

Soul-winning: Antinomy – Romans 9:20

I. Introduction:

- A. I have been debating with myself about at what point to put this lesson into our series.
1. Obviously, you can see what I determined.
 2. I have decided to get this piece of nastiness, and its wonderful theology, out of the way before we proceed into the more practical aspects of personal evangelism and soul-winning.
 3. And here is the reason:
- B. I was taught from the moment I entered Bible school, that to believe in the true sovereignty of God was to administer poison to the work of evangelism.
1. I have been told dozens of times that to believe that God will save whomsoever He chooses, kills any interest in soul-winning.
 2. I was taught that the idea of the sovereignty of God robs the potential soul-winner of both the motive to evangelize and the message of that evangelism.
 3. I was taught that people who longed for and worked for the salvation of souls, have always believed that the initial steps toward salvation had to be made by the sinner, not God.
 4. I was taught that the greatest soul-winners all believed what my instructors were teaching me.
 5. I was led to think that no successful soul-winner ever believed in election or predestination.
 6. I was fed the lies that men, like C.H. Spurgeon, rejected what they called “*Hyper-Calvinism.*”
 7. I was led to believe that all the early missionaries, like Adoniram Judson and William Carey, refused to believe in the absolute sovereignty of God.
 8. But later I learned that these all statements were false.
 9. I never was confronted with the fact that the doctrinal statements of most early Baptists declared their allegiance to the idea of God’s absolute sovereignty over salvation.
- C. Like most of the other neophytes around me in school, I thought that I **did believe** in God’s **sovereignty**.
1. It wasn’t until a couple years after I graduated that learned I hadn’t really understood the subject.
 2. After I left school and began to read the Bible on my own, without the help of the proscribed commentators and theologies, that I saw that without the intervention of God, no one would ever be saved.
- D. While I was still in school, or shortly thereafter, I bought a book called “*False Doctrines Answered from the Scriptures,*” by J.R. Rice.
1. I still have it, although I am not sure exactly why, because, until this week, I haven’t touched it since I last moved my library.
 - a. I had to wash my hands after picking it up, because it was so dusty; it made me feel dirty.
 - b. It made me feel dirty in other ways as well.
 2. Rice harps on the words “*Calvinists*” and “*hyper-Calvinists,*” but I now know his definitions were inaccurate.
 - a. It was through men like him I became confused and began to fear Calvinism.
 - b. I didn’t want to taste the poison which might kill my zeal for the Lord.
- E. Here is a quote from page 274 – “*Those who believe a doctrine of God’s limited love, limited grace, limited atonement and unchangeable plan to damn millions who could not be saved, are called hyper-Calvinists.*”
1. *These extreme doctrines were first taught somewhat by Augustine.*
 - a. *Then for about a thousand years no one found them in the Bible, of course, till Calvin developed such a theology.*
 - b. *Adopting the theory, men then persuaded themselves that they find it in the Bible.”*
 - c. He said, “*I believe hyper-Calvinism is not a Bible doctrine, but is a perversion by proud intellectuals who thus may try to excuse themselves from any spiritual accountability for winning souls.*”
 2. Almost everything in that quote is either an outright lie or at least a manipulation of the truth.
 - a. I cannot believe Rice ignorantly or inadvertently repeated the misconceptions of others.
 - b. I cannot believe he hadn’t fully considered what he was preaching and writing.

3. After that, reading for years his edited versions of sermons by men who believed like I do, I am convinced Rice knew what he was doing; he understood the deception he was propagating.
 4. And even though I can fellowship with some men who disagree with me on this subject, I doubt that I will ever have to fellowship with J.R. Rice, because based on his deeds, I am not sure the man is in Heaven.
 5. Maybe he is, but I'm just not convinced of it.
- F. Despite what Rice has said, when I began to teach through the Bible, I became convinced that what I now believe about God's sovereignty and man's depravity is Bible doctrine and has always been Bible doctrine.
1. It was in the Bible before Calvin and before Augustine.
 2. It was the doctrine of Peter and of Paul; it was the doctrine of Moses & David; it was the doctrine of Christ.
 3. From the Bible, I discovered that people are dead in trespasses and sins, and like Lazarus, Christ must say, "*Come forth*" before they can.
 4. I read in more than one scripture that God loved Jacob but Esau He hated.
 5. I learned that God chooses people to save based on nothing but His own grace and love.
 6. I saw people like Saul of Tarsus, who were not seeking God, but God was seeking and saving them.
 7. I read in the Bible, speaking of God, that "*of his own will he begat us with the word of truth*" – ie. saved us.
- G. Since I was raised with the earlier-mentioned misconceptions, I decided that a lesson on "*Biblical Antinomy*" was in order before we get to the larger subject of soul-winning.

II. As I said a couple week ago, "*antinomy*" is a new word in my vocabulary.

- A. It comes from the Greek language through the combination of two common words:
1. "*Anti*" which means "*against*" or "*in opposition to,*" and "*nomos*" means "*law.*"
 2. An antinomy is something which is against law, but in a very special way.
 3. It is related to "*antinomian*" & "*antinomianism*" which speak about people & theories which are against law.
- B. Webster defines an "*antinomy*" as "*a contradiction between two laws, or between two parts of the same law.*"
1. He wasn't talking about man-made laws, but natural laws, like gravity or thermodynamics.
 - a. There is a law which demands that if I drop a piece of bread with peanut butter on it, it will fall to the floor – peanut butter side down. (Well, maybe not the last part).
 - b. Gravity draws things together; smaller objects toward the larger.
 - c. Everything and everyone on this planet are drawn by gravity toward the center of the earth.
 2. People today are saying, "*there is no absolute truth.*"
 - a. That is an antinomy because those people are making their statement as if it was an absolute.
 - b. "*There is absolutely no absolute truth*" is an antinomy.
 3. And if you didn't know it was in the Bible, but you heard me say, "*All men are liars;*" you might consider this to be an antinomy, because my comment about lying could very well be a lie.
 - a. But on the other hand, since it is in the Bible, it is true and all men are liars.
 - b. And by the way, "*the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death,*" but that is another subject.
- C. The Oxford Dictionary defines "*antinomy*" as "*a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary.*"
1. That is a good definition when it comes to some things, but in theology, if the Bible makes two apparently contradictory statements, then the word "*apparently*" comes into play.
 - a. The Bible does not, and cannot, contradict itself.
 - b. So if the Bible makes two contradictory statements, both must be true.
 - c. And in that case the statements only **appear** to be contradictory
 2. If they appear to be contradictory to me, it is because I am not God, and I am not smart enough to see how both statements are true.

3. A Biblical *“antinomy”* exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilably, yet both are undeniable, because they both have a *“thus saith the Lord”* behind them.

D. There are at least two divine laws related to soul-winning which are antinomian.

III. The first relates to *THE NATURE OF GOD*.

- A. The Holy Spirit, in His Word, clearly declares that Jehovah is the **king** over His creation.
 1. He is both **THE** sovereign and He **IS** sovereign, with absolute authority over absolutely everything.
 2. This authority embraces everything under the sun – and above it too.
 3. The Psalmist declared that Jehovah *“is a great King over ALL the earth.”*
 - a. *He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.*
 - b. **He shall choose our inheritance for us...** What will it be? Heaven or the Lake of Fire?
 4. God is King over the world, and He *“worketh ALL things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11)*
 5. How wide is the word *“all”* in this verse? In one fashion or another it includes everything.
 6. Again, the Psalmist said, *“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth...”*
 - a. No one can tell the Lord not to do something or to do something else.
 - b. And certainly no one can stop the omnipotent God from doing whatever He would like to do.
 7. *“Both riches and honor come of thee (God), and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.”*
 8. Now, I admit David did not say this in **I Chronicles 29**, but I believe one application of this is: *“Both salvation & forgiveness come of thee (God), & thou reignest over all hearts; & in thine hand is power & might; & in thine hand it is to make righteous, & to give eternal life & strength unto whosoever you choose.”*
- B. I believe that Saul of Tarsus, the Christ-hater and Christian persecutor, was on a short leash, with the Lord holding the looped end in his hand.
 1. For reasons known only to God, God permitted that wicked man to carry out some despicable things.
 2. And then is to God’s sovereign will, He yanked on that leash, pulling that unwilling rebel to his knees.
 3. He revealed himself to Saul in special way, & the man responded with *“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do.”*
 4. The salvation of Saul clearly reveals the authority of God over the heart of that man.
 5. In this case, the Holy Spirit was the soul-winner, without any help from Peter, Philip, Barnabas, Ananias and especially, not from Saul himself.
- C. A similar case is seen in Nebuchadnezar, king of Babylon.
 1. Truly, *“the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”*
 2. Just like Saul, Nebuchadnezar was persecuting the saints of the Lord.
 3. And he was so proud that he considered himself to be a god, until the Lord afflicted him with insanity.
 4. And then after suffering for the effects of sin, the Lord saved him, giving him a new heart in the process.
- D. I won’t multiply the examples, but I can’t skip over the lovely one we have in Lydia of Thyatira.
 1. Lydia, a Jewess, like thousands of other Jews, probably laughed at the thought that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah, especially after He was crucified.
 2. But then, **Acts 16:14** says that the Lord opened her heart, enabling her to give attendance to the gospel which Paul preached.
 3. She was saved because God opened her cold, dead heart.
 4. That is the basic story behind every conversion, every babe in Christ, every soul-winning victory.
- E. The hypocrisy of John R. Rice and everyone else who hates what I just told you, is almost laughable.
 1. Those people surreptitiously acknowledge the sovereignty of God every time they pray.
 2. That soul-winner may pray that God would open doors to him, believing that God can do that.
 3. He may pray that the Lord would give him wisdom in speaking to some specific person.
 4. He believes in God’s sovereign control over the hearts of men when he prays for someone’s salvation.

5. And well he should believe, because God *is* in control.
6. Praise the Lord that He can open that door, warm that heart and fill us with wisdom, because, in truth, even as soul-winners, we lack all these things.

F. God is sovereign over all the affairs of man, including salvation.

1. Praise the Lord for that fact, because a second fact is that every man, woman and child is spiritually dead.
2. If God does not miraculously step in, no one would ever repent or understand why or how to trust in the Saviour.
3. If God doesn't bless the soul-winner, then that Christian witness is wasting his time.
4. The obvious Biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God over the hearts of men is half of the conundrum; the first part of the antinomy.

IV. The second part is that the *spiritually dead rebel* is **COMMANDED** to **REPENT** and **TRUST CHRIST**.

A. On one side of the antinomy is the **sovereignty** of God, and on the other is the **responsibility** of the sinner.

1. On one side is the **command of God**, but on the other is the fact that the sinner is **spiritually dead**.
2. What must that sinner do to be saved?
 - a. Jesus said, *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*
 - b. And the Father said, *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*
3. The sinner is commanded to come, but elsewhere in the Bible we read that he is unable to come.
4. What must we do not to end up crushed by God's stone of stumbling or under the falling tower of Siloam?
 - a. Repent and *"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - b. But if the sinner has no ability to do either of those things, because he is spiritually dead, what does that make of the command?
5. Is God a fraud in inviting the lost to come, or to repent, or to trust the Saviour, when in fact that sinner cannot do these things?

B. What a confusing antinomy!

1. *"God commandeth all men to repent."*
2. God himself said in **Isaiah 45:22**, *"Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else."*
 - a. But how can they see, when the god of this world hath blinded their minds lest the light of the glory of Christ should shine unto them?
 - b. How can they see, when they are spiritually dead?
3. Jesus said in **John 6:40** – *"This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life..."*
4. I hope that I don't need to multiply scriptures like these.
5. I read the other day that there are about 115 New Testament scriptures which link salvation to the sinner's trust in the finished work of Christ. And there are others which exhort sinners to repent.
 - a. I hope you are basically familiar with what is required of people at the time of their salvation.
 - b. And if you are not, that is okay, because we will come back to these in later lessons.

V. **HOW** should we **HANDLE** this **ANTINOMY** in soul-winning?

A. What is our Christian duty?

1. Our duty is to believe God, in everything, whether or not those things make sense to our limited minds.
2. Which of these is a true statement: *"God is King over His creation,"* or *"God is the judge over His creation?"*
3. Taken separately, most professing Christians would have no problem with either one. They are both true.
4. But just think about it for a moment.
 - a. If God is King and truly sovereign, then nothing can take place without His approval.
 - b. If nothing can happen without God's approval or permission, then for what reason is He also a judge?
 - c. He shouldn't have to judge people, if He is truly sovereign and doesn't permit those people to sin.

B. What should we do about this antimony?

1. **Romans 9:20** warns us against one possible response.
2. *“Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”*
3. Please return to **Romans 9** because the context in this case is very important.
4. **Verse 13** – *“As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”*
 - a. Remember when J.R. Rice accused me of intellectually denying the obvious words of God?
 - b. What about the also intellectualism necessary to say that *“Esau have I hated,”* means *“I didn’t love Esau as much as I did Jacob?”*
 - c. And, even if that was true, which it is not, it still says that God’s love is dispensed sovereignly.
5. **Verse 13** – *“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*
 - a. *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*
 - b. *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*
 - c. *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*
 - d. *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*
 - e. *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?*
 - f. *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*
 - g. *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*
 - h. *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:*
 - i. *And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”*

C. Forgive me for quoting J.I. Packer at this point, but he hits the nail on the head.

1. *“What should we do, then with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it.*
2. *Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real;*
 - a. *put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding;*
 - b. *think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other.*
3. *Be careful, therefore not to set them at loggerheads, nor to make deductions from either that would cut across the other. Use each within the limits of its own sphere of reference.*
4. *Note what connection exists between the two truths and their two frames of reference, and teach yourself to think of reality in a way that provides for their peaceful coexistence, remembering that the reality itself has proved actually to contain them both.”*
5. In this case, the *“reality”* is that the Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.
6. The Bible declares that man is incapable of repentance & faith, but he is still required to repent & believe.

D. What we see in evangelical religion today is people taking sides in their struggle with this antinomy.

1. One side, as in J. R. Rice, rejects God’s sovereign control of man’s salvation, because of all those commands which are given to the sinner. I can understand their concern.
2. Then on the other side, there are some who believe in God’s sovereignty but who in fact do nothing or very little to reach the lost, because God has promised to save them anyway.
3. It may be apocryphal, but it is often said that as William Carey, who believed in God’s sovereignty in salvation, was preaching a missionary sermon before a group of British pastors, one highly respected man is alleged to have said, *“Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do so without your aid or mine!”* That man was wrong. The truth lies in between John Ryland and John Rice.
4. God will save those He is pleased to convert, but He always does it through human instruments like you and me.

- E. Don't listen to those naysayers who scream that it is impossible to believe in election, predestination and God's sovereignty in salvation, and still to have an evangelical heart.
 - 1. Believe God instead. Believe the Bible and don't try to explain any of it away.
 - 2. We have a responsibility to evangelize the world and each individual in it.
 - 3. We have the responsibility to be soul-winners.
 - 4. And the lost have a responsibility to humble themselves before God and to trust in Christ the Saviour.
 - 5. At the same time, we can be assured that the sovereign God will carry out His will through us.

- F. It is not the soul-winners job to worry about whether or not God intends to save the sinner to whom we are witnessing.
 - 1. It is our job to repeat what the Lord says and what the gospel commands of that sinner.
 - 2. And at the same time we must trust God for positive results.
 - 3. It is our job to believe the Lord when the lost man cannot, and to accept both sides of the antinomy.