* man to do, man is *able* to do.
3. If his will or commandment is not obeyed by a man, that man is disobedient
4. Therefore, man indeed has the ability to disobey God and go against his will (hence, sin).
5. There is a consequence for sin, and that is death.

Now, we consider that the gospel is to be obeyed (please *read* 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Romans 10:16; I Peter 4:7; I John 3:23). God would not command all men to do something if they *could* not do it. The question then is: ***Does God command all men to obey the gospel?*** That is an easy question to answer if one takes the New Testament at face value. It is obviously yes (Acts 17:30); and consequently we have many who will be disobedient to the gospel, and who will suffer for their disobedience, lest they repent.

### **Without Free Will, the Bible Has No Practical Value**

From Genesis to Revelation we read how God rewards men for obedience and faith, and punishes them for disobedience and rebellion. If man cannot choose to obey or disobey, why would God

instruct us in anything, especially as to his will? Even the Saviour said, “not my will, but thine be done.” Jesus himself chose his Father’s will over his own, being that perfect pattern for us to follow.

The whole basis of **sin** is that man is disobedient to the commandment of God (even Adam was commanded to not eat of that tree). To be disobedient implies man has a free will, or disobedience is in fact, obedience.

The whole basis of **repentance** is that man has to confess and forsake his sin in order to obtain mercy.

The whole basis on **salvation** is that man has a free will to believe or not believe, and that **faith** is required of all men in order to be saved. This truth can be seen easily in these passages (please read):

Hebrews 4:1-11

2 Peter 3:9

Acts 17:30

Romans 5:18

I Timothy 4:10

I Timothy 2:1-4 (excellent passage)

Luke 8:12

I Corinthians 1:21

Romans 10:10 (“man believeth...”)

2 Corinthians 4:4

Galatians 3:22

Romans 11:32

For those people who read passages that are used by some to prove God elects or chooses who will be saved, I say to read those passages in light of the commandments of God, and God will give you the proper understanding. We all know verses can be used to teach something contrary to the will of God. This is not rightly dividing the word of truth. Beware lest you be spoiled by having a pre-dispositional understanding to the scriptures based upon man’s doctrine, rather than the commandments of God.

When reading Ephesians 1, or Romans 8 – 11, or I Peter 1, or 2 Peter 1, or I Thessalonians 1; one can only get the right understanding of these passages in light of God’s commandments.

You see, it is consistent and logical to believe that God **wills** – because he **commands** – all men to be saved; and that man freely chooses to obey the gospel or not. Those who do obey are chosen in Christ to live a certain way, and those that do not obey will be punished for their disobedience.

If God, as some believe, did choose who will be saved, he by doing that equally chose who will not be saved. They are equally chosen, but for different purposes. If that were the case, why command man to do anything? Man would simply do what God wills him to do. But the truth is, every man does have a free will, and will decide for himself whether to obey God or not, and reap the consequence of his choice. Consequently, those “election” verses must mean something different than what Calvinists make them to mean.

And, as good indicator of whether a thing is true in the Bible, one should consider the fruits of a certain teaching. What does that teaching provoke in the hearts of men? Is it love for God and man? Is it a desire to please God and to praise God? Is it a desire to pray for all men to be saved as Paul taught us to do? Does it provoke us to press toward the mark of the high calling? Does it provoke us to be a greater witness for God?

## **Men are Fallible**

Men who want to please God many times will do what God commands, but they have ideas that are inconsistent with their actions. For example, one is a faithful witness for Christ, lives a holy life, prays for men to be saved, witness to them of the love of God and preaches the gospel of salvation (all commandments); but at the same time believes God has foreordained who will be saved. This leads to confusion and one not being able to articulate clearly to others the simplicity of truth.

Paul labored zealously as he purposed to be free from the blood of all men. I suppose if it were true that God chooses who will be saved, it was vain for him to be careful for that. I suppose if Paul was made all things to all men that he might win some, he must have been wasting his efforts if that point was already settled with God. You see, the teaching of predestination is not consistent with the New Testament, whether we look at the Gospels, the history, the epistles, or most importantly, the commandments.

What is consistent with the New Testament is, that when a man believes on the Lord, he is now chosen (elected) and predestined in the mind of God, to live for God, be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, to labor for him, and to be faithful unto death. Whether he fulfills that election or not, is dependent on how diligently he makes his calling and election sure.

## **A Comment on Election**

And lastly, in respect to election, the Bible teaches that, in addition to those who are saved, Jesus himself is God's elect; and some angels are God's elect (I Timothy 5:21). One should not equate election with salvation (two different words), but rather God choosing those who are obedience to the will of God to fulfill certain callings. This election goes beyond salvation, and reaches to one's faithful service to God – that service being made known according to the calling of God. Paul said he had "finished his course." He knew what his election was. He knew God had chosen him to be a light unto the gentiles. However, on that road to Damascus early in his life, it was Paul's freewill choice to humble himself before Jesus Christ, and say, "What wilt thou have me to do." This is a larger study, but I wanted to caution people from assuming election equals salvation simply because someone says it does. The root word for elect is to select or choose. The question becomes then, for what? Is it for salvation? Or is it for a particular path of service? When Jesus said, many are called, and few are chosen (Matthew 22:14); we see where the ones invited *would* not come (Matthew 22:3). One should learn this parable first before assuming election is a thing contrary to the commandments of God.

May God bless you all.

The End.