

***Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, by J.I. Packer**
Westminster Book of the Month
November 6, 2024

“I never reconcile friends.” – C.H. Spurgeon

I. Introduction

- A. *“Packer’s popular book succinctly and plainly explains how God’s sovereignty and human responsibility affect evangelism.”* (Andy Naselli)

II. Who is J.I. Packer (1926–2020)

- A. James Innell Packer is a British-born Canadian, born in Gloucester in July 1926.
1. Truck Accident // Typewriter

III. The Basic Message of the Book

- A. *“[This book] is a piece of biblical and theological reasoning, designed to clarify the relationship between three realities: God’s sovereignty, man’s responsibility, and the Christian’s evangelistic duty. The last is its proper subject; divine sovereignty and human responsibility are discussed only so far as they bear on evangelism.”* (7–8)

B. Ch. 1 – Divine Sovereignty

1. Every Christian (functionally) believes in divine sovereignty.
2. *“... if you are a Christian, you pray; and the recognition of God’s sovereignty is the basis of your prayers ... The prayer of a Christian is not to force God’s hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence. When we are on our knees, we know that it is not we who control the world ...”* (11).

C. Ch. 2 – Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

1. Packer on “antinomy”: *“An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable.”* (18)
 - a) **Matt 11:28–29** – *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*
 - b) **John 6:44** – *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”*
 - c) **John 6:39–40** – *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
2. What would happen to evangelism if we *neglected* the sovereignty of God? What if we focused *only* on the sovereignty of God?

D. Ch. 3 – Evangelism

1. “[G]oing out in love, as Christ’s agent in the world, to teach sinners the truth of the gospel with a view to converting and saving them.” (53)
 - a) A message about GOD ... SIN ... and CHRIST.
 - b) A summons to FAITH & REPENTANCE ... motivated by LOVE for God and neighbor

“Whenever I am justified in choosing my subject of conversation with another, the theme of themes (Christ) shall have prominence between us, so that I may learn of his need, and, if possible, meet it.” – H.C. Trumbull

2. Evaluating evangelistic methods: “Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to promote, or impede, the work of the word in men’s minds?” (87)

IV. Lessons for Us (Ch. 4 - Divine Sovereignty and Evangelism)

- A. The sovereignty of God in grace does not affect anything that we have said about the nature and duty of evangelism.
 1. The belief that God is sovereign in grace does not affect the necessity of evangelism.
 2. The belief that God is sovereign in grace does not affect the urgency of evangelism.
 3. The belief that God is sovereign in grace does not affect the genuineness of gospel invitations or the truth of gospel promises.
 - a) **Matt 11:28** – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
 4. The belief that God is sovereign in grace does not affect the responsibility of the sinner for his reaction to the gospel.
 - a) **John 5:39–40** – “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”
- B. The sovereignty of God in grace gives us our only hope of success in evangelism.
 1. “So far from making evangelism pointless, the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful.” (106)
 2. “Not only does [God’s sovereignty] undergird and uphold evangelism, and uphold the evangelist, by creating a hope of success that could not be otherwise entertained; it also teaches us to bind together preaching and prayer; and as it makes us bold and confident before men, so it makes us humble and importunate before God. Is not this as it should be? (125–26)