



Hand in Hand: The Beauty of God's Sovereignty and Meaningful Human Choice

Randy Alcorn

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If God is sovereign, how can I be free to choose?

But if God is not sovereign, how can he be God?

Is it possible to reconcile God's sovereignty with human choice? This is one of the most perplexing theological questions. It's also one of the most personal.

In *hand in Hand*, Randy Alcorn says that the traditional approach to this debate has often diminished our trust in God and his purposes. Instead of making a one-sided argument from select verses, Alcorn examines the question in light of *all* Scripture. By exploring what the whole Bible says about divine sovereignty and human choice, *hand in Hand* helps us...

- Carefully and honestly examine the different views on this issue
- Gain a deeper understanding of God
- Appreciate God's design in providing us the freedom of meaningful choice
- See the value in *better* understanding what we cannot *fully* understand
- Learn how to communicate about the issue in clear and compassionate ways
- More fully experience the unity Christ intends for his Church

A careful guide through Scripture, *hand in Hand* shows us why God's sovereignty and meaningful human choice work together in a beautiful way.

Includes small-group discussion questions.

Hand in Hand: The Beauty of God's Sovereignty and Meaningful Human Choice Details

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From Reader Review Hand in Hand: The Beauty of God's Sovereignty and Meaningful Human Choice for online ebook

Robin Hatcher says

I loved this book. It is filled with such deep teaching, lots of Scripture verses, and dozens upon dozens of quotes from other Christians. It is balanced and lovingly presented.

One of the most influential pastors in my early years as a believer taught me that I should always interpret Scripture with Scripture. I was reminded of that teaching when I read this quote in hand in HAND: "Our object should not be to have Scripture on our side but to be on the side of Scripture; and however dear any sentiment may have become by being long entertained, so soon as it is seen to be contrary to the Bible, we must be prepared to abandon it without hesitation." —William Symington

I had been a Christian for 25 years before I heard the terms Calvinist and Arminian. Of course I had heard of men and women of faith who fell into one of those theological camps (i.e. John Calvin, John Wesley). I just didn't know the camps had names. In my very simplistic way, I finally determined that I fell somewhere in the middle, not fully in either theological camp, but partially in both. I completely believe in God's sovereignty and I completely believe God gave us free will. And I believe both because I see both in the Bible. I cannot explain to you how it works. I just believe it because God said it.

hand in HAND is an excellent book that forces us to look at all sides in any theological discussion, to lovingly and fairly search for the truth in the Scriptures, to reject true heresy but not be so quick to assign that label to those who disagree with our position. I highly recommend it.

Nick Carrico says

(Review from a Calvinist) This was a fun read that expanded my knowledge of the Arminian vs. Calvinism debate. (He also explains other uncommon views such as Molinism, open theism, and hyper-Calvinism) I learned a lot about Arminian beliefs. I now see more clearly exactly what they believe and why. It also broke down barriers to other views that I had. I was very surprised to read quotes from Arminius that sounded very Calvinistic, and quotes from Calvinists that sounded Arminian. This book also does a good job of using scripture to back up and challenge both views. Alcorn does a nice job of not being heavy handed. I liked that he stressed that we shouldn't force our theological system upon scripture (Calvinist/Arminian), but that scripture should shape our theological system. Very helpful read that I would recommend to those who are confused or wanting to understand these views better. It also forces you to think and expand your mind about the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's will and how these two can exist hand in hand.

Paige Gordon says

This was a fascinating and challenging read that I absolutely loved! The historical aspect that Randy talks about with the traditional views of the Sovereignty/Free will debate (Calvinists vs. Arminians) was so interesting to learn about and the insights that he shares on the whole subject were invaluable to my growth

in Better understanding something he freely admits we will never Completely understand. This book is well worth the time and effort it takes to read. Highly recommended!

Favorite Quote: "Modern believers have a bad habit of acting as if the Christian faith began with us, with the result that we up doing "theology on the fly", ignoring a few thousand years of Christian history as if not much of importance was learned...We tend to be guilty of what C.S. Lewis called "chronology snobbery", the flawed belief that newer ideas are always better than old ones."

David Steele says

The debate over the sovereignty of God and the free will of man originally heated up between Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius in the 4th century. This debate has raged throughout church history and does not show any signs of letting up. Arminians accuse Calvinists of serving a "tyrant God" who plays the role of a puppet master, making free will an illusion. Calvinists accuse Arminians of serving a "timid God" who is weak at the knees.

Hand in HAND by Randy Alcorn addresses the thorny issue of God's sovereignty and the free will of man. Alcorn does not promise to end all arguments. But he does enter the ring as a sort of "theological referee." The author is a former Arminian theologian who has since turned into a Calvinist. While Alcorn prefers to say that he is a 4 point Calvinist, since he is uncomfortable with particular redemption, he is committed to Calvinistic presuppositions. This theological shift allows the author to sympathize with Arminians and provide some good teaching points for Calvinists who tend to be overzealous.

Alcorn begins by reassuring readers that the subject should be discussed and notes six important reasons for pursuing the matter:

1. To develop a deeper appreciation for God and his Word, which reveals him to us.
2. To help us mirror Christ's humility.
3. To embrace all of God's inspired Word, not just parts of it.
4. To foster unity in the body of Christ.
5. To avoid fatalism and crushing guilt.
6. To prevent us from becoming trivial people in a shallow age.

The author surveys the biblical data which point to the biblical reality of God's sovereign control over all things as well as human responsibility. He notes how these two realities intersect, creating a paradox not a contradiction.

One chapter is devoted to addressing the matter of Open Theism, a theological cousin of Arminianism which denies God's definite foreknowledge of all things and affirms the libertarian free will of the creature. Alcorn makes it clear that both points are patently rejected in Scripture.

Several features make Hand in HAND a worthy book; a book that will likely win the Gold Medallion

Award:

First, Alcorn writes with the proper tone and spirit. Much of the debate occurs over these matters produce more heat than light. Dave Hunt's Book, *What Love is This* is a good example of this mean-spirited approach which caricatures a given theological view. Alcorn approaches the subject with humility and gentleness and invites readers of differing opinions to pay careful attention to the arguments.

Second, misunderstood terms are clearly defined. The author does a good job of providing working definitions that are biblical and understandable. The clear terminology should help in future debates between Calvinists and Arminians.

Third, the lines of orthodoxy are clearly drawn. Both Calvinists and Arminians are included in the so-called box of orthodoxy. This point is of great value, especially when both schools of thought accuse each other of heresy. Alcorn invites both sides to engage in meaningful debate without name calling. Additionally, Alcorn rightly notes that Open Theism is outside of orthodoxy. Any theologian who refuses to grant God the ability to possess definite foreknowledge of all things has moved outside the perimeter of orthodoxy.

Fourth, a determinism continuum is presented. Sadly, many readers and students of theology are unaware of the theological landscape which includes many views concerning determinism and free will. The author clearly describes and defines these views: Hyper-Calvinism (outside orthodoxy), Compatibilism, Molinism, Libertarianism, and Open Theism (outside orthodoxy).

Fifth, Biblical Calvinism is presented correctly. Apart from the merits of particular redemption which could be debated at another time, the author does a terrific job of presenting Calvinism as a biblical system which is passionately God-centered; a system which promotes evangelism and engagement with culture. Additionally, the author demonstrates repeatedly that Calvinism embraces the notion of free will, (what Alcorn prefers to call "meaningful choice") by pointing readers to the definition popularized by Jonathan Edwards - "choosing according to one's strongest inclination."

Sixth, all readers are admonished to trust a sovereign God. In what proves to be the best chapter in the book (chapter 10), the author encourages readers of all theological backgrounds to trust in a God who is sovereign.

Hand in HAND will not be received well by Open Theists and Hyper-Calvinists. Some Arminians and Calvinists may be bothered as well by some of the content. But as a pastor who has travelled a very similar theological path from Arminianism to Calvinism - and even attended the same Bible College, I trust that thousands of people will devour Hand in HAND in the days ahead. There is no doubt that Alcorn's work will spark questions and stimulate debate. But my prayer is that the debate will produce more light than heat. And in the final analysis, people will be drawn closer to the Savior and bank on his all-sufficient grace. Indeed, he is sovereign over all!

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5 stars

Eric Skwarczynski says

I was pleasantly surprised by this book. Although I did not agree with some of Randy Alcorn's beliefs,

specifically his views on limited atonement, I found the book to be insightful, well-researched, and well presented.

Mr. Alcorn's writing style is very accessible, yet very thought-provoking and deep. I was constantly dog-earing pages of the book to refer to later for further meditation and study.

Obviously, the book is about how both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility go hand in hand, and the author certainly does a great job of presenting many views honestly and without bias, and consistently refers to Scripture as the primary source for decisions.

The greatest accomplishment of this book was that although he states what he believes, he is careful not to come across arrogantly or speak in a derogatory manner of those holding an opposing view. There are many portions of the book where he will say a quote and then say "Now, who do you think said that?" He will then surprise you by telling you that the very calvinistic sounding quote is actually from an arminian, or vice versa.

This is followed by a subtle reminder that we cannot broad brush other Christians solely by their labels. We must get to the root of what we believe from Scripture itself, not what each other's theological system may historically be thought to represent.

Overall, this is more a thought provoking book than a "here's how it is, believe like I do" sort of book.

It was a great read, I highly recommend it to anyone desiring to expand their thinking in this area. You won't necessarily find all your answers in this book, but it will definitely put your mindset in a good place.

Dottie Parish says

This is an excellent book about the sovereignty of God and the free will of humans and how these dovetail, with the Holy Spirit's help (pun intended). As usual Randy Alcorn examines every Scripture on these two topics as well as offering charts and the views of various Christian scholars. He tells of his own journey as an Arminian who put more weight on man's free will but still valued and believed in God's absolute sovereignty. Later he became a Calvinist (4 point). He urges Christians to realize we can't understand everything. We need to communicate about the issue clearly and be compassionate and accepting to unify the Church. Here's a helpful illustration he gives:

"God's freedom and ours can be compared to a ship crossing the ocean...no passenger can change the course of the ship....the captain makes that decision...God controls the weather and knows where the ice bergs are....Unbelievers and believers alike are passengers able to make real choices, living under God's rules....We'll be held accountable for our actions" later. Pg153

This is an excellent book on a complex subject.

Justin says

Very solid. This is an extremely well-rounded book. That seemed like the whole point. Alcorn describes

himself as 80% Calvinist and presents a good case for compatibilist free will. I appreciate the pains taken to present such a tough subject with balance. He stressed the importance of listening to what the other side has to say and seeking to understand before you critique. It is an excellent resource that I recommend to anyone wanting to study the subject.

Nikolas Larum says

If you've never read any of Alcorn's work, do yourself a favor and grab one – any one. Alcorn is a deep thinker who delves into the implications of the plain text of Scripture with a boldness I've seldom read elsewhere. This book is his contribution to the Calvinism (God's will saves and man has no choice in the matter) vs. Arminianism (God's will saves and man has a choice in the matter) debate. Regardless of which theological camp you find yourself currently in, this book will challenge your presuppositions and give you some appreciation for the other side. Alcorn spent his first ten years in the faith as an Armenian and then slowly moved over to four-point Calvinism (which, to be fair, some would say is no Calvinism at all!). I found that much of my angst toward Calvinism was really a reaction to what could be more aptly termed hyper-Calvinism (which to me is nothing more than pagan fatalism wrapped in Christian terminology). After reading this book, I am still closer to Arminius than I am comfortable with Calvin. But the book helped me temper some of my hyper-Arminian assertions (which at times could be nothing more than secular humanism wrapped in Christian terminology). Alcorn's book is a fine apologetic for two contrary views that remain orthodox. Not only is the text engaging and provocative, the book also includes great tables and informative diagrams. What's not to like?

Jonathan Beigle says

I really enjoyed hand In Hand. Though I'm not a huge Randy Alcorn fan, I thought did an excellent job presenting both sides of the Arminian and Calvinist debate. As a former Arminian, and now a 4-point Calvinist he presented both sides and called for everyone to really consider what the other side is saying, not what people say they're saying. The book, goes through both positions, how to handle certain problems of both positions, and deals with the "Why would God..." question. I loved that fact that Alcorn really places a lot of focus on believing what the Bible says, and not what our theological system says and understanding that we may not have all of the answers on this side of heaven. The book contains tons of quotes from famous Arminians and Calvinists and lots of Bible verses as well to support both sides. I will definitely look back at this book as a reference in the future.

Favorite quotes:

p. 4 - "If we love the same Jesus and believe the same Bible, let's start and end there."

p. 5 - "In our world, feelings overshadow thinking, and sizzle triumphs over substance."

p. 12 - Charles Spurgeon - "If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other."

p. 31- "Let's trust all of God's words, not just the ones that fit neatly into a preferred theological system or church tradition."

p. 115 - "There's a difference between immediate good and ultimate good. Accepting that difference requires faith."

p. 124 - "If the world's sufferings (and his own on the cross) are worth it to the all-knowing and sovereign

God revealed to us in Scriptures, than in the end without end, surely they will be worth it to us."

p. 138 - Jack Cotrell - "A sovereign God is a God who is free to limit himself with regard to his works, a God who is free to decide not to determine if he so chooses, a God who is free to bestow the gift of relative independence upon his creatures. Such freedom does not diminish God's sovereignty; it magnifies it."

p. 143 - "If we have no ability to make one choice over another, why bother with life? Why seek to repent of sin if repenting (or not repenting) is entirely outside our control? In what way could I grow in conformity to Christ if my choices to read his Word, pray, seek fellowship, and resist temptation are not mine to make in the first place?"

p. 186 - William Symington - "Our object should be to have Scripture on our side but to be on the side of Scripture; and however dear any sentiment may have become by being long entertained, so soon as it is seen to be contrary to the Bible, we must be prepared to abandon it without hesitation."

p. 210 - "Any position appears preposterous when stated by its critics, but it will often sound sensible, even persuasive, when stated by its advocates."

p. 217 - "If the Bible never changes your mind because you've already got everything figured out, you're missing the joy of discovery."

Jean Reese says

God's Sovereignty

This is one of the best books I have ever read on God's Sovereignty. If, fact, I am starting to read it again. Highly recommend as a must read, must have book.

Dorothy Vandezande says

I think this book holds the distinction of being the only thing I've read on the topics of God's sovereignty and man's free will that has left me hopeful, encouraged and peaceful instead of unsettled or upset. It's definitely challenging, but in an inspiring way, not a dogmatic or threatening way.

Above all, every passage of Scripture is held in very high esteem and recognized as being the inspired Word of God, whether it's easy to understand and fit into your theology or not. "Let's seek consistency with Scripture, not with Calvinism or Arminianism."

Ron Dixon says

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Very open minded approach . He does not condemn other views but encourages introspection . His writing style is easy to follow and not pedantic .

Josh says

This is a tremendous and much needed book. Alcorn sets out to make the case that, rather than being pejoratives to sling about in flesh-driven theological mudfights, "Calvinism" and "Arminianism" are labels for orthodox, within-the-camp, frameworks as to how we reconcile the (seemingly?) paradoxical nature of divine sovereignty and creaturely freedom.

Alcorn's tone throughout is irenic and he is charitable towards those with whom he disagrees. Alcorn never stoops to the level of caricature and you will not find any strawmen gaining their existence from his words. He knows the difference between an Arminian and a Pelagian, a feat that seems to daunting to the point of impossibility for many Reformed writers.

The charts and diagrams are, while limited due simply to the nature of this particular beast, quite useful. I do wish Alcorn had dealt more extensively and explicitly with Pelagian teaching. It has been my experience that the more common foe to Reformed teaching has not been robust, Evangelical Arminianism but rather Pelagian in nature. Since one is orthodox and one is, at best heterodox but more accurately, heresy, being able to distinguish between the two is of greatest importance.

This is a treasure and will help many. But, to quote Alcorn, "if you aren't open to adjusting your position when it doesn't align with Scripture, then this book is not for you. "

For that reason, I hope and pray that this book is for all of us.

Eli Johnson says

A good analysis and comparison of Arminianism and Calvinism, with an emphasis on the authority of Scripture over any theological grouping we subscribe to. Overall, I found his explanations to be clear and helpful and his encouragement to humbly dialogue instead of arrogantly assuming the worst in others' beliefs to be sincere.

Becca-Rae Weidel says

I was introduced to Randy Alcorn nearly twenty years ago through his fiction stories, and I still consider many of them among my favorites. I've also read a few of his theological studies and I greatly respect his opinions. Despite growing up in church, the terms "Arminianism and Calvinism" weren't even a part of my vocabulary. It wasn't until college that I remember being introduced to Calvinism, and I'm now aware that it was clearly Hyper-Calvinism. It wasn't until over a decade later that I've been made to feel pressured into siding as one or the other. Randy Alcorn shares that he was raised in an Arminian church but now considers himself a 4-point Calvinist.

Alcorn first shared the traditional beliefs of Calvinism and Arminianism before splitting them up further into some more radical groups (like Hyper-Calvinism). Although he shares what his own theological thoughts are, he also tries to allow scripture to do the talking so that people are able to come to their own conclusions based on what God's Word says. I found this book to be extremely helpful. I maintain that I consider myself neither Calvinist or Armenian, but I am at least able to see that some of my views towards the two groups

have been formed by some that lean too heavily on the extreme sides (particularly Calvinism).

One of the statements I have heard someone I know say is "you should believe like a Calvinist, but you need to preach like an Arminian." I won't go into all the reasons that phrase has bothered me, but this book actually takes a look into that kind of thinking and how it's not necessary to separate the two.

I highly recommend taking the time to read this book. I personally recommend the print version considering how many sections I wrote in and highlighted. There is a lot of deep, theological study contained in this book. Although you can read without looking up all of the extra scriptures, it's important that the scriptures are where you are finding your truth and understanding.
