

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND LOVE

By

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“It’s all in the hands of God. He is still on the throne; He is in control.” On the face of it such a statement seems to indicate a deep faith. But on careful consideration it presents serious problems. Was God in control of the planes that slammed into the WTC towers on 9/11/2001? Is all the murder, rape and corruption planned and instigated by God?

Indeed, this is the case according to the devout followers of Calvinism. Arthur Pink argues, “God foreordains everything which comes to pass. His sovereign rule extends throughout the entire Universe and is over every creature...God initiates all things, regulates all things...” (*The Sovereignty of God*). Another advocate of Calvin’s doctrine argues, “Even the fall of Adam, and through him the fall of the race, was not by chance or accident, but was so ordained in the secret counsels of God” (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Loraine Boettner). Another Calvinist, Edwin H. Palmer, writes that every act is according to the sovereign decree of God.” “...even sin – the fall of the devil from heaven, the fall of Adam, and every evil thought, word, and deed in all of history – including the worst sin of all, Judas’ betrayal of Christ – is included in the eternal decree of our holy God” (*The Five Points of Calvinism*). The above quotes are from *What Love Is This?* by Dave Hunt, Loyal Pub., Co.

This mistaken concept of God’s sovereignty negates the possibility of any of God’s created beings to act spontaneously of their own free will. If God controls every event, every thought, and every act, it follows that:

1. We live in a system that is preprogrammed, and we can do nothing about anything. Like the song says, *Que Sera Sera*. “What will be will be.”
2. God himself is shackled by his eternal decrees, since He has already predetermined the outcome of every event.
3. All praise and all prayers are preprogrammed.

When a sinner repents it is all preprogrammed. This makes his tears of sorrow phony, as God is controlling his emotions.

4. Adam and Eve’s sin was not due to their rebellion, but to God’s clockwork control. In fact, if sinners have no free will – as Calvinism declares - then God is responsible for their failure to receive the gift of salvation. Then in judgment God punishes them for something they had no control over, since it was totally in the hands of God! If God is in control of all events, and if He determines every action, then to sin is to do His will, for which one is then condemned to death. This is not the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus.

One verse that is thought by many to prove that God initiates every action in the world is Paul’s expression, that God “works all things after the counsel of his will...” (Eph. 1:11). This does not say that everything that happens is according to God’s will, but according

to *'the counsel'* of His will and not from any other motivation. It has reference to God working in the lives of His people according to the counsel of His will. In no way can it be forced to mean that everything that is done is the work of God, and it says nothing of all the things that man may do on his own initiative.

It is obvious that the counsel of His will has given man freedom to disobey Him, as is shown by many examples in scripture. Luke records that "the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God" (Luke 7:30). Jesus understood that not everyone always does the will of God: "not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). John wrote: "And the world passes away and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). Clearly, it is one's own personal choice as to whether or not he will do God's will.

The fact is that there are some things that God cannot do for the very reason that He is God! God cannot do that which is evil nor cause anyone else to do evil. He does not even tempt anyone to do evil. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted, neither tempts he any man, but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1:13-14). But what of scriptures that say that God tempted someone or that He was tempted? "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen 22:1). The Hebrew word is *nacah*, which means to test or prove, and in no way implies a temptation to sin. God was testing Abraham's faith and willingness to obey. This is the same word in Deuteronomy 6:16 and Exodus 17:7 where the Israelites "tested" the Lord to see if He would bow to their wills or punish them for disobedience.

God cannot act contrary to His word, "for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). This means that God cannot forgive sin without the penalty being paid. His justice is absolute, and requires the penalty of death for sin. This is why the death of Jesus. His son is of the greatest importance to every human being. As through Christ's death God is able to be both 'just and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus' (Rom 3:21-26). God cannot force anyone to love him. God's love for humanity is emphasized throughout the Bible, and so is the exhortation that we are to love Him. The first and greatest commandment is: "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul (being)" and all thy mind" (Matt. 22.37). It is clear that God desires that man voluntarily return His love. Surely, if God, by sovereign power, could cause every person to love Him with all their being He would do so, but such love cannot be coerced. Instead, God in His sovereign power has created us as free spirits and not as puppets. Therefore, He does not control our emotions or our minds. Rather we are free to return His love or to reject it.

This in no way diminishes God's sovereignty. Rather it emphasizes the fact that God can sovereignty give to man the power of genuine choice. This places a responsibility upon man, a responsibility that is taught throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation – a responsibility to choose to obey. "Thou Shall" is a command to free people, not to robots. This is the answer to the question often heard, "If God is all-powerful, why does He allow such evil and suffering to plague mankind?" Man has moral responsibility to God, but by

his own free will he chooses not to obey Him. All have sinned by their own free will, not by God's will. God, in love, has given the solution to sin and evil in the gospel of Christ.

Of course, every event, whether thought or action, is made possible by the power of God, in that he gives life and breath to all, and continues to sustain and maintain all the natural laws that He set in order at creation. He gives life to all, including the rebellious and evil ones, but in His sovereign power He gives them freedom to act according to their own individual choices. In accordance with His just work of atonement He forgives sin and creates anew - spiritually - those who receive the gift of salvation. In sovereign power He hears and answers prayers of the faithful believer, as so well stated by Professor Robert L. Whitelaw:

“Saints of God imploring Him in effectual fervent prayer are glorifying Him *de novo* to His sheer delight, because it is their action, not His pre-action; and finally we must believe that such prayer may truly ‘avail much’ in that God Himself, because of His very omnipotence, can here and there, for His own glory and pleasure, change one of His decrees, open one more door of mercy, - in short, act SOVEREIGNLY as only God can act, for the sheer joy of responding to the heart-cry of one of His little ones!” (From his unpublished papers.)

I will bring these thoughts to a close in the words of Oswald Chambers:

“No man's destiny is made for him, each man makes his own. Fatalism is the deification of moral cowardice which arises from a refusal to accept the responsibility for choosing either of the two destined ends for the human race – salvation or damnation.

“The power of individual choice is the secret of human responsibility. I can choose which line I will go on, but I have no power to alter the destination of that line when once I have taken it - yet I always have the power to get off one line on to the other” (*Still Higher for His Presence*).

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