

Sovereignty and Disobedience 3-09-03

Romans 8:1-2; 11:33-36; Jeremiah 29:11

One of the areas in which theologians struggle the most is that of the sovereignty of God. Does God always have His way in the earth? If man is free to choose to disobey God, how can God's will prevail? The answer does seem to be a mystery, and yet we see in the Biblical account of many historical lives that God works His will in spite of man's disobedience. It is probably so mysterious because it is so far beyond what we consider ourselves capable of. Perhaps the LORD wants to expand our understanding of what is possible in Him. Perhaps in seeing what God has done with the mistakes of others can give us hope that He can do the same with ours.

Listen as we go over these stories of real lives. Through their experiences, our careless attitude toward our own disobedience will be affected as we see how sin takes people to consequences much more costly than they ever imagined facing. At the same time I believe we will find new hope for those we love that have chosen to rebel against God.

I find endless lessons from the story of the world's first couple. It is hard to imagine being in their shoes, having never known sin. Every need was right before them. The world was unspoiled and unaffected by the curse. Everything was in its glorious pristine condition, including the only two perfectly compatible people. Cunningly, the Tempter picked the perfect moment, the perfect temptation, and sowed a seductive lie into the mind of Eve. God had already warned that disobeying the one prohibition in the Garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, meant death. Satan was able to sow doubt into the mind and heart of Eve. The doubt took root, and imagination blossomed into rebellious thoughts against the Giver of all good things. Eve disobeyed. When the judgment she expected did not happen immediately, she urged Adam to join her in rebellion against God.

The consequences are so numerous we can't mention them all. Their fellowship with God was broken. There was pain and a curse upon the earth. Every future human would be born with a fallen nature, sullied by sin, rebellious and selfish from birth. Untold horror has resulted from that first sin. If we were Adam, we may have been so discouraged by our own failure and the future consequences that we would have just as soon ended it all. Imagine being the entry point into the world of every future horror. If we stop there, our hearts would never recover. But God made a promise, a promise of restoration, and a promise of the defeat of the tempter through the seed of the woman. (Genesis 3:15)

Would man have ever understood the depths of the love and grace of God without the fall? Surely, omniscient God knew, before He created Adam and Eve, that they would fall. Jesus is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the earth (Revelation 13:8). God did not desire the fall of man, but in giving man the freedom to make his own choices, He knew that man would fall. He also knew the price of

Commented [notes1]: 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Gen. 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.
Rev. 13:8 (NIV)

redemption from that fall would cost Him dearly. That redemption would be the means of displaying His love in its full extent.

1 John 3:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* 1 John 4:9 (NIV) ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*

What a horrendous fall! What an amazing solution! How does God take our rebellion and bring positive things as a result? It is certainly due to nothing on our part. It is all about the wonder of His gracious love.

There are so many examples of this in Scripture. I will just choose a few. Samson was a miraculous child. An angel announced his birth. He grew up dedicated to God, a Nazirite. He never cut his hair or drank wine, but the Enemy of his soul knew his weakness, women. He seemed to like the wrong ones. God used him in mighty ways to defeat the Philistines. His disobedience had immediate personal results. You probably know the story. He was bound, his eyes were put out, and he served like a mule grinding grain. The hopes of his family and of his nation were crushed by his disobedience and the resulting judgment.

But God wasn't done with Samson, just like God wasn't finished with Adam and Eve who went on to have Seth. Both their children, Abel and Seth, learned from Adam to have a relationship with God through sacrifice. Samson's heart turned back to God through his humiliation. During one of the Philistines' wild parties, Samson was brought out to be mocked and made fun of. Samson had his guide place him between the two supporting columns of the building in which the Philistines were partying. He prayed that God would restore his supernatural strength, and then he brought down that entire building, killing more of Israel's enemies in his death than he did in his life. God wasn't done with Samson when he failed. God was just refining the man and preparing him for one last great victory. His fall placed him in position for that victory to take place. Was it God's will for Samson to fall? No! But through it all, God worked in Samson and accomplished His purposes. The family of Samson saw his honor restored, and the nation of Israel again had hope that God was at work.

The history of the nation of Israel has numerous examples of God working in spite of their failings. One of the most blatant was their refusal to enter the Promised Land. It amazes me that after all that God had done for them, promised them, and shown them of His power, they refused to enter. They insisted that they would rather die in the wilderness, so God gave them their request. Was it God's will for them to rebel against Him like that? Of course not! Was it not His perfect will for them to enter in and take the land at that particular time?

What good could God possibly bring from this outright stubbornness? Well, for one thing, that older generation of murmuring, Egypt minded people died off before they entered. It would have been disastrous for them to bring that spirit into the Promised Land. God used it to teach the next generation the fear of God. God will give you what you insist on. So many good things happened in those years of

wondering, the defeat of Og and Sihon, the bronze serpent on the pole, which Jesus would later use as a picture of His ministry, and the anointing of Joshua to lead them into the land. It was a time of preparation for when they would enter in.

But then, when they did, they still did not obey the word of the LORD through Moses. He warned them that they had to drive all the Canaanites out or they would be a thorn in their side. They didn't do it. Oh, they did for the most part, but partial obedience is disobedience. They were too anxious to build their own homes, plant their own fields and enjoy the new land. As a result, their descendents were seduced by the idolatry of their neighbors. They disobeyed the covenant they had made with God. The immediate result was similar to the curse in the Garden. They lost fellowship with God. The ground was unproductive. They were defeated in battle. These were all the judgments of God to draw them back into the good things He had in mind for them.

In time, their disobedience brought about the nation's downfall and captivity. What good could come of that? Well, here we go again. They were more desperate than ever to keep the word of the LORD when they returned. They were more hopeful about the promised Messiah. They were more desperate for a Deliverer. Are you beginning to see a pattern here? It is a repeated pattern throughout Scripture. Let's use just one more example, this time from the New Testament.

Perhaps the ultimate example of the point I am trying to make is the way Jesus was rejected. As He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds were hailing Him as their Savior. It almost looked like Israel had finally accepted Him. Only a few days later, the majority cried, "Crucify Him!" What happened in between? It was the reason Jesus stopped to cry on His way into Jerusalem. The people wanted a King that would deliver them from Rome and taxation, not a King of their hearts. When they found out He was only going to teach and not fight, they decided they had made a mistake. They preferred Barabbas, the one who would fight. Barabbas wanted what they wanted, temporal physical freedom.

They expressed the ultimate rebellion against God that could ever be expressed. "Crucify Him!" Was that God's will? Was the horror of their rebellion, the suffering of Christ on the cross, the rejection of Jesus as Messiah, God's will? The coming crucifixion of thousands couldn't have been God's desire. Yet, the answer is not so simple. Of course they should have accepted Him as their spiritual Savior. Since they refused to have a King of their hearts, they were in rebellion against God. That is not God's will. Yet, it was God's will to express His love through the cross and to bring in the Gentiles. In the midst of their rebellion, God was working out His wonderfully gracious plan. Considering this great mystery, the Jewish rejection of the Messiah and the Gentiles being made a part of family of God, the Apostle Paul wrote the end of Romans 11. Romans 11:33-36 (NIV) *33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"*

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Most of you know my story of years in a misguided cult. There are repercussions from those years that are still reaping the harvest from sin. If I could do it over again I certainly would never choose the route I took. I was blinded to how rebellious toward God I really was and the damage I was inflicting in other's lives. When God miraculously opened my eyes, I wanted to end my life. Trying so hard to radically serve God, I had wandered far from His will. Yet, through it all, God impressed upon me some lessons I would not likely have learned any other way. They are strong points in my life today. Out of the despair of sin and failure, God brought clarity and hope. Romans 8:1-2 (NIV) *1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

In all these examples we see that sin costs more than we ever expected, both to us personally and to many others affected by it. God pleads with us to walk in His ways to save us from the horrendous consequences of sin. Think back over the examples. Adam and Eve's rebellion brought the curse on the earth, separation from God, and mankind born in sin. The wave of sin they began has only grown throughout time to the tidal wave of today. Would they have ever guessed the extent of it?

Samson suffered complete loss of his freedom and sight, but he also caused the distress of his family and nation. Israel's rebellion affected the surrounding nations as well as their captors. They were to be an example to the world, and instead they were a bad example. How much evil and pain resulted from their failure? Those at the time of Christ would never have guessed that their rejection of a spiritual Savior and insistence on a physical one would result in the horror of Rome leveling Jerusalem and the Temple. Thousands were crucified along the sides of the roads. Sin always costs more than we expect, to ourselves and to others, sometimes with such far-reaching affects, we would be crushed if we knew it all. How we should abhor it in all its forms! Our constant failure and the consequences are enough to make you want to throw in the towel! But wait; look at what God was doing through it all.

He was calling the world to Himself. He was paving a way to redeem mankind. He was working toward the ultimate display of love, the Cross of Jesus. He is teaching us that His requests are for our good. He is weaning man from self and sin to surrender to His great love. All is not lost. God is on the throne of heaven. Have you read the last page? In case you forgot, let me remind you. There is a multitude that no man can number around His throne, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and their robes are made white by His blood. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more sorrow.

Now please apply the truth we have seen of the working of God to your own life. Have you failed God? Have you rebelled against His goodness and faced the painful

consequences? You are certainly not alone. Yes, the price is more than you expected to pay, but through it all, our gracious Father is bringing about good. It was not His will that we rebel. He did not desire for us to face the consequences of sin that we face. But through it we are learning that His ways are the good ways, the rich and fulfilling ways. Through it we are seeing how gracious and patient and loving He is. He wants to reveal Himself to you and He will even do that in the way He deals with your sin. It's all about us knowing Him in an increasing way! Don't despair of your sin; be repentant of it. That means to have a change of attitude, a change of mind about it. Realize it does cost more than we can imagine, and have more devastating effects than we realize. But also know that God is faithful and just to forgive us when we repent, when we confess. Then look for the good lessons and working of God through it all. See God at work redeeming your attitude, your desires, and changing the way you will make future decisions. Listen with your heart to the words God spoke to Judah through Jeremiah. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) *11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* He was telling Judah this when they were at their worst.

Last of all, consider how the faithfulness of God is working in those you love. Is someone you care about entering into some destructive direction? If it is an adult, there is little you can do in the physical, but there is plenty you can do in the spiritual. Pray for their eyes to quickly see the destructiveness of the path they have chosen. Pray that the lie of Satan, the lie that says there is value in that direction, to be quickly exposed. Pray for a hunger for righteousness and wholesome living to replace the lie. Trust God to lead your prayers in the right direction for their specific need. Know that He wants them delivered even more than you do.

Then have faith in God! Believe that He can take that act of disobedience and use its bad results to bring them to Himself. Didn't we just see that through the Scriptural accounts? Why would your life, or those you love be any different? We can't save them from the horrible consequences of sin, but we can pray that God will use it to bring them to a closer walk with Him than they otherwise would have had. That gives us hope! That keeps us out of that pit of despair. That keeps the joy flowing in spite of the pain. Remember, it is not a physical battle but a spiritual one. We are wrestling against unseen forces. Time and time again God has wrought wonderful victories in the lives of the fallen. We see it in the Bible. We see it in history, in the lives of men like Augustine. We see it in the men from Teen Challenge, and most of us have seen it in our own lives. So take heart. God is still on the throne, and prayer changes things. Have faith in God!