

THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD

Don Haddleton

Disasters and hard times can descend upon Christians at any time: the death of a loved one, ill health, redundancy, sudden irreversible down-turn in business, family divisions. The list goes on and on and you can add to it from your own personal experience. Christians, contrary to widespread teaching within church circles, are not exempt from the afflictions and troubles that human flesh is heir to. Indeed, believers can expect their full share of troubles in this world, owing to the fact that they are the children of the living God. As such they have been promised persecutions by our Lord in this life. If we are not undergoing, or have not been through some difficult trail or test of our faith, we should sit down and question the reality of our Christian experience. Scripture plainly states that the Lord chastises all who are His children. If we are not chastised then the inspired author boldly writes that we are bastards (Heb. 12:8).

Even those in evangelical circles who ascribe to the 'health and wealth' gospel and its multitudinous variations, know that their personal Christian life gives the lie to its teaching. They have themselves experienced trails in their own lives. Knowing the explicit teaching of Scripture regarding the afflictions that will come into our lives, we need as God's elect children to understand the reasons behind these trails. We must watch our reactions to them and the way we behave whilst undergoing such trails.

Afflictions come into our own lives seemingly through at least these three means:

1. Through our own misguided actions, incorrect judgments, fanciful ideas, pride and lack of spiritual discernment.
2. Through the thoughtless or deliberate actions of others. These are areas over which we have very little influence.
3. Through the natural course of events. These are areas over which we have no influence or control.

We must, in some measure at least, accept responsibility for affliction that comes to us from our own mistakes, although if trouble continues we tend to complain to God that things have gone far enough, and we may begin to question His love and His motive in allowing our troubles to continue. It is the areas noted in the last two points which give us our greatest difficulties. 'How could a loving Father allow such things to happen to his own children?' We may not voice such a sentiment in public, but in our innermost thoughts, and even sometimes in our private prayers, we give vent to such petulant feelings.

Our inability to understand the reason why, and to accept the varying afflictions that come into our life, stems from the fact that we look at the human agencies whereby these things appear in our lives and not to the ultimate source of these trails and troubles. We see them as coming from man, or even perhaps from the devil, but not as from the hand of our sovereign and loving God. We put it all down to bad luck or accident or even 'enemy action'. We assault the throne of grace with our constant petitions that our affliction may be removed from us. But we lose sight of the fact that Scripture sees the Lord God Almighty as the ultimate cause of everything that comes into our lives, the good and the bad. Though God Himself is not the author of sin, and does not tempt or cause us to sin, nonetheless He is ultimately involved in all that befalls us. Indeed, reader, the very trails which you are going through at this point of time are part of God's plan for your life. It is the sovereign will of God for your life.

Unless you and I come to the point of accepting and believing in God's sovereignty over our lives,

and over all that comes into our lives, we shall never understand nor be able to respond in a Christian way, to all that befalls us on this pilgrim walk. In fact, we shall not be able to come to grips with the state of the world as it is today. We can only be overwhelmed, alarmed and dispirited if we do not recognize that God, through His immutable and sovereign will, is in complete control of all things. It is absolutely essential that we come to grips with doctrine of God's sovereign will over, in and through all things. Absolutely nothing happens apart from God's sovereign will. There is nothing in our lives that is accidental, incidental or coincidental.

Job recognized this when, in the midst of his terrible afflictions, he said "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?". His wife had told him to curse God and die (Job 2:10). But Job rightly discerned, even though he could not yet understand why, that his trials were somehow all sent by God. He was expressing the fact that even though man is a thinking, reasoning being, responsible for his decisions and actions, yet God is still sovereign and works His own will, without trampling on ours. This sovereignty in God is the rock on which our comfort as believers rests.

Don Haddleton