

1 Kings 8: 56-61

⁵⁶"Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. ⁵⁷The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, ⁵⁸that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. ⁵⁹Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires, ⁶⁰that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. ⁶¹Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the LORD our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day."

Dear Friend,

Most people when they first hear the claim that God is sovereign over everything, including human choice, immediately protest. We naturally presume that if God rules over human choice and determines all things, including those who will be saved, then we are merely robots. Divine sovereignty in salvation makes human choice and action of no consequence. If God saves whom he will, then why should I bother to do anything to be saved? If God always accomplishes his will, then why should I pray or worry about my decisions and actions? Contrary to human reason the Bible presents God as absolutely sovereign over all things, including human hearts and human beings as absolutely responsible for the choices they make. Divine sovereignty, contrary to human logic does not make human choice and action of no consequence. Rather, God's rule over human hearts makes human choice possible. Recently, as I'm reading through the Bible this year, I came across a passage that exemplifies this reality in the most remarkable way.

In 1 Kings 8, King Solomon, the son of David and the greatest king to ever rule in Israel has just completed building the temple. On the day of consecrating the temple to the Lord he offers a very long prayer (vv. 22-53). In the prayer he asks God to answer the prayers of all who come to the temple to worship and to ask him for help. In vv. 56-61, after he finishes his prayer he rises from his knees and faces the gathered nation of Israel and he blesses them. This blessing is an amazing revelation of how to pray and how to address humans in light of the fact that God is sovereign over human will.

Verse 56 is a prayer of praise to the Lord for his faithfully fulfilling all the promises he made to the Israelites. In verse 57 he asks the Lord to be with the nation Israel, to never leave them or forsake them. Now look at v. 58. Why does Solomon want the Lord to always be with the nation Israel? He wants the Lord to be near so that the Lord might incline the hearts of his people to himself so that his people will obey his laws. If we were to ask Solomon, what must happen if God's people are going to obey God's laws? He would answer, the Lord must be with his people in such a way that he gives them hearts that desire to obey his word. If God is not with us, then we will not obey. What is the cause of human obedience to God's law? God's enabling presence inclining our hearts to his law is the cause of human obedience to God's law.

Then in vv. 59-60 Solomon expects that the words of his prayer will remain near to God with the result that God will maintain the cause of his people. Solomon expects that God will respond to his prayer by watching over, protecting and providing for the nation Israel. The result of this

providential, gracious care will be that the entire world will know that the Lord alone is God and that no other God exists. Again, the ultimate end of God's saving his people is his own glory. He will be glorified, admired and respected by means of his preserving his people by inclining their hearts to keep his word.

But now notice the last verse. Verse 61 is addressed to the gathered people of God. It is a word of command that requires obedience. "Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day." The "therefore" tells us that Solomon expects that the result of God blessing the nation Israel with his presence that results in their hearts being inclined to the Lord will be that his people will obey the Lord. Therefore, he tells them to obey. They are obligated to obey God. God will hold them responsible if they don't obey him because their disobedience will be the result of their freely choosing to disobey. However, Solomon also knows that in order for the people to freely choose to obey, God will need to be near in order to incline their hearts to keep his commands.

Divine sovereignty does not eliminate human choice and human accountability. Rather, God's rule over human hearts is the only thing that can free us to willingly choose his ways. How we ought to worship our great God and Father for graciously being near to us and so inclining our hearts to his laws so that we keep them. What joy and freedom we have because God is absolutely sovereign over our hearts.

Seeking an "inclined" heart,