

J.i. packer reflection paper

[Religion](#), [Jesus](#)



Jonathan Gamble Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God Reflection Paper

When he sat down to write *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I.

Packer sought to explain the incredible importance of understanding the antinomy – or tension, as some call it – between the undeniable sovereignty of God and the free will of men. Throughout the book, Packer puts an emphasis on reconciling these two commonly misconstrued components of Christian doctrine. There are two primary points that the author stresses to the reader: the divine sovereignty of God and the free will of man, and evangelism and what it means for churches and individuals.

The first point J. I. Packer makes in his book is the seemingly contradictory doctrine of the divine sovereignty of God and the free will of men. This opposition – as some would call it – is remedied by Packer early on in the book. On page 23 of the text, the author states, “ Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent. God’s sovereignty is a reality, and man’s responsibility is a reality too. Though it may seem confusing to unbelievers and believers alike, this statement truly encapsulates Packer’s argument and helps to alleviate doubt toward this apparent opposition in Christian doctrine. Man is a moral being; meaning, he has free will, but was designed (by God) to be virtuous and upright in morality. Humans have the power to do as they please (free will); they can either live according to God’s laws or reject His teaching. God allows man to possess free will because He wants men to choose His teachings willingly and on their own accord, not forced into God’s law against his will.

However, Packer states that man is also divinely controlled, which seems to be at odds with the previous statement. Though man has free will, to a certain extent he is still controlled by a divine being (God). Ephesians 2: 10 tells us, “ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (NIV). This proves that, although we have free will and are capable of making our own decisions, God created us to do good works and He knows what we will do before we even do it.

Thus, Packer’s argument is that, although we have free will and God allows us to make our own decisions (including accepting or rejecting Him), we are still divinely controlled by Him through the good works we do. Second among Packer’s emphasized points is that of evangelism; not just the act, but what it means for churches and individuals alike. Throughout this portion of the book, the author focuses on several main questions regarding evangelism: what is evangelism, what is the evangelistic message, and what is the motive for evangelizing.

Packer uses the following to define evangelism: “ To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church” (Packer 38). This definition is superb because it leads into Packer’s next questions of evangelism. The message of evangelism, according to the book, is the message of Jesus Christ’s work, including, but not limited to, his miracles, death, burial, and resurrection.

However, Packer warns not to complicate the Gospel message; instead, a simplified version geared toward the target audience is a much more effective means of presenting Christ. The motive for evangelizing is thus: to reach lost and broken souls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to lead them to a saving faith in Him. Packer makes very good arguments and backs up his stance with solid evidence from both the Bible and extra-biblical sources; because of his logical and straightforward argument, I agree with his presentation of the antinomy of evangelism and the sovereignty of God.

In *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, the author argues that men both have free will, yet are divinely controlled. I fully support this viewpoint, from both a biblical and practical standpoint. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, men demonstrate their free will, for good or ill. For example, the parable of the talents shows how men's free will – through the illustrations of the three servants – can either bring glory to God or condemn the man. All three of the servants exercised their free will by either doubling the talents entrusted to them (the first two), or by simply hiding their talent (the final servant).

Obviously, the first two servants brought glory to their master by earning interest on their talents, while the final servant was condemned as a “wicked, lazy servant” (Matthew 25: 14-30). Thus, despite the outcome, men have been given the free will by God to do as they please. Packer endorses this viewpoint throughout his book, and gives numerous biblical citations to support his doctrinal views. Although men have free will, they are also divinely controlled by God; Packer shows this throughout his book, and I agree with his arguments and evidences.

An excellent example of this – and the main reason why I support Packer’s argument for men being divinely controlled – can be found in the book of Exodus. “ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘ Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 10: 1-2).

This event shows that God controls the hearts of man, by his hardening the heart of Pharaoh. So, although we have free will, God is still in control of our heart, mind, and soul; we are still divinely controlled. If I was to explain to somebody the biblical teaching on the relationship of evangelism Packer’s book and my own understanding of this seemingly contradictory doctrine. I would attempt to explain to them this complex doctrine in simplified terms. To start, I would define sovereignty for them.

Sovereignty can be defined as the complete, utter, and undeniable rule of God as King over all creation, including the stars, planets, and man. After establishing the meaning of the basic words for the argument, I would go on to explain about the antinomy of men’s free will and the undeniable sovereignty of God. Men are made with the free will to make their own decisions, and are left to their own devices for the most part. However, with this free will comes responsibility; our actions can either bring glory to God or can bring hardship upon ourselves.

Although we are given free will, we are still divinely controlled by God. I would bring about examples from both my own life and the Bible. I would try to relate to them by telling them of my past; I was heavily involved in alcohol

and partying in high school (my free will – to reject God and His teaching), until God intervened and brought me to a saving faith in Him, and my life turned completely around (God’s sovereignty over my own life). By drawing events from my own life, it would help to make the confusing doctrine a bit more understandable and relatable to whoever I’m talking to.

I would explain the concept of evangelism to them next; evangelism, in my own words, is the act of reaching out to an unreached audience and telling them about Jesus Christ, his miraculous life and works, his death and resurrection, and the saving grace that comes as a result of putting one’s faith in Him. Evangelism is worldly important because it brings sinners to God’s grace; by spreading the Good News to the unreached, we can help turn the tide of religious apathy into a generation that is in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many would argue that because God is sovereign, evangelism is pointless and a waste of time, resources, and talent. However, both Packer and I would argue that this is completely false. I would explain to my listener that because of the free will God grants us, we should tell others about Him and His great love and mercy. I would go on to quote Ephesians 2: 10, which says that we were created to do good works. Because we were created to do good works, it should not feel an obligation to evangelize; rather, it should be viewed a privilege and an honor – a necessity – to spread the news of Christ.

Although God is in control of man’s actions and thus already knows who is going to be receptive of the Truth, it is still our obligation and privilege as Christians to spread the Word (evangelize) to any and everybody. Works Cited 1. “ Ephesians 2: 10, Exodus 10: 1-2. ” NIV Bible. London: Hodder & <https://assignbuster.com/ji-packer-reflection-paper/>

Stoughton, 2000. N. pag. Print. 2. Packer, J. I. Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991. Print.