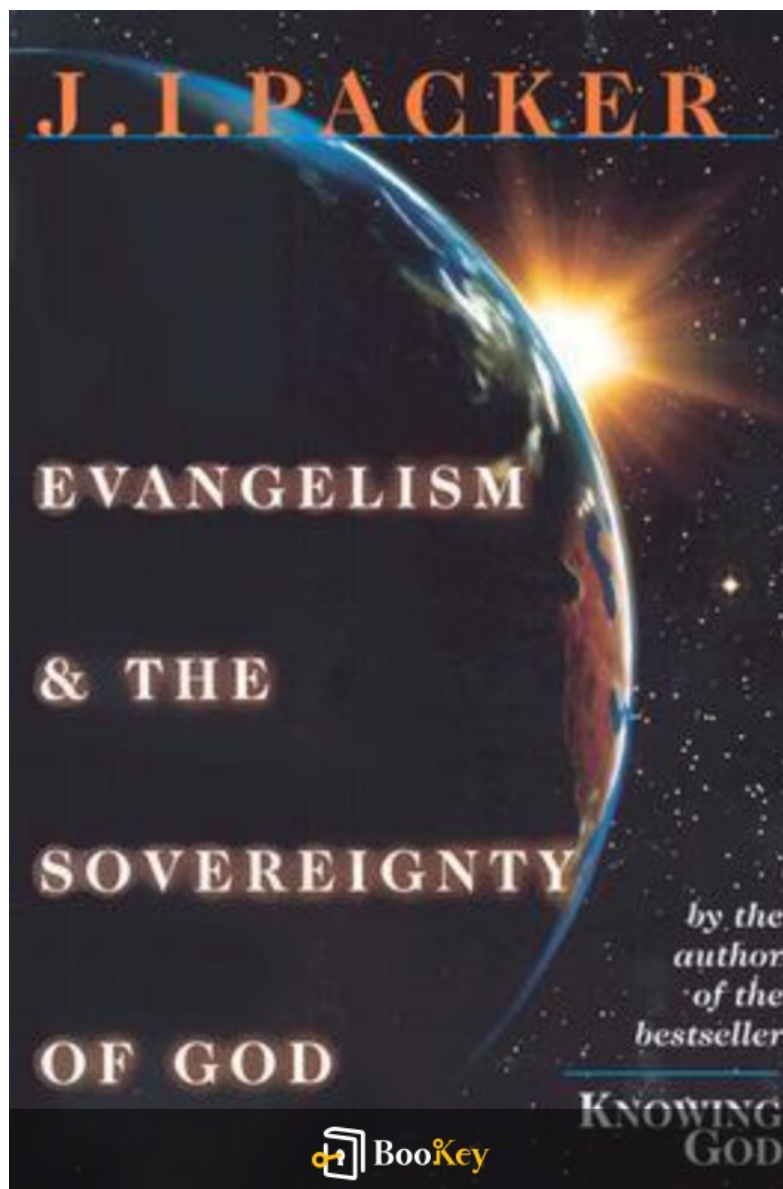


Evangelism & The Sovereignty Of God PDF

J.I. Packer



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About the book

Book Overview: "Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God" by J.I. Packer

In his impactful work, J.I. Packer delves into the fascinating relationship between evangelism and divine sovereignty. He tackles the complex question of how God's omnipotent control complements our duty to spread the gospel. With a blend of theological insight and pastoral care, Packer clarifies prevalent misconceptions, empowering believers to engage in evangelistic efforts with confidence. This book serves as both a profound exploration of key doctrinal themes and a practical guide for those wishing to deepen their faith. It not only illuminates the harmony between God's sovereignty and human responsibility but also inspires readers to embrace their role in God's grand narrative, fostering a passionate and assured commitment to the mission of evangelism.

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About the author

Profile: J.I. Packer

Full Name: James Innell Packer

Birth Year: 1926

Nationality: British-born Canadian

Overview:

J.I. Packer was a highly influential theologian, cleric, and author whose significant contributions have shaped modern evangelical thought.

Education:

Packer studied at Oxford University, where he was notably influenced by the writings of C.S. Lewis.

Contributions:

Throughout his career, Packer became one of the leading evangelical voices of the 20th century. His most notable book, "Knowing God," showcases his dedication to Christian orthodoxy and exemplifies his unique talent for explaining complex theological ideas in a way that is accessible to everyday readers.

Academic Role:

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As a professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Packer played a pivotal role in fostering a vigorous and practical approach to biblical scholarship, impacting countless students and readers alike.

Legacy:

J.I. Packer's life and writing serve as a testament to his ability to meld profound theological insight with practical Christian living, bridging the worlds of deep faith and actionable belief.

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Evangelism & The Sovereignty Of God Summary

Written by Listenbrief

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Evangelism & The Sovereignty Of God

Summary Chapter List

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2. The Biblical Basis for Human Responsibility in Salvation
3. Exploring God's Sovereignty and Human Choice in Evangelism
4. The Role of Prayer and the Holy Spirit in Evangelistic Efforts
5. A Balanced Approach to Evangelism in Light of God's Sovereignty

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1. Understanding the Relationship Between Evangelism and God's Sovereignty

The relationship between evangelism and God's sovereignty is a central theme in J.I. Packer's book "Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God." Packer emphasizes that God's absolute sovereignty does not negate the necessity or the effectiveness of evangelistic efforts. Instead, he presents a harmonious relationship where both divine sovereignty and human responsibility coexist in the work of salvation.

At the core of Packer's argument is the belief that God is sovereign over all aspects of life, including the process of salvation. This sovereignty means that He is in complete control, guiding the course of history, the actions of individuals, and the unfolding of His redemptive plan. Thus, when evangelists share the gospel, they are participating in a divinely orchestrated plan. Packer underscores that evangelism is not merely a human endeavor but is grounded in God's will, emphasizing that God initiates and sustains the act of bringing people to faith.

Understanding this relationship requires an exploration of biblical theology. Packer references several passages that illustrate God's sovereignty in salvation. For instance, Ephesians 1:4-5 speaks of God choosing individuals for salvation "before the foundation of the world." This scripture supports the notion that God's plan for salvation precedes our human actions.

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Likewise, Romans 8:30 outlines the golden chain of salvation where those God predestines, He also calls, justifies, and glorifies. Such verses affirm that while humans are active in the evangelistic process, the ultimate capability to respond to the gospel resides with God.

However, Packer does not advocate for a passive approach to evangelism in light of God's sovereignty. On the contrary, he argues that divine sovereignty should inspire believers to engage actively in sharing the good news. The knowledge that God is in control assures evangelists that their efforts are bound to be fruitful, as God's plans will come to fruition. This understanding shifts the focus from human performance to trust in God's power and purpose. For example, a missionary preaching in a hostile or indifferent culture can approach their task with confidence, knowing that their obedience to evangelize is part of God's sovereign plan, even if immediate results are not evident.

Packer recognizes the tension present in acknowledging both God's sovereignty and human responsibility in the act of salvation. He illustrates this through the example of a farmer planting seeds. The farmer can prepare the soil and sow the seeds diligently, but ultimately, it is God who provides the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). In this metaphor, the farmer's role represents human responsibility and effort, while God's role represents His divine sovereignty and control over the outcome. Both the farmer's actions

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and God's provision are necessary for the harvest, mirroring how both evangelism and divine sovereignty contribute to salvation.

Moreover, recognizing the sovereignty of God empowers believers to evangelize without fear of rejection or failure. When the outcome of evangelistic efforts is placed firmly in God's hands, it frees individuals from the pressure of results. An evangelist might share their faith multiple times without seeing a conversion, yet they can remain steadfast in their mission, supported by the belief that God is at work in ways that may not be immediately visible. This assurance can be illustrated by the story of a pastor who faithfully preached to a community for years before witnessing any conversions; contrary to discouragement, he maintained hope, rooted in the belief that evangelistic seeds were nonetheless being planted in people's hearts.

In conclusion, Packer articulates a profound understanding of the relationship between evangelism and God's sovereignty. He affirms that while God is sovereignly in control of saving grace, this does not diminish the urgency and importance of evangelism. Instead, it should compel believers to participate joyfully in God's mission, knowing that their efforts, intertwined with divine orchestration, can lead to the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes. This balance between trusting God's sovereignty and actively engaging in evangelism creates a dynamic and powerful approach to

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sharing the gospel, one that is both grounded in biblical truth and reflective of a cooperative relationship between the divine and the human.

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2. The Biblical Basis for Human Responsibility in Salvation

In his work "Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God," J.I. Packer delves deeply into the complex interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the process of salvation. A significant emphasis of Packer's argument is rooted in the scriptural evidence that affirms human responsibility as an essential component of salvation, showcasing that while God is ultimately sovereign, humans are also called to respond to God's invitation with action and conviction.

The Bible presents numerous verses that illustrate this human responsibility. One of the most compelling passages is found in the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:13-15, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" This scripture underscores the critical role of belief and calling upon God for salvation, indicating that individuals must take initiative by believing the preached word and responding in faith.

Moreover, the concept of human responsibility is woven throughout Jesus' teachings as He urges His followers to make conscious decisions regarding their faith. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus states, "Here I am! I stand at the door

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and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." This imagery of knocking at the door encapsulates the notion that while Christ initiates the relationship, individuals must actively choose to open their hearts in response. The act of opening the door is a metaphor for human choice in accepting or rejecting God's offer of salvation.

Furthermore, Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23) is another powerful illustration emphasizing human responsibility. In this parable, different types of soil represent varied responses to the Gospel message. The varying outcomes associated with each soil type highlight that while the seed (representing the Word of God) is available to all, the effectiveness of that seed is contingent upon the condition of the soil—symbolizing the hearts and choices of individuals. Some respond positively and bear fruit, while others reject or ignore the message. This parable demonstrates how critical human response is in the grand narrative of salvation.

Packer expounds on this theme, asserting that the invitation to salvation is extended to everyone, yet it requires a response from the individual. This notion is consistent with passages such as Ezekiel 33:11, where God expresses His desire for all to turn from their sinful ways, indicating His compassionate invitation for repentance. The New Testament reiterates this through the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), where Jesus commands

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His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations." Such a directive implies that human agency is required to spread the Gospel and that people have the responsibility to evangelize.

An essential aspect of understanding human responsibility in salvation is affording the believer the agency to actively engage in their faith journey. It is not merely about passive acceptance but involves an active engagement with God, as expressed in Philippians 2:12-13, where Paul instructs believers to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." This marriage of divine action and human responsibility further illuminates the intricate relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility — God enables human action, yet humans must respond.

In conclusion, the Biblical basis for human responsibility in salvation is firmly established through various scriptural references emphasizing belief, acceptance, and active engagement with God's message. J.I. Packer elevates the discussion around this topic, encouraging believers to recognize their role in the salvation narrative. While God's sovereignty reigns supreme, it does not negate human responsibility but rather complements it, calling each individual to respond faithfully to the divine call.

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3. Exploring God's Sovereignty and Human Choice in Evangelism

In J.I. Packer's work, "Evangelism & The Sovereignty Of God", the exploration of the intricate relationship between divine sovereignty and human choice is critical for understanding how evangelism functions within the Christian faith. This section delves deeper into how the sovereignty of God influences human decision-making, particularly in the context of evangelistic efforts.

At the heart of Packer's argument is the notion that while God is sovereign over all things, this sovereignty does not negate human choice or responsibility. Instead, God's sovereignty ensures that human free will operates within His divine plan. This duality poses significant philosophical and theological questions: How can God be both sovereign and allow for human choice? How does this interplay affect evangelism?

In Packer's view, God's sovereignty is absolute; He is in control of everything, including the ultimate outcomes of salvation. This is evident in scriptures such as Ephesians 1:4-5, which states that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Such passages underscore the belief that God's plans are unchangeable and that He orchestrates all efforts toward His divine purpose. However, this sovereignty does not mean that humans are mere puppets in a predetermined play. Rather, individuals are given a

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genuine choice to respond to God's offer of salvation.

To illustrate this point, consider the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23. In this parable, Jesus describes a sower who scatters seeds on various types of soil, which represent different responses to the message of the kingdom. The outcome of the sowing—the growth of the seeds—relies on the condition of the soil, symbolizing the human heart's receptivity to God's Word. Here, while the sower (representing God) is sovereign in the act of planting the seeds of the Gospel, the varied responses of the soil illustrate human choices and readiness to accept or reject the message.

Packer emphasizes that God's sovereignty and human choice should be viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. For evangelists, this means that while they are called to share the Gospel faithfully, the ultimate success of their endeavors lies in God's hands. This understanding alleviates the heavy burden of personal failure that many evangelists might feel when their efforts do not yield immediate results. Instead, they are encouraged to trust in God's perfect plan and timing, recognizing that He will draw those whom He has predestined to Himself.

Moreover, Packer suggests that the knowledge of God's sovereignty should embolden the evangelist. If God is indeed working through the evangelistic effort to reach the lost, then sharing the faith becomes less about the

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individual's abilities and more about God's power at work. For example, consider a scenario where an evangelist engages with someone who is initially disinterested or even hostile towards Christianity. Knowing that God is sovereign and capable of penetrating hearts, the evangelist can approach the situation with patience and persistence, trusting that God can change the individual's heart in His time.

Additionally, this exploration into God's sovereignty allows for a deeper motivation within the evangelistic task. When believers understand that they are part of a larger divine narrative, it fosters a sense of purpose and urgency. The desire to share the Gospel transcends personal accolades or success rates; it becomes a mission tied to God's glory and the joy of seeing lives transformed by His grace.

In reconciling God's sovereignty with human choice, Packer encourages a balanced view of evangelism. The evangelist is to both trust in God's sovereignty and actively engage in the work of witnessing. This means presenting the Gospel clearly and compellingly while also relying on prayer and the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the listeners. Ultimately, the tension between divine sovereignty and human choice enriches the practice of evangelism, urging Christians to be diligent in sharing their faith while resting in the assurance that God is in control.

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4. The Role of Prayer and the Holy Spirit in Evangelistic Efforts

In J.I. Packer's profound exploration of evangelism interwoven with the sovereignty of God, one key aspect that emerges is the paramount role of prayer and the Holy Spirit in the quest for salvation. Evangelistic efforts are not merely the work of human endeavor or intelligence; they are deeply rooted in spiritual realities that require divine intervention. Prayer serves as the vital bridge connecting the evangelist and the Holy Spirit, the ultimate agent of transformation in the hearts of individuals.

Prayer is a fundamental component of effective evangelism. Packer emphasizes that prayer is not only a means of seeking God's guidance but also a way to align the evangelist's heart and mind with the mission of spreading the Gospel. In the Bible, we see numerous instances where prayer precedes significant evangelistic moments. For example, in Acts 1:14, the early disciples dedicated themselves to prayer before the day of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit descended, resulting in the conversion of thousands. This illustrates that prayer serves as the precursor to spiritual awakening and revival, underscoring its indispensable role in evangelism.

Moreover, Packer points out that prayer acknowledges our dependence on God's sovereignty in the work of salvation. Evangelists must recognize that, while they are called to proclaim the Gospel, it is ultimately God who draws

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individuals to Himself. In John 6:44, Jesus states, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." This recognition should lead to a posture of humility and reliance on God, expressed through persistent prayer. A personal testimony of this can be seen in the life of George Muller, a well-known evangelist and prayer warrior who fervently prayed for the salvation of specific individuals. Over the years, several of those he prayed for came to faith, some even after Muller had passed away. His life exemplifies the belief in prayer as a powerful tool that, combined with the work of the Holy Spirit, can lead to conversion.

During evangelistic efforts, the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role as the one who convicts the heart of sin, illuminates the truth of the Gospel, and brings about regeneration. Packer asserts that the effectiveness of evangelism rests not on the persuasive abilities of the evangelist but on the Holy Spirit's activity in the lives of the hearers. This divine agency is what turns a mundane presentation of facts into a life-changing encounter with God. For instance, consider the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who, on the road to Damascus, experienced an unparalleled encounter with Jesus. This transformation was entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, illustrating how God can intervene directly in the heart of anyone, regardless of their past or current state.

The reliance on the Holy Spirit not only empowers the message being

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delivered but also reassures the evangelist. It removes the burden of feeling entirely responsible for the outcome of their efforts. Instead, they can act as vessels through whom the Holy Spirit works. This understanding liberates evangelists to share the Gospel boldly and confidently, knowing that the Holy Spirit will apply the truth to receptive hearts.

Packer stresses that prayer and the Holy Spirit are not just supplementary to evangelistic methods; they are central to the mission. When evangelists engage in earnest prayer, they invite the Holy Spirit to move powerfully in a gathering, whether it be a formal church event or an informal conversation. This can radically alter the climate of a discussion, making it ripe for the message of salvation.

In conclusion, the relationship between prayer, the Holy Spirit, and evangelistic efforts is intricately connected to the understanding of God's sovereignty. While evangelists carry the responsibility to share the good news, they do so under the banner of prayer and with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. This collaboration helps foster a complete reliance on divine grace, reminding believers that though they sow the seeds of the Gospel, it is God who ultimately gives the growth.

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5. A Balanced Approach to Evangelism in Light of God's Sovereignty

In contemplating the intricate relationship between evangelism and the sovereignty of God, it is essential to adopt a balanced perspective that recognizes both divine authority and human responsibility in the process of salvation. J.I. Packer's work emphasizes that while God is sovereign and ultimately in control of the salvation of souls, this truth does not diminish the vital role that humans play through evangelistic efforts.

First, a balanced approach necessitates an understanding that God's sovereignty does not translate to human inactivity. Many believers struggle with a sense of futility when sharing their faith, particularly when faced with opposition or indifference. However, Packer encourages Christians to embrace the calling of evangelism as a means through which God has chosen to work. Packer asserts that evangelism is not just a technique, but a divine appointment to proclaim the good news that God is using to effect change in the hearts of individuals. This means that each act of sharing the gospel is an opportunity for believers to participate in God's plan for redemption.

Moreover, Packer explores the tension between divine sovereignty and human choice, suggesting that both are not in opposition but function harmoniously in God's grand design. He highlights how scripture affirms

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both the responsibility of the believer to preach the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in converting hearts. For instance, in Romans 10:14, we are reminded of the necessity of preaching as Paul writes, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" This passage underscores the importance of human action in the context of divine initiative. A genuine commitment to evangelism acknowledges that while God is sovereign, He uses willing vessels to reach the lost.

The role of prayer is also a crucial element in this balanced approach. Packer discusses how prayer serves as both an acknowledgment of God's ultimate authority and a means through which believers can align their hearts with God's will for the lost. By praying for those whom we seek to evangelize, we invoke the power of the Holy Spirit to create a receptive environment for the gospel. This reliance on prayer underscores a believer's dependence on God's sovereign work even as they take up the mantle of evangelism. For instance, many missionaries share stories of how they prayed for specific individuals, and later, through seemingly coincidental circumstances, those individuals came to faith.

Furthermore, a balanced view of evangelism in light of God's sovereignty also provides emotional support for believers who may feel discouraged by their efforts. Recognizing that salvation is ultimately a work of God can

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alleviate the pressure to yield immediate results. As Packer asserts, Christians need to cultivate a perspective that is focused on obedience rather than outcomes. By embracing this mindset, believers can find freedom in their evangelistic efforts, viewing each conversation as an opportunity for seeds to be planted, rather than a test of their persuasive abilities.

Packer also illustrates that God's sovereignty should inspire confidence rather than apathy in believers. Knowing that God is at work behind the scenes encourages Christians to engage boldly in evangelism, trusting that God can work through their imperfect words and actions to bring about change. An example of this can be drawn from the ministry of Charles Spurgeon, who understood this tension well. Despite his profound persuasive abilities, he often attributed the conversion of sinners to the sovereign hand of God at work, encouraging his congregation to preach with fervor, knowing that the outcomes were ultimately in God's hands.

In conclusion, a balanced approach to evangelism in light of God's sovereignty acknowledges the enthusiastic call of believers to share the gospel while resting in the assurance that true conversion is the work of God alone. This perspective not only fosters a more robust evangelistic strategy but also nurtures a heart of reliance and faith. By recognizing the divine balance between evangelistic responsibility and sovereign grace, believers can engage more meaningfully in the mission to spread the gospel and trust

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