

## Divine Love: The Power of Christian Hope

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and

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### Response

by

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There is no greater source of Christian hope than that which flows from understanding the divine love that creatively responds to our suffering. Mary Paul and Tom Oord have masterfully reminded us of a God fully revealed in Jesus Christ who redemptively enters the arena of creaturely freedom and its consequences.

The challenge is to live with the biblical tension. Is God sovereign or is God loving? Does our loving Lord only respond or is there divine initiative? Is God sovereign or are we free? The creative tension of these two truths express the biblical truth.

Our finite faith systems tend to lead us to emphasize one truth to the demise of the other. If God is sovereign then all that happens is part of the divine will. On the other hand, God's interventions could be viewed as influence that limits human freedom.

Has God limited divine sovereignty to grant limited human freedom? How do these two free wills interact?

If God is arbitrary and sovereign, then salvation is bestowed only on the predestined. If humans are free, then salvation is conditioned upon their works of righteousness. Whole faith systems have been built on half-truths. God acts in tandem with human action.

When our daughter, Amy, was pulling on the hem of the Lord's garment asking for a miraculous cancer-free life-extension she was a free person asking a sovereign God to intervene. She did so boldly and persistently as our Lord instructed us to do. Does God always heal? No. Does our Lord sometimes grace us with a temporal healing? Yes.

Therein lies the dilemma. Amy exercised creaturely freedom and God also exercised freedom. God wept with her, strengthened her, and shone through her. The sovereign Lord did not cause the cancer nor choose to deliver her from its curse. After a courageous battle to live she developed pneumonia and died six years ago.

Ultimately, our disappointment with God rests in the fact that we are not Deists. We really do believe that God is present and active in our lives today. Amy embraced Christian hope, pleading for a majestic resurrection story. We believe in our Lord's resurrection that superseded human injustice.

She sought out those who would argue with God and defend her cause. At the same time she rested in the knowledge that her loving God was also acting. She embraced God's ultimate will.

"I don't want to talk about death nor plan for its arrival. I want to focus on life and God's power. If I die, I will ask God to talk to me about death." Amy struggled with God. Their wills interacted. In the midst of that honest wrestling, she found great solace in knowing that ultimately her freedom was subject to God's freedom. She wanted to know that her death would not be a random "bad luck" moment, but that her temporal life would be snuffed out within the parameters of God's sovereign wise love.

For fear of blaming God for the injustice and pain we might be tempted to portray a God who reacts in creative love, but does not act.

Amy's Christian hope flowed from the reality of a sovereign God who respected creaturely freedom and its consequences, and yet who was also free to intercept, interrupt, or intervene. God is not held hostage by sin's effects on the cosmos nor by the free choices of its creatures. The resurrected Christ has power over sin, death, and hell. Where, when, and how God acts is God's divine prerogative.

God did intervene, in the fullness of time, fully revealing the Godhead to us in Jesus. . . The Hope. God interrupted human history two thousand years ago with a new testament to deliver us from the dominion and power of sin. God's prevenient grace intercepted us in our lostness, as the Father moved the "furniture" of our circumstances to bring us to a grace-point where we would be free to choose life.

In God's interruption, interception, and intervention we find our hope. God does not cause unmerited suffering, but does allow it. To attempt to limit God's freedom further is to make our Lord only a creative loving Reactor. God responsibly interrupts the course of human history with resurrections. When the requested resurrections are not granted, God seem less than loving and somehow a cause of pain and injustice. That is the tension we must live with. God is sovereign, and God is love. God is sovereign, and we are free.

Isaiah reflected this two-truth reality:

You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, . . .  
say to the towns of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"  
See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, . . .  
He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young. . . .  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?  
He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He brings princes to naught

and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. . . .

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

but those who *hope* in the LORD  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:9b-10a, 11, 21b-22a, 23a, 25-31 [NIV])