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2 **Praying to a Sovereign God**

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If prayer changes things, how can we believe that God is sovereign and all knowing? How can we hold that he has his plans all worked out and that these plans cannot fail? If not a bird falls from the heavens without his decree, if we live and move and have our being under his sovereignty, if he works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Eph. 1:11), then in what meaningful sense can we say that prayer changes things? D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*

4

The Bible insists that we pray, urges us to pray, gives us examples of prayer. Something has gone wrong in our reasoning if our reasoning leads us away from prayer; something is amiss in our theology if our theology becomes a disincentive to pray. D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*

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Prayer Changes Things, but God is Absolutely Sovereign

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.
2. Human beings are responsible creatures—that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God’s sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent. Carson

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Evidence for #1

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.
Proverbs 16:33, ESV

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Evidence for #1

The Lord has made everything for its purpose, Even the wicked for the day of trouble. Proverbs 16:4, ESV

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The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Proverbs 16:9, ESV

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Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Psalm 115:3, ESV

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Evidence for #2

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Isaiah 30:18, ESV

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Evidence for #2

I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices... Isaiah 65:2, ESV

12

“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom

you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:14-15, ESV

13 

... because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." Romans 10:9-11, ESV

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How the principles #1 and #2 function together in Scripture

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• God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.

2

• Human beings are responsible creatures—that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God's sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent.

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Function

But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Genesis 50:19-20, ESV

16 

Function

2

... for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Acts 4:27-28, ESV

17 

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:37-40, ESV

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Mystery and God's Nature

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Notion of Freedom

Sometimes without thinking about it, we assume that such freedom must entail the power to work outside God's sovereignty. Freedom, we think, involves absolute power to be contrary—that is, the power to break any constraint, so that there is no necessity in the choice we make.

D.A. Carson

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Notion of Freedom

2

This is why many theologians have refused to tie "freedom" to absolute power to act contrary to God's will.

D.A. Carson

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The Question of Evil

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1)Some suppose that God does not stand in any sense behind evil

and...

2)Others think that God stands behind good and evil in exactly the same way.

D.A. Carson

23  **God is Transcendent and Personal**

24 

Perhaps it is the way God apparently stands outside time and space that enables him to handle secondary causes the way he does. I do not know. D.A. Carson

25  **What does this have to do with Prayer?**

26  **God's Sovereign Election Applied**

27 

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
Romans 8:28-30, ESV

28  **Sovereignty and Prayers that Change Things**

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."
Exodus 32:9-10, ESV

29 

But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'
Exodus 32:11-13, ESV

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And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Exodus 32:14, ESV

2

God expects to be pleaded with; he expects godly believers to intercede with him. Their intercession is his own appointed means for bringing about his relenting, and if they fail in this respect, then he does not relent and his wrath is poured out.
D.A. Carson

31 

- 1)There is mystery. We can only reason so far and then we get a headache.
- 2)If we understand how principles from Scripture function in Scripture the headache isn't so bad.
- 3)God is never at the end of his own resources to bring about what he desires.

4)He desires whatever brings him the most glory.

32 

5) God is a personal God and wants to interact with us.

6) Prayer changes things in a limited sense.

7) It pleases God when we pester him in prayer when we pray rightly.

8) God ordains the means and the ends of all things.

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