



Sovereignty – Limitations of God

The majority of Christians today believe a doctrine that says God either causes or allows tragedy in His children's lives. Their definition of "sovereign" is that God is in control of everything, everywhere, all the time. That doctrine also says that nothing happens without God willing it to happen.

This sounds good, but it is the reason why many people secretly hate God. Let's say that a man had a son who contracted cancer and died after many years of suffering. The man is told that "God is in control", "nothing happens outside of God's plan, therefore this was God's plan", and the preacher at his son's funeral even says "God took the child". I'm sure you can understand the resentment and emotional confusion that the man has towards God. Yet, the man knows that if he hates God, he will go to Hell. No Christian wants to hate or resent God.

This is one of the worst doctrines around. If it were true, we would have no choice but to accept it, as many people already do. Thank God it's not. In this article, I'll attempt to explain the truth.

Sovereignty

Most people understand sovereignty to mean that God is in control of everything. Nothing can happen but what God causes or allows. The dictionary defines "sovereign" as, "1) Paramount; supreme 2) Having supreme rank or power 3) Independent: a sovereign state 4) Excellent". None of these definitions mean that God controls everything. The KJV and NKJV use the word "sovereign" 0 times. The NIV and NLT use the word about 280 times. The ESV, which is a new and widely accepted version uses the word 3 times, in Acts 4:24, 1Tim 6:15, and Rev 6:10. The HCSB & NASB use the word only once, in 1Tim 6:15. Let's take a look at those 3 verses, especially 1Tim 6:15:

Acts 4:24 = "Sovereign Lord". G1203 = δεσπότης despotēs; perhaps from 1210 and πόσις posis (a husband); an absolute ruler ("despot")— Lord, master. In the KJV, this same word was translated as "Lord". G1203 is used of any master, not only God; see 1Tim 6:1-2, 2Tim 2:21, Tit 2:9 & 1Pet 2:18.

1Tim 6:15 = "Sovereign". G1413 = δυνάστης dynastēs; from 1410; a ruler or officer: - of great authority, mighty, potentate. A prince, a potentate a courtier, high officer, royal minister of great authority. This same word is also used of other people besides God! "He (God) has brought down *the mighty (G1413)* from their thrones" (Luke 1:52). It was also used of the eunuch in Acts 8:27, called *the official (G1413)*.

Rev 6:10 – "O Sovereign Lord". G1203, same as Acts 4:24.

None of the translations mean, "in control of everything everywhere, all the time, past, present and future". So is God sovereign? Yes, God is supreme, powerful, independent, and excellent. Without us, God is fine, but we aren't fine without God. He's independent and doesn't need permission to do what He wants to do. Does the word sovereign mean that He controls everything? No.

God Has Limited Himself

There is no one more powerful than God, but God has limited himself. God can't lie and it is impossible for God to lie, so that limits Him from going back on His word (Heb 6:18 & Tit 1:2). God doesn't change (Heb 13:8 & Jam 1:17). He never has and never will lie. Every promise he makes, He's bound to. If God doesn't keep His promises, that makes Him a liar. The bible is full of God's promises. God has bound Himself over and over again with different promises so that **He can't do everything**. Finding just one thing that He can't do proves that He can't do everything. He limits Himself by His own promises.

God Gives Us Choice

One of the ways that God has limited Himself is by giving us choice.

Deuteronomy 30:19 – “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live”.

Do you see that it is our choice? If we choose death and die, God is not to blame. Choosing death doesn't mean that God willed us to die. It doesn't mean that it was part of God's grand plan for us to die. It doesn't mean that God predestined us to die, CONTROLLED us to die, or forced us to die. If God was in control of us, then the choices that He gives us aren't really choices, and our free will isn't real.

God's Will Doesn't Always Happen

2Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Do people perish? Yes. Is that God's will? No. Therefore, things happen that aren't God's will. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants everyone to turn from evil so they will live (Eze 33:11). This is further proof that not everything that happens is what God wants. Are we to believe that God preplanned things that He doesn't want? That He is controlling things to happen that He has no pleasure in? That he's predetermined to send people to Hell before they were even born?

Our Free Will

You have free will. If you choose to do bad things, you get bad things. The way the bible says that is, “you reap what you sow” (Gal 6:7). With every action comes a reaction. If you plant apple seeds, you'll get an apple tree. If you smoke 3 packs of cigarettes a day, you'll end up with cancer. Should anyone in that situation say it's God's fault that they got cancer for smoking? That God was in control? Controlling him to smoke? Controlling him to get cancer? That God was passively allowing it? God does have good plans for us (Jer 29:11), but He doesn't force His plan on us. Not everything that happens is what God planned! Bad things also happen to us because we live on a fallen world, but God is the solution.

Our Responsibility

God gave power to Christians to spread the gospel so that people can repent, but the gospel hasn't been spread as it should. It was God's will that the gospel would be spread, but it hasn't been spread like it should. Should we conclude that it was God's will that the gospel shouldn't be spread just because the people He trusted the gospel to have not worked hard enough? No! We are to blame for not doing God's will. We are to blame for not spreading the message that He trusted us with so that wicked men could repent and live instead of die.

God gives us power

We have authority given by God to do God's works. That authority is given by God's promises, which God cannot break. Whatever you ask in prayer, believe and you'll receive (Matt 21:22). Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven (Matt 18:16). Jesus said, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19). God has made a way for us to fight the enemy. He has given us a weapon. If we do not use that weapon, then it's our fault. With this authority that He's given us, It is not God who allows our tragedies. It is us.

Why This is Important

Knowing that God doesn't cause or allow my problems is very important to my faith. If I believed that when a problem comes into my life that it either came from God or is something that God permitted or allowed, I wouldn't know what to think. Why would I pray against something that is God's will? If a person believed that God put sickness on them, then they shouldn't pray against the sickness. They shouldn't go to a doctor, or even take medicine. All of those things would be resisting God's will. If God put sickness on them, then they should embrace the sickness and let it run its course so they can get the maximum benefit from it. Does anyone do that? Of course not, that's crazy! It's even crazier to say God was the cause of it. But IF God controls EVERYTHING, then of course He is the cause, and Satan does His will. What we should actually do is resist sickness through faith in the anointment Jesus has provided for us (Isa 53:5 & Jam 5:15). But if God is in control of your life and your life is in a wreck, then who's to blame?

Problems Come from Satan, Not God

We are taught that our problems are actually blessings from God. That's a faith killer. Acts 10:38 says that Jesus healed all those who were oppressed OF THE DEVIL. It was not God who oppressed them with sickness. It was the devil. The same is true today. God only gives good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). Jesus said, "what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt 7:11). I don't think that anyone is seriously stupid enough to believe that cancer is a good and perfect gift from God. Here's a basic principle to remember: if it's good, it's from God. If it's bad, it's from the devil. Period. Any problems I have are either from the devil, myself, or the result of being on a cursed planet. God has never harmed me, and He never will.

Take this for an example. I have a 7 year old son. I tell him not to touch the stove because it will burn him. He reaches, touches the stove, and gets burned. If he told people that I caused or even allowed the burn, I would be pretty upset. I warned him so that he wouldn't get hurt, not so that he would. Yet that's what so many people do with God by pinning their blame and hurt on Him.

Take another example. A man who I know to be a rapist murderer comes to me and asks for permission to rape my 20 year old daughter. No good father would say, "yeah, go ahead, she'll learn a lesson from it and it will work out for good in the end". But that's exactly what people say God does! That He allows it or gives permission to the Satan to do all kinds of horrible things to His children!

On the other hand, if I was sending my daughter out into a world where I knew that rapist murderer was, I would prepare her. I would give her a weapon to use against him, if she ever met him. If he did meet her, and I'm sure he would, she would be prepared. But if she denies the weapon I gave her when he meets her, she doesn't use it, and the worst happens, she can't say that I wanted that to happen. We as Christians are sent out into a world with the enemy (1Pet 5:8). But God has given us a weapon.

Just because good things can come out of hardships doesn't mean that God permitted the hardship. If you turn to the Lord due to hard times, then it was you who made that decision, not God pushing you to make it. The Lord is the answer to all our problems. He is not the problem.

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