

The Divine Tension

by Allan Halton

The Christian life requires a balance between resting in God's sovereignty and working out our own salvation with diligence and discipline.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Ephesians 1:11, Philippians 2:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 1 Peter 1:10

Topics: "Sovereign Grace", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

Allan Halton delves into the divine tension present in the Christian life, emphasizing the balance between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. While Scriptures assure believers of their secure salvation and predestination, there is also a call for diligent discipline and active participation in working out one's salvation. The sermon highlights the importance of maintaining this tension to avoid spiritual ruin, drawing parallels to tending a garden that requires continual care and cultivation.

Transcript

One of the things we know as a result of the primal fault is that our world requires substantial ordering. A house requires regular maintenance. A garden must be tended. It must be watered and weeded. Left to itself it quickly goes to grass.

Now, certain Scriptures are very beautiful with the idea that the Christian life is simply a matter of leaving it all to God. We rest in God. Our salvation is secure. We are appointed, not to wrath, but to obtain salvation (1 Thes. 5.9). We are chosen to salvation (2 Thes. 2.13). We are predestined (Rom. 8.29). God will work all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1.11). We are born again. We are free spirits. Our lives are like the wind that "bloweth where it listeth," that is, wherever it wants to blow in the great sky of God.

This is beautiful truth. On the one hand the Christian life is to be nature to us--the beautiful nature of the new creation Man born of the Spirit and borne along in the Wind of God. But there are other scriptures that show the Christian life requires diligent and continued discipline, which if we are not careful to maintain, leads to our ruin. Like the garden, we must be continually cultivating, watering, and rooting out weeds. Or we too go to grass.

We find these two opposites all over Scripture, and people are chronically arguing over which is the right view--God's sovereignty or man's responsibility. In fact I believe that both are held in play by what I like to call the divine tension. The string on a musical instrument is held between two fixed points; if it is slack, if it

is not held in perfect tension, it is useless. You can't make music on strings that are not held in tension.

Great arguments rage over whether Calvinism is the right doctrine, or Ariminianism. Are we unconditionally elect, and there's nothing we can do about it one way or the other? Or do we ourselves have a part to play in our salvation? It's wonderful truth that God "hath chosen us in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him" (Eph. 1.4). Or in another place: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit..." (Jn. 15.16). There are times when we need to lean heavily on this truth--in times of great trial and difficulty, or perhaps failure. In a time of failure the Devil will be quick to assure us God is through with us now. But we arm ourselves with this truth--that God in His own wisdom and grace has chosen us from before the foundation of the world--and we know that He that hath begun a good work in us will perfect it unto the day of Christ.

But then the divine tension comes into play. When we get slack and presume in spite of our slackness that we are predestined and all is well with us, we are in deep trouble. We must pay heed to what Peter says. I may be called and chosen, but Peter says, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure..." (1 Pt. 1.10). There are times when not doing this could result in total shipwreck.

Paul says in one place, "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2.16). How wonderful--a mind filled with the very thoughts of God. But then Peter calls us to "gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Pt. 1.13). This is speaking of spiritual discipline in the thought life. If we are not girding up the loins of our mind we will find our thoughts flowing all over the place and we will be in trouble.

In another place Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." Why would this be necessary if it is all up to God? Obviously we have a critical part to play in our own salvation. But Paul goes on, "...for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2.12,13). Ah, you say, if it is God who is working in me both the willing and the doing, why do I have to work out my own salvation? It's because of this divine tension. The Christian life is not a passive walk. We have a vital part to play in the working out of our salvation.

But don't forget that our working must be God's own working. Otherwise we quickly degenerate into striving. Really, it's no use trying to separate these two facets of truth. It's the divine tension. Yes, we are to work out our own salvation. But our work must be God's own working. Jesus says:

Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of (from) Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Mt. 11.28-30).

Notice here the two kinds of burdens--those which are our own initiative, our own labour: "all ye that labour," and those that are put upon us by outward circumstance or others: "and are heavy laden." (The first is active, the second passive.) We are not to get our shoulder under either of these types of burdens.

But yes, we are to labour--but only in that which is the Lord's own labour, only in the yoke of the Lord... in which Jesus says we will find rest. We are not debtors to any other labour, and we must discipline ourselves not to get involved in any of it. We must abide in the yoke of the Lord--working together with Him, and at the same time resting in the Lord.

It's the divine tension. Let us learn to accept it. We'll find ourselves playing beautiful music to the Lord on our instrument of ten strings.

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