

ALLIANCE BIBLE CHURCH

Is God Sovereign ?

Is it possible to still believe
God is in control when so
much seems to go wrong?

By Mitch A. Schultz

I spent more time pondering who God is since my family has suffered than I ever did before. Prior to this my understanding of God was so pat. He was definable and easily explained. I even preached some good sermons on the sovereignty of God. I had fallen into the trap of assuming that I understood Him. That is no longer the case. If you want an honest conversation about the sovereignty of God don't go to a Bible college professor even though his knowledge and training would equip him with all the right theological explanations. I would suggest you go sit in the waiting room of a hospital where some family members await the results of life dependent surgery. Go speak to someone who is hurting, and then you will appreciate the real struggles of trying to understand God.

My wife Elaine, having suffered from the debilitating affects of a brain tumor, will often speculate now how different things would be for her had I made different decisions when she fell ill. I fight feelings of guilt and try hard not to lay too much responsibility on my shoulders for my ignorance and poor judgment. Looking back, of course, I would have done things differently. I realize also that had the tumor been detected earlier that week and operated on in an elective manner, Elaine's situation would be different now. She would not have suffered as severely as she did. As it was, her surgery to remove the tumor was done to save her life. What her condition would be if she lived was a secondary consideration.

To simply save her life, the surgeons quickly removed not only the tumor but a portion of her brain. There was really no time to consider what effect this sort of aggressive surgery would have on Elaine. Since the tumor was located on the speech center, the consequence to this life- saving measure was severe. Under an elective surgery, the surgeon talks to the patient and discusses the risks. In this case there was no time for such an option.

All of this brings me to agonize over the whole issue of God's sovereignty in relationship to the choices we each make in life. I say this with the realization that several simple decisions could have radically changed the course of events. For example, several weeks before our family left for a vacation in Germany I received a phone call from our regional director, asking if I would be available to take a vision trip to Bosnia for our mission. Having served six years as missionaries in England, we were now being considered for ministry possibilities in the Balkans. I explained to our regional director that although I was eager to take the trip I felt that canceling our plans for Germany would be impractical. Yet, now, Elaine recognizes that had I gone, she would have been home in England where our family doctor would have likely pursued a more aggressive course of action based on her symptoms. I am also haunted by the decisions I made to continue our planned trip from Germany to Paris and then to Belgium, rather than admit her to a local hospital.

How different would things have been? What would have happened had the doctors who saw Elaine in both Germany and Paris insisted that she be admitted to the hospital right away? What is the relationship of God's sovereignty to our choices and actions?

What should our response be as Christians, when admittedly things could have gone far better for us if we had chosen something different?

I believe firmly in God's sovereignty, but I also believe completely in the free will of man. (My own life is proof enough that man does what he wants.) I believe God gives us space to move and room to make decisions, even to make mistakes. Honestly, I cannot articulate very well how a sovereign God remains sovereign over everything even when we make mistakes. What I do know is this; as a sovereign God, He takes all we go through and shapes it all to form what he wants. I also know that I can take the guilt, the what ifs, and the agony and tell God all about it. That is the wonder of serving a sovereign God. He can take the messed up situations, sometimes even those things we create ourselves and redeem them for his own glory. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

My conviction of God's sovereignty permits me to live with the unanswered questions and, yes, the mystery as well. I can believe that God is sovereign without having to explain how that makes sense in light of human experience. God is in control. That truth is sufficient for me.

I can walk away from an unexplained event and simply live with assurance that somehow He manages it all for our good and His glory. Oswald Chambers summed it up well when he said; "God does not tell us what he is going to do, he reveals who he is."

I recently read Gerald Sittser's book, [A Grace Disguised](#), written as an attempt to make some sense of the tragic car accident that claimed his mother, his wife, and his daughter. A theology professor, who thought he knew God, Sittser now faced the overwhelming realization that he really did not. He has this to say about the sovereignty of God:

"Prior to the accident, I held a narrow view of his sovereignty, though I did not realize it at the time. I was inclined to believe that God simply pulled the strings and manipulated the events of our lives as if we were marionettes on a string and God was a puppeteer controlling us completely... I believe now that my view of God's sovereignty was far too small. His sovereignty encompasses all of life – for example, not simply tragic experiences but also our responses to them. It envelops all of human experiences and integrates it into a greater whole. Even human freedom, then, becomes a dimension of God's sovereignty, as if God were a novelist who had invented characters so real that the decisions they make are genuinely their decisions."

To believe that God is sovereign does not require that I comprehend all that this entails. Our suffering presents us with a more

awesome and far more mysterious God than the convenient predictable creator we assumed in our time of peace. But if suffering presents us then with the true God, are we not then forced to see that suffering has some tremendous value to us who suffer? I am beginning to see that it does. Suffering peels away our nurtured preconceptions of God introducing us to God as He truly is. No wonder Job could say what he could have never said before. "I know you can do all things. No plan of yours can be thwarted... Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know... My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:2-3,5-6).

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