

Chapter 9 - A Sovereign and Personal God

Who here believes that prayer changes things?

Who here believes that God is sovereign and all knowing? That he has his plans worked out and that they cannot fail?

Eph.1:11 - If this is true, in what meaningful way can we say that praying changes things?

Some Possible Ways to Reconcile

1. God is Limited

- In this view, God's sovereignty is restricted either by nature or voluntarily.
- If he were absolutely sovereign, we would all be puppets and prayer would be meaningless.
- Maybe the reason he doesn't answer you prayer is because he cannot. He is doing everything he can.

2. God is Aloof

- Or, perhaps he powerful but somewhat aloof. He won't do anything until we ask him, and when we do he does the best he can.

3. Prayer Changes the Person Praying

- Praying doesn't actually change what happens but changes our view of it or changes what we ask for.

God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Two truths taught in the Bible:

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty in Scripture never reduces human responsibility.
2. Human beings are responsible creatures - that is, they choose, they believe, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices, but that responsibility never diminishes God's sovereignty or makes him contingent.

Big Picture on the first:

- Proverbs 16
- Matt. 6:26-30
- Specific cases: Exo. 21:13; Ruth 1:13; Isa. 45:6-7; Lam. 3:32-33,37-38;

Big picture on the second:

- Commands to obey, choose, believe
- God calls us to repentance and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked
 - Isa 30:18
 - Ezek. 18:30-32

Bringing them together:

- Genesis 50:19-20
- 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21
- Isa. 10:5-19
- John 6:37-40
- Phil. 2:12-13
- Acts 18:9-10
- Acts 4:23-30

Mystery and the Nature of God

- There are no contradictions in these passages, though how exactly they cohere may be somewhat of a mystery.

What is Human Freedom:

- Some would say freedom is absolute freedom to be contrary, to be against any constrain
- However, the biblical view as we have seen would be more along the lines of the freedom to voluntarily choose what we want.

God's relationship to Good and Evil

1. Some suppose God does not stand in any sense behind evil
 - This would mean there is another power outside of God's sovereignty (dualism)
2. Others think that God stands behind good and evil in exactly the same way
 - If God stands behind good and evil in the same way, then he is amoral - powerful but not good.

The bible, however, insists that God is sovereign so that nothing takes place outside of his will, but that he is also wholly and entirely good. He does not stand behind good and evil in exactly the same way. All good can ultimately be credited to him, and evil is credited to secondary agents, but not in a way that they can operate without his sanction. How exactly this works together is a bit of a challenge, and falls under category of the problem of evil.

Most importantly, these two statements regarding God's sovereignty and human responsibility are directly tied to the nature of God, who is:

1. Sovereign and transcendent,
2. Personal and immanent

Conclusion

What does this have to do with prayer?

We must ask the question, how do these truths function in Scripture?

God's sovereignty: Matt 6:8, not to be a babbling fool, but not a disincentive to prayer

Praying in line with God's will, that is praying for God to do what he already said he would do. For example, Jesus on the cross, or Daniel 9.

Moses' Prayer in Deut. 32