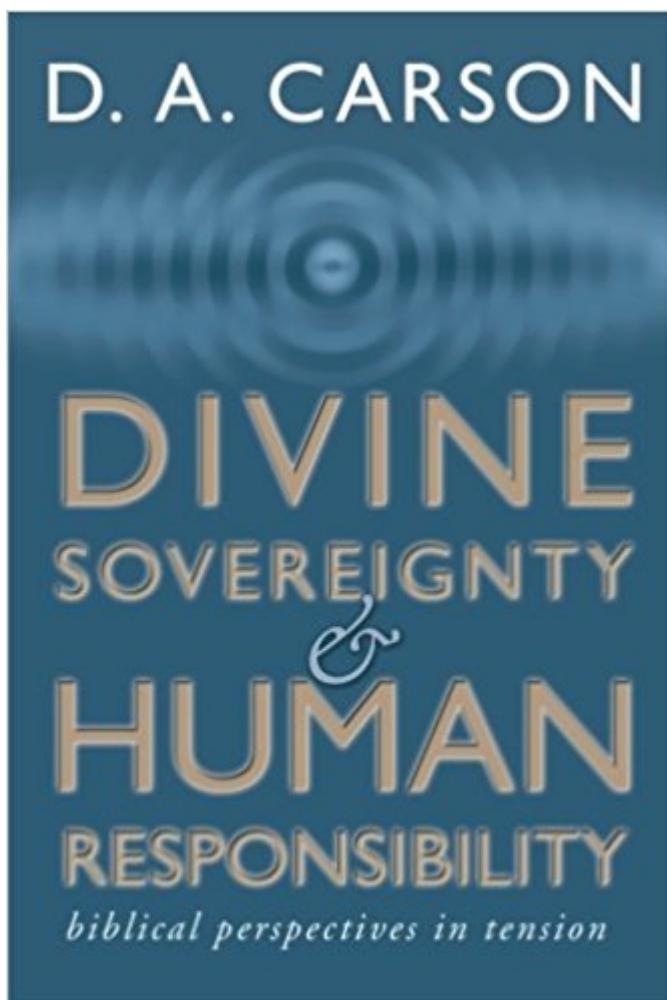


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Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective In Tension



Synopsis

Both theology and philosophy wrestle with the tension that exists between the sovereignty of God and human response. In Christianity, this tension is particularly acute as God is understood to be both omnipotent and benevolent. This tension underlies numerous other questions: about the nature of God, the meaning of human freedom and choice, the concept of divine repentance, the reign of God and supremely, the significance of the incarnation. Dr. Carson brings clear, scholarly insights and finely-honed exegetical skills to this all-pervasive issue, seeing it not so much as a problem to be solved as a framework to be explored. He examines the sovereignty-responsibility themes in the Old Testament, intertestamental literature and in the theology of John's gospel and concludes with a reflection on the theological implications for ministry and mission today.

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Customer Reviews

D. A. Carson is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He is the author or editor of more than forty books, including *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, *The Sermon on the Mount*, *Exegetical Fallacies*, *Matthew* (EBC), *Showing the Spirit*, *How Long, O Lord?* *The Gospel of John*, and *The Gagging of God*.

Great book by Carson!

This is a great book for discussing its main premise but needs re-reading and much thinking through of ideas presented. A dictionary nearby is useful, too. Not being a theologian or scholar, it takes

some work to get through but is well worth it. Carson presents a difficult topic and though more simplified explanations would be to my liking, I enjoyed/am enjoying the challenge.

Unlike most authors who tackle this subject, Carson refrains from leaning too far in either direction. He pulls it off because his focus is on scripture. Consequently theologians and philosophers of various positions refer to this book. It is a must read for anyone who wants to do a little deeper study into the subject.

D. A. Carson is magnificent as always. Get a copy and find out what I mean.

You can not beat this completed work by D.A. He does a great job. He Def has the authority in this arena of theology. A must read for any serious Christian trying to conform his mind to scripture and not the world. Rom. 12:2

good read

In this book (based on his dissertation) Carson surveys the literature from the time of Moses through the apostles and into the Christian era, examining attitudes toward these two topics frequently posited against each other in Christian thought: divine sovereignty, through which God ordains what will come to pass, and humans' responsibility for what they choose to do. This survey helpfully includes old and new testament biblical sources, but also deuterocanonical and other apocryphal sources, contrasting the development of rabbinic and christian thought over that period. (Carson writes with a protestant christian presupposition). He closes his book with an honest assessment of the tension between these two axiomatic points of doctrine. The book is divided into 5 sections:-
Introduction - chapter 1- Tracing the issue in the hebrew canon - ch. 2 - 3- Tracing the issue in 'intertestamental' works (including deuterocanonical and other works from that period proper, and rabbinic literature into the christian era) - ch. 4 - 10- Analysis of the issue in the writings of John - ch. 11 - 12- Theological reflections given all of the above - ch. 13 Each section is undoubtedly immanently accessible to people familiar with the subject domain. I found the second section very eye-opening, as other works I have read have exclusively focussed on biblical (non-deuterocanonical) sources: it was "tough slogging" to follow the academically oriented text, but rewarding to do so. The review of the new testament works of John, in contrast, is more accessible to any Christian who has thought about this subject, and it also is rewarding for its well-reasoned

interpretation. I would heartily recommend chapters 12 and 13 as being well worth the value of the book to anyone not willing to endure the more challenging first 11 chapters. Intellectual honesty characterizes the work. Carson's conclusions are well argued, dispatching various simplistic "answers" to the tension between the two doctrines (from "hyper-pelagian" to "hyper-calvinist" and many in between) by demonstrating how they reshape rather than resolve the apparent conflict; typically, they address the issue at one point but fail to follow through the logical implications. Carson himself does not end with a tidy, simple resolution to the tension; rather, he:^{*} clarifies what the bible clearly teaches about these two doctrines (remember my comment above about Christian Protestant perspective), and^{*} clarifies what presuppositions this apparent conflict challenges. The reader is left with a renewed appreciation for how one should be humble about the conceptual frameworks we on all have on which we try to structure our understanding of such teachings. Carson focusses on God's sovereignty from a "purpose", contrasted with a "directly causal", perspective. The only point in the book I find weakly supported is that he defends an asymmetry in divine sovereignty between election and reprobation, and generally causality of good vs. evil. He includes minimal argument; here's hoping he will might explain that position (Dr. Carson, if you reading this, how about an article in 'Modern Reformation' magazine?) To challenge Carson's work, anyone that wants to take him on must demonstrate how an alternate understanding is more compatible with the biblical texts, rather than demonstrate how it is more compatible with one's presuppositions or how it leaves one with a more "comfortable" answer. Note, for an easier read that includes an over-view of the conclusions reached here without many of the supporting arguments, consider reading Carson's also excellent book "A Call To Spiritual Reformation" - chapter 9 in particular.

What do you get when a biblical scholar writes a book on a difficult theological topic? Not a very good book. Carson attempts to explain the divine sovereignty-human responsibility tension in Scripture and early Jewish literature. He goes over the Old Testament, Apocrypha, Pseudopigrapha, DSS, and a host of other Jewish literature. According to Carson, as Judaism progressed in time human responsibility became more emphasized and merit theology began to develop (though DSS can be seen as an exception). He basically refutes E. P. Sanders' view that early Judaism was a highly grace oriented religion with no concept of "earned" righteousness (though he agrees with Sanders that early Judaism did not totally put aside God's grace in the salvific process). The section on how the OT and early Jews understood the tension is slightly informative. It can provide students some information on how early Jews formulated the tension between grace and merit. The more interesting (and more useful) sections of Carson's book is how

the Gospel of John formulates the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility (chap. 12) and the theological implications of his study (chap. 13). Carson argues that John keeps the tension in balance (though not totally solving the dilemma) by positing BOTH divine sovereignty and human responsibility in people's actions. He argues that John, following the OT, does not see the logical incoherence of holding both concepts at the same time (i.e., humans are commanded to believe and obey even though God is sovereign over all human actions). The last chapter (13) pretty much summarizes all the points made in the book. What is interesting is that Carson does not come to a firm conclusion on the matter except to conclude that this tension is a lot more complex than the human mind can process. One wishes that Carson can push this matter a bit further - but, again, he is not a theologian or philosopher but a biblical scholar. In the end, what Carson comes up with is a compatibilist (Calvinist) concept of divine sovereignty-human responsibility (in contrast to the more classical Calvinistic model promoted by the likes of Charles Hodge). Overall, the book is useful in some respects. However, because this was Carson's doctoral dissertation at one point the reader will find the reading a bit difficult at times.

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