
Is Everything That Happens God's Will?

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Challenging Misconceptions

My heart was really stirred when I attended a meeting where an old friend of mine was ministering. He had been through some terrible things that nearly destroyed his faith. He became bitter and angry at God for the things that had happened. When I heard him, he had humbled himself and was again loving the Lord and excited about the future. Praise the Lord! However, in the process, he had come to believe that it was the Lord who had caused all his problems. He had resigned himself to the “sovereignty of God.”

I believe this is the worst doctrine in the church today. I know that this is a shocking statement and is near blasphemy to some people, but the way “sovereignty” is taught today is a real faith killer. The belief that God controls everything that happens to us is one of the devil’s biggest inroads into our lives. If this belief is true, then our actions are irrelevant, and our efforts are meaningless. Whatever will be will be.

If we believe that God wills everything—good or bad—that happens to us, it gives us some temporary relief from confusion and condemnation, but in the long term, it slanders God, hinders our trust in Him, and leads to passiveness.

True Meaning of God's Sovereignty

The word sovereign is not used in the King James Version of the Bible. It is used 303 times in the Old Testament of the New International Version, but it is always used in association with the word “Lord” and is the equivalent of the King James Version’s “Lord God.” Not a single one of those times is the word sovereign used in the manner commonly taught in religion today.

Religion has invented a new meaning for the word sovereign, suggesting that God controls everything and nothing can happen apart from His will or permission. However, there is nothing in the actual definition that states that. Here’s how the dictionary defines sovereign: “1. Paramount; supreme. 2. Having supreme rank or power. 3. Independent: a sovereign state. 4. Excellent.” None of these definitions means that God controls everything.

God's Will and Human Freedom

It is often assumed that since God is paramount or supreme, nothing can happen without His approval. That is not what the Scriptures teach. In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter said, “The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” This clearly states that it is not the Lord’s will for anyone to perish, but people are perishing.

Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:13-14). Relatively few people are saved compared to the number who are lost. God’s will for people concerning salvation is not being accomplished.

This is because the Lord gave us the freedom to choose. He doesn’t will anyone into hell. He paid for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2 & 1 Tim. 4:10), but we must choose to put our faith in Christ and receive His salvation. People are the ones choosing hell by not choosing Jesus as their Savior. It is the free will of man that damns them, not God.

Free Will's Role in Our Lives

People virtually have to climb over the roadblocks that God puts in their way to continue on their course to hell. The cross of Christ and the drawing power of the Holy Spirit are obstacles that every sinner encounters. No one will ever stand before God and be able to fault Him for withholding the opportunity to be saved. The Lord woos every person to Him, but we have to cooperate. Ultimately, the Lord simply enforces the consequences of people's own choices.

God has a perfect plan for every person's life (Jer. 29:11), but He doesn't make us walk that path. We are free moral agents with the ability to choose. He has told us what the right choices are (Deut. 30:19), but He doesn't make those choices for us. God gave us the power to control our destinies.

Misinterpretations of Divine Control

Typical teaching on the sovereignty of God puts Jesus in the driver's seat with us as passengers. On the surface, that looks good. All of us have encountered the disastrous results of doing our own thing. We desire to be led of the Lord, and the idea that nothing happens outside God's will fits that desire nicely. However, the Scriptures paint a picture of each of us being behind the wheel of our own lives. We are the ones doing the driving. We are supposed to take directions from the Lord, but He doesn't do the driving for us.

People have been given authority over their own lives, but they must have the Lord's direction to succeed. Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." God created us to be dependent upon Him, and our independence is at the root of all our problems. As if it weren't bad enough for man to try to run his affairs independently of God and His standards, religion has made it even worse by teaching that all our problems are actually blessings from God. This is a faith killer and makes people totally passive.

Actively Resisting the Devil

James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." This verse makes it clear that some things are from God, and some are from the devil. We must submit to the things that are of God and resist the things that are from the devil. The word resist means to actively fight against. Saying "Whatever will be, will be" is not actively fighting against the devil.

If a person really believes that God is the one who puts sickness on them because He is trying to work something for good in their life, then they should not go to the doctor or take any medicine.

That would be resisting God's plans. They should let any sickness run its course and thereby get the full benefit of God's correction. Of course, no one advocates that. That is absurd. It is even more absurd to believe that God is the one behind the tragedy.

Acts 10:38 says that Jesus healed all who were oppressed OF THE DEVIL. It was not God who oppressed them with sickness. It was the devil. It's the same today. Sickness is from the devil, not from God. We need to resist sickness and, by faith, submit ourselves to healing, which is from God through the atonement of Christ.

Understanding God's Role in Hardships

I know someone is thinking, "what about the Old Testament instances where God smote people with sickness and plagues?" There is a lot I could say about that if I had the space, but a simplified answer to that question is that none of those instances were blessings. They were curses. God did use sickness in the Old Testament as punishment, but in the New Testament, Jesus bore our curse for us (Gal. 3:13). The Lord would no more put sickness on a New Testament believer than He would make us commit a sin. Both forgiveness of sin and healing are part of the atonement Jesus provided for us.

Deuteronomy 28 should forever settle this question for all who believe the Word of God. The first fourteen verses of Deuteronomy 28 list the blessings of God, and the last fifty-four verses list the curses of God. Sickness is listed as a curse (Deut. 28:22, 27–28, 35, and 59–61). God called sickness a curse. We should not call it a blessing.

Recognizing God's True Nature

Knowing that God is not the author of my problems is one of the most important revelations the Lord has ever given me. If I thought it was God who killed my father when I was twelve and some of my best friends before I was twenty, if it were God who had people kidnap me, slander me, threaten to kill me, and turn loved ones against me, then I would have a hard time trusting God, if He were like that.

On the contrary, it is very comforting to know that God only has good things in store for me. Any problems in my life are from the devil, of my own making, or just the results of life on a fallen planet. My heavenly Father has never done me any harm and never will. I KNOW that.

Learning from Hardships, Not Embracing Them

I am not saying that there is nothing to learn from hardships. Most of you reading this article have come to the Lord because of something in your life that overwhelmed you and caused you to turn to the Lord for help. That situation was not from God, regardless of the results. It was you turning to the Lord and the faith you placed in Him that turned your life around, not the hardship.

If hardships and problems made us better, then everyone who has had problems would be better for them. Those who have the most trouble would be the best. That simply is not so.

Personal Story of Understanding God's Guidance

Let me illustrate this with a story about my son Joshua. When he was only a year old, I was loading lumber on a large truck in the heat of a Texas summer. I had Joshua with me, and he was having a big time playing in the lumber yard. By mid-afternoon, he was tired and sleepy and started to lie down in the dirt for a nap. I knew his mother wouldn't like that, so I put him in the cab of the truck to lie down and take his nap.

He had been wanting to get into that truck all day, and when I put him in there, he revived. I had to roll the windows down because it was hot, and Joshua was leaning out the windows and waving at me in the side-view mirrors. I told him to lie down and even gave him a spanking, but he didn't take heed. He leaned out the window too far, fell out of the cab, hit his eye on the running board, and landed on his head.

God's Intentions and Human Interpretations

I ran up to him, prayed over him, and held him until he quit crying. Then I told him that this was why I told him to lie down and go to sleep and not lean out the window. I used that situation, which caused him pain, to teach him, but if Joshua had been like the sovereignty teachers of today, he would have gone out and told all his friends that his father made him fall out of that truck to teach him to obey. That's not so. I did what I could to restrain him. I would be very hurt if that's the way Joshua thought I was.

Likewise, I don't believe it blesses our heavenly Father for us to blame Him for all the problems that come into our lives. Sure, He will comfort us when we turn to Him in the midst of our problems, but He doesn't create the negative circumstances that hurt our lives.

Embracing God's True Sovereignty

God is sovereign in the sense that He is paramount and supreme. There is no one higher in authority or power, but that does not mean He exercises His power by controlling everything in our lives. God has given us the freedom to choose. He has a plan for us. He seeks to reveal that plan to us and urge us in that direction, but we choose. He

doesn't make our choices for us.

In many instances, it is our wrong choices that bring disaster upon us. In other cases, our problems are nothing but an attack from the devil. In some cases, natural forces of an imperfect world cause us pain. Our tragedies are never the judgment or correction of God. Jesus came to give us abundant life. The devil came to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Don't ever get that confused. If it's good, it's God. If it's bad, it's the devil.

Clarifying a Fundamental Doctrine

This is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity that must be understood properly if you want victory in your life. Believing that God controls everything renders a person passive. Why pray and believe for something better? Whatever God wants will come to pass. That simply is not true.

The Lord is the answer to all our problems. He is not the problem.