

The following statement is a brief response concerning

## **VBF'S POSITION ON ELECTION AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.**

Concerning election and human responsibility, we believe the Bible teaches both, yet on this side of eternity we cannot understand how both can be true at the same time. Therefore, we must take what has been revealed in the Scriptures alone and not try to resolve the issues by attempting to raise one position over the other by means of human reason or emotion. Indeed, those who see election alone (i.e the hyper-Calvinist) have to ignore or reinterpret certain Scriptures to make their case and those who would see free will alone (Arminian's) try to redefine election by ignoring or reinterpreting certain Scriptures.

We believe that God certainly elects those who will be saved (For the sake of time I will not list the Scriptures). Yet, we believe, in the context of the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word, that one needs to exercise their will to believe the Gospel (respond in faith). Hence, here lies the problem. How can someone dead in sin (spiritually dead) exercise his or her will in believing the Gospel?

The Reformed view and solution would be that one needed to be regenerated (i.e. born again) before they are able to repent and believe. However, we do not see that in Scripture. Nowhere do we see that one is saved, i.e. born again and then repents and believes. Now we believe the Arminian is quite wrong also. Spiritually dead men within themselves cannot choose to believe. "as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; (Romans 3:10-11).

It is at this point we see that both unbiblical extremes miss the main point due to rationalistic deduction beyond the text or by an emotional appeal to resolve the unresolvable. It is not "either or", but "both and" in the context of God's powerful Gospel and convicting Spirit. Thus, the resolution to the problem is found in the Gospel. Paul makes it clear that "it (the Gospel) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). God's Word penetrates the dead heart calling for a response of faith.

Hebrews 3-4 illustrates this perfectly. As the writer of Hebrews is making the case for Jesus being superior to Moses, he introduces the illustration of Israel and their hard hearts. This serves as a warning to those who are tempted to leave their confession of faith and revert to Judaism (3:6b, 3:12-14), ultimately because they were not saved in the first place.

Therefore, if they hear His voice, they are not to harden their hearts. For just as the Israelites saw God's mighty works and ultimately didn't believe in Him (cf. Numbers 14:11 and Numbers 14), they too would fall because of unbelief in the good news (Heb 4:1-11). So then, they are not to harden their hearts, "For (because) the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb 4:12-13).

Here lies the point. When the alive, piercing, Word of God is heard by a non believer, it pierces through the deadness of the heart, and then the person can believe or even harden his own heart to the message. Now if the dead sinner did not or cannot hear or understand the gospel in their state, how then could they or why would they harden their heart to something they do not understand or cannot understand? They must have been convicted or enlightened to the truth. Thus we see in Scripture, one is responsible for the choice they make when their heart is confronted and convicted by the living, active, piercing, judging Word. This principle is illustrated throughout the warnings of Hebrews: "*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.*" (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Notice how the apostate, one dead in sin, has "once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." It is clear that even though one is dead in sin, that because of the power of the Spirit and the Word, he is able to taste and thus is fully culpable for the hardening his own heart.

Indeed, in Hebrews Chapter 10:26-31, the apostate who is facing eternal judgment is said to have had received "the knowledge of the truth." The word translated "knowledge" is epiknōsis. It speaks of a full knowledge. These apostates have received full knowledge of the truth and are thus rightfully condemned for rejecting the Person of Christ, His Work, having "insulted the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:26-29). They are rightfully deserving of eternal hell because they have insulted the very means in which God reveals His grace.

Now we know God uses His Spirit to convict the world of sin (John 16:8) and illumine the gospel of God's grace in Christ as revealed in the Word. When the Spirit of God convicts a man, that is dead in sin, by means of God's all-powerful Word, he can either respond in repentance and faith (not works) or harden his heart. When a heart is hardened to the Spirit's work in revealing their sin and the Savior Jesus Christ, this is unforgivable. This is the only unforgivable sin, deserving of eternal judgment (see Luke 12:10).

Now we know that God elects and that whom He elects He saves -- Yet for some reason we do not understand, He reaches compassionately to those who will be eternally damned (See Ezekiel 18:31-32 versus Psalm 116:15), by convicting them of their sin, and revealing the Only Savior Jesus Christ by His Spirit through the Gospel. And thus man who is dead in sin, is convicted and fully understands, and because the alive Gospel has pierced their dead hearts, he is thus fully able to respond in repentance and faith (not works) and is fully culpable. This helps us understand how God could command one who is dead in sin after being pierced with the alive Word to "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME." Hebrews 3:15.

Thus, God's means of quickening, opening or drawing the heart of the unregenerate, those dead in sin is by means of His Spirit and the Word, not by independently regenerating a person before he exercises faith (i.e. making one born again, giving a new life, so that he can believe).

Now comes the part we cannot resolve on earth without wrongly appealing to prideful human reason or emotionally influenced exegesis. God does elect and those whom He elects will believe. Also, those whom He doesn't elect will not believe, yet they will be eternally responsible because they themselves have hardened their own hearts to the alive Gospel message, which is the power of God unto salvation.

Therefore, our position is that we cannot resolve this issue on earth with what has been revealed in Scripture. To do so would take us past what Scripture has revealed into the realm of human reason or emotional reaction which both ultimately result in unbiblical exegesis that spawns the spiritual pride as we see in Hyper-Calvinistic theology or unbiblical emotional reinterpretation of the gospel as we see in Arminian theology with its devastating results. All this said, we believe that the Scriptures affirm both election and human responsibility.

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