

# "God's Sovereignty...Or?"

by Evangelist Dea Warford

While flying from Ontario, California to Columbus, Ohio for a meeting, I was seated beside a Christian who several times made a comment followed by something like, "if God wants it to be it will be." I got to thinking how many people actually think that God's sovereignty means that everything that happens is exactly what God meant to happen: If people are healed, it must have been God's eternal plan; If they die a horrible death, God must have wanted them to "do something up in heaven."; whether bad or good, God is in control of all things and whatever He wants to happen on earth will happen. I want to speak to this erroneous philosophy this month. Let me begin by stating my opinion, and then I'll try briefly to defend it. Here is my opinion ...

*Most things that happen on this planet not only are not the will of God, but have nothing to do with God and have everything to do with man's free will, the devil, and the consequence of living on a fallen out of whack planet.*

After God had completed the creation of the earth, Genesis 1:31 says, "And God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good." In its original state, everything that happened on earth was indeed exactly as God intended it to be. The way the universe operated was "very good". But, then Satan brought his great rebellion to earth. Encouraged by his previous success in convincing 1/3 of the heavenly angels to follow him instead of God (Rev. 12:3, 4), he was emboldened to bring God's newest creation, mankind, into that same rebellion.

He succeeded by convincing man to disobey God and partake of the forbidden fruit. Immediately after man's sin, a "death" process corrupted the entire creation (Gen 2:17, 3:19). What had been good, was now bad. Animals started eating one another. Men started killing one another (1st murder – Gen. 4:8, 1st war – Gen. 14). It didn't take very many generations, until there was such a mess that God had to destroy everything on earth (Gen. 5:5-7), except for those saved by "grace" (Gen. 5:8) on Noah's ark. After the deluge, God began to bring "good" influences to try to restrain man from his stubbornness and restore "good" to His earth.

These good influences included, among other things, prophets, priests, and the Holy Scriptures. Even today the Lord influences men upward toward Him and heaven, the fallen earth influences men downward (towards death and "worldliness", 1 John 2:15-17), the devil influences men backward (away from God and "restoration" which is God's plan-Joel 2:25, Ps. 23:3, Acts 3:21)), and men stand in the middle of all these influences ever trying to push their way forward (Philippians 3:13, 14). God loves us and wants us to be happy, whole, and fulfilled in life (Jer. 29:11). Working contrary to what God wants for us is the will of the devil, the will of man and a fallen world (full of bad things: from germs to oxidation of our cells to gravity ever pulling us 6 feet under!). Influences other than God affect our lives.

Eccl. 7:17 illustrates the above truth, ; "Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time." That final phrase "thy time" along with Ecc. 3:2, "a time to die", have been misconstrued by many Christians to "prove" one of several misunderstandings about God's control over the universe. Let's examine a few ...

## Misconceptions about God's sovereignty

**1. Everybody has a predetermined time to die :** "Don't worry about flying in that airplane honey. If it isn't your time to die, you won't." (a concerned love one consoles), to which the fearful flyer retorts, "Yes, but what if it is the pilot's time to die!?" has been a much repeated joke and a paradox which illustrates the problem with a "set time" to die. When a person dies is not just predetermined by God and set in stone forever. Ecc.7:17 proves this truth unequivocally as Solomon warns, "don't be over much wicked" (that is) "don't commit some stupid sin, like robbing a bank, because you might get shot and die before your time". Then adds, "neither be thou foolish", (that is) "don't smoke because, on average, you'll shorten your life by 13 years" (a scientific fact!).

If just one person in history could "die before his time" then so can you and I. "Well, (you might ask) then what does it mean by "thy time?". That's easily explained. In Genesis, God said man's days shall be 120 years. Then, Psalm 90:10, further says, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years". Clearly, our "time" is to live a full life of 70 or 80, with a maximum of 120 years, That's our allotted "time" on earth. And, we will live 80 instead of 70 years, not because God pre-set that length of time for us to live, but because of "strength".

Reader, you can add probably 10 years to your "time" on this planet, if you will just exercise and make your body stronger! Satan tried to kill Jesus before his "time" by convincing him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple in Matt. 4:5, 6. (And, don't you jump of a pinnacle into too many bowls of ice cream either, or you'll die before your "time"!) God killed people in scripture (Gen. 38:7). The devil killed people in scripture (Job 1:12-19). People killed other people (Lu. 13:1-3). This fallen world killed people (Lu. 13:4, 5, II Ki. 13:14).. And some people killed themselves (Matt. 27:5). Eat right/drive safely & delay your " time to die".

**2. God determines who gets saved and who doesn't:** It's called the doctrine of "election". John Calvin was its great proponent. He taught that God determined back in eternity who would be saved and who would be eternally lost. God Himself "elected" or personally chose those who would hear and respond to the gospel and ultimately be saved and who wouldn't respond. There are many "proof texts" that "Calvinists" use. We don't have time in this teaching to study them or even to study the many proof texts that "Arminians" use (Arminius became the early proponent of what most full gospel Christians believe – that man's free will choices determine whether he ultimately goes to heaven or hell.)

If the scripture gives warnings to not do certain things or one will lose his salvation, then that must surely mean that it is possible to lose one's salvation. (And there are many warnings!) And, if is possible for someone by an act of their will to do anything that determines their eternal destiny, then it wasn't God who determined it, but man! I wrote on this subject two or three years ago. If you weren't on the mailing list then, and would like to receive my scriptural study on this topic, you're welcome to write to request it!

**3. Certain things are "fate" and meant to be:** The term "fate" is rooted in Greek Mythology, which taught that there were "gods" (sisters to be exact) who were called "The Fates". Their job was to "string out" the significant things that happen on earth, like when people are born and when they

die. In modern vernacular, we call it "fatalism". It is simply the belief that certain things are meant to be, whether planned by "The Fates", the "Force" or "the man upstairs". The belief in fate is strongly rooted in Buddhism and Hinduism (they call it "karma").

In true Christianity, we don't believe in "fate", but we do believe in "destiny". We believe that God has a perfect plan and purpose for each life, for each church, for each ministry and even for each "nation". It is His desired and planned "destination" for you and me, thus it is our "destiny". It's not guaranteed and is always conditional. But, if we will cooperate with His Spirit, believe His promises, and obey Him each step of the way, we will fulfill His plan, almost always imperfectly, but basically "on target". It was God's destiny for Europeans to come to America and Eastern Americans to move westward. We called it our "manifest destiny".

It wasn't God's will for us to wipe out Indian tribes, or make Las Vegas a city with 300 pages of "escorts" (which is thinly veiled euphemism for "prostitutes"), or to make Hollywood a seed-bed of seduction. I believe America has fulfilled its destiny, but indeed very imperfectly. (So imperfect, in fact, that I fear that God will now use some other country, more amenable to His righteous ways, for His future world purposes (like safeguarding democracy and sending out missionaries – America's most obvious past destiny). I know my destiny was to be an evangelist. I felt compulsion moving me that direction since I was a teenager. God was "at work in me, to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:14). I know it wasn't his destiny for me to have made some of the mistakes I've made or to have said some of the dumb things I've said from time to time.

Paul had a destiny, but nevertheless Satan could still hinder him (1 Thess. 2:18). Jesus knew his destiny, but under the dread of a cruel death, prayed for the Father to release him from the obligation to fulfill such a harsh "destiny". He wouldn't have prayed for it not to happen, if he believed that things written in the Word, prophesied, or were simply "the will of God" would happen automatically. Our free will and obedience is ALWAYS involved in our destiny (Phil. 2:8).

**4. When something good happens we were "lucky":** There is no such thing as luck. If something good happens, it's either God blessing you, somebody else blessing you, or circumstance. You can't beat Vegas with "luck". They don't build those billion dollar casinos on "luck". They build them on the odds. Are you praying you will win the lottery? If you pray to win, you are just one of 10 million also praying. If you buy a ticket, your "luck" is the mathematical probability of perhaps 1 in 10 million. Even if there were such a thing as luck, it would just be some demon, who might use some seeming incredible odds to deceive one into further bondage. Telling someone "Good luck" may just be an innocent encouragement. But, since there is no such thing as luck, it's a hallow encouragement indeed. We should rather say, "God bless you". Blessing is real! (Numbers 6:22-27).

**5. When something bad happens it's an act of God:** I heard Rev. Jack Hayford once say, "When something bad happens it's called "an act of God". When something good happens, of "lucky" gets the credit." Weather problems, at times, can be "an act of God". There are plenty of examples of this in scripture: Noah's flood is the best example. When Jesus died, God sent an earthquake. But, Satan can cause weather conditions too. Job 1:19 is a good example. Also, see Rev. 12:15. Then, of course, some weather disasters are simply the result of a fallen world subject to the effects of the sun, wind, rain, gravity, and inner-earth activity.

To categorically say that God has "everything under His control" is scripturally unsound. God gave man dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). Ps. 115:16 says, "the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." What happened in Germany in WWII was the Nazi's fault, not God's. Then, of course, man has ceded some of the control of earth to the devil by submitting to him and giving him "place" (Eph. 4:26, 27) in their lives.

When something bad happens, as Christians, we need to search the scriptures and search our hearts for revelation. Is this the judgment of God? If so, what should the church do about it? (repent: see II Chron. 7:13, 14). Is this the work of the devil? If so, what should we do about it? Probably wage spiritual warfare (Matt. 18:19) or discover how we, our church, or our country gave "place" to the devil, and recapture that territory back (Matt. 11:12). If it is man's fault, how can we remedy it? (Vote in new leaders, fight for better legislation, and pray more for our leaders? (1 Tim. 2:1, 2).

If it is the fallen earth's fault, how can we correct that? (For instance, if it is green house gases, how can we limit them? (reasonably, of course!!!) If hurricanes are apt to hit New Orleans, how can we build better dykes to protect it? Though God is sovereign, He doesn't step into every situation in life and take control. Christians have car accidents. Innocent children die. Bridges over rivers collapse while "good" people are driving over them. Towns like Running Springs burn down from fires set by lightning, falling electrical lines. Bad things do happen to good people. But, to help prevent bad things, even "acts of God", the Lord has placed a tool in our hands to help change circumstances. That tool is prayer!

**6. Prayer doesn't do much good:** It's interesting to me that the man seated next to me who believes "if God wants it to happen, it will" goes to a Wesleyan Methodist church-a church named after the great evangelist, John Wesley, who himself said, "God will do nothing on earth, except in answer to believing prayer". Has his church wandered from the ideals of its founder? I suppose we could ask that about many Foursquare Churches too, couldn't we? Their founder, Aimee Semple McPherson, taught divine healing and worked great miracles of healing in her church services.

Every Foursquare church by "bylaws" requirement, must have "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8) inscribed on the front of the sanctuary to honor their belief in the truth of divine healing that Aimee championed. Yet, many Foursquare churches rarely hold public "healing" services as the founder did. I, for one, will continue to contend for and preach that same proclamation that "Jesus is the same today as He was yesterday, and He still is healing the sick".

I can't even remember the last time I heard a Foursquare pastor preach on that subject (though, of course, I am sure many do). Historically, many denominations began during a time of great revival and manifestation of the power of the Holy -Spirit. But, all too often, a "move of God", deteriorates into a "machine for God", and from there to a "memory of God" until finally, it is often but a "museum of God" (full of dead relics and dead ideas from the past).

Is the inscription on Foursquare churches saying "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever", but a relic honoring dead saints of the past who used to experience that present living healing power? Or is it an ongoing confession of a truth Foursquare people still live by? (Foursquare member reading this, ask yourself and your pastor this question, and if you don't like the answer,

began to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" Jude 3). If people aren't being healed in our churches today, is it God's fault? Or are we simply no longer believing our prayers make a difference?

*Prayer really does do much good!* "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Prayer "availeth much". Prayer changes things! But, we must cooperate with God's plan to get prayers answered. We must first determine God's will in the matter. And, we do this through fording a promise in the word. This promise becomes the basis for the necessary faith that our prayer will "avail" (Romans 10:17).

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick," James wrote in 5:15. He didn't say "the will of God" or the "goodness of God" shall save the sick. He clearly said "the prayer of faith". If Satan's works, or natural laws, or sick bodies are supernaturally changed, it will be because people pray and they pray in faith. And, if sick bodies don't get healed, it will be because they didn't pray – at least not with enough faith. Jesus did His part shedding his blood on the cross (1 Peter 2:24), now we must do our part! And one big part of that is to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

It's not the goodness and faithfulness of God, His sovereign plan, or "fate" that brings healing to hurt bodies. It's our faith! When Jesus tried to bring healing to one community, He had very little success-Same Jesus, same Father, but a different faith level. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." (Matt. 13:58, Mark 6:5). If Jesus couldn't get people healed where faith wasn't present, then we sure can't! Faith can move mountains (Mark 11:22-24). Our combined faith didn't move fire off the mountain, but it at least helped spare one home, mine! Let's combine our faith and prayer against future American tragedies! But, use faith, not fate!