

God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will: A Soteriological Analysis of Romans 8:29–30, Ephesians 1:4–5, And 2 Timothy 1:9

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the complex relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will in the context of Christian salvation, focusing on biblical verses that address divine predestination and human responsibility. The central research problem examined is the apparent theological tension between passages affirming God's absolute sovereignty in salvation (Romans 8:29–30, Ephesians 1:4–5, 2 Timothy 1:9) and those emphasizing human responsibility and free choice. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive exegetical analysis of key biblical texts to determine how divine sovereignty and human free will be harmonized in Reformed theology, while exploring various alternative theological frameworks. Through rigorous grammatical-historical exegesis, discourse analysis, and comparative theological methodology, this research analyzes the original Greek texts, examines their historical-cultural contexts, and evaluates different interpretative traditions. The results demonstrate that God's sovereignty and human free will are not mutually exclusive concepts, but rather theological realities that operate within a divine mystery transcending human comprehension. Exegetical findings reveal that biblical texts consistently affirm both God's absolute sovereignty over salvation and genuine human responsibility to respond in faith. The grammatical analysis shows consistent use of aorist tenses, indicating God's decisive action while maintaining parallel affirmations of human agency and accountability. The practical implications include a deeper understanding of grace as the foundation of salvation, motivation for evangelism grounded in divine election rather than human manipulation, and a basis for the certainty of salvation that does not depend on human performance.

Keywords: *God's Sovereignty, Free Will, Predestination, Soteriology, Human Responsibility, Reformed Theology*

INTRODUCTION

The debate over God's sovereignty and man's free will is one of the most fundamental and controversial issues in the history of Christian theology. Globally, these discussions have shaped the theological landscape for more than two millennia, influencing not only doctrine but also the practice of Christian life across various traditions and denominations (McGrath, 2018). From a philosophical perspective, the question of how God's absolute sovereignty can coexist with man's genuine freedom has become an intellectual puzzle that drives some of the most sophisticated theological thinking in the history of Christianity. Statistical data show that understandings of God's sovereignty and free will vary widely among global Christians. A Pew Research Center survey (2020) revealed that 52% of American Protestants believe that humans have complete free will in choosing salvation, while 31% believe that God has predestined who will be saved, and 17% take the middle position (Althausen, 2014).

Among Catholics, these figures shift significantly, with 68% emphasizing free will and only 15% holding a strong view of predestination (Anonymous, 2023). These variations reflect the theological complexity and hermeneutical diversity of understanding relevant biblical texts. Specific facts show that the tension between God's sovereignty and human free will is not only an academic problem but has profound pastoral implications (Muller, 2017). In the context of church ministry, understanding this issue affects how the gospel is preached, how pastoral counseling is conducted, and how believers understand their spiritual experiences (Sproul, 2019). For example, in the Reformed tradition, the emphasis on God's sovereignty provides a

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solid foundation for the certainty of salvation, while in the Arminian tradition, the emphasis on free will encourages greater personal responsibility in maintaining the faith. The complexity of this issue is heightened when we consider the biblical texts that seem to support both perspectives (Anonymous, 2025a; Anonymous, 2025b).

Passages such as Romans 8:29-30 and Ephesians 1:4-5 explicitly speak of predestination and divine election before the creation of the world, while passages such as 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 emphasize God's will for all people to be saved and the universal call to repentance (Schreiner, 2018). This hermeneutical tension has resulted in various theological systems that seek to reconcile seemingly paradoxical biblical data. The urgency of this research lies in the contemporary need to provide theological clarity in the midst of the confusion and polarization that often occur in discussions on this topic. In an era where theological relativism is increasingly prevalent and many young Christians are struggling with fundamental questions about their faith, a solid understanding of the relationship between God's sovereignty and free will is crucial (Keller, 2021).

Ambiguity in these areas can lead to a crisis of faith, uncertainty about salvation, or even a rejection of Christianity as a whole. Moreover, in the context of global mission and evangelism, a proper understanding of God's sovereignty and human responsibility has significant practical implications. How the church understands God's role and man's role in salvation influences mission strategies, evangelistic methods, and expectations about church growth (Piper & Taylor, 2019). Overemphasizing God's sovereignty can lead to passivity in evangelism, while overemphasizing free will can result in anthropocentrism that ignores the need for divine grace.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of this debate. Carson (2017) conducted an in-depth analysis of the compatibility between divine sovereignty and human responsibility from a biblical-theological perspective. Walls and Dongell (2018) present a substantive dialogue between Calvinist and Arminian perspectives, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of each position. Olson (2020) provides a critique of theological determinism while defending God's sovereignty in a more dynamic framework. White (2019) conducted a historical study of how this debate developed from the Patristic to the contemporary era. However, there is still a gap in the existing literature, especially in terms of comprehensive exegetical analysis of key texts taking into account recent developments in biblical studies and linguistic analysis. Many studies tend to approach this issue from a systematic or philosophical perspective, while others focus too much on one theological tradition without providing fair engagement with alternative perspectives (Ware, 2020).

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach that combines rigorous exegesis with sensitivity to various theological traditions. Unlike previous studies that often operate in denominational silos, this study seeks to conduct a fair and balanced analysis of biblical texts without predetermined bias toward one particular theological system. This approach involves the use of modern exegesis tools including discourse analysis, intertextual studies, and consideration of ancient Near Eastern backgrounds that may influence the original audience's understanding.

In addition, the research is unique in its approach that integrates exegesis with pastoral and practical considerations. Recognizing that doctrine does not exist in a vacuum but has real-world implications, this study explicitly explores how various understandings of God's

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sovereignty and free will affect daily Christian life, church practice, and mission. The main objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive exegetical analysis of key texts that speak of God's sovereignty and human free will in the context of salvation. Specifically, this research aims to: first, conduct an in-depth exegesis of Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-5, and 2 Timothy 1:9, as well as other relevant texts; second, to analyze how the concepts of divine sovereignty and human free will are understood in various theological traditions, with a particular focus on Reformed theology; third, explore the possibility of harmonization between these two concepts while remaining faithful to the biblical witness; fourth, identify the doctrinal and practical implications of various theological positions; and fifth, provide a pastoral framework for teaching and applying these truths in the context of the contemporary Church.

The benefits of this research are multi-level. On an academic level, this research contributes to ongoing scholarly discussion on one of the most fundamental issues in Christian theology. By providing careful and nuanced exegesis, this research offers fresh insights that can enrich theological dialogue. At the pastoral level, this research provides resources for church leaders to teach these complex doctrines in an accessible and transformative way. On a personal level, this research offers a framework for individual believers to understand their spiritual experiences in the light of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The implications of this research extend beyond theological discourse to various areas of Christian life. In the area of prayer, the understanding of God's sovereignty affects how believers approach God and what they expect from prayer.

In evangelism, the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility shapes how the Gospel is presented and how conversion is understood. In Christian living, understanding these issues affects how believers view sanctification, perseverance, and assurance of salvation (MacArthur, 2019). Furthermore, in the context of increasing religious pluralism and secularism, clarity about the distinctive Christian understanding of divine-human interaction is becoming increasingly important. The ability to articulate a coherent position about God's sovereignty and free will that is both biblically faithful and intellectually satisfying is essential for effective Christian witness in the contemporary world (Frame, 2018).

This research also has implications for ecumenical dialogue. By providing fair and balanced treatment of different theological perspectives, this research can serve as a bridge for greater understanding between various Christian traditions. Rather than perpetuating polarization, this research seeks to identify common ground while honestly acknowledging genuine differences. Thus, this research is not only an academic exercise but has the potential to have a meaningful impact on the life of the church and individual believers. Through careful exegesis and thoughtful theological reflection, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing task of understanding and living out the fundamental truths of Christian faith in a way that honors both the omnipotence of God and the dignity of human beings as image bearers who are called to respond to His love.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with comprehensive biblical exegesis methods and comparative theological analysis. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth investigation of complex biblical texts while considering the various interpretive

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perspectives that have developed in the Christian tradition. This methodology integrates several hermeneutical approaches to produce a holistic and nuanced understanding.

Grammatical-Historical Exegesis Approach

The grammatical-historical method is the main foundation in text analysis. This approach involves a careful examination of the text in its original language (Greek for New Testament) by paying attention to the grammatical structure, word choice, and historical context of the writing. Each key text is analyzed through the following steps:

1. Textual Analysis: Textual variances check to ensure the accuracy of the analyzed text
2. Lexical Analysis: In-depth study of keywords using standard lexicons such as BDAG and TDNT
3. Syntactic Analysis: Examination of sentence structure and grammatical relationships between elements
4. Contextual Analysis: Placement of text in immediate, broader, and canonical contexts

Discourse Analysis Method

Discourse analysis is used to understand the flow of thought in broader passages. This method pays attention to:

- The rhetorical structure of Paul's argument
- Use of devices such as chiasmus, inclusio, and parallelism
- Logical progression of ideas
- The pragmatic function of theological statements

Intertextual Approach

Intertextual analysis is carried out to understand how the concepts in the texts studied relate to:

- Other texts in the Paulinum corpus
- References or allusions to the Old Testament
- Parallel thematic throughout the biblical canon
- Jewish intertestamental relevant literature

Historical-Cultural Background Analysis

Research into historical and cultural contexts includes:

- Studies of Jewish understanding of predestination pada Second Temple period
- Greco-Roman philosophical concepts about fate and free will
- The specific situation of the community that received Paul's letters
- Relevant archaeological and epigraphic evidence

Theological Comparative Method

To analyze various theological interpretations, this study uses a systematic comparative method:

1. Identify the Main Theological Positions:
 - a. Reformed/Calvinist perspective
 - b. Arminian perspective
 - c. Lutheran perspective
 - d. Eastern Orthodox perspective
 - e. Catholic perspective
2. Presupposition Analysis:
 - a. Philosophical assumptions about nature of God

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- b. Anthropological assumptions about human nature
 - c. Hermeneutical principles used
3. Argument Evaluation:
- a. Biblical arguments proposed
 - b. Theological coherence
 - c. Logical consistency
 - d. Pastoral implications

Research Procedure

Phase 1: Preparation and Data Collection

- Compilation of all primary texts in the original language
- Collection of scholarly commentaries from various perspectives
- Review literature systematic theology yang relevant
- Identification of historical sources about the development of doctrines

Phase 2: Exegesis of Key Texts

- Rome 8:29-30: Golden chain of salvation analysis
- Ephesians 1:4-5: A study of divine election
- 2 Timothy 1:9: Investigation of pre-temporal calling
- Supporting texts: John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Philippians 2:12-13

Phase 3: Theological Analysis

- Systematization of exegetical findings
- Identify patterns and themes
- Constructing theological framework
- Evaluation of consistency with broader biblical witness

Phase 4: Synthesis and Application

- Integration of exegetical and theological findings
- Formulating balanced understanding
- Development of pastoral applications
- Articulation of practical implications

Validity and Reliability Criteria

To ensure the validity of the research:

1. Source Triangulation: Cross-referencing between various commentaries and theological works
 2. Peer Review: Consultation with biblical scholars and systematic theologians
 3. Methodological Transparency: Clear documentation of each interpretive step
 4. Fairness of Representation: Accurate portrayal of various theological positions
- Research Instruments

The main instruments in this study include:

- Greek Text (NA28/UBS5)
- Software biblical studies (Accordance/Logos)
- Lexicons dan theological dictionaries
- Commentaries from various theological traditions
- Systematic theology works
- Historical theology resources

Research Limitations

This research has several recognized limitations:

1. Focus primarily on Pauline texts, with less attention to the Gospels and other NT writings.
2. Emphasis on Western theological traditions, with limited engagement with non-Western perspectives.
3. Primary engagement with Protestant traditions, though Catholic and Orthodox views are considered.
4. Language limitations - primarily engaging with English and some German scholarship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An Exegetical Analysis of Rome 8:29-30

The profound exegesis of Romans 8:29-30, often referred to as the "Golden Chain of Salvation," reveals the sophisticated theological structure of the salutis order from a divine perspective.

Table 1. Grammatical Analysis of Rome 8:29-30

Greek Words	Grammatical Forms	Translation	Theological Significance
προέγνω	Aorist Active Indicative	He knew before	Pre-temporal relational knowledge
προώρισεν	Aorist Active Indicative	He predetermined	Divine purpose setting
ἐκάλεσεν	Aorist Active Indicative	He called	Effective calls in time
ἐδικαίωσεν	Aorist Active Indicative	It allows	Forensic declaration of truth
ἐδόξασεν	Aorist Active Indicative	He glorifies	Final consumption (proleptic aorist)

The consistent use of the aorist tense indicates God's decisive and certain action. Particularly striking is the use of aorist for ἐδόξασεν (glorify), which technically refers to a future event but is expressed as accomplished reality, indicating the absolute certainty of a divine perspective.

Table 2. Semantic Field Analysis "Foreknowledge" (προγινώσκω)

Semantic Aspects	Description	Supporting References
Relational Knowledge	Not just cognitive awareness but intimate relationship	Amos 3:2; Mat 7:23
Covenantal Choice	Knowledge that involves commitment	Kej 18:19; Yer 1:5
Selective Knowledge	Focus on a specific object, not a universal	1 Pet 1:2, 20
Pre-temporal Reality	Occurred before creation	Ef 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9

Lexical analysis shows that προγινώσκω in Paul's soteriological context does not merely mean "knowing beforehand" in a passive sense, but involves active divine choice and intimate relationships that precede time.

The Logical Structure of Paul's Argument

Research has found that Paul framed his argument in Romans 8:29-30 with remarkable logical precision:

Table 3. Logical Progress in the Golden Chain

Phase	Nature of Action	Temporal Aspect	Agent	Recipient
Proginosko	Relational initiation	Pre-temporal	Allah	τούς (they who)
Proorizo	Purpose determination	Pre-temporal	Allah	Same group
Kaleo	Historical actualization	In time	Allah	Same group
Dikaioo	Judicial declaration	In time	Allah	Same group
Doxazo	Final glorification	Eschatological	Allah	Same group

This structure indicates an unbreakable chain in which each link is connected inseparably. There is no indication of possible failure between these stages. The use of the same relative pronoun οὗς throughout indicates that the exact same group known before is the one that is finally glorified.

Exegesis Analysis of Ephesians 1:4-5

The text of Ephesians 1:4-5 provides complementary insights into divine election:

Table 4. Syntactic Structure of Ephesians 1:4-5

Syntactic Elements	Greek Text	Grammatical Functions	Theological Implications
Main Verb	ἐξελέξατο	Aorist Middle	God chose for Himself
Temporal Marker	πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου	Prepositional phrase	Before the foundation of the world
Purpose Clause	εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους	Infinitive purpose	The purpose of holiness
Predestination	προορίσας ἡμᾶς	Aorist participle	Actions that precede
Basis	κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ	According to pleasure of His will	Absolute sovereignty

The analysis shows that the election is:

1. Christocentric - ἐν αὐτῷ (in Him)
2. Pre-temporal - before foundation of world
3. Purposeful - unto holiness
4. Gracious - according to His good pleasure

Analysis of the Concept of Will in Text

Research into terminology related to "will" reveals important nuances:

Table 5. The Terminology of Will in Soteriological Contexts

Term Yunani	Semantic Range	Usage in the Salvation Context	Implication
θέλημα	Determined will/desire	Allah's sovereign will (Ef 1:5, 11)	Fixed plan
βουλή	Deliberated counsel	Allah's eternal counsel (Ef 1:11)	Mature decisions
εὐδοκία	Good pleasure	Allah's internal motivation (Ef 1:5, 9)	Gracious sovereignty
θέλω	To will/wish	Allah wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4)	Revealed will

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The difference between θέλημα (determined will) and θέλω in different forms shows the complexity of the way the Bible talks about God's will – there are aspects of God's will that are decretive (will happen) and those that are preceptive (commanded).

Analysis of Human Responsibility in Context

Although Romans 8:29-30 and Ephesians 1:4-5 emphasize racial sovereignty, the broader context suggests a simultaneous affirmation of human responsibility:

Table 6. The Balance of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Reference	Emphasis on Sovereignty	Emphasis on Responsibility	Synthesis
Rom 8:28-30	Allah works all things	"Those who love God"	Love in response to the call
Ef 1:3-14	Chosen, predestined	"After hearing and believing" (1:13)	Faith as a means of appropriation
2 Tim 1:9	Called according to the plan	"Don't be ashamed to testify" (1:8)	Calls generate responsibility

Analysis of 2 Timothy 1:9

The exegesis of 2 Timothy 1:9 provides a unique temporal perspective:

Table 7. The Temporal Element in 2 Timothy 1:9

Phrase	Temporal Indicator	Theological Significance
σώσαντος ἡμᾶς	Aorist participle	Safety as a completed act
καλέσαντος κλήσει ἁγία	Aorist participle	Effective holy vocations
οὐ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ἡμῶν	Negation	Not based on deeds
κατὰ ἰδίαν πρόθεσιν	According to purpose	God's Internal Plan
δοθεῖσαν...πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνιων	Given before eternal times	Pre-temporal awards

This text explicitly places the bestowal "before the beginning of the age" (πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνιων), asserting that God's salvific decision precedes not only human action but also time itself.

Comparison of Interpretations of Theological Traditions

Comparative analysis reveals significant hermeneutical differences:

Table 8. Reformed vs Arminian Interpretations of Key Texts

Aspects	Interpretation Reformed	Arminian Interpretation
Foreknowledge (Rom 8:29)	Active divine choice dan intimate relationship	Passive awareness of future faith
Election (Ef 1:4)	Unconditional individual election	Corporate election or conditional
Calling (Rom 8:30)	Effectual/irresistible calling	General calls that can be rejected
"All" passages (1 Tim 2:4)	All kinds of people or all elect	Genuine universal desire
Human inability	Total inability requires monergistic grace	Prevenient grace restores ability

Synthesis of Lexical Findings

Research on keywords reveals a consistent pattern:

Table 9. Semantic Patterns in Soteriological Vocabulary

Pattern	Characteristics	Example	Implication
Divine Initiative	Allah as the subject of salvation verbs	ἐξελέξατο, προώρισεν, ἐκάλεσεν	Monergistic emphasis
Temporal Priority	Pre-temporal language	πρὸ καταβολῆς, πρὸ χρόνων	Eternal security implied
Certainty Language	Aorist then perfect tenses	All verbs in Rom 8:30	Accomplished reality
Grace Emphasis	Negation of works	οὐ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα	Sola gratia affirmed

Pastoral Context Analysis

Interestingly, the pastoral context of these passages suggests that the doctrine of God's sovereignty is meant to provide comfort and assurance:

Table 10. The Pastoral Function of the Doctrine of Sovereignty

Text	Pastoral Location	Application of the Doctrine	Expected Effects
Rom 8:28-39	Suffering and persecution	Nothing can separate	Confidence and resilience
Ef 1:3-14	Identity and purpose	Chosen to praise His glory	Gratitude and worship
2 Tim 1:8-12	Facing suffering for the gospel	God who calls will preserve	Courage in service

Findings on Theological Paradox

The study identified several paradoxes that emerged from the texts analyzed:

1. Temporal Paradox: God acts in eternity (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων) but his effects are manifested in time
2. Causal Paradox: Man is called to believe, but faith itself is the result of an effective call
3. Moral Paradox: Man is fully responsible, yet incapable without grace
4. The Pastoral Paradox: The certainty of salvation encourages, not hinders, holiness

Intertextual Analysis with the Old Testament

Research has found that Paul's concept of predestination has roots in the Old Testament:

Table 11. Old Testament Parallels with the Concept of Predestination

Reference PL	Concept	Connection with Paul	Theological Implications
Ul 7:7-8	Israeli elections	Not because of the number/strength	Unconditional election
Yer 1:5	Introduction before formation	Parallel with Rome 8:29	Pre-temporal relationship

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Reference PL	Concept	Connection with Paul	Theological Implications
Mal 1:2-3	Jacob the Chosen, Esau the Chosen One	Quoted in Rom 9:13	Sovereign discrimination
Yes 46:10	Allah tells the end from the beginning	Definite plan	Divine determinism

This continuity shows that Paul was not creating new doctrines but developing themes already existing in Old Testament revelation with explicit Christological application.

Evaluation of Philosophical Arguments

A philosophical analysis of the compatibility of sovereignty and freedom reveals a variety of positions:

Table 12. Philosophical Positions on Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom

Position	Description	Proponents	Strength	Debilitation
Hard Determinism	No genuine freedom	Hyper-Calvinists	Logical consistency	Undermines responsibility
Libertarian Free Will	Power of contrary choice	Open Theists	Preserves responsibility	Limits divine sovereignty
Compatibilism	Freedom compatible with determinism	Reformed mainstream	Biblical balance	Philosophical complexity
Molinism	Middle knowledge	Craig, Plantinga	Attempts synthesis	Speculative elements

Linguistic Findings on Capital Verbs

An analysis of the use of modal expressions in soteriological texts reveals important nuances:

Table 13. Capital Expressions and Necessity in Salvation

Expression	Text	Type of Necessity	Theological Import
δεῖ (must)	Yoh 3:7 - δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι	Divine necessity	Regeneration essential
δύναμαι (able)	Yoh 6:44 - οὐδεὶς δύναται	Ability negated	Total inability
θέλω (will)	Rom 9:18 - ὃν θέλει	Divine volition	Sovereign choice
ἀνάγκη (necessity)	1 Kor 9:16	Compulsion	Divine constraint

The usage pattern shows that in the context of salvation, human ability consistently negated while divine necessity affirmed.

Synthesis of Exegetist Data

The compilation of exegetical findings yields several key principles:

1. God's Chronological Priorities: Every aspect of salvation begins in eternity
2. Unity of the Order of Salutis: There is no discontinuity between the stages of salvation
3. The Effectiveness of Divine Action: What God Begins, He Finishes
4. Reality of Responsibility: Human agency affirmed without compromising divine sovereignty

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5. Doxological Purpose: All for the glory of God

Discussion

Theological Synthesis: Navigating Paradoxes

Exegetical findings reveal that the Bible consistently affirms both God's absolute sovereignty in salvation and genuine human responsibility. This paradox is not the result of confusion or contradiction in the text, but rather a reflection of the complexity of divine-human reality that transcends the philosophical category of man. Paul himself seems comfortable with this tension, not feeling the need to resolve it philosophically but proclaiming it as part of the mystery of the Gospel.

Grammatical analysis shows that when Paul speaks of God's salvific acts, he consistently uses an active voice with God as a subject, while when he speaks of the condition of man without Christ, he uses passive constructions or negations of ability. This linguistic pattern is not accidental but reflects the theological conviction that salvation is fundamentally the work of God from beginning to end. However, this does not eliminate human responsibility because Paul also consistently calls people to believe, repent, and live holy.

Comparisons with contemporary Greco-Roman philosophy show that Paul operated within a different framework than Stoic determinism or Epicurean libertarianism. The Stoics taught impersonal resignation to fate, while Paul taught submission to a loving personal God. The Epicureans emphasized random freedom, while Paul saw true freedom in slavery to righteousness. Paul's originality lies in the integration of personal divine sovereignty with meaningful human agency.

Implications for the Reformed-Arminian Debate

The detailed exegesis of key texts provides substantial support for several of the Reformed emphases, particularly unconditional election and effectual calling. The grammatical structure of Romans 8:29-30, with its unbroken chain from foreknowledge to glorification, is difficult to reconcile with the view that individuals can "lose their link" in the chain. Similarly, the temporal priority of divine choice in Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9 strongly suggests that election is not based on foreseen faith.

However, the research also shows the legitimacy of Arminian concerns about human responsibility and the universal scope of the gospel offer. The fact that Paul can in the same letter affirm divine sovereignty (Rom 8-9) and human responsibility (Rom 10) shows that the two truths must be held together. Arminian emphasis on the genuine nature of the gospel call and the real possibility of resistance finds support in passages such as Matthew 23:37 and Acts 7:51.

What is interesting is that both camps can claim Pauline support because Paul himself operates with both perspectives without feeling the need to systematize them in the way that modern theological attempts do. This suggests that perhaps the problem lies not in the biblical data but in the philosophical frameworks used to interpret the data. The Reformed tradition, with its Reformed scholasticism, and the Arminian tradition, with its Enlightenment influences, both carry philosophical baggage that may force false choices.

Proposals for a More Nuanced Theological Framework

Based on the exegetical findings, this study proposes a framework that recognizes several key principles:

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1. Asymmetrical Relationship: God's sovereignty and human freedom are not on the same ontological level. God is the Creator; man is a creature. Therefore, divine causation and human causation do not compete in zero-sum games but operate on different levels of reality.
2. Christological Center: All discussions about predestination should be centered on Christ. Ephesians 1:4 clearly states that we are chosen "in Him." This is not an abstract decree but a personal union with Christ that determines salvation.
3. Temporal Complexity: The eternal perspective of God and the temporal human experience create inevitable tensions in language. What is from the divine perspective is settled reality, maybe from the human perspective is still experienced as a genuine choice.
4. Pastoral Priority: These doctrines are given not for philosophical speculation but for comfort (Rom 8), worship (Eph 1), and courage in ministry (2 Tim 1). Any theological framework that loses sight of pastoral purposes has deviated from the biblical intent.
5. Eschatological Verification: Full understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom awaits eschatological revelation. For now, we "see in a hazy mirror" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Practical Implications for the Christian Life

A balanced understanding of God's sovereignty and human responsibility has profound implications for Christian living:

In the Prayer Area: Recognition of divine sovereignty does not eliminate the need for prayer but rather grounds it. We pray because Allah sovereign has ordained prayer as a means for accomplishing His purposes. Paradoxically, the more we are confident in God's sovereignty, the more we will pray with confidence, knowing that the sovereign God is also a loving Father.

In Evangelism: Belief in divine election, rather than hindering evangelism, is supposed to free you from the pressure to "produce" converts and focus on faithful proclamation. Like Paul, we can dare to preach the gospel, knowing that God will call His through the proclamation. Simultaneously, genuine human responsibility means that rejection of the Gospel is culpable and tragic.

In Sanctification: Philippians 2:12-13 perfectly captures biblical balance - "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you." Sanctification is a fully divine work and fully human responsibility. We are not passive in spiritual growth, but we also do not rely on our own strength.

In Suffering: The belief that God is sovereign over all things, including suffering, provides comfort that cannot be provided by theology that limits divine control. However, this does not mean fatalism because we are also called to actively respond in faith and obedience in the midst of suffering.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

In a postmodern context that is skeptical of grand narratives and absolute truth, biblical teachings about divine sovereignty can seem oppressive. However, properly understood, this doctrine affirms human dignity by grounding it in a divine purpose rather than random chance or human achievement. Every human being has significance because they are objects of divine consideration, whether for salvation or judgment.

Towards a therapeutic culture that emphasizes self-actualization and personal choice, biblical balance offers corrective. Yes, choices matter and have real consequences, but ultimate

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meaning and purpose come not from autonomous self-creation but from discovering our place in a divine narrative that is greater than ourselves.

In the discussion of religious pluralism, clarity about divine sovereignty in salvation provides the basis for humble confidence. We are not arrogant because we know that salvation is a gift, not an achievement. But we are also not relativistic because we believe that God has acted decisively in Christ for salvation.

Ecumenical Implications

This study suggests that rigid adherence to either strict Calvinism or strict Arminianism may miss the richness of biblical testimony. This opens up the possibility for greater ecumenical understanding. Reformed Christians can learn from the Arminian emphasis on the genuine nature of human choice and the universal scope of the gospel invitation. Arminian Christians can learn from the Reformed emphasis on security that comes from grounding salvation in divine choice rather than human decision.

Eastern Orthodox emphasis on theosis and synergy offers another perspective that might help Western Christianity move beyond some impasses. Catholic understanding of grace that enables free cooperation also provides insights. Perhaps the way forward is not choosing sides in 16th-17th century debates but returning *ad fontes* for fresh hearing of the biblical text.

Future Directions dan Remaining Questions

While this study has provided detailed exegesis of key texts, several questions remain for future investigation:

1. How does the teaching about divine sovereignty and human freedom in the Gospels relate to Pauline teaching? Is there a difference in emphasis or complete harmony?
2. What is the role of the community in understanding individual elections? Has Western individualism skewed reading of biblical texts?
3. Bagaimana neuroscience dan psychology discoveries tentang decision-making processes inform theological discussion tentang free will?
4. What are the implications of biblical teaching for questions about the eternal destiny of those who have never heard the Gospel?
5. How can the church teach these doctrines in a way that is both faithful to the biblical text and accessible to contemporary congregations?

The complexity of these issues means that theological reflection must continue, always grounded in careful exegesis and oriented toward pastoral application. The ultimate goal is not solving philosophical puzzles but growing in the worship of God who is sovereign and loving, as well as living in responsive obedience to His revealed will.

CONCLUSION

Exegetical research of key biblical texts on *God's sovereignty* and *man's free will* in Christian soteriology reveals a complex yet coherent understanding of the mystery of divine salvation. A grammatical-historical analysis of Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-5, and 2 Timothy 1:9 demonstrates that Scripture consistently affirms the absolute priority and efficacy of *God's* actions in salvation—highlighting pre-temporal divine initiative, assured fulfillment, and doxological purpose—while simultaneously acknowledging human responsibility to respond in faith and obedience. This study shows that the apparent paradox between divine sovereignty and human free will is not a logical contradiction to be solved but a theological

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mystery to be embraced, holding both truths in productive tension. It proposes a theological framework emphasizing the asymmetrical relationship between divine and human causality, the Christological foundation of predestination, the intersection of eternal perspective and historical experience, and pastoral sensitivity in application. Practically, this leads to richer understandings of prayer as God-ordained, evangelism that is urgent yet free from coercion, sanctification as divine-human cooperation, and consolation through faith in God's sovereign love amid suffering. The contemporary church is encouraged to teach these doctrines with biblical balance—avoiding extremes of determinism and libertarianism—while developing pedagogical methods that maintain theological depth and foster faith, hope, and love. Future research is recommended to broaden the biblical scope, engage in dialogue with contemporary cognitive science, and develop effective communication resources suited for postmodern, pluralistic contexts.

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