

## CONCERNING DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

### QUESTIONS ON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

#### A. What is it?

1. Meaning of divine sovereignty
  - a. It means principal, chief, supreme.
  - b. It refers to position - God is the supreme being in the universe.
  - c. It refers to power - God is supreme in power in the universe.
  - d. Definition by Robert Lightner, "God is the absolute and sole Ruler in the universe.
  - e. Concern: God is God and I'm not! More about that later.
2. Principles of divine sovereignty
  - a. God has an all-inclusive plan which He controls.
  - a. God has the freedom to do what He deems best.
  - b. God is only bound by Himself.
  - c. God is always consistent with Himself.
  - d. God is never frustrated.
  - e. James MacDonald, God completely controls the universe - with His feet up! He's not stretched or stressed in any way."
3. Biblical evidence for divine sovereignty
  - a. Ps. 135:6, *Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.*
  - b. Prov. 16:4, *The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.*
  - c. Eph. 1:11, *...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.*
  - d. Rom. 11:33-36, *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*
4. Warning concerning divine sovereignty - Augustine, *God is best known in not knowing Him.*

#### B. What about me?

1. The place of man's free will in divine sovereignty.
  - a. Man has choices within God's sovereign rule.
    - 1) Joshua 24:15, *...choose this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*
    - 2) Romans 12:1, *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
  - b. Robert Lightner, *The sovereignty of God and the responsibilities of man are parallel truths in Scripture...It remains a mystery how God can be altogether sovereign and yet allow for genuine human responsibility in His sovereign plan.*
  - d. For me, I believe without a doubt that my position is under God's sovereign control. In my practice of daily living, I have freedom to make personal choices.
  - e. In the area of evangelism, I believe like a Calvinist but live like an Arminian, it is all of God and all of me.
2. The validity of prayer in divine sovereignty.
  - a. Divine sovereignty raises questions concerning prayer
    - 1) If God is sovereign, why should Christians pray?
    - 2) Does prayer limit sovereignty?
    - 3) Does God change His mind?
    - 4) Is it possible that one's will can prevail over God's will?
    - 5) Is God obligated to answer prayer?
  - b. Responses
    - 1) The necessity of prayer is unquestioned in the Bible, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, *pray without ceasing.*
    - 2) Dabney wrote, *Prayer is not intended to produce a change in God, but in us.*
    - 3) John Hannah, *The end of prayer is not so much tangible answers as a deepening life of dependency and love that can come to the saint only through this means of grace.*

3. Human principles concerning divine sovereignty (James MacDonald)
  - a. Be obedient when told - stay in the Word.
  - b. Be righteous when tempted - temptation is not a sin but how you respond can be.
  - c. Be submissive when tried - more about that later but let me share a quote from Alexander MacLaren, *If God sends us on stony paths, He will provide us with strong shoes.*

C. Why them?

1. This deals with another theological term, theodicy - the vindication of God's justice in allowing evil to exist. Or, why do bad things happen to good people?
2. Theodicy is a recurring concern.
  - a. A cyclone killed over one hundred thousand people in Myanmar.
  - b. Starving children are reduced to eating mud cakes in Haiti.
  - c. A man imprisoned his daughter for more than 20 years and fathered seven children by her. On and on and on.
  - d. Theologian Millard Erickson, *Probably the most difficult intellectual challenge to the Christian faith is the problem of how there can be evil in the world. If God is all-powerful and all-loving, how can evil be present in the world?*
3. Theodicy deals with 3 basic issues.
  - a. Omnipotence of God
  - b. Goodness of God
  - c. Existence of evil in the world
4. Most attempted solutions try to modify one or more of the 3 issues.
  - a. God is not all-powerful.
  - b. God is not good as we understand goodness.
  - c. Evil is an illusion.
5. Biblical considerations
  - a. God is not the Author of sin - it was and is a human choice.
  - b. God overrules evil for good.
    - 1) His focus is not on short-term good but long-term welfare, Rom. 8:28-29, *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*
    - 2) Bad actions can produce tremendous blessings, Joseph and his brothers, Gen. 50:20, *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*
  - c. God is the victim of evil - He took sin and its evil effects upon Himself at the cross.
  - d. God is victorious - a day of judgment will come when evil will be no more.
6. Theological responses
  - a. Robert D. Culver, *Evil is allowed in the world for reasons God has never seen fit fully to disclose and which human wisdom has not discovered.*
  - b. I don't have simple answers concerning the relationship of God's omnipotence and goodness to the presence of evil. But, I do have a simple faith, one in which I can trust my God Who is faithful, omnipotent, omniscient and good.

D. Why me?

1. The normal response to pressures in one's life is to ask God, *Why me?*
2. *Why me* in view of circumstances
  - a. We are told that nothing reaches us without God permitting it.
  - b. I know that most people have gone through or are going through deep waters. I encourage you to hear what Corrie Ten Boom declared, *No pit is so deep that God is not deeper still.*
  - c. I learned things when my parents lived with us for several years.
    - 1) I have become more patient.
    - 2) I have become more dependent on prayer.
    - 3) I have become more appreciative of basic blessings like good health, friends and family.
    - 4) I would agree with George MacDonald who said, *I find that doing the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plans.*

- e. Would I say that good things are worth the pain? I believe difficulties enable me to exhibit God's nature in our lives, despite the circumstances. Thanksgiving despite the circumstances is a gift to God Who has everything.
3. *Why me* in view of selection
- a. The one question I would like to ask God concerning divine sovereignty is ,*Why me?* Not, why me concerning difficulties, trials or failures in my life, but, why God in your sovereignty did you choose me for Yourself?
  - b. The God of all creation adopted me. The price He paid for me was the life of His only Son, Jesus.
  - c. I don't have answers for all the questions that can be raised concerning the sovereignty of God but I do know that because He chose me, I choose to honor Him with my life.
  - d. C.H. Spurgeon, *Oh! For a spirit that bows always before the sovereignty of God!*

<b><i>CONCLUSION</i></b>
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- A. May we honor God despite our questions and difficult circumstances.
- B. May we agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God does not give us everything we want, but He does fulfill His promises...leading us along the best and straightest paths to Himself.*
- C. I am so thankful that God is God and I am not! My privilege is not to control my life but live under God's sovereign, loving, gracious control.