



Stand by the Water Bowl

God can't be manipulated. I know—I've been trying to most of my life. It started when I was small and told God that I would be good if my dad would be sober. It didn't work, but instead of growing bitter and telling God I didn't believe in him anymore, I decided that I needed to work at being even better. If I could just be a good boy, I thought, things would work out with my dad, and I could be a normal kid.

I suspect that most of my life I've been trying to be good so God would love me and—I blush when I say this—so I would get my way. When I was a teenager, I tried to make deals with God about the girls I wanted to date—"Lord, just make her say 'yes,' and I'll read my Bible every day, I promise."

I tried it in school to get higher grades—"Oh Lord, I just finished the test. Please make London the capital of France, and I'll be your slave for life." Later, I worked at getting him to further my agenda for a higher salary, a bigger church, best-selling books.

Once I even tried to manipulate him about a sermon I was working on titled, "The Sovereignty of God."

I know. I know. It can't be done, but I still try.

But you know something? God in his graciousness has never let me even think that I had gotten my way because I was good or pure or religious. Sometimes in his grace, he blessed something I was doing when I wasn't good, or pure or religious. He has given me some of his best gifts when I was at my worst. And some of my biggest failures, most terrible losses and greatest pain came when I was doing—as best I knew how—quite well in the obedience area. Go figure.

The doctrine that God is sovereign (i.e. that he can't be manipulated) is a

wonderful statement of his love and care for us.

He doesn't change his love for his people because of anything we do. Because there is nothing, as Luther said, we can do that is more sufficient than the blood of his Son. God's love is absolute, and I'm thankful that he never allowed me to manipulate him.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:33-36).

Remember God's provision—not because you manipulated him, but because he has promised to provide for your needs.

I was thinking the other day about our Quincy the Wonder Dog (who is now in doggie heaven), and how much he trusted me. One of the things I miss about him is the way he would let me know his needs. Sometimes when I was leaving in the morning, I would find him standing by his empty water bowl.

He didn't bark or growl or run back and forth between the water bowl and the water faucet. He just stood there quietly waiting and knowing that he wouldn't be thirsty.

When we know that God not only can't be manipulated, but that he doesn't need to be manipulated, that his love never changes and that his provision is the provision of a good and kind father, then all we have to do is "stand by the water bowl" and be thankful.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

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