

The Christian Worldview Transcript

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Host: David Wheaton

Guest: Jerry Bridges

Topic: Is God Really In Control In This World of Hurt? (Part 2 of 2)

DAVID WHEATON: Is God Really In Control In This World of Hurt? Part two of my interview with Jerry Bridges is the topic for hour one here on The Christian Worldview where the mission is to think biblically about all matters of life and faith so that we can then live accordingly. And to share the Good News that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, the Way, the Truth and the Life and that His Word is both relevant and our basis for living in this modern world. I am David Wheaton, the host of The Christian Worldview. Our official website is TheChristianWorldview.com.

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If you listened to the program last week, we had an interview with Jerry Bridges on the sovereignty of God, a most crucial and important doctrine of Scripture to understand. This week I want to play part two of that interview with Jerry Bridges. I think you are really going to enjoy it. Let me get started with that interview and we will have time in the second half of the program to take phone calls and talk more about that. Let's get right to my interview with Jerry Bridges where I repeat about four minutes from last week and get right into part two for this week.

DAVID: Jerry, I listed in my prep for our interview several different categories where the sovereignty of God frequently comes up, questioning it. Whether it is through a natural disaster, we can look back to the 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed nearly 200,000 people. People thought, where is God in all of this? How could a good God allow this? We have the six-year-old grandson of a couple in our Sunday school class who was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. Or just the other weekend, I heard of a young man about my age, who's father had died when he was very young, had just died in a random single car crash on the way home one night, slipped off the road one night and died. We look at the issue of salvation, how God elects some and seems to not chose others. Or we look at the violent evil that takes place in the world, maybe in the attacks of 9/11 or the recent rampage by a Muslim extremist at Fort Hood. Or we look at the politics of America right now. We look at the leadership and we have an administration that I believe has the most unbiblical worldview leading this historically Christian nation. We think, well wait now, where is God in all of this if He is sovereign? Why is He allowing all this to happen?

My question for you, Jerry Bridges, is this, is God more concerned about His own glory and His own purposes that human's health and their own lives?

JERRY BRIDGES: I think the answer to that is found in Romans Chapter 1:18, *For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.* Godliness is basically living a God-centered life. Ungodliness is living as if God is totally irrelevant. People may say they believe in God, but in their practical lives, they basically ignore God. God has created human beings to reflect His glory. When we ignore God, as the vast majority of our population is doing, then that is an affront to the glory of God. We have to realize that God is the creator. God created us to reflect His glory. Our failure to do that brings God's righteous indignation upon humanity.

We have no case against God. We are the ones who have failed to carry out the purpose for which we were created. My main concern today about America is not so much the violence, the sexual immorality and the greed and dishonesty and all these things that are going on, but the fact that even among respectable people, the people that are not engaged in those flagrant sins, there is virtually an ignoring of God. On a Sunday morning, you may find people in a church building for an hour or an hour and a half, but they basically live the rest of the week as if God does not exist. So Paul says, the wrath of God is poured out on this. In my view, we are experiencing the righteous judgment of God upon our society and our world.

DAVID: I have heard John MacArthur preach on how can a good and loving and sovereign God allow so much evil and suffering in the world because ultimately it is about His glory, first and foremost. When there is sin and evil and suffering, it makes us realize us that like the tower of Siloam that fell on the 18 people, things that are inexplicable, that unless you too repent, you shall perish likewise, far beyond just losing our physical life, but being cast into Hell for eternity. So it is a reminder that life is short, life is unpredictable, we are not guaranteed to live 80 years and die in our sleep. We never know the day of our death. The most important thing is to make sure that we are reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

Is the proper response to suffering, Jerry, to emulate Job because at the end of Job he got to the point of understanding the counsel, so to speak of his three so-called friends. Is the point that we should get to in our response, to put our hands over our mouths like Job did, not complain and realize that God is just far higher than we are and that we can't always understand God's purposes?

JERRY: That is right. In fact the apostle Paul says in Romans 11:33, God's ways are beyond our ways and His ways of dealing are inscrutable, that is beyond our ability to fathom and to understand. In Isaiah 55 God says, My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways for as the Heavens are as high as the Earth, so My ways are higher than your ways. In the day that Isaiah wrote those words, there were no rockets going to the moon or Mars or anything like that. To speak of His ways being as high as the Heavens or above the Earth, this basically indicates infinite distance. So God's ways are infinitely higher than our ways. Not just greater than our ways, but infinitely higher than our ways and we simply cannot understand them. I think from a Christian point of view, David, the important thing to realize is that our primary task is to glorify God. The Westminster Catechism so clearly puts it; the end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

I sometimes have to ask myself in a given situation, what is my goal? My wife and I went on a little one-week vacation for our wedding anniversary last week and I have had a pretty hectic year and I was looking forward to relaxation, which God graciously provided. As we were traveling, I just asked myself, what is my goal? Is my goal to glorify God while I am here or is my goal just to relax and have a good time? Not that these are necessarily irreconcilable, but which one is my priority? If my priority is to glorify God, then whether or not I am happy about the events as they turn out is quite secondary.

DAVID: It is really about adjusting our own perspective to the situations that come into our life. Jerry Bridges is my guest today here on The Christian Worldview. Our topic is, Is God Really In Control in this World of Hurt? That is a combination of his title and subtitle of his book, which is our book club selection here on The Christian Worldview. Jerry, you write on page 18 basically that trusting God is harder than obeying Him. What does that mean?

JERRY: Well when we obey God, we are obeying the law of God and I am using the law in the lightest possible sense not just the Ten Commandments but the moral will of God where it is expressed in the Bible. When we obey God, we are responding to the moral will of God, which is spelled out for us. Just by way of illustration, often when my wife is driving she will say what is the speed limit here? She wants to make sure that she drives within the speed limit. She wants to know what it is. So happily I might say, here is the speed limit sign just coming up. It says you can drive 65 miles per hour.

Well that is kind of like the law of God. The circumstances of life are not clearly defined. We never know what is going to confront us. We never know the intensity or the duration or the nature of circumstances that we would evaluate as bad or difficult circumstances or painful circumstances. We simply do not know what is going to happen. We do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, so we have to learn to trust God in the unknown.

I think again, if I could use an analogy. I fly a lot and quite frequently when the plane is coming in to the destination airport, it flies through a bank of clouds. During that time, the pilot cannot see where he is going. He cannot see the land below him, so he is completely dependent upon his instruments and upon the instructions he gets from the controllers, the people who say you are too high or too low. So he had to trust them. He cannot see what is going on.

We cannot see what is going on in life. You might say that we are always enveloped in a cloud. We simply do not know. We make plans and generally speaking we are able to carry out those plans. All of know that there are quite a few times when things come up unexpectedly and thwart our plans. It almost happened today on this broadcast. So we just have to trust God for the unknown. Just as the pilot trusts the aircraft controller who can see his plane on his radar and can tell whether or not he is in the proper location to make his landing.

DAVID: You are listening to part two of an interview with Jerry Bridges on the sovereignty of God. A most appropriate subject here at Christmas time where the great sovereign plan of God had His own Son come in the form of a man to dies for our sins 2000 years ago.

DAVID: Jerry there are people listening today all over the country who have great adversity in their lives. Maybe the have been going through an unexpected divorce. Maybe they have a child who has cancer. A couple who have been married for years and years all of a sudden a diagnosis of a terminal illness. Maybe they have a son of daughter they have raised in a Godly fashion who has now gone off to college and is rejecting the faith. Maybe they lost their job and they don't know where their next check is coming in. Things happen like this that are very difficult for people to endure and it is a point of suffering in their lives. We all have this in our life. I know you have had it in your own life. Your first wife died of cancer.

So we all go through this type of adversity. You write on page 19 in *Is God Really in Control?*, you say, "in the arena of adversity the Scriptures teach us three essential truths about God. Truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. They are 1. God is completely sovereign. 2. God is infinite in wisdom. 3. God is perfect in love. Someone has expressed these three truths as they relate to us in this way. God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom, He always knows what is best. In His sovereignty, He has the power to bring it about."

Tell us about why those three essential truths are so key in our trust in God's sovereignty?

JERRY: We have been speaking mostly about the sovereignty of God. That is how God controls all the events in the universe, specifically the events in our lives. But it is important to know that God not only is sovereign, but that He is perfect in His love. All that He causes or allows to come into our lives is a result of His love for us. We might say well if God loves me, why do I suffer so much?

Then we come to the infinite wisdom of God, that God's ways are higher than our ways. God's ultimate goal for us, Paul expresses it in Romans 8:29, is to conform us to the likeness of His Son. God is persistent in that. He will bring both blessing and pain in our lives, blessing as we define it and pain as we define it. He will bring both of those in our lives to accomplish His ultimate goal for us, which is to conform us more and more to the likeness of His Son. We have to remember that when we are going through difficulties and pain in our lives that the Scripture has promised that none of these things can separate us from the love of God. God loves us in our pain. We say, well God if you love me, why do you allow this pain? There is where we have to go back to the wisdom of God. He is infinite in His wisdom and He knows what He is doing.

He brings about the difficulties and the painful events in our lives to accomplish His purpose, which is to conform us more and more to the likeness of Christ. I am confident that when we go to be with the Lord, that we will be able to say, He did all things well, even the painful things. The cancer, the rebellious child and all these things, He did all things well.

DAVID: Amen. I completely and wholeheartedly agree with that. We need the adversity in our life to develop the character of Christ that He wants to develop in us.

Just a few more questions for you, Jerry Bridges. Thanks so much for coming on the program today. It has been a very illuminating interview. Should we expect to know the why or should we try and find out the why behind the suffering that takes place in our lives or the other bad things that happen in the world?

JERRY: No. Let me say this. When bad things happen, if there is a human solution, for example, if I come down with a major illness. I was just reading about a friend of mine and his experience with their newborn child and this child developed some disease, the name of which I cannot even pronounce, but the essence of it was the child had not platelets, so the child was going to bleed to death. They took her to the hospital and they

tried every means and God blessed those means and the child was healed and she is 8 or 9 years old today and she is perfectly healthy.

We should avail ourselves of all human means that God has given to us. But when the human means that we use do not produce the result and the painful event does indeed happen, let's say that my friend's little infant girl had died, then we need to believe that God was not only in control of that, but in His great love and in His infinite wisdom, He allowed that to happen to cause us to grow more and more in the likeness of Christ.

DAVID: You talk about in Chapter 10 of *Is God Really in Control?*, Jerry Bridges, our responses in trusting God. You talk about thanksgiving, worship, humility, forgiveness, prayer, and God's glory. In other words, those should be our responses and our attitude in trusting of God's sovereignty. I am just going to pick one for the sake of time. How should prayer merge with our understanding of God's sovereignty?

JERRY: It merges in the sense that we say to God, God I know that You are sovereign, I know that You are loving and You know what You are doing and I accept this from You. I ask that you would give me the grace, the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to persevere in this situation. Remember when Paul had his thorn in the flesh and he said that he asked God three times to remove that thorn and God said, My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in your weakness. To accept the fact that God often makes us weak in some area in order that His grace might shine forth.

I think the bottom line in everything, David, what are most interested in? Are we most interested in our comfort or are we most interested in God's glory? I am a sinful human being, a saved sinner, but a practicing sinner. Sometimes I want God's glory, but I don't like the pain.

DAVID: I think this might be helpful for people who are going through suffering right now. We all are going to go through it at some point; it is just a matter of when. I guess that is an interesting question. Is there any way we can prepare in advance for the suffering that is inevitable to come our way, the death of a family member or some of these terrible things that have happened. How should we prepare ourselves for those type of things or do you actually have to go through the adversity of the crucible of the moment to be able to grow in character and be ready for suffering?

DAVID: Back to live here on *The Christian Worldview*. Jerry Bridges will answer that question, is there a way we can actually prepare for the difficult things and the challenging things that inevitably happen in each of our lives? After this break that will be the last question that he answers. That will conclude part two of our interview.

Then we are going to open up our phone lines. Last week we asked about, since God is really in control of everything that happens, how does our own decision making figure into that? What is the difference between free will and God's sovereignty? This week the question is this, if we know God causes or allows everything that happens to us or in the world as well. We really learned that last week and there is a Biblical basis for that. He is in control of absolutely everything that happens. He either causes it directly or He allows it to happen as He did in the live of Job. We know that God causes or allows everything that happens and that we can't necessarily know why things happen. That is what Jerry Bridges just said. We can't necessarily know why some of the evil or bad things happen in the world or to us. Why do we struggle to trust in God's sovereignty so much? We know He causes or allows everything. We know He is in control. We know it is for His glory. We know we necessarily can't know why. So why do we struggle with trusting in God's sovereignty?

DAVID: The question is this, if we know God causes or allows everything that happens, that is what the Bible says. We can't necessarily know why thing happen. Job never knew why all those things happened to him. Why do we struggle so mightily to trust in the sovereignty of God?

I guess that is an interesting question. Is there any way we can prepare in advance for the suffering that is inevitable to come our way, the death of a family member or some of these terrible things that have happened. How should we prepare ourselves for those type of things or do you actually have to go through the adversity of the crucible of the moment to be able to grow in character and be ready for suffering?

JERRY: Well I think that we can prepare ourselves by focusing on the teaching of God's Word. Scattered throughout the book, I have given various passages of scripture. I think it would be well to commit some of those to memory. For example, one that I go to so much of the time, that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

I know from Romans 8:29 that the good that Paul is speaking of there is conforming to the likeness of Christ. So when difficult things happen as happened to me yesterday, without going into the details, but I had to go back to that and just say Lord you and your inscrutable wisdom are using this event in my life, this difficult event, somehow to make more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. If we just keep in mind that our ultimate goal is God's glory. God's glory is going to be manifested mostly by our obedience and trust. We honor God when we obey Him. We honor God when we trust Him. If we can keep these things in mind, then when these difficult experiences happen, we will be prepared for them. The Holy Spirit can bring to our mind these principles from Scripture that will sustain us in those times of difficulty or great pain.

DAVID: The way you answered that question actually answered my last question for you, what are some of the most instructive passages of Scripture that listeners can turn to and cling to as to God's sovereignty in the midst of suffering. I think you answered that by giving Romans 8:28 and 29. An excellent passage to commit to memory.

Jerry Bridges, I so appreciate your time today on The Christian Worldview, but even more for the great service you have been to the Lord and to many people out there by writing about some of these issues like the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God and the discipline of spiritual growth. These types of things are so important for people to understand. The fundamentals of the faith so to speak. We wish you all of God's best and grace in your own life and to your family as well. Thanks so much.

JERRY: It has been a pleasure to be with you.

DAVID: You have just heard part 2 of my interview with Jerry Bridges. If you missed any of that interview on the sovereignty of God, and his book, *Is God Really In Control?* That was our book club selection for November and December of this year. We will be selecting a new book for next week, so stay tuned for that. If you miss of the interview with Jerry Bridges this is a most important topic, understanding the sovereignty of God. When we have an understanding of that, it gives us such as better perspective in life. It changes our thinking. I would encourage you to go to TheChristianWorldview.com if you missed any of that interview to be able to get this ingrained in your mind. What it means to trust in God's sovereignty. It is a life changer. That is why I play it at this time of the year. End of the year, we like play some really important programs and this is certainly one of them.

Let's get to our callers who have been patiently waiting. The question is, If we know God causes or allows everything to happens and that we necessarily can't know why things happen, why do we struggle to trust in God's sovereignty so much? What can we do to trust more in Him?

Let's go first to Amarillo, Texas and Judy. Welcome to The Christian Worldview Judy. How do you answer that question?

JUDY: I was going to try and play the devil's advocate for a minute here with a couple of points. Let's say I am a young person out of school. What do I need God for? I am cool. I am strong. I am capable. I am either in the military and I am learning to be tough or I am in college and I don't need God. I have it all together. I am starting my life and my career and I don't need God. I am doing it myself. What do I need Him for? That would lead into the next one, which would be, the Word says over and over that we are just here to glorify Him. That sounds so arrogant. I am just here to glorify God all the time? He put me here to just glorify Him. He sounds like such an arrogant God.

I will just hang up and hear your response to that.

DAVID: I appreciate your call today, Judy. The answer to the first question, why do I need God? I have everything together. Well first of all, that is a mistaken conception that anyone has anything together. We are merely a millisecond from something going completely wrong in our lives that takes us completely out of

control. Often when we think we have things together, we are healthy and we have a good job and maybe a good marriage and a nice house, a nice car, a nice looking family, we think, well things are going well. Only by God's grace are we even in that situation to begin with. If God's restraining Holy Spirit was taken away from this Earth, everything would collapse into chaos right away. It is only by God's common grace that we are able even to take another breath.

So we don't have things together despite the fact that we think we do and we are just a millisecond away from things spinning completely out of control. That is the answer to the first question.

The second question is what is this all about God's glory? Is He a megalomaniac to expect that everyone should live to glorify Him? The answer is that He is deserving of it. He is God. He is the creator. He is so infinitely more higher and more holy and more righteous and more everything than us. He deserves above everyone else and everything else to be glorified, to be worshipped, to be bowed before. The Bible says that someday every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. If we were ever in God's presence and we are in God's presence, but if you see in Scripture that whenever someone encounters the presence of God, they immediately fell on their face. They couldn't even be near the presence of God. He is so high and mighty and lifted up that all you can say is Holy, Holy, Holy as it says in Isaiah 6. That is our response. If we ever encounter that, we would immediately understand what it means to glorify God.

Let's go to Errol in Macon, Georgia. Welcome to The Christian Worldview Errol. What is your comment on this issue of the sovereignty of God?

ERROL: In 2006, I had a stroke. I was living good. I was cocky, arrogant. I had a 5 bedroom, 3 ½ bath, 3 car garage and making good high six figures as a long distance truck driver. I was on top of the world. I didn't need God for anything. I had to tell my wife that it is my skills, my experiences that got me everything I needed and wanted.

DAVID: Errol, I am going to put you on hold. I want to hear the rest of the story.

DAVID: Welcome back to The Christian Worldview. Hark the Herald Angels Sing is truly an amazing doctrinal Christmas carol. Hark the herald angels sing, glory (there is that word glory) to the newborn King. He deserves all glory. Peace on Earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. That is why Christ came to reconcile us as sinners to the God of this universe. Joyful all ye nations rise; join the triumph of the skies. With the angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. The third stanza reads, Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace, hail the Son of Righteousness! Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings. Mild He lays his glory by, born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of Earth, born to give them second birth. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King. You think about what it says there, light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings, born to give them second birth. This is the meaning of Christmas. If you had Christmas this year and were thinking what was this all about, that is what Christmas is all about. The fact that Christ, the very Son of God came to Earth, born of a virgin woman, lived a perfect life, fully God, fully man, was crucified and died on the cross when He was about 33 years old. He died to pay the price that we deserve to pay for our sins, on that cross. That is what the meaning of Christmas is. He was born to die. This was just the beginning of His life because what He was going to do later was going to be theTheChristianWorldview.com turning point in history where He could reconcile with God, sinful man. That is Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

We are talking about the sovereignty of God today here on The Christian Worldview. Let's get back to Errol in Macon, Georgia. He was telling us about how he had everything in control of his life. He as a marine, he was strong, he was fit, he had a house, he had a car, he had a family. He had everything going for him and Errol why don't you finish the rest of that story.

ERROL: Like I said, I was a United States marine and a drill instructor. My recruits gave me the nickname "hardcore." I was healthy, vibrant and strong. I was discharged and I became a long-distance truck driver. I had four trucks. I had a 2500 square foot house, five bedrooms, three and a half baths, three-car garage and a fat bank account. I would take \$30,000 out of my account and spend it just because I could do so. I had all the women I wanted. I had everything I wanted. In 2006, I had a stroke. According to my mother, almost died

three times. I lost 100% of my left peripheral vision. I had no college; I am just a high school graduate. I bragged that I was making more than doctors. I am just a high school grad.

DAVID: So how did this whole experience, Errol, bring you to the understanding of the sovereignty of God?

ERROL: It showed me that it took God to change me. It took God to make me realize that He is the one that gave me everything. I came to learn that all of my accomplishments, small and great, came from and is coming from nobody but God.

DAVID: That is exactly right. Errol, I so much appreciate that call today. That is very encouraging, to have everything as you did and then to have God just quickly remind you and humble you as He reminded even Paul with his thorn in the flesh so that you might not become proud and exalted above measure. That He gave you this as a reminder to come to Him for the first time it sounds like. That is a very encouraging and inspiring story of understanding how God's sovereignty works in our lives for His glory, to bring you back to understanding His glory. Thank you so much for that call.

Let' go next to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis in Minnesota our home station AM980 KKMS and Bob welcome to The Christian Worldview. What is your comment or question on this issue of the sovereignty of God?

BOB: I think the reason why it is hard for us to trust the sovereignty of God is because we don't understand why He wants us to glorify Him. You mentioned the fact that He deserves glory, which is true. In addition to that, is why He wants us to glorify Him, why He wants us to be conformed to the image of Christ. The reason for that is so that we may show others what God is like. That is what the word glorify means. It means to display the attributes of God or to show what He is like. How is the world going to know what God is like unless they see Him in us, His likeness in us? Especially with children, they are not born with the knowledge of what God is like. The only way they can learn that is to see other Christ-like people and to see Christ living out their lives in Him.

DAVID: It is a great point Bob and I appreciate that. The question that naturally arises is, if we are supposed to give glory to God, how do we do that? That might be another good show topic. A full hour should be devoted to that, but just real quickly, how do we glorify God? We glorify God by living lives that are glorifying to Him. Obeying Him basically, obeying His Word, trying to become more sanctified in our life, developing or exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit rather than acting according to our flesh. That is number one, the way we live our lives glorifies God. Telling others about Him, about His glory and about the reconciliation as Hark the Herald Angels Sing mentions, the reconciliation that can be had with God. Basically being an evangelist. Discipling others to become more like Christ, that glorifies God. Helping people in need. That is what Christ did when He was on Earth. He went to the poor and the hurting and the sick and helping those kinds of people. That brings glory to God. When we do these things and many, many more that is what brings glory to God. That is really what God wants for our life. Everything is for His glory, even when we go through difficult things, it is for our good. When we know of the reality of the sovereignty of God and we trust in it with all our might, that is when we can apply this very important and great doctrine of Scripture into our lives.

Let me close today by reading from Job Chapter 42. Here is what Job said after the incredible testing and trial he went through and finally understanding God's sovereignty and never knowing why it happened. *Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that though canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge, therefore I have declared that which I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know, hear now and I will speak. I will ask thee and do thou instruct me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of thy word thy ear, but now my eyes see therefore I retract and repent in dust and ashes.*

We need to know about God's sovereignty and we need to trust in it with all our might and never question God's purposes in life. Merry Christmas to all of you today as we conclude hour one on The Christian Worldview. It has been a wonderful 2009. We appreciate your listener ship, your prayer, your support of the program.

You know we do live in a changing and challenging world everyone, but there is one thing we can always trust in; Jesus Christ and His Word are the same yesterday, today, forever.