

The Sovereignty Debate

A Revised Version

By Wayne Vasilenko

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In Part one of this series it was shown how well meaning Christians sometimes do more harm than good by concentrating on subjects of disagreement rather than things we can all agree on. To illustrate this it is necessary to expose some of these issues to the Light of the Word, filtering out that which is not clearly, stated from what *is* clearly stated. Because an issue is not presented in precise detail, it does not mean that any interpretation is valid; keeping things in context is one of the essentials of bible interpretation and for the proper interpretation of anything else for that matter. So let us move on to another issue that is debated between Christians and various Churches, the issue of the "Sovereignty of God." This is perhaps the most misunderstood concept, and one of the most dangerous for various reasons. See the following definitions of the word Sovereignty.

Sovereignty Definitions From The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 4th Edition

- *n.* Supremacy of authority or rule as exercised by a sovereign or sovereign state.
- *n.* Royal rank, authority, or power.

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- *n.* Supreme authority over all things.
- *n.* The liberty to decide one's thoughts and actions.

I am not going to question or debate the Supreme Authority of God, for He is the creator of the universe, the ultimate power in the universe, and His power is limitless. I am sure most people agree with me so far. Here is the irony of this subject... Even though the majority of people agree that God is sovereign (as defined above), and they refer to sovereignty often, the actual word is most extensively used in only one translation of the Bible, the NIV. The word is not found at all in the King James Bible!

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Nevertheless, the issue and debate about the sovereignty of God however has caused many serious misunderstandings about the true nature of God. What are some of these misunderstandings? For example, many people will tell you that nothing happens outside of God's will. This sounds logical to most people; after all, the one who created the universe has to be in ultimate control of everything that happens in it! Well, Yes and No... Most of us at one time or another has sung the song, "God is in control" haven't we? Yes, god is ultimately in control of everything but does that mean every detail of everything that happens? Some churches apply this theory of God controlling everything to a person's salvation as well; they teach that God calls whom He pleases to repentance (and there are verses to back that up). They go on to say that if God doesn't call you to salvation it won't happen! In other words, God "Predestines" who will be saved and who will not be saved. If this is so how can we explain the following passage?

2 Peter 3:9 (KJV)

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance? (Emphasis mine)

If it is true that God determines who will or will not accept His plan for our salvation, we have a problem here. It says here that God is not willing that anyone perishes but that ALL come to repentance. The question we now have to consider is, "Does everyone accept Jesus as their savior?" The answer sadly is No.

Once again, this creates a problem if we are to believe that nothing happens out of God's will. The issue here is whether God desires (and wills) that none perish or He doesn't! Another controversial issue that comes up in the sovereignty debate is that God will put sickness such as cancer on someone to "teach them a lesson" or get their attention in order bring them into dependence on Him. After all, God is in control of everything; so it is thereby assumed He can, and does do this as well. If this is so and you are a Christian diagnosed with cancer why then would you go to the doctor? Why would you pray for healing, worse yet, spend

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your families inheritance to pay for the chance of being healed? Do you not desire to be in God's will? If you believe God put cancer on you to teach you something for your good, you should be thrilled to be in His will!

Just take what comes and hope that eventually God will have mercy on you and heal you. If... He decides to. There is an old saying, "Sometimes God has to knock you flat on your back to get you to look up. I used to believe that, however I now have a hard time believing that a loving God would do that, knowing for a fact that I wouldn't wish something like that on any of my own children. If your daughter wore excessively short skirts against your will, would you consider sending a rapist after her to "teach her a lesson?" That would get her attention I am sure... Absurd isn't it? So is the thought of God putting cancer on someone to teach him or her, a lesson; or that somehow this would be an act of love on the part of God.

James 1:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

This verse says to me that Sickness, and any other "Bad Thing" is **not** from God! Although the actual context of this passage is on the subject of temptation, the words "Every good Gift and every perfect gift is from above" would not in my opinion include cancer or rape as in the previous illustrations. As you can tell by now, the Sovereignty issue is a complex issue and it will not be solved in this writing. In my study of the topic, I was exposed to some compelling scriptures on both sides of the issue. But when you keep things in context and consider the "Character of God" and what He did for us in order bring us back into fellowship with him, it seems we all might be missing something within the debate. Perhaps through time God (in His Sovereignty) chose to deal with man differently at different times, all the while with the ultimate goal of reconciliation in mind. It's just like slapping a child on the hand when they are about to touch something they

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shouldn't. When my children were young, people were always amazed when we went somewhere or visited with someone. My children would walk up to an expensive item and look at it but wouldn't touch it. I used to laugh to myself as I could see sweat beads forming on a person's face expecting my child to topple over their family heirloom or expensive Crystal... it never happened. You see, my wife and me never "childproofed" our home... we disciplined our children. Sometimes they felt our wrath as it involved pain for them in the form of a spanking. But we didn't have to do that very often and soon all we would have to say in an ominous tone was, **NO** and that was enough. Our children learned very quickly that if they were obedient their parents they were rewarded, sometimes with just simple praise from their proud parents or sometimes with a blessing or reward. It was by their choice what it would be...wrath or blessing.

When God created man, He created him in His own perfect image; and just as God chooses to love us, He had to give man the ability to choose also, in order for man to be able to return that love, both to Him (God) and eventually his fellow man (and woman). Allowing choice usually involves risk in some form; in this case, the risk God took was that man might choose *not* to be obedient or love him back. God gave man the opportunity to illustrate his choice through obedience or disobedience of one simple rule. We all know the rest of the story. Keep in mind, this was all before Jesus, it was before the Law was given; it was before the Flood, and it was before Cain killed his brother Able. Even as sin continued to fester and grow among men, God never took away man's freedom to choose (and He never will). However, in order to keep sin in check, God did impose consequences for obedience or disobedience in the form of Blessings or Curses. It is interesting that as I looked up the different verses in which the words Blessing and Curses appears in the Old Testament; when Blessing were mentioned they came from God, usually unwarranted... only because He loved us. However when Curses are mentioned, you can always find the words, "If and/or Then" somewhere nearby. The words if and then strongly imply that choice is involved. Remember my illustration concerning my children... I said many times to them, "IF you touch that, THEN you will get a spanking;" it was all in love I might add... sometimes it was to deter

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them from doing something that could hurt, or even kill them! As my children's parent, I indeed was the sovereign authority over them when they were young, however they didn't always obey me and **it was ALWAYS their choice** which determined Blessing (praise) or Curse (punishment).

As I said before, the Sovereignty Debate is not going to be solved here and now. The choice the Church has to make is whether or not the issue warrants more of our time than telling people about God and the Bible just so that one group can say to the other, "I'm right and you are wrong." Once again, if we concentrate on these divisive issues and continue to fight with one another, we are not attracting people to Christianity; we are merely trying to get people to agree with us! Take time to pray about this... then decide if these types of debates are worth someone's eternal life; because ultimately, the people observing and listening to us including our debates, will have to make a choice about Jesus and that is the "Bottom Line" of all issues concerning what we believe. I pray that we will lead them to Jesus, and not away from Him through our words, actions, and even the debates we engage in.