



Home : Sermons : July 30, 2006

The Sovereignty of God

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Introduction

It is rather curious that one of the most complex and difficult doctrines to understand is also one of the sweetest and most blessed as well. Our intellect rails against it but our salvation is dependent upon it—the complete sovereignty of God. Because of its complexity and because of our desire to want to figure all things out, we have attempted to come up with rationale or excuses that satisfy our minds but the problem remains that we are not submitting ourselves to the Scriptures.

God Controls the Actions of Free Agents

This is one of the two primary questions that arise in our minds when we try to make sense of an exhaustively sovereign God interacting with His creation in a way that does not set aside their free agency and responsibility for their actions. Generally speaking, we don't typically have a problem believing that God sovereignly controls inanimate things like rocks, atoms, or hairs on our head. Where we have difficulty understanding this is when God controls *our* actions and yet we are not like the rocks or atoms. Frequently, our chain of questions rushes to the "how" of this truth and yet it is not for us to understand—mostly likely we couldn't understand. But nevertheless, God teaches us in His word that He controls animate and inanimate objects all to accomplish His good purposes and yet this never sets aside our freedom and obligation to choose everything we do.

1 Kings 28, 34-35

- " This is a fascinating and humorous story of man planning his affairs (even in rebellion to God) and yet all of the details are being scripted or carried out at the hand of an omnipotent, sovereign God. Notice that God controlled the false words of the false prophets as well as the faithful words of Micaiah. Further, after declaring the destruction of Ahab, the king of Israel, God controlled the flight of an arrow shot at "random" so that it would pierce the king at a precise location.

Job 14:5

- " Job has a good understanding of God's sovereignty even in the context of his being despondent. God has ordained all of years, months and days and hours and He has even foreordained all of the things we do during this time. Just as man cannot make his allotted time start before its time, neither can he extend them beyond that which has been God's pleasure to determine according to the counsel of His will and purpose. But what you must see in this is that this means up until the day that God decides to call us home, all of us are, in a sense, immortal. That day will come when He pleases but up to that day, He preserves, protects and sustains us.

Psalm 139:16

- “ Again, God teaches us (in very plain language) that He has fashioned each of our days for us, even before our birth. Each day we face a new set of details that God has fit together for us and sometimes those details involve trials or severe hardships and other times they may involve prosperity. But regardless, they are days that *He has* fashioned. Because they come from His hand and He also promises that all things will work together for good, we are given the grounds of faith to receive all things with thanksgiving. We also see in Ephesians 2:10 that all of the works that God has for us each day have been determined beforehand and that they all have a common orientation—our position in Christ (Eph. 2:10).

Proverbs 16:1

- “ We see in this verse the obligation of man to think and reason but God’s sovereignty extends even to the tongue as those ideas are manifest.

God Controls the *Sinful* Actions of Free Agents

The second primary question which floods our minds when considering the sovereignty of God is how this can be true with the sinful actions of man. If God controls even sinful actions how is that He is not therefore guilty of the sin and, further, how can He blame those whom He controlled? But again, we see that we are asking the wrong question because we are beginning with the wrong inference. We are told in the Scriptures that God is holy, just and in Him there is no evil. But we sometimes assume that God is just a big one of us, albeit that He is stronger and smarter, but we think surely He must be constrained in the same ways that we are. If something works one way for us, then we assume that it must work the same with Him. This is obviously where we blow it.

The closest comparison that we can come up with to understand this (although not fully) is that of God as Author. The relationship between Saruman and Frodo is different than the relationship between Saruman and Tolkien. But still even this analogy is not sufficient because we are not simply talking about a *story* of sinful actions; we are referring to actual sins and atrocities where real lives are really affected.

Genesis 50:20

- “ Joseph’s brothers had acted in jealousy and vengeance toward him. Through their actions, Joseph ultimately rises to power in Egypt and later is reunited with his family. Although the brothers attempted to kill Joseph, God had meant for the situation to be a great blessing by saving thousands of lives from the effects of the famine. But also consider that Joseph was not aware of God’s plans throughout his trial. In the end, Joseph was able to see God’s purposes for the hardships but it is not always this way—sometimes God does not reveal to us what the plan is.

Isaiah 45:4-7; Amos 3:6

- “ In the first passage, God is speaking to Cyrus (king of Persia who defeated Babylon and allowed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem) through Isaiah and declares that both peace and calamity are brought upon His people. In the second, again God claims to be the One who controls the peace and calamity in the city. It doesn’t matter whether God uses an earthquake, a tsunami, a wildfire or terrorists flying planes into buildings; God is sovereign over all things and works everything

according to the counsel of His own will.

Mark 14:30; Luke 22:22

- “ When considering the sinful actions of men, surely the chief of all sinful actions is the putting to death of God’s Son. But as we see the whole event was scripted by Him even down to the roles of chickens.

Acts 2:22-23; Acts 4:27-28

- “ Everything that occurred, from the prophecies spoken hundreds of years earlier down to the actions of the Roman soldiers, Jewish servant girls, the political leaders and the common folk were under the sovereign hand of God so that all things would bring about His glory as He determined. Notice that this is not something that God simply foreknew about. Certainly He has perfect foreknowledge. But it goes much beyond this to His sovereignty where all things happen as He determines.

Free Agents?

Matthew 12:33-37

- “ Jesus teaches here that we have a *creaturely freedom* but that our choices, decisions and words are really shaped by our *nature*. Our nature is (like the type of tree) what will determine our choices of turning left or right, eating this or eating that. But how our creaturely freedoms and God’s exhaustive sovereignty over tiny details are reconciled, we cannot understand—we simply know that both are true.
- “ On the other hand, we see from the scriptures that we do not have *moral freedom* because again, according to our nature, we are enslaved or in bondage to the desires of our nature. (Romans 6:6-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). What this means is that with regard to his being a sinner, man is not free at all; man is a slave to sin and cannot escape this on his own because it is his nature.
- “ In the atonement, God provided for us a death and a resurrection. Our old man was crucified and we were raised as a new creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works. It is God alone who gives us the moral freedom to do right and He does this by killing our old nature and giving us a new one. Praise be to God!

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