

Does Evangelism Suffer because One Believes in the Sovereignty of God?

Scripture

“For though I am free from all [men], I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those [who are] under the law, as under the law, that I might win those [who are] under the law; to those [who are] without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those [who are] without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with [you].” (1Co 9:19-23 NKJV)

Devotion

Does evangelism suffer because one believes in the sovereignty of God? To answer the title question, this writer would suggest it does not. Clearly Paul had a great passion to share the Gospel with as many people as possible. It is interesting to note the last sentence in the passage above. “Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with [you].”

Paul gives us his motivation in that statement. He did what he did that he might be a partaker of the Gospel with you or them. The word “you” is not in the original text. How did he mean this? Did he mean to say that he had to share the Gospel to ensure his own salvation? This is not at all likely. Did he mean to intimate that he did not want to be alone in his standing? How is the believer to interpret Paul’s words?

Barnes says he wanted to give evidence to the Corinthians of his genuineness in the Gospel. John Gill thinks it is likely that Paul was simply saying he wanted to be a part of their conversion. Matthew Henry says basically the same thing.

“This I do for the gospel’s sake, and that I may be partaker thereof with you; that is, for the honor of Christ, whose the gospel is, and for the salvation of souls, for which it was designed, and that he and they might communicate in the privileges of it, or partake together of them” —MH.

Now it seems that the underlying motivation is love. Paul, like Christ, when he looks upon the masses is moved by love. “. . . When He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” (Mr 6:34 NKJV)

The argument that those who see God as sovereign will not be motivated to share the Gospel may be based on one’s own misplaced affections. Where love says, “I will never stop trying to save that person for they are in great need,” self gratification says, “I will never stop trying to save that person because there is a reward in it for me.” The latter often have a need to validate their efforts.

Paul became all things to all men because he loved them and wanted to see them in fellowship with Christ and himself. This is the only motivation that will sustain a consistent evangelistic effort. “Love suffers long. . .” (1Co 13:4) “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13 NKJV)

Do you love? Does your soul ache as you look upon the masses? Do you have to be berated into sharing the Gospel, or does it leap from your mouth with each opportunity? If you truly love others, you will be motivated to share the Gospel at any cost. To get tied up in the mechanism of salvation is to lose sight of lost souls.

While God is sovereign in salvation, He commands us to preach the Gospel. He also commands men to repent (Acts 17:30) which places responsibility squarely upon their shoulders. Therefore, Christians must boldly, lovingly hope for the conversion of sinners as they proclaim the truth. This will be done by those who truly love.