

Romans 9:17 God's Sovereignty Over Circumstances

by Ernest O'Neill

God's sovereignty over circumstances is not about controlling the actions of those who reject Him, but about restraining and affecting their outward acts to reveal His nature and conform His children to that nature.

Scripture: Exodus 9:16

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Free Will"

Description

Ernest O'Neill delves into the concept of God's sovereignty and free will, emphasizing that while God has a plan and purpose for each individual, He respects our freedom to accept or reject His guidance. Through the story of Pharaoh in Exodus, it is highlighted how individuals like Pharaoh, who reject God's plan, can still impact the lives of others. The sermon explores how God interacts with those who choose to go against His will, ultimately revealing His nature and working towards the good of His children.

Transcript

INTRODUCTION

1. During these past few months we've been saying that our lives are not just a combination of time plus chance: the things that you experience are not just lucky or unlucky coincidences, but that God, Our Creator, planned your existence and has in mind a certain design and purpose for your life. At the same time, we've been seeing that God can't force you to take part in His plan for your life-He has given us free wills, and we have the gift and the power to accept or reject His plan: obvious from Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem.

2. Not, let's look at this whole truth from another angle: what if you accept God's plan for you and follow His guidance, but others who have power to affect your life-(like bosses, parents, husbands, wives) do not. Are they like wild-cat planets careening around the universe and destroying the order of those that keep to their planned orbits? In other words, does God exercise any sovereignty over the action and effect of those who have rejected His plan for them? Let's look at this in regard to Romans 9:17.

3. What scripture? The Old Testament - footnote : Exodus 9:16: who is speaking? Exodus 9:13- God. Paul makes the scripture and God synonymous. What is the relevance of this to the question: "Has God any control over the people who are able to affect our lives and yet have utterly rejected God's plan for their

lives?" Well, Pharaoh was one such person. He was a wild-cat planet that had rejected God's rule over his life-- yet he had tremendous power and influence over God's chosen people, Israel.

PHARAOH

1. Around 1450 B.C., that's about 3400 years ago, the Israelites were slaves to the Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God, you remember, became real to Moses and showed him that he would be used to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites from their slavery so that they could begin to settle in the promised land, where they are today. But Pharaoh utterly rejected God's right to determine his actions and he intended to hold on to his cheap labour: Exodus 5:2. Notice that this defiant rebellion against God is utterly due to Pharaoh's own will-in no way is God able to influence Pharaoh's will simply because Pharaoh will not let Him.

2. In answer to Moses, Pharaoh simply took away the straw and told the Israelites they had to produce the same quota of bricks but not they must find their own straw. Then began the series of actions that God refers to in this verse: Romans 9:17, Exodus 7:8-14.

3. But an important point to notice is the two English words "hardened" in verses 13 and 14: they are translations of two different Hebrew words: the first CHAZAQ means "Strong"; the second KABED means "stubborn". Again we need to see that Pharaoh freely exercised his own will to reject God's rights despite this display of His power.

4. The two words "strong" and "stubborn" continue to be translated "hardened" right through the first five plagues that God sent upon the Egyptians: blood, frogs, gnats, flies, cattle disease. Exodus 7:22 (strong); Exodus 8:15 (stubborn); Exodus 8:18-19 (strong) even when the magicians were convinced by the facts; Exodus 8:32 (stubborn); Exodus 9:7 (stubborn).

5. Throughout these first five plagues which God sent to convince Pharaoh that he was dealing with the one true and real Creator of the universe, Pharaoh exercised his free will so consistently against God that it became obvious that he knew what he was doing. Again and again the historical record states that he hardened his own heart, he became stubborn in his own will, and strong in his own resolve to oppose God. Only then when the Egyptian king had chosen freely to reject God, did God actively initiate the plan outlined in Romans 9:17.

GOD'S ACTION

1. He sent a plague of boils and only after that sixth plague, when it was plain that Pharaoh had determined his own eternal destiny by five times rejecting God's warning-only then do we read those significant words: Exodus 9:12. Here, for the first time, Pharaoh is not the subject of the sentence BUT God is!

2. But the word is not the Hebrew for "hardened", not even for "stubborn" - it is the Hebrew word CHAZAQ: "strengthened": God gave Pharaoh the courage to do what in his own will he had shown himself determined to do despite the previous five plagues, but which he might refrain from doing NOT because of obedience to God but because of fears of the consequences. Then God explains to Pharaoh why He had given him the courage to do what his own will wants to do anyway: Exodus 9:14-17.

3. This was exactly the result: God's power was obvious even to the Egyptians, some of whom believed: Exodus 9:20. But Pharaoh continued to exercise his own will against God: Exodus 9:27,34, so God

withdrew His convicting and softening Spirit: Exodus 10:1.

4. In other words, God does not raise up a Pharaoh or a Hitler or a Stalin to be evil and go to Hell--but once they have freely and plainly and consistently shown Him that they intend to have their own way in their lives even though they know He is God and has a plan for their lives and a right to rule them-- then He is able to control and restrain and affect their outward acts in ways that will reveal His own nature more clearly and will conform His own children to that nature.

TWO KEYS

1. There are two keys then to understanding the effects others, who reject God, can have on our lives. The first refers to them: Matthew 5:28. If they will to do a thing, they have already done it and affected accordingly their relationship with God--whether they had the opportunity to actually do the deed or not. So with Pharaoh, God did not give him the wicked desire but the stubborn courage to carry it out instead of suppressing it through fear. So let us be clear that God's controlling or restraining the outward actions of an evil person does not affect their own eternal destiny in any way.

2. But this action of God's, this power of his providence, is the second key and refers to us, who are affected by the action of others who reject God: 1 Corinthians 10:13: not simply "temptation" but "trial": no one does anything to you or can affect your life in any way unless God permits it for His glory and your re-creation in His image. God will not allow anyone or anything to spoil His plan for your life. Indeed, nothing can-EXCEPT YOUR OWN WILL.

3. Which people can affect your life? Your husband, wife, parents, teachers, bosses, government? Here is God's word for you: Proverbs 21:1.

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