

WHO'S IN CHARGE?



Studies on the Sovereignty of God

Written by

Howie and Dennie Dowell

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Introduction

As new believers in Christ, Howie and Dennie had many unanswered questions concerning their lives. Facing the deep emotional pain of Howie's and their son's progressive, incurable and terminal disease, left them questioning God's involvement in their lives.

But God was merciful in giving them a thirst for His infallible Word and a longing to find out who was truly in charge of their lives. As they read through the Bible several times, they noted verses that related to God's sovereignty in this vast universe and in individual lives. They came to rest on the irrefutable fact that God was totally in control of every facet of their lives. With this foundational wisdom came the unsurpassed peace of which Philippians 4:7 speaks. Yes, they could truly rest in the arms of the One who was dictating the course of their lives, and because of His holiness and perfect love for His own, they had the assurance that He was always working for their good. (Rom. 8:28) Even though their circumstances were insecure, they found security in their relationship to Christ.

As God began to send troubled people to them from differing doctrinal backgrounds, they found many would say, "God is sovereign," but their words were hollow and repeated without scriptural understanding. Many felt they were determining their own destinies and consequently, obedience to God was often very difficult. Howie and Dennie saw that many lacked a concrete knowledge, based solely on God's own words that He alone was in charge of their lives.

One aspect of God's sovereignty often brought confusion. That was the doctrine of suffering. And so they have included in the following studies an in-depth treatment of God's call to suffer, and His purposes for including it in the life plan of His children. Why does He permit evil and its destruction? If He is in control of everything, are people mere puppets? The answers to these questions and many others are found in The Bible.

God gave Howie and Dennie a ministry of biblical counseling and discipling, devoting themselves to calling people to live responsible, obedient lives. Yet, they rested *fully* in the sovereign Lord of the Universe, who laid the foundation of the world. He governs the lives of men and determines the sparrow's fall. His mind is infinitely superior to our limited, finite minds. Only He, who created the universe in its vastness and the neutrons and protons in microscopic detail, is capable of designing a plan which allows Him to be totally sovereign, while giving man valid choices. May you stand in awe of such a Mind and be truly humbled by such greatness!

On January 20, 1995, God took His faithful servant, Howie, home to be with Him. The Lord graciously provided Dennie with a new partner, Tom Patton. They were married in October 1998. Serving the Lord together, they continue the Called to Obedience ministry.

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Reasons for Understanding the Sovereignty of God

1. Those of you who are carrying heavy guilt will see that even your sin was allowed by God, and you can grow in Christ from the lessons your sin teaches you.
2. Those of you who are angry and self-pitying because of your circumstances will learn to accept your difficulties, which are ordained by a loving God.
3. Those of you who tend to be manipulative or controlling of people will learn to give control of your own life and the lives of others to God.
4. Those of you who are fearful of the future will understand how God is in control of every circumstance, which will relieve a lot of stress and fear.
5. Those of you who are suffering trials and persecution will understand that they are ordained for you by a loving Father for your best interest.
6. Those of you who compromise or twist God's Word or "cut corners" rather than obeying God, will be able to understand that God is in total control of the outcome when you submit to difficult commands.
7. Those of you who see no reason for trials will learn that God has purposes for your call to suffer.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Rom. 8:28

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Study 1

4. How does David's prayer describe God's sovereignty? (1 Chron. 29:10-13)

God's Sovereignty in Creation

1. What did God create? (Gen. 1:1-26)
2. Over what domains does Christ exercise His authority? (Matt. 28:18)
3. Who created and sustains the world? (Col. 1:13-17)
4. From Psalm 139:1-15, list the ways God knows you intimately.
5. With what words does God describe His sovereign control over your life in Psalm 139:16?

Because the Lord created you and knows you intimately, He also knows exactly how to protect you, how to fulfill you and how to help you become the person He desires you to be.

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God's Sovereignty in Salvation

1. **Read and rewrite in your own words the following verses:**

- a. 1 Corinthians 2:14
- b. Romans 3:10-12
- c. Ephesians 2:1

Just as a physically dead man has no power to do anything physically, so a spiritually dead man has no power nor ability to do *anything* spiritually. Thus, the natural man is incapable of making a spiritual decision. The answer to his spirituality must lie outside himself.

- 2. Who gives you life so you are made capable to understand spiritual truths? (John 6:63)
- 3. What has God done for you according to Ephesians 2:4,5?
- 4. What must happen in your life to live eternally with God? (John 3:3-8)
- 5. Who granted you repentance that leads to life? (Acts 11:18)
- 6. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? (2 Cor. 7:10)

God placed His love on you while you were dead in your sin. There was nothing worthy in you to merit His mercy or love. All men deserve eternal punishment because of their sin. (Rom. 6:23) All men, in their natural state, are enemies of God. (Rom. 5:10)

- 7. Did you choose to be a Christian or did God choose you? (John 15:16)
- 8. Ephesians 1:4,5 says God chose us to be holy, to be adopted as His sons. *When* and *why* did He do this?
- 9. Before there was a world, before there was time, God had ordained you would not only exist, but also you were chosen to be brought into a relationship with Him through the finished work of His Son.

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10. Is God's choice made on the basis of what man has done? (Rom. 9:11,16,20-23; John 6:63)

11. The Bible says that man is incapable of coming to Christ unless he is drawn by whom? (John 6:44)

12. Who will come to Christ? (John 6:37,65)

13. For whom did Christ die? (John 6:37,39; 17:2,9,24)

14. What did Jesus say concerning the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 22:14?

Many will hear the "external call" through the gospel message, but only those God chose will receive the "inner call" of the Holy Spirit, who brings the spiritually dead person to spiritual life and understanding. Then man is able to *respond* to God by receiving Him and by believing on the Lord Jesus. (John 1:12; Rom. 10:9)

A good example of external and internal calls is found in the story of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13 when they were preaching in Pisidian Antioch. In verse 44, it is recorded that most of the city's inhabitants heard the word of God, which was the external call to salvation.

15. What does God say He had already done for those Gentiles who heard the inner call and believed? (Acts 13:48)

16. Will all that hear the "inner call" inherit eternal life? (John 10:27,28)

God's will to draw us to Him is always greater than our wills to resist Him. *All those, whom the Father chose from the foundation of the world, will come to Him. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives to me shall come to me."* (John 6:37a)

17. Will any whom God chose to come to Christ be lost? (John 10:25-29; Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:29,30)

Read Romans 8:29,30 and notice that all the verbs are in the past tense. In the Greek, "foreknow," means, "to love beforehand." It does *not* carry the meaning of God's advance knowledge of which people would choose Him, an argument used by those who believe man chooses God. Since your salvation depends totally on God's sovereign choice, then you cannot lose your salvation. God's eternal decree cannot be revoked. He, who knew you from ages past, has already accomplished your glorification.

There are two key words which emerge from this study of God's sovereignty in our salvation. In Ephesians 1:4-5 and Romans 9:11, some translations use the words "predestined" and "elect." *The New Bible Dictionary* defines **predestine** as God appointing a situation for a person or a person for a situation, in advance.¹ *The New Compact Bible Dictionary* defines **election** as God's eternal and immutable decree to choose from sinners those whom He will save, providing the source of their salvation in grace through Christ, and the means through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit's regenerative work.²

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Despite what God's Word clearly teaches, man often emotionally rebels against God's wisdom. The most frequent protest that man raises against the teaching of predestination and election is, "It isn't fair; therefore, I don't believe

God would do that." It is important to remember the **fact** that all men *deserve* God's justice (Rom. 6:23). So those destined for hell are receiving God's perfect justice. Secondly, remember that often God does not operate according to the ways that man believes he should. He declares, "all His ways are perfect." (Ps. 18:30) God is God and is not dependent upon man's initiatives or responses for how to order His creation. In order to accept this teaching, you must set aside your presuppositions and ask, "What does God's Word teach me about this subject?" Man repeatedly tries to place *his* concept of God within limits that he can understand, so he will feel comfortable with the way God operates. But the Infinite God remains untouched by man's attempts to reduce Him to the limits of his understanding. God doesn't ask that you understand Him, but that you *accept* what He has said about Himself. You must be humbled before the Almighty who asked Job, "***Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?***" (Job 38:4)

18. **Read Romans 9:18-23.** How are you, the created vessel, to respond to God, your Maker?

*"God will never be made in man's image, no matter how we attempt to anthropomorphize. What's more, the universal truths, the life-support systems he has created, his very being, are not contingent upon our recognition. They, and he, exist whether we acknowledge it or not."*³

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Study 3

God's Purposes for Suffering and Adversity

You suffer because of circumstances beyond your control, as disease, natural disasters, too much of some things and a lack of others. You suffer because of your own sinful choices, "*reaping what you have sown*" (Gal. 6:7,8). You suffer because of choices of those who have sinned against you. There are many reasons why God permits adversity.

- For His eternal purposes (2 Cor. 4:17)
- To bring you to a greater dependency upon Christ so you will know Him more intimately (2 Cor. 12:9,10; Phil. 3:10)
- To teach you, experientially, that God's grace and love will sustain, uphold, enfold you in the midst of the trial (Is. 41:10)
- To be conformed to the image of Christ; to build your character (Rom. 8:29; 5:3,4)
- To share in Christ's sufferings and for His sake (Phil. 1:29; 3:10)
- To share the comfort with others that you have received from Christ; to minister more effectively for His kingdom (2 Cor. 1:3-7)
- To learn more of God's Word (Ps. 119:71)
- To discipline you so that you will experience the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11)
- To prune you so you will produce more fruit than you are already yielding (John 15:2)
- To realize that inner and eternal blessings, and sometimes outward blessings, are God's rewards as a result of trials (Matt. 5:1-12; Jas. 1:12)
- To glorify Him in the midst of adversity (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 1:6,7)

Suffering and Sin

Suffering often results from others' sin against you, as well as from your own sin.

1. What are you to do when others' sins impact your life adversely? (Mark 11:25)
2. What attitudes are you to put on in place of bitterness? (Col. 3:12-14)

Read Hebrews 12:3-11.

3. For whose good are you disciplined? (v. 10)

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4. What are God's goals for you in being disciplined? (vv. 10,11)

Read Joel 2:25-27 and Isaiah 43:18,19.

5. After you have biblically dealt with the bitterness and guilt from your past, what does God promise to do for you?

Suffering and Understanding God's Goals and Eternal Purposes

1. What is God's ultimate goal for each believer? (1 Cor. 10:31)
2. With *God's goals* in mind, are personal happiness and a carefree, comfortable life biblical goals?
3. What is your current focus when suffering enters your life?
4. What should it be? (Rom. 8:18)
5. How are you to regard affliction in the light of eternity? (2 Cor. 4:17)

The fulfillment of God's purposes for your life includes suffering and adversity. You are to keep your focus on an eternal spectrum, rather than letting a temporal focus consume you.

Suffering and God's Grace to Sustain

God wants you to be dependent upon Him. As you *experience* His ability to uphold you in trial, you will learn to trust Him more fully. Therefore, your neediness becomes the avenue to experience Christ's sufficiency!

1. Record God's promises to Paul (and to you) in the midst of affliction. (2 Cor. 12:9,10)
2. List the ways God promises His presence and faithfulness in the midst of tribulation. (Is. 41:10)
3. What further promises are given in Isaiah 40:29?

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Suffering and Character Growth

Read James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5.

1. How are you to respond to trials?
2. *When* your faith has been tested, what does it produce?
3. What are *God's goals* for you, which are the result of enduring in trial?
4. Why does God bring trials to obedient, fruitful Christians? (John 15:1,2)
5. What are the reasons God places you in the "wilderness" of uncertainty and suffering? (Deut. 8:2)

Suffering and Sharing in Christ's Trial

*"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ
not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."
Phil. 1:29*

1. How did Christ **learn** obedience? (Heb. 5:8)
2. What experiences deepen your knowledge of Christ? (Phil. 3:10)

Read 1 Peter 2:18-24.

3. What finds favor or is commendable with God?
4. In verse 21, it states that you were called for "*this purpose*." What does "*this purpose*" refer to in verse 19?

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5. From what you know about Jesus' life and from verses 22-24, how specifically did Jesus set this example for you?

6. In whose footsteps are you to follow?

Remember that God wants you to glorify Him. Christ glorified His Father through obedience in His suffering. You will glorify God if you rely on His sustaining power in the midst of trials.

Suffering and God's Word

1. According to Psalm 119:71, how does God use affliction in your life?

2. What was another result of affliction in the Psalmist's life? (Ps. 119:67)

3. Write the word that the Psalmist uses to describe God when He is afflicting him. (Ps. 119:75b)

Suffering and Blessing

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

God says you are *blessed* when you are very needy and choose to follow Him! As you read through these verses, each condition of man describes a spiritual need or an opportunity for personal sacrifice. God's blessing is bestowed as a result of your dependency upon Him to meet your need or to equip you to sacrifice in obedience to Him. Beneath each underlined word write the particular need/sacrifice and the resulting blessing God gives.

NEED/SACRIFICE

v. 3 poor in spirit, which means to recognize

that you are spiritually bankrupt

BLESSING

the kingdom of heaven

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God's Sovereignty in Adversity

God's Sovereignty in the Fall

1. Who planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden? (Gen. 2:9)

Read Genesis 3:14-19.

2. Who ordained that the world would be cursed as a result of the fall of man?
3. In what ways did the "curse" change the world? List them.

It is time ill spent to question *why* God played the role He did in the fall. He merely states His participation. You must accept He is God and nothing happens apart from His purpose and plan. Immediately after the fall in Genesis 3:15, He announces the provision He has made for man's salvation. God prophesies that the woman's seed (Christ) will someday conquer the serpent (Satan); thereby, purchasing sinful man's redemption.

God's Sovereignty Displayed in Job's Life

The book of Job is a picture of how God is in control of the circumstances that cause suffering and adversity.

Read Job 1:1-2:13.

1. How does God describe Job's character? (1:8)
2. Why did Satan want to tempt Job? (1:9-11)
3. From whom did Satan seek permission to bring adversity into the life of Job?
4. What limit did God place on Satan's plan? (1:12)
5. What did Satan, with God's permission, take away from Job?
6. What was Job's response to this trial? (1:20-22)
7. In what way did Satan next ask God's permission to tempt Job? (2:5)

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8. What limit did God place on Satan this time? (2:6)
9. How did Satan tempt Job to curse God? (2:7)
10. What was Job's response? (2:10)
11. What should your response be to suffering and adversity? (1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20)
12. Gold is purified under intense heat and pressure. What did Job see as the end result of his trial by fire? (Job 23:10)

"God gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction."

Unknown

13. How have Job's trials and his endurance been used for God's eternal purpose?

You learn from the book of Job that although Satan is the tempter, God is ultimately the controller of evil. His eternal purpose is evident in His sovereign control. **Acceptance** of adversity rather than railing against it, will produce the fruit of the Spirit regardless of your circumstances. (Gal. 5:22,23)

God's Promises to You in Suffering

1. To *whom* is the promise in Romans 8:28 addressed?
2. For *whose* purpose are you called?
3. What is God's promise to you in the midst of trials? (Rom. 8:28)
4. Does this mean a "Cinderella ending?" (Recall from *Study 3*, God's reasons for permitting your adversity).

Examine 1 Corinthians 10:13, which is a *promise* of God for all who must stand against temptation or are in the midst of trial.

5. Have others gone through experiences like yours?
6. What characteristic of God tells you He will be with you?
7. How will you be able to withstand the temptation or trial?

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8. Does this mean He is obligated to remove your difficult circumstances because you are obedient in following His way of escape?
9. For what purpose does God promise strength?

Suffering and Comfort

“Jesus Christ did not come to take away our pain and suffering, but to share in it.”¹

Kefa Sempangi

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

1. What is one promise that God has for you in your suffering, trouble or afflictions? (v. 4)
2. What is one purpose for the troubles you experience? (v. 4)
3. Is it necessary to have suffered the same type of adversity or trouble to minister to or comfort someone else? (v. 4)

As you are comforted directly by God or through His children, who have also suffered, God promises this comfort will produce patient endurance in you. (v. 6)

“God deepens your trials to broaden your ministry.”

Bill Gothard

“Are there some people in your circle of friends to whom you naturally go in times of trial and sorrow – people who always seem to say just the right words and who give you the very counsel you so desire? If so, you may not realize the high cost they have paid to become so skilled at binding up your gaping wounds and drying your tears. Yet if you were to investigate their past, you would find that they have suffered more than most other people.

They have watched the silver cord on which the lamp of life hung slowly unravel. They have seen the golden bowl of joy dashed to their feet, and its contents spilled. They have experienced raging tides, withering crops, and darkness at high noon, but all this has been necessary to make them into the nurses, physicians, and ministers of others.”

Unknown

God is sovereign in *all* areas of your life, in *all* experiences, in *all* circumstances and trials. Through His grace, He gives you the power to endure them. (Phil. 4:13) God has never promised the perfection of heaven in our earthly

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existence. However, through His love, He will bring blessing, even out of seeming tragedy. You need not fear the plans He has for you. (Eph. 3:20)

*“ ‘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.’ ”*

Jer. 29:11

*I walked a mile with Pleasure
She chattered all the way
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me
Unknown*

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God's Ultimate Control

God's Control over Good and Evil

God is in control of what you view as good and as evil influences. He causes them both to come into your life for His eternal plan and purpose.

1. What does He cause? (Is. 45:7)
2. Who *causes* the sun to shine and who sends the rain? (Matt. 5:45)
Will obedience to the Lord result in a problem-free life?
3. Although Job was a very godly man (Job 1:1), what did he say in Job 7:3?

God's Control over Illness and Disease

Some illnesses and diseases, as well as other health problems, may be a direct result of personal sin. (1 Cor. 11:27-30; Ps. 32:1-5) However, not all illnesses and infirmities are the *direct* result of sin, but rather, the result of living in a fallen world.

1. Who created the blind, deaf, and dumb? (Ex. 4:10,11)

Read John 9:1-3.

2. Was the man's blindness caused by his own sin or his parents' sin?
3. What reason did God give for creating this man blind?
4. The Apostle Paul was a man of great faith, but he had a physical affliction. What seems to have been Paul's infirmity? (Gal. 4:13-15)

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

5. Was Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (physical pain) taken from him when he pleaded with the Lord?
6. How did Paul become content in living with his affliction?
7. For what purpose was he given this affliction?
8. From Paul's example, how are you to handle your afflictions?

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God's Control over Earthly Authorities

God places human authorities over you. Are you free to disobey them? What is your obligation to them?

1. Pastor; elders? (Heb. 13:17)
2. Husbands? (Eph. 5:22)
3. Parents? (Eph. 6:1,2)
4. Governing authorities? (Rom. 13:1,2)
5. Employer? (1 Pet. 2:18-21)
6. Who directs the heart of earthly authorities? (Prov. 21:1)

Read 1 Peter 2:18-21; 3:1-6.

1. How are you to respond to an unreasonable, harsh or unjust authority?
2. How do you find favor with God in such a situation?
3. How are wives to respond to a husband-authority who is disobedient to God?
4. Who are you *really* obeying when you submit yourself to an unreasonable authority?

The only time you are given permission to disobey an unreasonable or any authority is when you are asked to commit a direct sin. (Acts 5:29)

God's Control over Adversaries

1. Does God raise up adversaries? (1 Kings 11:14,23)
2. King Saul became David's adversary. Was God in control of Saul's evil?
(1 Sam. 18:10; 19:9)
3. What was God's involvement with those who crucified Jesus? (Acts 4:27,28)

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Likewise, God was certainly in control of Joseph's situation when his brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph speaks to his brothers many years after their sinful deeds had been done, saying in **Genesis 45:8**, "*So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.*"

4. When Joseph addresses his brothers in this passage, he tells them God's purpose in their evil act. What was it? (Gen. 50:20)

Because Joseph understood God's sovereign control over his brothers' sins against him, there is no indication that he was embittered, but rather he regarded his ordeal as an opportunity to glorify God. Thus, he was able to say, "*God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.*" (Gen. 41:52)

God's Control over Everything

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."

Eph. 1:11

1. List some of the events for which God has appointed times. (Ecc. 3:1-8)
2. How does He control the inhabitants of the earth? (Dan. 4:35)
3. Does God have authority over the day of death? (Ecc. 8:8; Ps. 139:16)
4. Over what events in human life does God exercise His sovereign control?
5. (Ruth 4:13; 1 Sam. 1:6; Gen. 18:14; 21:2)
6. In Genesis 24:14,44, who appointed (ordained) the woman who would be Isaac's wife?
7. What other events does God determine? (Acts 17:26; Prov. 16:33)
8. With what detail is God intimately involved? (Matt. 10:29,30)
9. 1 Corinthians 12 discusses spiritual gifts. Who appoints your placement within the body of Christ, in regard to your spiritual gifts? (v. 18)
10. Who ordains or directs the steps of man? (Prov. 20:24)
11. What does God say about your own plans? (Jas. 4:13-15)

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12. Can God's will be thwarted? (Job 42:2; Is. 37:26)

You can see from this study that what you often view as evil, God has permitted or ordained for His good purposes, so the believer might mature and He may be glorified. He ordained The Fall when man first transgressed His holy law, and He chooses to use sinful men in a fallen world to carry forth His eternal purposes.

You cannot limit His ways of working to your finite view of "goodness." How sad when you fail to see tribulation, suffering and persecution as tools in the hand of the Master Craftsman, who, in His boundless love, is shaping His chosen vessels of mercy!

Hudson Taylor, a man well acquainted with hardship and suffering, was a missionary to Inland China in the 1800's. He shared a profound truth when he said he had learned "...to think of God as the one great Circumstance in Whom we live and move and have our being, and all lesser circumstances as necessarily the kindest, wisest, best because they are ordered or permitted by Him." ¹ The Lord chooses to use both good and evil to accomplish his high purposes. You must bow to the Creator, whose wisdom far exceeds your finite thinking. You must begin to view life from God's perspective, as set forth in His Holy Word!

**Man views suffering as negative.
God views suffering as positive.**

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Study 6

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

God's sovereign control of your individual life has been supported scripturally in this study. You have seen how God predestines man's salvation (Eph. 1:4-6) and ordains his steps daily. (Ps. 139:16; Prov. 20:24) Yet, the Bible is filled with commands from God, calling every individual to responsibility and accountability. Therefore, God lays before each man the choices of right and wrong.

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are two seeming contradictions. First, you must remember that God's ways are not your ways, and His mind is infinite and without limits. (Is. 55:8,9). Second, you must recognize that the human mind is finite, with definite limits of comprehension. Even though you strive to know God better daily, you are incapable of understanding all of God's ways. (Rom. 11:33)

When you are confronted with this apparent contradiction, your finite mind may want to reject one concept or the other. The first conclusion is that men are mere puppets of God's who have no valid choices in this life. A puppeteer does not give his puppets commands. Instead, he totally controls their movements through the strings, which he pulls. The puppets themselves make no choices and the controller has no expectation of the puppets' obedience.

God, however, gives you many commands in Scripture. Being all wise and all knowing, God would not have given you commands if He moved you as the puppeteer moves the puppet. You have been issued His commands through His Word because He has given you the ability to make choices, which are truly valid.

The second conclusion is that you have "free will" to make choices and that God has little to no control over your choices. Many people with this view feel that God had laid out a "perfect plan" without sin for each person, but every time the person sins, God's plan for their life is changed because they are "out of God's perfect will." In that case, each person would quickly reach plan number 50,284! How can there be a "perfect plan" for any mortal man, when all are born sinners? God designed only one man to live "the perfect plan"...Jesus Christ. The third conclusion is to try to mesh the two contradictions. In this theory, God is "sometimes sovereign." Generally, those holding this view accept His sovereignty over good but not over evil, so *they* determine the degree of God's involvement based on what is comfortable to their belief system.

Let's approach this seeming contradiction from another angle:

- *God's predestined will:* God has predestined one life plan for you, which includes and allows your sin. You are *not* responsible for knowing His predestined will.
- *God's directive will:* God directs you through The Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit within you to make the right choices. He holds you responsible and accountable for knowing His directive will. (Lev. 5:17) Failing to obey God's commandments may lead to negative consequences and chastisement. (Heb. 12:5; Gal. 6:7,8)

A theoretical situation that would picture these two "wills" would be a Christian woman contemplating marrying an unbeliever. God's directive will to this woman is clear: she is commanded not to be "unequally yoked" in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. If she disobeys God's directive will, she can expect to be disciplined. Because God did not overrule her disobedience, although He had the power to do so, she still is in God's predestined will for her life. (Job 42:2)

Remember that God's goal for the believer is to be conformed to the image of Savior. There are lessons to be learned through sin because the discipline which follows, "*yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*" (Heb. 12:11)

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility exist side-by-side like parallel train tracks. Though it baffles the mind of man, the Creator has devised a plan where these two seeming contradictions work in harmony with one another

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from *His perspective*. (Is. 40:13,14) You can see in the diagram on the next page that when you reach heaven, you will understand God's infinite mind, but now you "*see through a glass darkly.*" (1 Cor. 13:12) In your present life, you are *not called to understand* this apparent contradiction, but to **accept** that both principles are true because God repeatedly says so.

The **acceptance** of this seeming contradiction can lead you to the "*... peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension.*" (Phil. 4:7 NASB) You are called to obedience, but when you do sin, you know that you are still within God's ordained will, and He will teach you valuable lessons from your disobedience. You also will understand that the trials and tribulations, including others that sin against you, are also part of His plan for your life. Thus, you can be comforted by knowing that **nothing** will happen to you that has not been ordained by a loving God for your best interest.

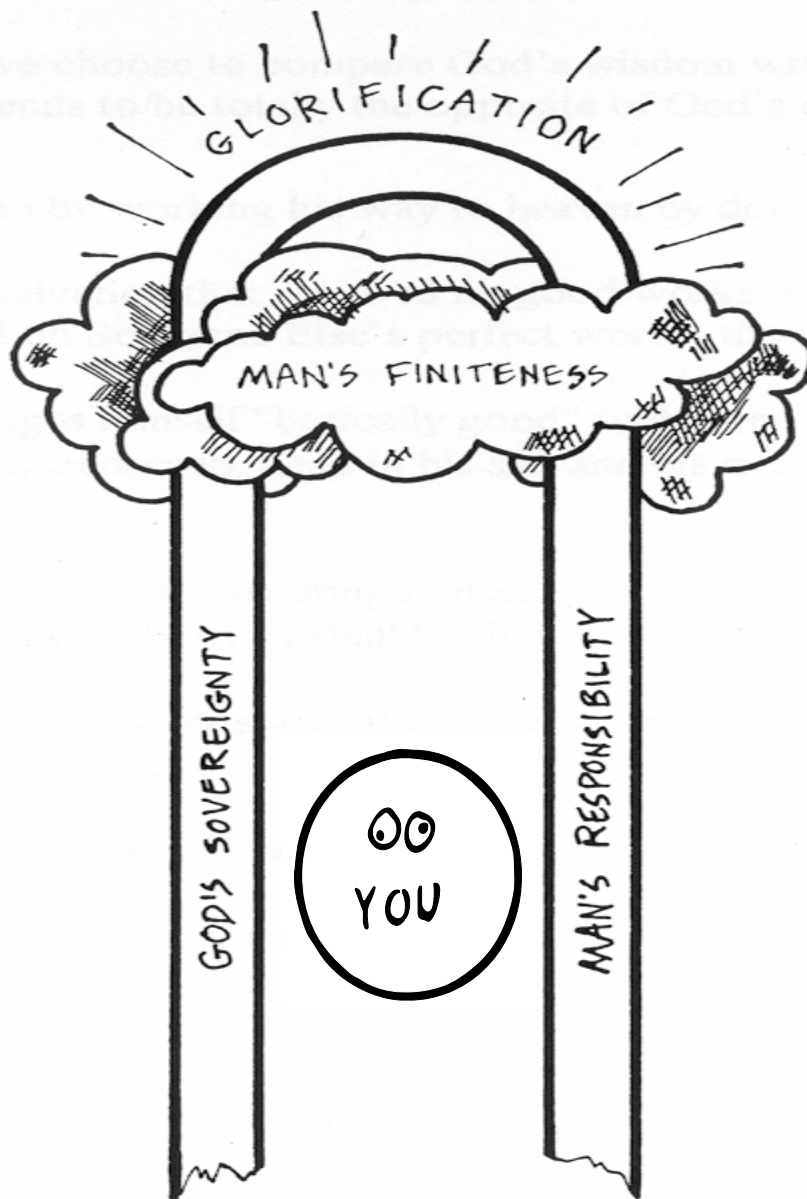
*"Yes, marvel, wonder, awe are words that should describe our feelings as we contemplate the reality of the mystery that choice is real, not a trick to fool us, and yet God is God and is not manipulated by chance. The true balance of these two realities is a mystery that should cause us to get on our knees and worship God, not to sit demanding to understand exhaustively nor to pace up and down figuring out a system which squashes out all the mystery so that we feel self-satisfaction, instead of overwhelming worship. How **finite** infiniteness makes us feel."*¹

The Tapestry
by Edith Schaeffer

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

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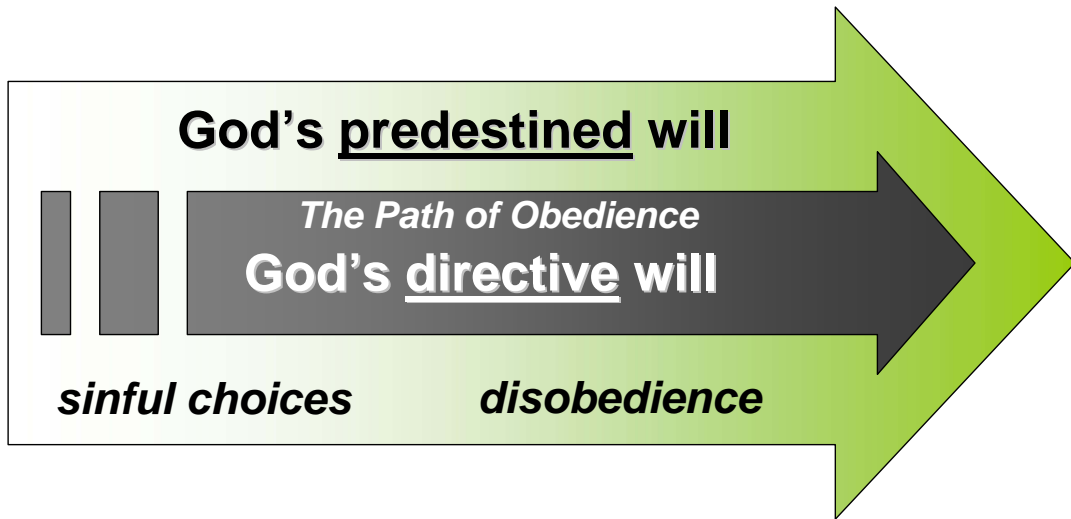
God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility



WHO'S IN CHARGE?

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GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE



- *God's predestined will*: God has predestined one life plan for you which includes and allows your sin.
- *God's directive will*: God gives direct commands through His Word in how you are to live.
- You can choose to be outside of *God's directive will* by your disobedience, but you can never be outside of *God's predestined will*.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Study 6

Man's Mind vs. God's Mind

*“ For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD.
‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
and My thoughts than your thoughts.’ ”*
Is. 55:8,9 NASB

When we choose to compare God's wisdom with man's thinking, we will usually encounter a conflict. Man's thinking tends to be totally the opposite of God's on every conceivable subject.

For example:

- ⇒ Man would earn salvation by working his way to heaven by doing “good” deeds and by being a “good” person.
- ⇒ God designed a plan of salvation that required no good works, since He judged man incapable of them. His plan rested on Someone Else's perfect works; those of Christ.
- ⇒ Man views himself as “basically good,” with a few flaws here and there.
- ⇒ God judges man as totally depraved, dead in his sin, and his righteousness is considered as filthy rags.
- ⇒ Man would become “first” through exalting himself, aiming to be Number One.
- ⇒ God says that he who is the slave of all shall be first. The last shall be first.
- ⇒ Man says in order to receive, he must be given to or he must take.
- ⇒ God says to receive, one must give.
- ⇒ Man says the way to be fulfilled and satisfied is to claim rights and then demand that they be met.
- ⇒ God says the way to be fulfilled and satisfied is in union with Him, which is achieved through forfeiting perceived rights.
- ⇒ Man says he must find his own self-identity in order to be mature.
- ⇒ God says man must crucify self and be fully identified with Christ to be mature.
- ⇒ Man says he can carry grudges, be vengeful and wrathful toward his enemies.
- ⇒ God says man must love his enemies.
- ⇒ Man says death is the end of life.
- ⇒ God says life springs from death, both spiritual and physical.

- ⇒ Man says he can only live fully through giving to self, trusting self, having confidence in self.
- ⇒ God says the fulfilling life in Christ comes only through death to self-giving, self-will, self-confidence.
- ⇒ Man focuses on this life, seeking temporal pleasures.
- ⇒ God asks us to focus on Him and eternal life.

These are only a few of the ways in which man's mind opposes God's mind. But daily, you are confronted with God's thinking opposing yours, and as a result, you may protest:

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“Why did this difficulty come into my life?”

“Why can't one thing go my way?”

“Why is my loved one suffering like this?”

“Why does (name) continue to rebel and make my life so difficult?”

“How much longer does this trial have to go on?”

“How can I be fulfilled without _____ in my life.” (Fill in with what or whom you consider very important to have).

“Why was this (person or thing) that meant so much to me taken from me?”

“If God loves me, why does He treat me like this?”

No wonder the mind of man stands opposed to the mind of God! You may think entirely differently than God does. And if that isn't a big enough problem, you also have your adversary, Satan, continually reinforcing the lie that your ways are right and God's ways are wrong!

1. Man's thinking naturally rails against God's thinking and plans. What does God warn you not to do in Isaiah 45:9 and in Romans 9:20,21?
2. What does God tell you is man's problem in Isaiah 29:16?

The formidable task that lies before every believer is to begin to think the way God does, as He reveals His thinking in Scripture. You need to see life from His perspective rather than yours. Through his intense affliction, Job came to see who he was in relation to the Awesome One who created him. He began to understand eternal realities as he loosened his grasp on temporal concerns.

God may remind you of who is in control at times when you protest His sovereign plan for your life. Job, during his prolonged suffering, began to doubt God's ways of handling his affairs. He wanted some answers. Ultimately, Job was silenced by God's responses even though Job did not receive the information for which he asked.

3. With what words does God remind Job of His greatness and limitless abilities? (Job 38:4)
4. By what significant acts does God remind Job of his finiteness? (Job 38:31-38)

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5. God rebuked Job, *“Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!”* (Job 40:2) How did Job respond to this rebuke? (Job 40:4,5)

6. What words show that Job accepted the plan of suffering that God ordained for him? (Job 42:2,3)

7. What was Job’s reward for submitting completely to his creator? (Job 42:5)

8. What was Job’s response as he saw the holiness of his creator? (Job 42:6)

9. What does Colossians 3:2 command you to do with your mind?

10. You are to think on an eternal perspective rather than thinking only of your temporal circumstances. Copy Romans 8:18 below.

*“... he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.
That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;”*
Jas. 1:6,7

Doubting is a problem of the mind. The doubting man has a mind that opposes God’s mind. He’s frequently calling God’s thinking into question and opposing God’s commands. The result is instability and lack of abiding inner peace. He is ultimately calling God a liar.

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11. In what specific ways have you believed Satan's lies and thus, opposed God's mind? Make a list of your sins of the mind. Ask God to forgive you for each of them. Perhaps you should consider confessing these sins to God in the presence of a witness.

12. How will you be transformed from a doubter, whose mind is opposed to God, to a believer who will prove what the will of God is? (Rom. 12:2)

13.

Pray frequently, that you will be very aware of Satan's lies and your own lies. *Renew your mind* with God's truths about Himself and His wonderful promises for you. The choice lies before you. You can continue to doubt God's character, His love and compassion for you and His faithfulness and goodness to you. Or you can repeatedly choose to believe that He does love you and is working *all things* for your good, just as He promises. (Rom. 8:28) This manual includes a study *Satan, the Adversary*, which informs you about who your enemy is and the tactics he uses to tempt you to doubt and disobey God.

14. Copy Isaiah 26:3 below.

God's goal of every believer is to experience oneness with Him, which is accomplished when your mind ceases to oppose His mind and your will ceases to oppose His will. When the struggle stops, fulfillment in knowing God intimately begins! When your opposition to God ends, it won't be the end of anything but the end of "self." And the end of "self" is the beginning of experiencing God's infinite grace! Saying "no" to self and "yes" to God are prerequisites to a deeply satisfying life in "**...Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.**" (Eph. 3:20, NASB)