

Divine Sovereignty *and* Self-Compatibility

Vincent Cheung

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PO Box 15662, Boston, MA 02215, USA
<http://www.vincentcheung.com>

A sovereign God contradicts the idea that man exercises free will when it comes to any matter, including salvation. The sovereignty of God and the freedom of man are mutually exclusive. To affirm one is to deny the other. Accordingly, a person who insists that he accepts Christ because of his own free will, and not because of God's sovereign choice and direct action in his soul, cannot at the same time affirm a sovereign God. Since the only God presented in the Bible is an absolutely sovereign God, a person who affirms human free will cannot, without contradiction, affirm belief in God.

Some theologians perceive this dilemma, and so they choose to believe in a contradiction. But this makes them look stupid, and some of them cannot endure the humiliation. So they invent a way out, and say that God's sovereignty is "compatible" with human choice. Sometimes it is even said that divine sovereignty is compatible with human "freedom" in the sense that the man who chooses is not coerced in his choice, but he chooses according to his desire.¹

¹ I refer to the doctrine of compatibilism. It teaches a kind of human freedom and rests moral responsibility on this freedom. I have refuted it by showing that the kind of freedom that it teaches is irrelevant to a discussion of divine sovereignty, and that there is no necessary relationship between freedom and responsibility. In fact, the Bible denies this relationship. (See Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.)

Someone alleged that I misrepresented the doctrine by stating that it asserts a kind of human freedom and that it rests moral responsibility on this freedom. He said the doctrine only states that divine sovereignty is compatible with human choice, and that this is because man is not coerced, but chooses according to his desire. He named John Frame as a representative of this doctrine, and thus as someone whose view I misrepresented.

So we will cite John Frame. In his "Free Will and Moral Responsibility," he writes, "An alternative concept of freedom, one consistent with Reformed theology and held by a number of philosophers...is often called

Of course man chooses, but what makes him choose? What is the metaphysics of human choice? And what is the metaphysical explanation for his desire? If God is absolutely sovereign, then he also decides and causes human choice and desire. And if God is the one who decides and causes human choice and desire, then to say that divine sovereignty and human choice are compatible is only to say that God is compatible with himself. But we already know that, and man is still not free.

Human choice is irrelevant, since it comes under divine sovereignty. To say that man is not coerced is only to say that in this instance God does not cause one effect of his power to clash with another effect of his power, as he does when he causes two objects to crash into each other. But if there is no contradiction when God causes two objects to crash, then even coercion entails no contradiction. It would only mean that he causes a person to desire one thing but to choose another. What would be the problem with that?

Indeed, the absolute sovereignty of God and the moral responsibility of man are compatible. Perhaps this is what the theologians are so worried about. But man is morally responsible only because God has decided to hold him accountable. This has no necessarily connection with choice or freedom. Even coercion does not eliminate responsibility. What does one have to do with another? The moral responsibility of man depends on the absolute sovereignty of God, and nothing else. Therefore, to say that man is responsible, once again, is only to say that God is compatible with himself.

It remains, then, that divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible. For man to be free in any relevant sense, he must be free from God, and if he is free from God in any sense and in any degree, then God is not absolutely sovereign. The God of the Bible is rejected.

'compatibilism,' for on that basis, free will and determinism (the view that all events in creation are caused) are compatible. Compatibilism maintains simply that in making moral decisions we are free to do what we want to do, to follow our desires....Reformed theology recognizes that all people have freedom in the compatibilist sense....I believe that compatibilist freedom is the main kind of freedom necessary to moral responsibility." Frame explicitly asserts that compatibilism teaches a form of freedom, and that it is even necessary to moral responsibility.

The person who accused me of misrepresentation also said that compatibilism does not say that man is free from God, as if I asserted that it does. He missed the point. I understand that compatibilism does not say that man is free from God, and that is why it is irrelevant. My point is that any kind of freedom that asserts freedom from God is impossible, and any kind of freedom that does not assert freedom from God is irrelevant. That man is not coerced is also irrelevant, since if God is sovereign, he is the one who causes both human desire and human choice.

As for my position, it is that divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible and mutually exclusive, and that since God is sovereign, man is not free. It appears that this person wished to dispute this, but he did not know how to do it. There is no way to do it. The confusion was probably fueled by the refusal to accept that this cherished doctrine is so easily shown to be ridiculous and irrelevant.