

Kingdom Perspectives – Part 6

Welcome to Kingdom Perspectives, Part 6, October 15, 2008. In Kingdom Perspectives, we explored the root of the kingdom; the content of the kingdom; different views that we hold, both true views and erroneous views about the kingdom; attire, which addressed that which we're to take off and put on; the choices that we face in the kingdom and how to understand choice; then glory, kingdom glory. Today we're going to address kingdom paradox.

If you do not have a grasp of the glory of God, you will never be comfortable nor at peace, nor at rest in embracing anything in Scripture that is paradoxical. So these flow for good reason. Now this is what I think is an equal opportunity teaching. It's almost guaranteed to offend everybody here equally. That's because everyone prefers, and often insists, on teaching only one side of any paradox in Scripture, particularly the paradox related to election and predestination as opposed to the will of man. So I'm going to embrace both because the Bible does. To me that's no different from embracing the paradox of one God in three persons because the Bible does. It's no different from embracing Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man because the Bible does. And there's no way to intellectually rationalize a Being, being fully God and fully man, or a God being three persons. We ultimately rest in the holiness of God, so if you are not quickened to the holiness of God, you will never be able to rest in that which the mind cannot understand. Proverbs 3:5 tells us – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. We can never understand omniscience. We have finite brains. God gives us glimpses into part of omniscience, but it would be arrogant to the extreme to think that we can understand all that omniscience does. So God never excuses us from walking by faith. God has always given us plenty for faith, but not enough always to satisfy our understanding. It's His divine prerogative to do so. It is His creation. Revelation 4:11 (KJV) reminds us – Thou hast created all things and for Thy pleasure they are and were created. So we are created by God and we're created for the pleasure of God.

So how do we please this God Who created us? Hebrews 11:6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God. All men walk by faith. Many men don't know that they walk by faith. Many men pooh-pooh faith while walking by faith. We please God by faith in Him, and thus in His Word, because you could almost define faith as taking God at His Word. We walk by faith. II Corinthians 5:7 – for we walk by faith, not by sight. Faith, and not by sight, can be understood in two ways. One, if something is seen in the physical realm, you don't have to have faith about it. If I have an automobile that's here in the physical realm, I don't have to have faith to get an automobile. It can also mean (walking by faith and not by sight), in the sense of sight meaning understanding. So we walk by faith without insisting on understanding that which we walk by faith about. Faith is even defined that way in the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 – Faith is the conviction of things not seen (the absolute certainty of things not seen).

So let's review some of those elementary concepts. We are created by Him. We are created for His pleasure. We please Him only by faith. Faith is the certainty of thing not seen; thus, we walk by faith, not by sight. That is to trust in the Lord with all your heart and not to lean on your own understanding. Now our most vivid testimony of doing all of those things, and embracing all those spiritual principles, is when we are able to embrace both sides of a paradox and rest fully as we do so. We embrace both sides regardless of what we think about it. We embrace

both sides regardless of how illogical it seems. We embrace both sides regardless of how we feel in our emotional lives. To me this is not compromise. This is submission. We walk by faith that our sovereign, holy, transcendent God functions in dimensions of which we are unaware and will reconcile things that appear contradictory to us.

For over 2,000 years Christians have argued, fought over, and divided over the issue of election versus the will of man. I am not going to try to untie that knot and resolve that argument in this session. Entire books and libraries are written on that subject. If it could have been untied by the mind of man, it would have been untied long ago. The reason that it has not been untied is that God did not untie it. In my mind, insistence on totally untying that knot can almost become a form of rebellion against God since He did not untie it. I'm simply going to explain how I embrace both and rest in doing so. I'll give a couple of verses as the foundation of the paradox; but I'm certainly not going to try to be exhaustive about the paradox. I'm not a theologian. I come as a little child before my holy God and simply take Him at His Word.

Ephesians 1:4 – Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. The Father God chose us in Jesus before the world was even created. Ephesians 1:5 – He (the Father God) predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself. Clearly we are elected by God for salvation. There's no ambiguity about those Scriptures. Romans 10:13 – For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. That quotes Joel 2:32 – Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Revelation 22:17 – And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. The entire Bible is packed with commands about the sovereignty of God and the accountability of man. We're told to choose this and not that. Choose life and not death. Obey this and don't disobey that. Choose God and do not choose the ungodly. We're told to turn to God and be saved. The Bible is packed with accountability for all the choices made by man.

Next poster. We covered this poster in a prior session. The Bible clearly teaches that God influences the choices made by man. God softens hearts, hardens hearts, and opens hearts. The Bible clearly teaches that Satan is under God, and Satan is a finite created being, and Satan can only operate in areas circumscribed by God. The Bible clearly teaches that Satan can influence the choices of man. The Bible clearly teaches that man is accountable for all his choices. Thus, on any particular choice, man is not able to sort out, in a mathematical sense, the degree to which God has opened his heart, hardened his heart, or softened his heart as man is required to make that choice and be accountable for the choice. On any particular choice, man is not able to account for in a mathematically known way, the circumscribed area in which Satan is permitted by God to test us. On any particular choice man does not always understand the degree of satanic influence upon his thinking. The best example of this is Matthew 16:16-23. This is where Peter said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And to that, Jesus replied, flesh and blood did not reveal that to you; but my Father in Heaven revealed that to you. Yet within a few verses in the same context Jesus rebuked Peter for stating that Jesus should not go to Jerusalem to be killed. Jesus said, get thee behind me, Satan. So within one brief conversation, Peter expressed a thought from God and a thought from Satan. But in spite of the various influences upon the thoughts of man, man is never to excuse himself from accountability for his own choices. This whole thing is almost a swirl of paradox. But I must hold two thoughts in perfect tension. How much influence of each of these is engaged in my present choice? Thou knowest Lord. And you Bible scholars recognize I'm quoting the attitude of Ezekiel in Ezekiel

37:3 when God asked Ezekiel, can these bones rise? And Ezekiel said, Thou knowest Lord. It's beyond my ability to sort that out.

We must also regard the second aspect of that tension state. My attitude has to be, insofar as it depends on me, I will choose God. That's more or less the attitude of Joshua in Joshua 24:15 when he said, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Romans 12:18 tells us that insofar as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. It doesn't all depend on you, but insofar as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. So what is my role in making every choice? Insofar as it depends on me, I will choose the Lord.

Next poster. On each choice we're to walk by faith, even in the absence of complete understanding. It's no different related to our attitude when facing the paradox of election and predestination versus the will of man. This poster draws from Scripture to talk about the depravity of man. There is no doubt that man is depraved. In Genesis 3:5-13 – Adam chose to be self determined rather than to be God determined. I mean, what greater depravity is there than that? And that set the course for the whole human race thereafter; because once Adam declared, by himself, that he would be self determined, that he could look at two potential choices, and that he could decide what was in his best outcome over the long term, rather than simply obeying what God declared would be in his best interest. All men have had the indwelling sin nature since that time—self on the throne. In Genesis 4:3-9, Cain chose to kill Abel because Abel gave a God approved sacrifice and Cain did not. One generation, murder introduced, simply because God was pleased with one and not the other. That's depravity. In Genesis 6:5, just prior to the flood, it says that the wickedness of man was great on the Earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. I mean, what greater definition of depravity can you have than that? In Revelation 16:21, unless you think that this all relates to primitive man, toward the end of the tribulation period, when God is releasing in judgment, hail stones upon the human race, men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail. They knew it was judgment. They knew it was from God, but rather than repent of their sins before their holy God, Who had the sovereign power to bring down 100-pound hail stones, they blasphemed God. That's depravity.

A little later in Revelation 20:7-9, at the end of the millennial kingdom, where Christ ruled for a thousand years on Earth, Satan was released. So what happened? Surely, men after seeing perfect righteousness displayed and ruling for a thousand years, would do the obvious. Then the number of those who joined Satan was as the sand of the seashore. What greater example of depravity is there than that? That is depravity, to see perfect righteousness displayed and ruling for a thousand years, and the instant the chains are taken off, you rebel against God in conjunction with Satan. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus describes the torment of the ones in Hell in that particular time frame. You remember the story, the poor man Lazarus and the rich man. The poor man Lazarus had the sores that the dogs licked and so on. And in that scriptural quotation, they wanted relief from the torment, but they didn't repent. Can you imagine that? In Romans 3:10-12, it tells us there is none who is righteous, none who does good, and none who seeks God. Man is truly depraved.

Next poster. We looked at this poster before; but I'm setting the stage to talk about the subject for today. God is sovereign. God is omniscient except when He chooses not to know. God is

omnipresent except when He chooses not to be present. God is omnipotent except when He chooses not to utilize His omnipotence. If God did not possess those three qualities, then God would not be sovereign, because there might be something He didn't know, might be something that could exceed His power, and might be someplace that He wasn't. If God never restrained the expression of His sovereignty, then no other being would ever have a choice. We'd simply be robots. And if we have no choice to make, then we have no accountability for that choice. But we all know that we're accountable because it is written that we are accountable. Here are some summary statements about where we are at this point. God is sovereign. God sovereignly restrains the expression of His sovereignty in order to allow choice, and therefore accountability. Man is depraved. I'm accountable for choosing God, but I cannot choose God apart from God. I'm accountable for obeying God, but I cannot obey God apart from God. I'm spiritually dead apart from God, but I'm commanded to turn and choose life. So how do we walk that out?

Next poster. Now with the next three posters we'll get into the subject. Here are some points to get us started. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that may nevertheless be true. The only way that we can peacefully embrace an apparent contradiction that is logically inconsistent is to walk by faith, not by sight. And we walk by faith in a holy, transcendent God that transcends anything that our finite brains could purpose to understand, and we do not lean on our own understanding. We trust the Lord with all our hearts and do not lean on our own understanding, because only faith pleases God. Secondly, by embracing both sides of the paradox, balance is brought to our spiritual walk, and that will be addressed specifically on the next poster. Thirdly, we must constantly live in the light of the bottom line. The bottom line is that all glory goes to God and all accountability goes to man. Self on the throne totally rejects that concept. And yet embracing that concept is the only way to kill self on the throne. That's why I say self will never deny self. Self will never control self. Self will never kill self, and so on.

Next poster. So now that we've gotten the overview of the purpose of the paradox, let's look at how it plays out. This poster demonstrates how balance is brought to our spiritual walk only by embracing the paradox. This shows the two frames of reference at the top of predestination election versus the free choice of man. The key revelation on this that I'll talk us through is that what one frame of reference tends to cause, the other frame of reference is the antidote for. When one embraces only predestination, then it tends to cause excusism. This is addressed in Romans 9:18-19 (Paul writes) – He (God) has mercy on whom He desires and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then why does He still find fault? If He's doing it all, how can I be responsible and accountable for anything that I do? Now following that to its logical conclusion, the murderer will say, well I'm not responsible since God is sovereign and God controls anything then God is the murderer. The rapist will say, well since God is sovereign and God controls anything then God made me rape. The only antidote for that line of thinking that results in excusism is to embrace the frame of reference of the choice made by man and being accountable for that choice. That's why free will is the antidote for excusism. So what predestination tends to cause is excusism. The frame of reference of free choice is the antidote for excusism because I'm accountable for every choice that I make.

It works the same way in the other polarity. When viewed only through the frame of reference of the will of man, then pride is the result. Every time that man construes that he made a godly choice, he takes pride in the fact that he was so godly as to do so. He takes pride in the fact that

he had so much insight as to do so. He takes pride in the fact that he had so much willpower so as to do so, and looks around him at all these inferior beings who cannot work it up within themselves to do what he so obviously is able to do so well. The antidote for that line of thinking is to embrace the other frame of reference of predestination, because when free will causes pride, the antidote for pride is predestination. I cannot take pride in my godly choice since God is willing and working within me and predestined me to make that choice. Thus, God gets the glory for the godly choice. Man gets no glory for the godly choice and that sticks in the craw of man.

Next poster. This is another poster that we've seen before; but I'm going to take this poster about our attitudes as we engage in choice and how it links to the frames of reference of predestination versus free will. Humility is our God commanded biblical attitude. One way of defining humility is as follows. When humility chooses God, it gives God the glory, gives God all the credit that it chose God. When humility chooses un-God, it gives self the blame, that is, all accountability and all responsibility for this ungodly choice rests within me, not related to God or circumstances. In reference to the subject today about kingdom paradox, here's how it connects. When humility chooses God, it gives God the glory. That's to view by the frame of reference of predestination because God predestined me to choose God in that particular situation. When humility chooses un-God, it gives self the blame. This is to view by the frame of reference of the will of man operating in free choice and accountable for all his choices. Pride does the exact opposite. When pride chooses God, it gives self the glory for making such a godly choice. When pride chooses un-God, it gives the blame to God either directly or indirectly, because pride will blame God, Satan, others, or circumstances for making an ungodly choice. That's to view by the frame of reference of predestination, that God predestined this to occur because He controls all these events. So when I make an ungodly choice, it was predestined that I do so. When I make a godly choice, I get the credit. That's pride, and pride, you can see, is the exact opposite of the Godly ordained frame of reference of humility where God gets all the glory and man gets all the accountability.

It helps to use natural examples. Human walking is a natural example to explain how this plays out in our spiritual walks. So let's look at human walking briefly before making the spiritual correlation. When we walk, we constantly shift our weight from one leg to the other, because to swing the left leg through, we have to take all the weight on our right leg. If not, we'd collapse. To swing the right leg through, we have to take all the weight on our left leg. Now when we walk in a balanced fashion, shifting our weight entirely from the right leg, entirely to the left leg in sequence, then we walk with no wasted motion, no wasted energy, and maintain perfect balance. When we try to walk by using only one leg, then we must hop on that one leg. That wastes motion, wastes energy, and makes us prone to losing balance. Predestination and free will can be viewed as our two legs in our spiritual walk. When we stand only on the leg of predestination, it tends to cause excusism, because it excludes the role of the will of the man and accountability to man for all his ungodly choices. That causes loss of balance toward excusism. But if we stand only on the leg of the will of man, then it tends to cause pride, because man wants to take the credit for every godly choice that he makes, and give God or circumstance the credit for all the ungodly choices that he makes. So if we are standing only on the leg of the will of man, then it will tend to cause pride and then cause us to lose balance in the other direction. The way to spiritual balance is to constantly shift the weight from one leg to the other.

If I note, or if others speak into my blind spot, to tell me that I'm tending to use excusism for the residual sin in my life, then I am to shift weight onto the frame of reference of the will of man whereby I am accountable for every choice. If I note, or others speak into my blind spot, to tell me that I'm tending to walk in pride about my godly choices, then I'm to shift weight onto the frame of reference of predestination whereby God causes my godly choices and God gets all the glory. So if I stand on the leg of accountability of man, then I'm accountable to prepare for these sessions with all my heart because it's bringing glory to God. But if I start to take pride in those teachings, I'm to stand on the leg that it is God willing and working within me. It is His truth, His revelation of that truth, His gift to articulate and express that truth, and God gets all the glory. So it's a constant thing to shift the weight from one frame of reference to the other to give God all the glory, give me all the accountability for every ungodly choice, and maintain balance of giving God my all instead of using excusism for not preparing the lesson. So you can see that I've not untied the double-stranded knot of predestination versus the will of man. I have embraced the knot by embracing both strands. And I do that because the Bible does that. If I walk only by election predestination as my only frame of reference, I've got to throw out all the Bible that has to do with commands. If I walk only in following commands, then I cannot possibly come to God because you have to be elected and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. So I embrace both because they're both in the Bible. How can I do that? Only by faith, walking by faith in my holy, transcendent God and not walking by faith in my own understanding, and I believe that this faith pleases God. That is to embrace kingdom paradox, because kingdom paradox is part of it is written, and I want to embrace all of what is written.

So my time is up and I thank you for yours.