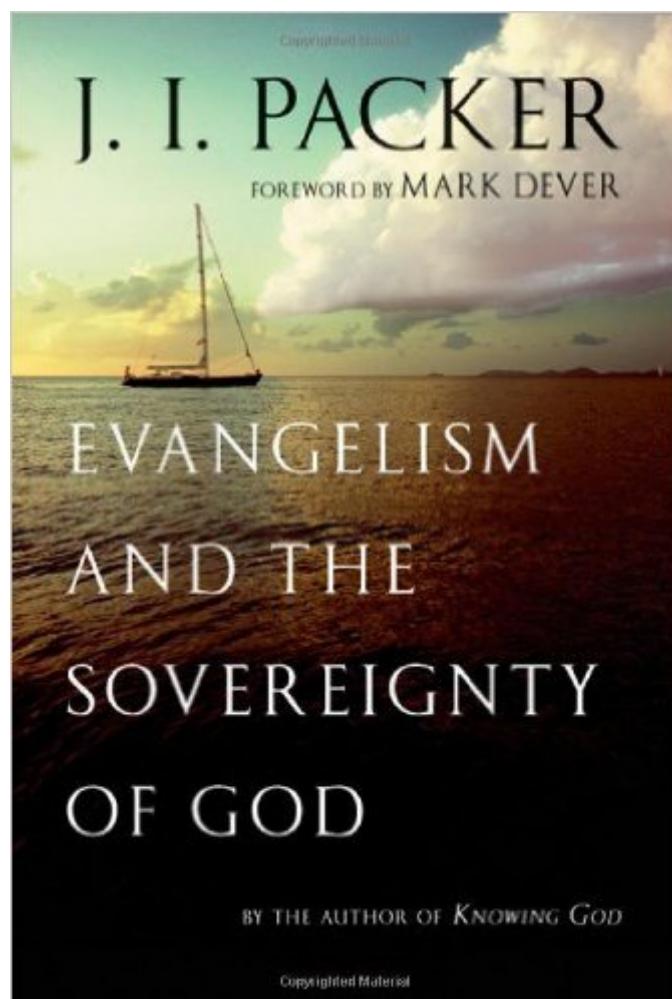


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Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God



Synopsis

If God is in control of everything, can Christians sit back and not bother to evangelize? Or does active evangelism imply that God is not really sovereign at all? J. I. Packer shows in this new edition to the popular IVP Classics how both of these attitudes are false. In a careful review of the biblical evidence, he shows how a right understanding of God's sovereignty is not so much a barrier to evangelism as an incentive and powerful support for it. With over 100,000 copies in print, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* is truly a classic that should be read by every Christian.

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Customer Reviews

To have published a single literary work that becomes a classic is a notable accomplishment. Publishing two gives the writer a corner on contemporary Christians' reading lists. James Inverness Packer has accomplished just that. Packer is well-known for his landmark book, *Knowing God*, which first was published in 1973. This is not a review of that book, but if you have not read it you should. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (first published, 1961) is the other classic Packer has written, and it punches far above its weight (my copy is a 2008 reprint edition--it's only 134 pages) in the world of biblically faithful Christian classics. The first chapter, *Divine Sovereignty*, makes the case that all believers adhere to a confidence in God's absolute sovereignty. Packer calls the average Christian's prayer life to the witness stand, and the testimony is irrefutable. If you are inclined to question this last sentence, just read the chapter and form your own opinion: it's only seven pages long. Next, in *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, Packer shows that these two poles of activity (divine and human) comprise not a paradox, but an antinomy: the assertion of

two statements which seem to be contradictory, but both of which are logically necessary: "An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable" [26]. Packer goes on to show, with plenty of examples, that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are taught in Scripture. His advice regarding how to handle the conflict between the two is wise: "What should one do, then, with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it.

When you read the Bible it is clear that two things are true: a) God is sovereign. b) Man is responsible for his actions. What becomes tricky is the harmonization of these twin truths. One person might say, "If God is sovereign then he cannot hold people responsible." Another would say, "If man has responsibility to make the right decision, God cannot be sovereign." Doubtless you have heard and even felt this tension. The biblical category where this tension tends to get the most attention is the area of Evangelism. How does the truth of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility mesh together in terms of evangelism? J.I. Packer wrote a book that regrettably does not get as much attention as it should. It is aptly titled *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*. In the book Packer helpfully unpacks the concepts of divine sovereignty and human responsibility with a particular application toward evangelism. Too many churches have their theology in one room and their evangelism in the other. However, God means to have our theology drive our evangelism. What God has joined together let no man separate. Packer aims to marry the two having theology inform evangelism and evangelism reflect biblical theology. The book is more than just the establishment of theological categories. Packer labors throughout to tease out the implications. For example, if you believe God is sovereign then you will not resort to pragmatic, calculating manipulation tactics in order to "get the sale closed." You also won't neglect evangelism because of discouragement. After all, it is God who brings the life and he has many people in this city! You won't neglect prayer because it is prayer that God has ordained to be a tool in the process.

We live at a time of spiritual lethargy, which is often rightly equated with laziness. In part, this lethargy is the result of philosophical postmodernism that winsomely accepts ideas in obvious tension. Tension arises when my reality and your reality differ, but rather than work out the differences we just ignore the tension, as if it would just go away. But when the subject turns to God, this tension will not simply go away because God's salvation is not defined by our convenient, custom realities; God defines the one reality that matters because he created it. If we are going to understand God's reality, then we need to study theology. In his book, *Evangelism and the*

Sovereignty of God, J. I. Packer addresses the question: if God is in control, why should we do anything at all? • (8) Packer answers the question by first observing that the apparent contradiction between divine sovereignty and human response is just that: an appearance of contradiction • (24), not a real contradiction, which arises because God is both king and judge (27). As king, God makes the rules; as judge, he holds us accountable. Packer writes: What the objector has to learn is that he, a creature and a sinner, has no right whatsoever to find fault with the revealed ways of God. Creatures are not entitled to register complaints about their Creator. • (28) Because we are created by God as moral agents, we must not be tempted neither to believe that we alone are responsible for the Gospel's effectiveness nor that God will sovereignly bring the Gospel to everyone on his own (30-40).

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