

Are Assurance and Free Will In Conflict

Scripture Is Consistent

As we begin, we must pay close attention to this text. Most of the Bible is clear and understandable. Some passages, like this text in Hebrews, require more work. This text has divided denominations, churches and Christians. It has created debate for centuries and caused men to develop doctrinal positions telling us what God is saying, believing they can explain these passages better than God. Scripture is not conflicted, only mankind is. The theme I want you to lock onto this morning is; **God foreordains all things, but not in such a way as to negate the responsibility for the choices we make.**

This message will be shorter than normal to give us time for questions and hopefully together discover the answers. So please take notes.

One of the more notable examples of scriptures that many believe are in conflict with each other, is God's passages on predestination and man's free will. Some people believe these are in conflict and are mutually exclusive of each other. Many theologians have worked to define these two positions. Their goal is generally to exclude the opposite position driven by a desire to manage doctrine and gain control; this is the fallen nature of man. The man-defined doctrines of Armenism and Calvinism have some good points but they work to exclude each other and thus change what scripture teaches. The Scriptures teach God has predestined people and people have free will. Paul speaks of predestination, **"we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."**²⁹ **For those whom he foreknew he also**

predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ **And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**” (Romans 8:28-30) The scriptures also speak of free will, for example, Adam and Eve exercised free will when they chose to sin against God, but they did not deny God. In Genesis chapter 2, “**the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’**” (Genesis 2:16-17) I understand sinning against God, for I am a sinner. People sin by weakness and rebellion and lack of understanding. However, to deny God after one has known God and one has experienced God as reality, is difficult for me to grasp.

I also, understand my logic is not God’s. As I work through this teaching this morning my logic may not be your logic either. Being left-handed and right-brain dominate can lead me to process differently. So, for all you left-brained people I will do my best. I have difficulty understanding that when God calls a person and brings to life their spiritually dead soul and makes them aware He is real, why they would reject Him. I approach this through my own experience, which is, when God called me and gave life to my soul, I fell in love with Him and could not imagine not wanting to be His child. However, this does happen, for example; Lucifer in Isaiah chapter 14 fell from being an angel of God to becoming the evil Satan. Why? Because his ego and pride led him to desire to be worshipped as God is worshipped. He did not reject the fact that God exists but he desired to be worshipped as god and thus rejecting God as the only God to be worshipped. Judas was with Jesus for 3 years and saw miracle after miracle and heard the eternal words of truth and yet rejected God and betrayed Jesus. Reading from Luke

chapter 22, “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. ³ **Then Satan entered into Judas** called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ **He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.** ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.” Satan could not have entered Judas if he had been faithful to Christ and the Holy Spirit was at work in him. So, here is what I believe, there is no conflict with predestination and free will and they work together in God’s sovereign plan; it is we, as humans, that struggle and do not fully understand how they work together. So, instead of fighting and dividing, we need to accept the Word of God as He has ordained it and do our best to live His Word and bring Him honor and glory.

Last week we learned about people in the early church, the author of Hebrews referred to as living on the milk of the Word rather than meat. Now he is placing before the entire church the idea that for some, it may be more serious than simply being an immature Christian. There may be some who are not Christian at all and some who after experiencing God return to the world. Jesus says, people within the church are like wheat and tares sown together; Jesus’ parable found in Matthew chapter 13, ends with Jesus saying, ³⁰ “**Let both (*tares/weeds and wheat*) grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’**” It is God who will determine which is which and separate them at harvest for eternity. Scripture clearly teaches that it is God who saves. He alone opens our hearts and souls to the fact we are sinners in the need of repentance and a Savior. He alone opens hearts to believe in Christ. God alone gives believers

Himself as the Holy Spirit to give and secure faith and He alone keeps His children. Back to Hebrews chapter 6, there are three groups the writer is concerned with. First, there is the main group he is writing to; true believers, immature wheat, who need to move towards spiritual maturity. The second group needs to be saved; they are tares within the church. The third group have experienced God and now reject Him. For the true Christian, God's inspired words become encouragement, however, to the false disciple His words are a serious warning.

Pray

God Sovereignty In Assurance

It is important when we look at a text, that has elements in it difficult to understand or accept, we must look at the overall teaching of Scripture. We interpret scripture in light of the entirety of scripture. We do this because we realize the Bible is the complete revelation of God to man and is to be seen as a whole. It has many earthly authors but only one true Author, God the Holy Spirit.

To add confusion to this morning's text, for centuries there are those who taught once God has saved a person, He is able to keep them saved and despite one's behavior and they cannot lose their salvation. Conversely, there are those who taught a true believer can, at some point, abandon their salvation and be lost forever. The problem here is how people see these 2 opposing positions. I have struggled with this over the years. I am going to give you what I believe it right after studying, meditating and praying over this passage. I believe the answer to these 2 questions of sovereignty of salvation and man's free will is "Yes". God is forever faithful and sovereign and capable of keeping believers in security and faith and salvation. And yes, free will makes it possible for someone to walk away from God and lose their salvation. People see these positions as incompatible

towards each other because they are trying to solve man-imposed conflict caused by human reason. It is the same difficulty as the doctrines of predestination and free will. As people, we see conflict, but since God has placed both in the scriptures, they must both be true. At this point you might say, Pastor remind us of the theme of your message. I am glad you asked. **God foreordains all things, but not in such a way as to negate the responsibility for the choices we make.**

Let me give some groundwork for how we consider this morning's text.

- **God is beyond our ability to completely understand.** If we could define God and completely understand Him; then what kind of God would He be? The answer is, He would be a man-made god, the god of man-made false religions. Our God is beyond our ability to fully understand – so, I describe God as “otherly” or His completeness is beyond my imagination.
- **God is sovereign, all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere in the universe He created by His mere word.** So, as we struggle to understand some of the deeper things God teaches us in His Bible, we need to understand the problem is not God. The problem is us; we are sinful people. God is infinite and we are finite, God is all knowing and we are limited.
- When it comes to several teachings in the Scriptures men find conflict with each other as they try to understand these scriptures with human logic. **God's logic is not man's** and these teachings are not in conflict with God, they work together in His plan for the salvation of mankind.
- Fatalism sees everything happening as a result of the law of science and circumstance. This removes and eliminates responsibility for people's choices. This thinking is atheistic, it is not the thinking of Christian faith, which teaches **God is sovereign and man is a sinner responsible for his choices.**

Now I believe we are ready to read this morning's text, beginning at verse 1 of chapter 6, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ And this we will do if God permits.⁴ **For it is impossible**, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ and then have fallen away, **to restore them again to repentance**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and **holding him up to contempt**."⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned." Verse 8 relates to Jesus' parable in Matthew 13 of the tares and wheat and is the reason I used this parable.

Let me begin, if you are concerned about losing your salvation then you are not in risk of doing so. Only an awe and love of God would cause you to fear losing your salvation and this concern indicates you have not rejected God and are not in jeopardy. In the Gospel According to Mark is recorded these words of Jesus concerning the unpardonable sin, " 'Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'—³⁰ for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.' " (Mark 3:29-30) To say the works of God are actually the works of Satan is eternal sin and here in Hebrews it would mean, as the verses state, one has been "enlightened", "shared in the Holy Spirit" and "tasted the goodness of the word of God" but chose to walk away from God

and return to the world. In Proverbs it says this is “Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.”¹² Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? **There is more hope for a fool than for him.**” (Proverbs 26:11-12) This then, is the eternal sin in Mark of “**blaspheming against the Holy Spirit**” for such a person “**never has forgiveness**” and in Hebrews “**it is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance**”. Know this, my beloved, if you are concerned about this happening, it is a sign you are not denying God but desiring God more than the prince of this world. This does not mean one can take their salvation for granted, become lazy – God calls each of us to pursue Him through the study of His Word and prayer to grow in spiritual maturity. Pursuing spiritual maturity in Christ is one premise woven through the Book of Hebrews.

How do we balance or bring together the losing of one’s salvation with what is recorded in John chapter 6? The crowd of followers finds Jesus on the shore of the sea at Capernaum. Reading at verse 35, “**Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**”³⁶ **But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.**”³⁷ **All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**”³⁸ **For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.**”³⁹ **And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.**”⁴⁰ **For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.’ ”** Jesus says, He will lose no one who the Father has given Him. The Father and Jesus are consistent and are all powerful, so they are capable of not losing one soul. Jesus also says there are those among his followers that have seen His miracles and teachings and yet do not believe and these people are lost and in need of salvation.

How does this then work with the idea that a believer can lose their salvation? Jesus will not lose, but it does not say man cannot reject Jesus. God's authority and man's free will and man's responsibility are affirmed by Scripture, and we must continue to hold them together. The relationship between the two is difficult, but to deny either is to deny the Scriptures. Can God keep you and protect you and guarantee your salvation? Absolutely! Can one harden their heart against God after knowing God and turn from God and choose to walk away from God committing the eternal sin of "**blaspheming against the Holy Spirit**" for such a person "**never has forgiveness**" and "**it is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance**"? The answer is absolutely, even though I do not understand how - when a person's soul has been brought to spiritual life, they could desire for it to die and deny God, but this is what Hebrews and other scriptures teach. God is sovereign – He is not the problem. Man is a sinner and people are responsible for their actions – so, it is mankind that is the problem.

Consequences Of Free Will

In the unbelieving and purely materialist framework of society, people believe there is no soul and argue that every decision is pre-determined by physical laws and circumstance. Therefore, true good or evil does not exist. Society's fatalism eliminates responsibility and blurs the line between good and evil, and this is why the unbelieving world is in such a complete mess. Christianity on the other hand teaches God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

In last week's text and message, we observed that there are believers and unbelievers in church together; those worshipping with a true love of God and those who are artificially worshipping. John spoke of the tares or unbelievers within the church in his 1st letter, "**They went out from us, but they were not of us;**

for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*" (1 John 2:19) These people returned to the world because they did not believe and were not saved. It is clear only God sees the true condition of a person's heart. We are called to observe the "*fruit of the Spirit*" in one's life, as laid out in Galatians chapter 5, and the absence of the "*fruit of the Spirit*" in one's life brings into question, "are they saved?" This is a valid question; however, this is a question only God can answer. So, if a person walks away from God, denies God and goes back to the world only God knows if they were unsaved and walked away because of an unconverted and unsaved soul or if they committed the unpardonable sin of knowing and experiencing God and then rejecting Him. This is why our job is to continue to share the Gospel of Christ, to seek a person's repentance and submission to Christ, until they demand we stop. But this certainly does not mean we accept behavior that is counter to the Gospel. As verses 4 to 6 states, believers who reject Christ - "**it is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance**".

When we put verses 4 to 6 in context and then bring alongside the words of Christ in Matthew 12 where the Pharisees accused Jesus saying, "*It is only by Beelzebul (Baal-Zebub), the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.*" (v. 24) Beelzebul is the pagan god of the Philistines and means "lord of the flies" so, the Pharisees use of this pagan god as the prince of demons was not correct and they do not get his name quite right either. Jesus gives a lengthy response, including these words, ²⁷ "*if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.*" ²⁸ "**But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**" Jesus is saying for evil to cast evil is not logical and all people are either with Jesus or against Jesus; there is no middle ground. If Jesus is who both He and God the Father says

He is – God’s judgment will fall upon these Pharisees. Therefore, for His enemies, those who have never known Christ or believed in Him there is hope of salvation. But for those who have believed and reject Christ and again become His enemies there is no hope. ⁴For it is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. What is being spoken of here is not backsliding or committing a sin and not coming quickly to repentance. It does not mean one can lose their salvation and get it back and lose it again and get it back again. The sin of rejecting God after having known God is permanent, this sin it so horrible, for me, it is almost beyond belief.

Let me lay out a few elements I see that would need to be present in order for someone to commit this unpardonable sin.

- This person would have had a clear knowledge of who Christ is and have experienced the Holy Spirit’s work within them.
- They willful reject the truth of Christ they have known and desire the prince of this world over the Most Holy God.
- They slanderously attribute the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ to the power of Satan.

In such a case the hardness of one’s heart would have become so great that any ordinary means of bringing the sinner to repentance would already have been rejected. Persuasion of the truth will not work because they have known the truth and rejected it. Demonstrations of miracles and the power of the Holy Spirit will not sway this person because they have seen and experienced them and rejected them. This person’s heart that once had the light of Christ, now has become so dark, malicious and willful in its rejection of Christ and hatred of Christ is so

complete it can only be fueled by the Prince of Darkness. I simply do not understand how when someone has known the light and truth of Christ, they could reject Him. But God does **not** say, Bill you must understand everything, but God does say as I seek Him, I am to be obedient to His Word. As I stated earlier, **God foreordains all things, but not in such a way as to negate the responsibility for the choices we make.** My beloved, the fact that this is such an extreme hardness of the heart and complete denial of the truth, if one is concerned about committing this sin that means they still are seeking Christ and cannot commit this horrible sin. However, as one prays and their heart, mind and soul is opened by the Holy Spirit to the sins they have committed, they certainly will come to know their need for repentance before a Holy God. Any disobedience to God is sin and shows our contempt for God – may we, my beloved, help strengthen each other to live in obedience to God and His Word, bringing Him glory and may we gain ever more spiritual maturity by our pursuit of God. Amen!

Now before we close with a song, with singing worship to our Most Holy God, we will take time for questions and have some discussion.