

# Whatever Comes to Pass

## *A Personal Pilgrimage Toward God's Sovereignty*

By Brian Godawa

Okay, so I've been a Christian for a long time and I've pretty much always believed that God is "sovereign" over all. You know, creator and sustainer of all things (whatever that means), right? But there is no way that God *predestines or decrees all things*, especially the evil men do. I mean, if God decrees *absolutely* everything, including what man does and chooses, that would make God a puppet master and us his soulless puppets unjustly punished for what we could not have done otherwise. That would violate our Free Will. Worse yet, if God predestined any evil that occurs in the world, that would make God the author of sin. No. God creates us with free will. We are self-determined in that the choices we make in our lives, including the most precious choice of all—whether or not to exercise faith in God—is up to us. God may woo us, He may influence and guide us, even protect us and take care of us, but the ultimate decision is up to us. God will never violate our "free will." This what I used to believe.

But not any longer.

God took me through a process of what I can only describe as dying to my self in a more comprehensive sense than I have ever experienced. I can best liken it to what Elisabeth Kubler-Ross defined as the five stages of death. In her book, *On Death and Dying* she explains that when patients are told they have a terminal illness, they often display common patterns of reaction that proceed through to a conclusion. At first the patient is in **denial**. They refuse to accept the fact that they are dying. As the truth sets in, the patient displays **anger**. They lash out at others or themselves. Then they begin **bargaining**, or trying to find a way out, a loophole to death. When they see that they cannot win, they fall into **depression**, until they ultimately end in **acceptance** of their terminal condition. Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. While I certainly do not consider Kubler-Ross's New Age metaphysical and religious views of the afterlife as worthy of any respect, I cannot help but acknowledge that there is a certain empirical veracity to her five-stage model. It is not absolute and it is subject to the Bible, but this pattern can often be observed in human behavior. The reason why I bring this up is because I think the five stages are a good analogy for what happened to me. As I struggled with the doctrine of God's sovereignty and predestination, I went through a process of dying to my self. A process where I tried to grasp onto my terminally ill idea of autonomous "free will," and in so doing, experienced those five stages of death until I yielded to what I now understand as the true Biblical definition of God's sovereignty and predestination.

I believe that God's sovereignty is biblically defined as His decree of "whatever comes to pass"; which includes all the acts and choices —both good and evil—of every single human being, as well as every single event that occurs, down to the smallest quantum fluctuation. This is what is meant by such references as

*...we have been predestined according to His purpose, who works all things after the counsel of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)*

and

*In Him, all things hold together (Colossians 1:17)*

and

*In Him we live and move and exist. (Acts 17:28)*

This is a doctrine that, similar to the Trinity, is quintessential to understanding God, and yet, like the Trinity, is more assumed and inferred throughout Scripture than it is systematically spelled out. And it is this doctrine that when yielded to, brought about a brokenness and closeness to God that I had never experienced; a connection with Him that many seek through ecstatic experience or signs and wonders, and yet for me was found through simple submission to doctrinal revelation of God's own character.

---

**Definition: God's Sovereignty**

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will,  
freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...

*Westminster Confession, III:1*

and

[God] works all things after the counsel of His will.

*Ephesians 1:11*

---

I had always considered myself to be governed by the Scriptures. Only the Bible was my absolute test of truth, not experience, or some other man-made standard. If the Scripture said it, I believed it and that settled it. Or did it? I was soon to discover that while I gave lip service to this priority of God's revelation, and even submitted to it to a certain degree, I came to realize that my submission was not quite complete. I was still holding on to a certain degree of my own control over God in my life. My clinging to the notion of *free will*, most commonly defined as having some degree of autonomy from God's control, was in fact, an area of unyielded disobedience to God. And most important of all, my pilgrimage toward the doctrine of God's sovereignty and predestination is not *merely* an academic exercise or intellectual examination of a doctrine, but *also* a moral part of my personal relationship to God.

---

**Definition: *Autonomy / Autonomous***

Not controlled by others or by outside forces; independent: Self-ruled.

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*

---

## **A Word About Doctrine**

Doctrine is the basis or foundation of our relationship with God. It's our only way of knowing whether our personal experience of God is the real thing or whether it is a self-delusion or demonic deception. In **1John 4:1-2**, we are told to test the spirits to see if they are from God. And what is the test? Is it that we "have peace" about them? Is it that we speak in tongues or perform miracles? No. The test for spiritual veracity is *doctrine*. Confessing Jesus as coming in the flesh.

In **Deuteronomy 13:1-3** God forewarns his people that prophets and dreamers will arise who even perform signs and wonders. Yet, if they teach a different *doctrine* of who God is, we are to avoid them. And of course, even Satan and his minions can disguise themselves as angels of light, who can only be discerned through doctrinal differentiation (**2Cor 11:14-15**).

---

**Definition: *Doctrine***

A principle or body of principles presented for acceptance or belief. Dogma.

*American Heritage Dictionary*

or

Teaching which is taught with authority.

*Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*

---

Doctrine is a barometer of how well we know God personally. So the doctrines we hold are personal *moral* choices, not mere intellectual ones. Many Christians scoff at rigorous debate of doctrine. They feel that it amounts to intellectual parlor games. Dry, dead, "head knowledge" without "heart knowledge." And you know, sometimes it can be. Sometimes Christians can be the most petty divisive-spirited egoists who just can't get along with you unless you believe every blooming little thing they believe, down to the jot and tittle. Or even worse, we get upset and take disagreement personally, getting all heated up and hostile out of our own insecurity. I know. I've done it myself. And hey, if we're all honest about it, haven't we all? This side of glory, we've got a lot of sanctifying to do.

Anyway, I understand how doctrinal conformity can be abused, but unfortunately, it cannot be escaped. *Everyone* believes in doctrine. Even those who *don't* believe in doctrine believe in doctrine. You know the saying; "No creed but Christ. No doctrine but the Bible." Well, that's all fine and dandy. Except

these phrases are meaningless terms until defined – and as soon as you define what you mean by Christ and the Bible, you have just expressed *doctrine*. You’ve differentiated how you define the terms from how others define them. Is Christ an Eastern avatar like the New Agers believe or a Postmodern construct created by western minds like the Jesus Seminar believes? Or is he the Son of God? And what do you mean by Son of God? Son of God Like the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons believe?” I think you can see where this is going. We all differentiate the details of our beliefs from others and this is our doctrine. So God differentiates Himself from false notions of who He is through doctrinal revelation. And one of the most primary of all doctrines of God is His sovereignty.

## Denial

I had a friend who was one of those rabid “Reformed” believers, you know the dirty word: Calvinist. He would hound me with Bible verses like, “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and evil come forth?” (**Lamentations 3:37**), and, “God works all things after the counsel of His will” (**Ephesians 1:11**). Well, I had studied the issues over the years enough to know that I was what you call an “Arminian.” Arminianism is what much of evangelical Christianity is these days, whether it thinks so or not. It’s basically the belief that man has free will to such an extent that God is involved in history and can certainly do great and mighty things, but He does not determine or predestine *every* act of man. Rather, the will of man is a separate sphere from God’s will. God may influence man, but he does not control man’s decisions. In contrast, the Reformed understanding of God and man is such that God determines all things, even the will of man, yet not in such a way that man is not responsible for his actions. For those of you familiar with the “Five Points of Calvinism,” you will know that this is only the beginning of a disagreement that leads to additional serious conflict over the Gospel itself, but that is another paper altogether. Some day, I’ll tell that story.

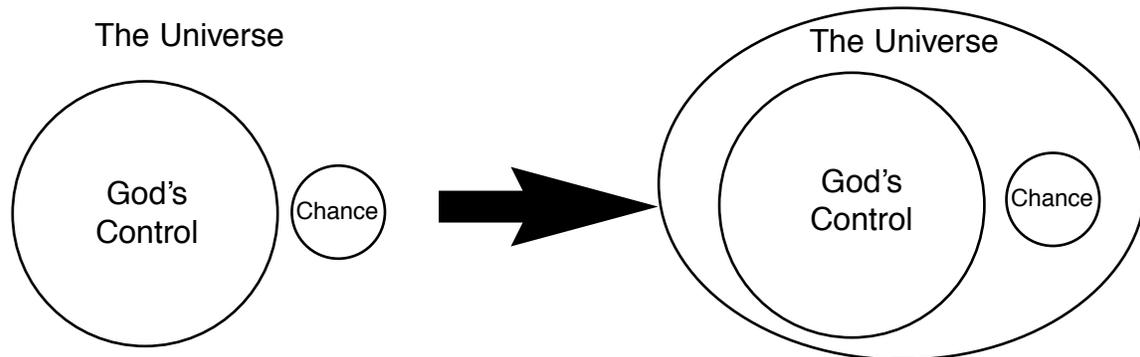
Well after a few months of writing our arguments back and forth about man’s free will versus God’s predestination and other Calvinist/Arminian issues, I decided to write a book about it. I called it *A Layman Looks at Calvinism*, and it was three hundred and thirty pages of my attempt to discount the Five Points of Calvinism. And I must say, it was pretty darned good, too. I looked up the greek meanings of words, I exegeted many Scriptures. No fluffy “Christian Living” babble here. I even analyzed passages that seemed to mitigate against my view and deconstructed them, with the intent of leaving no stone unturned. I was a rabid Arminian.

And I was wrong on all five counts.

## How it All Began: Chance and Sovereignty

I had to face it. Scriptures of predestination, foreordination and the like had always haunted me, but I ignored those or desperately reinterpreted them for many years to relieve the pressure they put on my intellect and soul. But I first started admitting God’s complete sovereignty in my apologetics. As I was defending the faith to unbelievers, I was slowly facing the fact that the only nature of God that I could defend against the random chance of atheism or the limited deism of other beliefs like Hinduism or Mormonism was a God who literally decrees *all things* in the universe– from every physical law of

science to every volitional act of man. And there can be no such thing as “chance”—that is, random events without causes or things occurring apart from the purposeful intent of God. I like the way R.C. Sproul puts it. If there is one renegade molecule in the universe that is outside of God’s control, then that molecule thwarts God’s wil—by definition. And worse yet, it may destroy God, because if it is outside God’s control then God is not all-powerful (there is something He cannot control) and if he is not all-powerful then he *can* be destroyed. And what more qualified to do the destroying than that renegade molecule that God cannot control? I think of it graphically like this:



If there is anything that is outside of God’s control, like chance, then God is not ultimate. There is something bigger than God, that includes *both* God’s control *and* chance. God becomes a subset of a larger set including them both. This is what is called in philosophy, *the problem of unity and diversity*. Two opposing forces cannot both be ultimate because they will cancel each other out. There can only be one infinite ultimate force in the universe. *Two* opposite ultimates are finite. And finite forces must be subsumed in an infinite force because finiteness cannot be ultimate. There must be something bigger than both opposing forces that unifies them and includes both of them within its parameters. You may have heard of this in relation to physics. The quest for a “grand unified theory” or a “theory of everything” is the quest to somehow find a more ultimate unifying force *behind* the two known opposing forces of Newtonian Mechanics and Quantum Mechanics.

According to the Bible, there is no chance in an ultimate sense. Sure, in a sense, ***“time and chance overtakes all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).”*** But this is from the perspective of man without God in his life. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes is showing man’s pessimistic observations and conclusions when he does not see the big picture of life from God’s perspective. Chance is merely a word for man’s ignorance, not for ultimate reality. King Solomon, giving us God’s perspective, says,

***“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. (Proverbs 16:33).”***

Throwing lots in the ancient Middle East was a game of chance, much like throwing dice today. So Solomon is specifically referring to what most of us would consider as “chance” occurrences to illustrate that God is the determiner of all outcomes, indeed, even the most seemingly unimportant “chance” events like throwing lots or dice. This notion should forever dispel the belief in “luck.” We are not *lucky*, we are *blessed*. “Luck” is just another word for an impersonal force of randomness without

purpose that we are at the mercy of. To believe in luck is idolatry, because it is deity that ultimately determines outcomes, and God says we should have no other deities in His presence.

This absolute determination is precisely what Jesus is echoing when he says,

***“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).”***

The context of this analogy is not merely that God *cares* for us, but that there are no chance occurrences outside of His providence. You see, if God only *cares* about sparrows falling to the ground but is not actually *involved* in their descent, then His care amounts to impotent sentiment, and those “chance” events become reasons for fear. Jesus is making an argument from the lesser to the greater. If the lesser sufferings of a sparrow are in God’s providential control, then the greater sufferings of his children are even more so. It is only because His will governs *all things* that we can find any meaning whatsoever in *anything*, especially in suffering.

A great book to read about the irrational notion of “chance” versus God’s sovereignty is *Not a Chance* by R.C. Sproul.

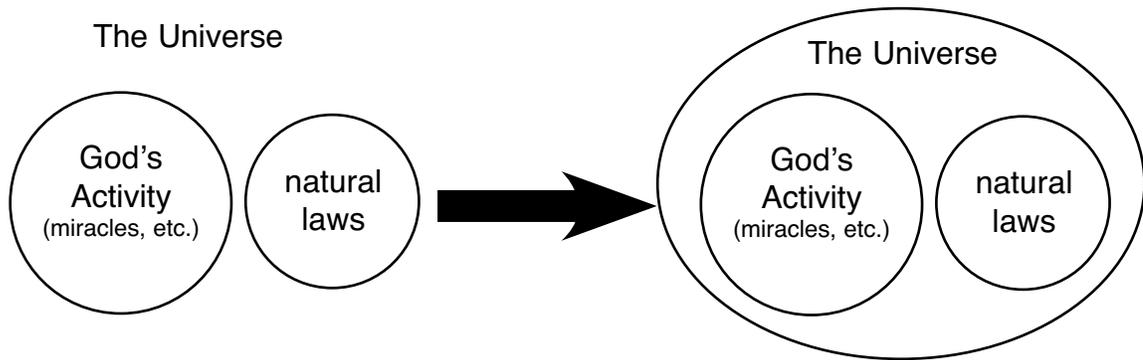
## **Natural Laws and Sovereignty**

Speaking of the physical laws of the universe, I also had a Deist notion of the universe without knowing it. Deism is the belief that some (unknowable) god wound up the universe like a clock and let it run without his interference. According to this worldview, there are no miracles because god does not violate natural and physical laws. Yes, he exists, but he doesn’t interfere. The astute observer will recognize that there is no difference between this god existing and no God existing at all. If this god is not necessary to the workings of our reality here and now, then he is not necessary at all. Worse yet, he is irrelevant.

I thought that I was opposed to this centuries-old anti-supernatural worldview, but I really wasn’t. You see, I didn’t believe that God left us alone. No, God did, from time to time, perform miracles by violating natural laws to achieve His purposes, right? Like the miracles of the Red Sea and the Resurrection, right?

Wrong.

The only difference between my belief and the Deist position was mere degree, not essence. It was in fact a limited Deism, but a Deism nonetheless. If we believe that there are natural laws, such as logic or physics, that *exist apart from God’s active operations* and he “violates” them to perform miracles, then we are saying that natural laws exist and continue *on their own power*, apart from God. God is no longer the sustainer of all things. Not only that, but God is no longer infinite in his power because there is something that exists and sustains itself outside of His power, namely, these natural laws. And you’re right back to the problem of there being something capable of thwarting God’s will. A graphic would be helpful here to make the point.



As you can see, if there are natural laws that exist and are sustained outside of God’s activity, then God is not infinite in His power and there is something bigger than Him, namely, the set, called *the Universe*, including both God’s operations within the universe and the operations of natural laws. *Our understanding of “natural laws” must be that they are simply expressions of God’s uniform activity in the universe.*

I used to think that it was ludicrous to assert that God pulls every apple that falls to the ground. No! I said, God creates a natural law called gravity that does the work. When He wants to violate gravity to rapture us to heaven, then He can do so because He is the creator of that law and can therefore transcend it. But now I realize that God *does in fact* pull every apple that falls to the ground and in an ultimate sense, there is no such thing as Natural Law —at least in the sense of something that exists apart from God’s control and power. Natural Law is merely a scientific euphemism for *God’s uniform activities in the universe*. In the philosophy of science, this is called *the uniformity of nature*. Words like “gravity” and “electromagnetism” are not *explanations* of physical phenomena, they are *descriptions* of the regularity we observe; behind which is the regular acting and sustaining power of God.

A miracle then, is not a *violation* of natural laws, as if God is acting contrary to something that exists apart from Him. No. Miracles are merely God’s *non-uniform* activity meant to inspire us with awe. He normally *uniformly* pulls all apples to the ground, but at the Second Coming, He’s gonna pull us to his side! No “violation,” just a change in activity. What a mighty God I serve.

I guess I never had a problem believing that God controls some natural events, like catastrophes. I just didn’t face up to the fact that He controls *all* natural events. And that means *all* as in *all*, you know, everything. I simply cannot ignore or deny Scripture verses like these:

***“If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it? (Amos 3:6)***

or,

***“I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. (Isaiah 45:7)***

But I tried to interpret these as only referring to singular incidents, certainly not *every* incident. That was for natural laws to take care of, right? Wrong again. The verses I avoided very clearly spoke of God being the literal causative force behind every so-called “law of nature.” Colossians 1:16-17 says,

***“For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities —all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”***

When the Apostle speaks of God creating all things visible and invisible, he is not referring to merely molecular structures or earthly and heavenly beings but to anything that acts with authority. Logic is invisible and is an authority. When we use our reason, we are appealing to invisible authority. We say “A” cannot be “non-A.” Something cannot be both true and false. And we can say this only on the assumption that God is everywhere in the universe at all times *keeping* A from being non-A, keeping true opposite from false. And so it is with the laws of nature as well. Laws of nature and logic are *invisible* authorities over our universe. And lest anyone think any one of these “laws” of logic or nature can sustain itself by its own power, Paul concludes that all things hold together by God’s direct intervention. The fact that we don’t explode into dissolving atoms right now is a law of physics that is simply an expression of God’s sustaining power. We call the binding force that keeps things together, “gravity.” But really it is God who is the glue to the universe, in whom “all things hold together,” not some impersonal force (gravity) that is sustained on its own power. God is the ultimate active agent behind the uniformity of nature in the universe.

***“In Him we live and move and exist.” (Acts 17:28)***

When Paul is talking to the Greek philosophers here on Mars Hill, he quotes one of their own poets to show that they had a distorted yet somewhat-true understanding of God’s power. The immanence (“within”) of Greek thought held that God was pantheistically in all of us, whereas Paul was antithetically pointing out the Christian idea of God being transcendent (“apart from”), yet intimately involved in our every atom. The Greeks were concerned with the idea of motion and how it relates to natural law. Aristotle was famous for philosophically reducing God to “the Unmoved Mover” as an explanation for the existence of motion, the primary physical law. Aristotle taught that causality is rooted in a First Cause of all things. But this is that Deist notion of God I wrote of earlier that God gets the ball rolling and then the ball rolls on its own momentum. Paul stresses that all motion is governed by God — that is, all physical laws, every movement we make, every breath we take, is “in” God’s providential control. God is pulling every apple that falls to the ground.

Another reference to God’s providential activity behind all natural laws is found in his comfort to Noah after the flood:

***“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:22)***

This is another way of saying that the scientific uniformity of nature is God’s hand. For God’s promise is not mere crystal ball-gazing — passively foreseeing the future— it is His certainty of action.

## Free Will and Sovereignty

In a way, I always thought I believed God was “in control.” You know, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” I have always believed that nothing could thwart His purposes. But my understanding of this sovereign control was actually a *limited sovereignty*. Yes, God was in control, but this control was not *truly* absolute, a control that included even my own will and decisions. No, this control was more like the control of the strongest man in the room. We all have free will, the ability to choose and do apart from anyone else’s will, and God’s will just happens to be the biggest, strongest most powerful will in the room (that is, the universe). So when He wants to do something, since He is the strongest, no one can thwart that will. No one can stop Him. This kind of sovereignty is similar to a king over his kingdom. He has “authority” over us, but we freely operate within His kingdom apart from Him. And every once in a while he makes his appearance to achieve some goal of His or enforces a law he has made, but he certainly does not manipulate his vassals like puppets on strings.

Again, I could not have been more wrong.

Now, free will is a tricky issue. There are many definitions and there are many men far more intelligent than I who have tackled the subject. But in terms of my own personal story, I would have to say that I originally believed that man has a will that is autonomously free from all external forces. That is, nothing outside of man’s own volition can make him do anything. Sure, external forces, like the environment or other people or God could influence him through pressure and other means, but such outside forces could never be the ultimate *cause* of his choices. Only *man* can choose to sin or to exercise faith in God. And not even God will violate this freedom He gives us. This is the notion of *self-determination*. So God might woo us to Him; He might orchestrate events all around us to point us in a direction; He might even enlighten us, or open our eyes to the truth of something—but He will never, no never, *make us* do anything. The final choice is up to us. And wouldn’t that make sense? Because after all, if anyone or anything outside of ourself makes us do something, then we are not free, and certainly not responsible for our actions. We are mere pawns or victims in someone else’s perverse universe. I’ve heard the concept of God’s Election of believers expressed in the metaphor of a voting election: God casts his vote for us, Satan casts his vote for us and we cast the deciding vote as to who will win in our lives.

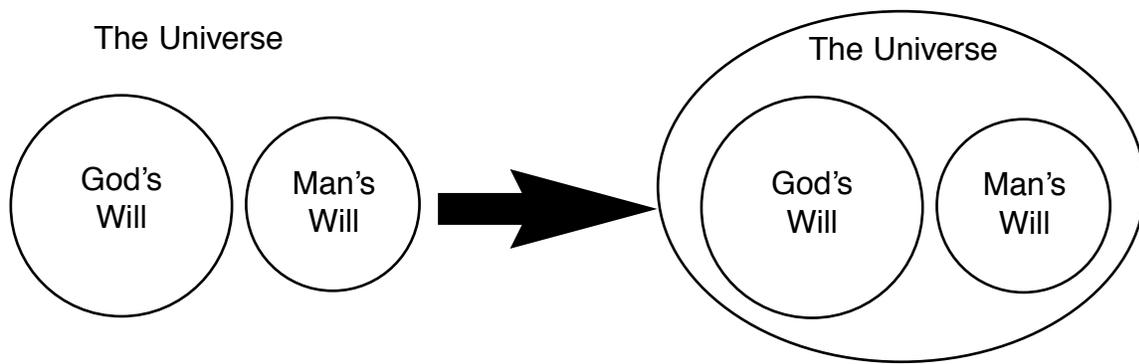
---

### **Traditional Definition: *Free Will***

Man is self-determined in that his choices are ultimately determined by him alone, outside of the control of God. Man is the final determiner of his choices.

---

But herein lies the problem. If we have a will that is free from the control or determination of God, then that means our wills are outside the control of God. And that leads us to the graphic visual again:



As you can see, if man's will is not within the parameters of God's control, then God is not all-powerful, for there is something outside of His will. And God is not infinite because there is something that is bigger than God's will that includes both subsets of God's will and man's will.

## 5 Billion Free Wills?

And what's more, if you really think about it, if God is not in control of man's "free will," then that means God is not in control of the 5 billion free wills on planet earth, which pretty much reduces God's involvement in history to *nothing*. Nil, zip, zero, nada. That's right. Since historic events are the actions of free wills choosing and acting, and God does not violate man's so-called free will, then God cannot ensure that any event will happen, because to do so would necessitate His violation of this so-called autonomous free will of man. So God could not be involved in any events that occur in our history.

I used to think that God would not violate my autonomous free will, but could orchestrate events and circumstances around me in order to guide me without forcing me. Sound familiar? For example, God may not make me believe in Him, but he could orchestrate events in my life in order to woo me to Him. Maybe my best friend could be murdered, I could be in a near death auto crash, and I might lose all my money in a bad stock market deal—all in order to get me to face my own mortality and influence me to consider my need for His saving grace. But ultimately, my choice of how I respond to God is up to me. God orchestrates events around me, but He doesn't orchestrate me. This is what I meant when I said God works all things together for the good, or that God is in control.

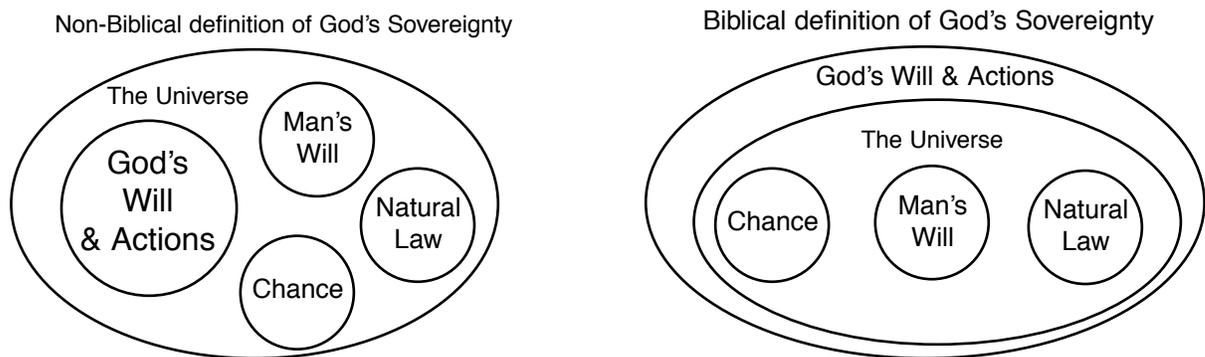
But alas, in order for God to be involved in any of those events, He would have to violate the "free will" autonomy of hundreds if not thousands and millions of other people in order to keep from violating my "free will" autonomy. He would have to somehow make sure that my best friend die by making sure that the murderer do his deed at just the right time in my life; He would have to make that other person swerve in their car to hit me and manipulate the crash in such a way to make sure I would not die; and he would have to make sure a million other people make a million plus decisions throughout a period of many years, that would work it out just perfectly to crash on top of my stockmarket choice at this point in history.

Do you see the interconnection of all things? For God to be involved in any *single* historic event, He would have to be involved in *all* historic events, including the choices of human beings or He could not be in ultimate control. God could *hope* that something might happen, but He could never be sure that

it could. “Events” is just another word for *other people’s decisions and actions in history*; so in order for God to orchestrate events in my life without controlling my “free” will, God would have to violate everyone else’s “free” will in order to bring about their events that influence me. See the contradiction? In order for any of us to be free from God’s control, and yet God be involved in the events or circumstances of our lives, everyone else would have to be within God’s control.

Sorry. It’s all or nothing stakes. Winner takes all. Either God is in control of all things—even the wills of men—or He is in control of nothing. He’s just another limited being in this universe fighting for His way, and not always getting it, because after all, even though he is the “biggest” will in the room, we are still “free” from Him and therefore have wills that are more ultimate than His will. This common notion of “free will” reduces God to an Inquisitor who can torture and torment man to confess, but it’s ultimately up to the man whether he will confess, not the Inquisitor. God is not all-powerful because he simply does not have power over man’s will.

You can see this best described in the graphic below:



As you can see, if we add up all the ideas of chance, natural law and man’s will that I have been discussing, the notion of God’s omnipotent sovereignty becomes clearer. The left side shows what the idea of God’s control looks like if these aforementioned aspects of the universe are outside of God’s active hand. We have a universe that is so much bigger than God, which includes many other things in addition to God’s will and His actions as to reduce Him to a mere active agent in a Universe that is bigger than Him. But on the right side is the Biblical idea of God’s will encompassing all things in the universe, including man’s will and natural laws and what we call “chance.”

This diagram illustrates that even though man’s will and natural laws are *within* God’s will, they are not therefore unreal or merely reducible to some other force, namely, God’s will. No, they are real in and of themselves. It’s like this: Man’s will and natural laws are *proximate* causes of events, but God’s will is the ultimate *remote* cause. He operates in such a way that His will does not negate these forces, but merely orders them within the parameters of *His* purposes. And He does it in such a way that man is still responsible for what he does, yet everything man does is within God’s control. How He does this is a mystery. But He does it.

***The mind of man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)***

*Man's steps are {ordained} by the LORD. (Prov 20:24)*

*Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Thy book they were all written,  
The days that were ordained {for me} , When as yet there was not one of them. (Psalms  
139:16)*

## Anger

### Five Billion Puppets?

As I began to see that the God I was defending in my apologetics was not the God of the Bible, but a God I had tried to circumscribe within my parameters of “free will,” I began to get angry. I began to react against this notion of God that was intruding in upon my reasoning and Bible reading. I became what I thought was “righteously indignant.” I mean, after all, if God is predestining *all* things, we’ve got some real problems. Number one, that makes us all puppets (As if the claim that mankind being puppets was somehow self-evidently wrong). Number two, If God ordains all things, including evil, that would make God the author of evil! And number three, it wouldn’t be fair for God to punish us if we were all simply doing what He made us do anyway (another variation of the first two problems).

But I began to reconsider.

I used to read verses that relate God’s sovereignty, like the ones above and Romans 9 with an immediate reaction of, “But man must have free will, so however you interpret these passages, you can’t negate man’s free will.” I would read in Isaiah 10 that Assyria was the rod of God’s anger. That their raping, pillaging and plundering of Israel was *God’s hand* of chastisement. At least that’s the way the text puts it. “But that can’t negate man’s free will thought I. Therefore...” Yeah, okay, Proverbs says, “Man’s steps are ordained by the Lord,” but God doesn’t violate man’s free will! Therefore...”

Wait a minute! Stop the presses.

I began to realize that the priority I had made out of my understanding of free will was supreme. It was my ultimate condition through which I interpreted all Scripture and theology. Anything I read that indicated God’s sovereign control was always qualified by the higher priority of man’s free will. My free will was my ultimate, not God’s will. This condition I put on my theological interpretation was arbitrary. Worse, it was idolatry. By making “free will” the ultimate reference point for interpreting the Scriptures rather than God’s will, I had made man’s will an idol. Something other than the power of God was my absolute for interpretation. Why should I think that man’s free will was the ultimate qualification of interpreting the Bible? Why not the other way around? Why not interpret everything the Bible says about man’s responsibility with the qualification that God’s will controlled all? No matter what I read about man’s moral accountability for his actions, I should always remember that whatever he does, he is still not out of God’s control. God is still somehow sovereignly ordaining these acts that man does. And doesn’t that make more sense? God should always be the ultimate condition or qualification in any interpretation, not man. Man is not ultimate, God is. So God’s will should be given ultimate priority in our interpretations of the Bible as well as our own lives. As you can see, my change in understanding was not

mere intellectual assent to doctrine, it was repentance, because I had made an idol out of my own will. I had worshipped a false god by placing “free will” as an interpreting principle over God’s will.

Mea culpa. God forgive me.

But the idolatry goes much deeper. What if the Bible *did* say we were all puppets? Was I willing to come to the text of the Scripture and truly submit to whatever it says, even if I don’t like it? Even if it doesn’t fit with my personal demands of what should be? Which authority is higher, my understanding or the Bible? So what if we’re all puppets in God’s big game. Can’t the Creator of the universe do whatever he wants with that universe, and who am I to say? If God wanted to create the universe and make us all puppets, doesn’t He have the right to do so? I submit that a child of God so adores his Maker that a universe of puppets does not concern him —if that’s the way things are—if that’s what the Bible says —if that’s what God wants. Let the Scriptural facts lead you.

***But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. (Psalms 115:3)***

As a matter of fact, I don’t think that the Bible says we are puppets *in that* we are without personal responsibility or individual value. But it does say we are puppets in the sense that God is still behind the scenes, “pulling the strings,” in ultimate control of all. Read the following text with this ultimate reference point of God’s control, not man’s will, and see how it expresses that no matter what man does, God is still the ultimate cause of everything that happens:

***“With Him are strength and sound wisdom, The misled and the misleader belong to Him. “He makes counselors walk barefoot, And makes fools of judges. “He loosens the bond of kings, And binds their loins with a girdle. “He makes priests walk barefoot, And overthrows the secure ones. “He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. “He pours contempt on nobles, And loosens the belt of the strong. “He reveals mysteries from the darkness, And brings the deep darkness into light. “He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away. “He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth’s people, And makes them wander in a pathless waste. “They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man. (Job 12:16-25)***

If this isn’t a litany of free will-denying language, I don’t know what is. The rise and fall of great men, of good and evil rulers, is attributed to God’s will, not man’s will. What makes a nation—full of people— great, but their *choices and actions*? What destroys a nation —of people—but another nation—of people, or their own *choices and actions*? Yet, the text does not grant ultimacy to man’s choices in the process, but rather to God who makes nations great and destroys them. This is not to deny man’s actions or choices as real, but merely to make God the more ultimate will behind all of man’s will.

## **Romans 9**

But you know, the most powerful Scriptures that brought me to my knees with tearful repentance from free-willism was Romans 9 and Job 37-42.

In the first part of Romans 9, Paul addresses the very issue of God choosing a group of people (Israel) and how that people consists of a mixture of true and false *individual* children of God. He explains that some individuals are chosen for salvation and others for damnation. He analogizes this election through his love and hatred of the *individuals* Jacob and Esau. Paul goes out of his way to emphasize that God's love for those He elects to be His children is entirely without reference to man's will or choice in the matter. And to prove it, he writes that this choice of God's occurs before man could ever will anything.

***for though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to {His} choice might stand... Romans 9:11***

The instant reaction that I would have to this truth was that if the choice is entirely up to God without any reference to man's faith in the process, well then, that seemed unfair. After all, shouldn't we all be given the chance or opportunity to believe? Shouldn't it be up to us whether we want to follow God? Especially if we go to hell by not being chosen! Well, Paul anticipates this reaction. In 9:14 he addresses the very challenge that this election of men by God's prerogative is not fair.

***What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." Romans 9:14***

So the answer to whether it is fair for God to save some and eternally condemn others purely on His purpose without giving man a say in it is this: None of us deserve mercy, so God can give it to whoever he wants because mercy is not a right, or something we earn, it is a privilege given from grace. To call this unfair is ludicrous, because we are not the arbiters of fairness, God is. And if we don't think God's actions are fair, then we are obligated to change *our* definitions to meet *God's* definition, not the other way around.

Then Paul talks about how God raised up Pharaoh for the expressed purpose of illustrating God's own glory. And he did so by hardening Pharaoh's heart in order to bring about God's judgments and deliverances. Now the debate about hardening Pharaoh's heart has been long and tedious. Did Pharaoh harden his own heart first? Did God merely harden what was already a sinner's nature thereby softening God's intrusion into Pharaoh's will? Paul gives a clue to the correct interpretation of this idea by his reference to how the questioner will respond to God's revelation:

***You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" Romans 9:19***

The contextual understanding of Paul's logic is precisely this: that if you understand correctly what he is saying, you will either accept God's total sovereignty or respond that it takes away man's responsibility because responsibility necessitates the ability to resist God's will. "***Why does He still find fault?***" The person Paul is critiquing here believes that if we are to be responsible, our choices must ultimately lie in our own self-determination, not God's determination. We must have *free will*. Do you see how this is the "puppet master" argument? It argues that if we are all puppets of God's will, then how

could we be found guilty of doing what God himself has made us do, “*for who resists His will?*” This Free-willism believes that God’s complete sovereignty takes away man’s autonomous free will and with it, our moral responsibility. This false assumption of man’s absolute free will is what Paul answers.

And his answer changed my life:

***On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? Romans 9:20-21***

The Potter can do whatever he wants with his clay and the clay has no say in the matter. Or to put it another way, the puppet master can do whatever he wants with his puppets, because he made them and he controls them. Clay being formed into pots at the will of the maker is about the most passive metaphor you can use in relation to man’s will being shaped by God’s will (more so than even puppets, I would argue). And if this doesn’t totally destroy the notion of man’s “free will” unconstrained by God’s control I don’t know what does. What’s more, the very act of questioning God’s complete sovereignty is ludicrous, like an inanimate clay pot accusing the animating potter.

But I didn’t get it right away. I simply ignored Romans 9. It became one of my “trouble” passages that I didn’t “quite comprehend.” I suppressed it and focused on other passages in Scripture to try to cover over the clear expression of God’s absolute sovereignty. And this suppression was more than ludicrous. It was downright rebellious. Who was I to question my Maker? The implicit truth here is that questioning God is an act of denying His authority by asserting my own. I did not merely need to change my doctrine, I needed to repent of rebellion!

We must understand that intellectual pursuits, including those of doctrine, are *moral* in their dimension. God is at the heart of everything we do, even our thinking. There is no neutrality. Even in rationality, we are either *for* Him or *against* Him. No middle ground. So to question Him is to be against Him. To doubt the fairness of God is not merely an intellectual dilemma, it is spiritual rebellion. And if you doubt that, just take a look at Job; which we will a little later.

## **The Evil That Men Do**

Number two on the list of angry responses to God’s sovereignty was the problem of evil. Now, every Christian wrestles with the existence of evil and a good God. But Calvinists appear to have a bigger hurdle, because whereas the free will worshippers simply answer that evil is not God’s problem because it originates in man’s will, the Calvinist asserts that even the evil that occurs is somehow within the purview of God’s will. God has predestined whatsoever comes to pass, and whatsoever comes to pass includes the evil acts of men. “But that makes God the author of evil!” I responded with some more of that “righteous indignation.” Or so I thought. Until God opened my eyes to the absolute moral and intellectual inadequacy of free-willism to truly answer the problem of evil as well as the complete adequacy of God’s predestinating sovereignty to account for it.

In as few words as possible, the appeal to “free will” as the answer for the existence of evil is ultimately impotent. To say that evil exists only because man willed it and not also because God ordained it is to say that something occurs — and not merely something, but *many many* things— that are outside of God’s power. God is not infinite or all-powerful because there are things outside of His control and outside of His power and by that definition, can therefore thwart His will, ultimately destroying God Himself. We are right back to those circle graphics that illustrate how God becomes subject to things that are outside of his will and He becomes a subset of something greater than Him that includes His will and man’s will, God’s will and things that foil God’s will.

I used to get angry when I was at funerals or wakes and I heard statements from some of those “heartless” Calvinists who tell people, “It was God’s will,” or, “God has a reason why your son was killed in a car accident,” or murdered or something of the like. “Those idiots!” I would crow, “How dare they attribute such evil to God! God didn’t have that Christian murdered. What kind of barbaric pagan god do they worship anyway? Why, their notion of God is no different than Kali, the creator/destroyer of Hinduism.” It is not God’s will that these Christians suffer and die in such terrible incidents, I would think. It is because of man’s free will and the natural laws and chance. Well, we know where all that leads.

Later, when I submitted to God’s total sovereignty, I soon came to understand that the idea of God who is decreeing or controlling everything that happens in the Universe, even the evil that befalls His precious children, is really the only God we can draw comfort from. For if there are any accidents, or wicked happenings that are not in God’s will or control, then there truly are meaningless, worthless, purposeless events in the world that defy God’s purposes. If it wasn’t God’s will that my Christian friend be murdered, then God was not in control of that Christian’s life and God simply could not make all things work out for the good of him who loved God and was called according to His purpose. God is ultimately impotent in this free will view. Reread Ecclesiastes again to see that the whole thrust of the Preacher is to show that without God behind everything, then life truly is vain. It is only with God behind *everything* that *anything* can be understood to make sense. It is only with God that the events that seem meaningless or despairing can have ultimate meaning, because God has a reason behind it all.

## **Predestination**

Normally, the word “predestination” is used in relation to the Calvinist doctrine of “Unconditional Election,” the Biblical reference to God determining in advance who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. But the term has a wider application in Scripture. It also refers to God’s sovereign determination of any particular event or occurrence as well. It is this wider sense that I will refer to in this section when I use the term *predestination*.

---

### **Definition: *Predestination***

To mark out beforehand. To determine before. To foreordain.

*Vine’s Expository dictionary of NT Words*

---

Now, the thing that really got me the most in relation to this whole idea of God predestining the evil that occurs was found in Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. Imagine if you will the most terrible evil you can conceive. Would it be murder? Child molestation? How about genocide? Gang rape? Torturing babies? Bear with me, here. I know this may sound gruesome. But whatever you say, wouldn't you agree that the worst evil to ever occur in all of history would be the murder of God's own Son? In fact, you could probably add up all the evils of history together and they would not meet the depth of evil of killing the very Son of God. I would think most Christians would sympathize with this.

Now, one thing I had always believed as a Christian was that God certainly predestined the death of Christ, before the foundations of the earth, in order to fulfill His plan to save the lost from sin. So, it wasn't too hard for me to accept the following verses when they proclaimed this predestination of God:

*...this {Jesus} , delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death. Acts 2:23*

*“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. Acts 4:27-28*

“Sure,” I would think. I don't have a problem with that. God predestined the cross of Christ in order to save me from my sins. Jesus is often spoken of as being predestined by God to bring redemption. Jesus is the Chosen one, right? Well, look closer. It is not merely the cross that is predestined by God, it is the *evil acts* of the men who crucified him. The text says that the killers of Christ did whatever *God's hand and purpose predestined* to occur. And it isn't merely a general predestination that *someone* will crucify Christ, it was the specific individuals of Herod and Pontius Pilate, among others. *God predestined the evil done to Christ*. God predestined the worst, most heinous wicked sin in all the universe in all of time. And He somehow predestined the *individual people* who performed the iniquity.

Now, being a Christian, I could not deny this. And it would eventually sink in that if I could accept that God predestined the most evil act of all, one that would be greater than all other evil acts added together, then I had already conceded the argument that God predestines evil. It was only a matter of recognizing the logic of the greater to the lesser. If I admit that God predestines the greater evil, then I have no complaint about Him predestining the lesser evil. It would be utterly irrational for me to say that God predestining His Son's murder (greater evil) was acceptable, but God predestining rapes and holocausts (lesser evils) is foolish. If I accept the greater, I must accept the lesser all the more. Like Paul would say, “How much more...”

And there is more...

## The Hand of God

At first, I was tempted to redefine God's predestination in passive terms. You know, God "foreknows" that this will happen. Kinda like God looking in His crystal ball and seeing that men would do this to Christ, so therefore, He "determines" it. I love the way James White puts it in his book, *The Potter's Freedom* (a must-read defense against Norm Geisler's Arminian *Chosen But Free*): This kind of "predetermination" is like sticking your toe in the water to "determine" that it is cold—entirely passive, entirely observant—and wholly uninvolved. This is basically the Arminian notion of God's predestination being a *foreseeing*, in a passive sense, not a foreordaining in an active sense. I will address this more under my section entitled, "Bargaining," but suffice it to say that I felt this would soften what I thought were the authorial implications of God actively predestining evil, namely that He is then the author of evil.

But there is a big problem for this passive view of predestination. It's not in the text. If you look even closer at the Scriptures above, you will notice that the word "hand" is used in reference to the nefarious deeds mentioned (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). **God's hand** is the one that accomplishes the crucifixion. The hand is an obvious metaphor for *active accomplishment*, not *passive observation*. So the Scriptures specifically deny any passive notion of predestination or "foreseeing" in favor of active working out or "foreordaining" of individual behavior.

This active use of God's hand is also starkly present in the Isaiah 10 passage quoted earlier:

***Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets.... {Then God will say,} "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness." For he has said, "By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did {this,} ...my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest...Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it? {That would be} like a club wielding those who lift it, {Or} like a rod lifting {him who} is not wood. Isaiah 10:5-15***

The Scripture definitively says that the evil bloody acts of rape, pillage and plunder that Assyria does to Israel is *God's Hand*, His active predestinating hand. Yet the King of Assyria will boast thinking it is *his hand* or *his actions* that are ultimate, but he is not ultimate. God is. God is actively determining the evil that is happening. He is not merely "allowing" the evil to occur, or even describing what He foresees happening, His *hand* is actively accomplishing the events.

And just to seal off any escape of rationalization, the metaphor of the axe and club is used by God. Who is passive in the act of axing or clubbing? Is it the hand or the weapon? Obviously, it is the weapon. And the weapon is an analogy for the wicked man. True, the weapon does the damage, but it is described as the passive one in terms of *ultimate causes*. How anyone can get a passive sovereignty out of this active description is beyond me. And boy, you could tell *this* was a passage I avoided at all costs in my Arminian self-righteous free-willism days.

## Fairness: The Issue of Job

Job had held out quite a while in his suffering. But when it finally became too much for him to bear, he did end up asking God, “why?” And here is God’s answer:

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, “Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? “Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”  
Job 37:1-4*

As most of us know, God then asks Job a long series of rhetorical questions like the one above to illustrate the point that the Creator can do whatever he wants with His creation, even mangle it and destroy it. To question your Creator is to try to switch places with Him. Idolatry. The point of it all to me is that *God never gives Job the answer*. The answer to the question of why evil, pain and suffering is, “I’m not going to tell you. You just worship me in awe.” To question God is to rebel against him. Job’s ultimate response should be an instructive example to us all:

*Then Job answered the LORD, and said, “I know that Thou 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 did 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 the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:1-6*

The biblical answer to the theological conundrum of God and suffering is to repent from asking the question.

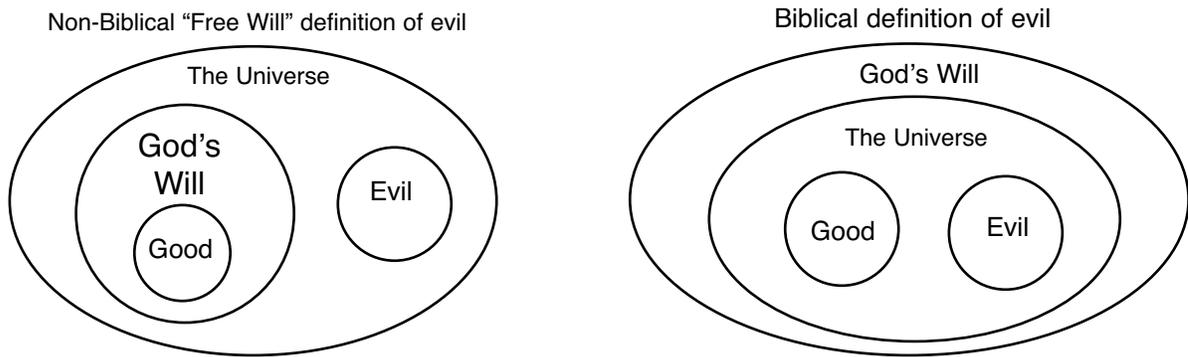
## Bargaining

Okay, so now God’s Word is starting to wear on me. I’m being backed into a corner. I feel the desperation, so I try to bargain. Maybe God doesn’t decree the evil that happens, maybe He just *allows* it, right? Maybe God *foresees* the future instead of determining it, so that’s how he knows and determines without *actively decreeing* evil. And even if God does decree some things, that doesn’t mean He decrees *all* things, does it? All these desperate attempts to bargain my way out of God’s complete and total sovereign decree of whatsoever comes to pass soon wore down in the light of the glory of God’s Word.

## God Allows Evil

I used to use this aspect of free-willism in order to try to reconcile the notion of God’s all-powerful presence in the universe with the existence of that which goes against his nature. In this view, God has a plan, but He’s not responsible for the evil that happens. He merely *allows* it. It’s sorta like *allowing* a child to roam in the yard, but a fence is put up by the father to keep some control. The evil that happens is allowed by God for some greater purpose of His.

Well, in a sense, God does *allow* evil, but not in the autonomous free will sense. We are right back to that graphic of nothing being able to be outside of God’s control without de-infinitizing God or making Him a subset of something larger than Himself:



Yes, God allows evil. But He also decrees and predestines it. Besides, if you say he allows evil for a greater purpose, you’ve just made the teleological argument of purpose, which is the exact same argument that complete sovereignty uses. The only difference is that free-willism necessitates *passive* purpose and Sovereignty necessitates *active* purpose.

You see the problem? A person cannot have a purpose to something he is not actively doing. If I *allow* my child to burn his finger by putting his finger on a stove burner, I may have a purpose in my *allowing* him to do so, but I cannot have a purpose *in the act itself*, for I am not the will behind the act. What I allow can too often and too easily go beyond what I intended. If I am not actively orchestrating my child’s act, then more can happen to him than I purpose. He may not receive a mere tiny scald that will teach him not to touch the stove, he may receive dangerous burns or maybe even electrocute himself which could end in his death, which is something I would not purpose or will. But you see, if his will is not in my hands, it is very probable that what the child does will thwart my purposes for him. This simple idea of “allowing” in a passive sense mitigates against all the certainty of purpose and control that God reveals throughout His word to us:

***For I am God, and there is no other; {I am} God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’***  
**Isaiah 46:9-11**

***Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.***  
**Psalm 33:8-11**

***The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand. Isaiah 14:24***

***Then Job answered the LORD, and said, “I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. Job 42:1-2***

These are just a smattering of the multitude of verses in the Bible that tell us that God’s plans are absolutely certainly going to happen, whatever they are. His purposes cannot possibly in a million years, ever ever ever be thwarted. There is not a chance in the entire universe of possibilities that God’s purposes and plans will not come to pass. Now, as I’ve said, I’ve always believed this as a Christian. What I did not realize until later was that I cannot believe in the certainty of God’s purposes or intentions for man and simultaneously believe that man’s will is absolutely free from God’s control. If God does not somehow sovereignly control the acts of men, if they are autonomous in their freedom, then God’s will for man *can*, by that very definition, be thwarted. Think of all the rebellious children who defy their parents and go their own destructive ways all over the earth. Now imagine that is only a mere example of the billions and billions of times that God’s plan is thwarted by rebellious humans who choose against God’s plan for them.

If a person is free from God’s control, then no matter what God wants for that person, that person can simply choose against what God wants, thereby thwarting God’s will. If God wants to protect me from walking down a particular alley because there are criminals lying in wait to rob and kill me, then what can God possibly do to make *absolutely* sure that I do not walk down that alley? Since the criminals have so-called “free-wills,” then God can’t make them fail to be there. However God tries to influence me, He cannot ultimately stop my “free will” from choosing to go down that alley or the criminal’s “free will” from attacking me. This kind of “free-willism” God would have to sit there with his fingers in his mouth in worry, hoping and praying that I do not go down that alley. Even if He spoke in an audible voice, “Do not go down that alley,” I could still, by the autonomous definition of free will, simply ignore His revelation and go down that alley, thus thwarting His will for me.

I began to see that no matter what possible scenario I could contrive for God trying to make sure His purpose for me was accomplished, if I had an autonomous free will, then I could ultimately thwart that purpose by choosing in such a way that God does not want. Even if God’s chances of convincing me were high, they were still not *absolutely certain*, like the way Scripture describes God’s purposes. So I had to either take autonomous free will and a god whose will can be thwarted because he is not all-powerful, or a will that is controlled by a sovereign God who controls all things and therefore whose will is unthwartable. If you want self-determination then your god is not infinite. And if you want infinity, you can’t have absolute self-determination. Wherever the buck stops is where the sovereignty lies. The final choice or determination is either with man, making him the final authority, or it is with God, revealing Him as final authority.

Here are some Scriptures that illustrate that God does not merely allow evil, but is in fact the ultimate ordainer of evil:

***I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. Isaiah 45:7***

***Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? ” Job 2:10***

***Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded {it} ? {Is it} not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth? Lamentations 3:37-38***

***“If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it? (Amos 3:6)***

***“I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. (Isaiah 45:7)***

Of course, my first reaction to these verses had always been that they describe God bringing calamities, like natural disasters or “hard times” upon us, therefore, I can’t attribute *evil* to them. But when I looked up the Hebrew words for *calamity* and *adversity* in my Strong’s Concordance, I discovered they were the same words used for *evil*. The translators simply added their bias into the translation by deliberately averting our understanding to their preconceived ideas about God.

Look at the context too, and you will see what I saw. When Job is referring to adversity coming directly from God, he is not merely referring to fire from heaven consuming his animals, he is also referring to the Sabeans kidnapping Job’s family and murdering his servants! It’s all part of the same “adversity” or “evil” that Job was talking about. That’s right, the slaughter of Job’s family was, according to the Scriptures, from God Himself! And Job, as a righteous man, faithfully accepted that as the bottom line.

As I looked closer at the Lamentations and Isaiah verses, I discovered some real gems of insight:

***Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded {it} ? {Is it} not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and [evil] go forth? Lamentations 3:37-38***

***“I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. (Isaiah 45:7)***

The metaphor here of speaking forth is another Hebrew expression of causality. God doesn’t merely talk about good and evil, He is the ultimate ordainer of all these things. No one can make anything come to pass without God’s own command behind the event. And God’s command is a *creative active* command, not a *passive* one. Remember Genesis 1? “And God *said*, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,” etcetera, etcetera. When the Scriptures speak in this way of God commanding and speaking, it is as a creative force. He doesn’t merely say something and it happens like magic. That would be to posit a universe of magic powers that exist beyond God. To say that God commands what comes to pass is to say that He creatively ordains it. He is the ultimate remote cause of all things, both good and evil. He is in control, people! But it does not necessarily follow that God is the *author* of evil. I will explain this later. Let’s move on.

## God Causes Some Things But Not All Things

Bargain number two. Just because Scripture says that God causes some things doesn't mean he causes *all* things. Just because God hardened Pharaoh's heart, doesn't mean he hardens *all* hearts. This was how I tried to continue to worm my way out of submitting to God's total sovereignty. Again, I came to realize that if I claimed that God would not violate man's free will, because it would make man a puppet, *yet* I accepted that God may have individually hardened Pharaoh's heart, then I already surrendered the argument. To allow God to violate even one free will is to admit that God does in fact "violate" or control a man's free will. The only difference is one of degree not essence. Violating *one* free will is still violating a man's free will, which then falls prey to all the accusations that a Free-Willer makes against the Calvinist. So the Free-Willer who admits Romans 9 as God violating Pharaoh's free will for just one incident, but not all people, still has to answer his own accusations that a God who is in control of a person's will is making that person a puppet and therefore not responsible for his actions. The Free-Willer's accusations have turned around and pointed right back at him.

But this is simply not the context of Romans 9 anyway. Romans 9 talks about God's hardening of Pharaoh as an example of how He hardens *everyone* who is not saved. That's the point of concluding afterward like Paul does: "**So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires**" (Romans 9:18). Having mercy is another way of saying, God saves who He wants. So the complementary hardening is a reference to everyone else. Why else would Paul then strike up the question of God's fairness regarding *no one* resisting His will if he was not in fact alluding to Pharaoh as an example for *all* hardened hearts, Esau as an example of *all* non-elect and Jacob as an example of *all* elect. And of course, Romans 9 is about God saving people not merely God controlling all things, but the point is made that in this passage God violates autonomous free-willism.

And there is the nagging Ephesians 1:11:

***[God] works all things after the counsel of His will Ephesians 1:11***

This one was a real doozy. And boy, did I try to get around it. After the fashion of all good Arminians, I tried to interpret this Scripture as meaning that *whatever* God does, He does according to His will. In other words, God doesn't work all things after His will, like the text says, but what He *does* do, He does after the counsel of His will. But I soon had to admit that this would be a tautology, a meaningless self-definitional statement that is akin to saying, "Whatever God does, he does because He has decided to do it." Do you see how this really says nothing? And especially when you look at the context. In Ephesians 1, Paul is talking about our salvation and how its every aspect has nothing to do with us, but with God's doing. Notice the emphasis on God throughout and His will:

***"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the the world... He predestined us to adoption as sons... according to the kind intention of His will... to the praise and glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us, in Him we have redemption...according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us...His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him...in Him we have obtained an inheritance, having***

*been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.*

And just in case anyone may think that Paul is saying that “all things” is simply a reference to “all things pertaining to salvation” he slaps a wider context smack dab in the middle of this litany of God’s will. He says,

*...with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, {that is}, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.*

God is summing up ALLTHINGS in Christ. Everything, not just the salvation of His beloved, but ALLTHINGS *in heaven and on earth*. That just about accounts for everything that happens, doesn’t it? Let there be no doubt that God cannot sum up all things if He is not in control of all things. If there is something outside of His control, then He cannot sum that thing up in Christ. He would not be able to bring it into subjection to Himself. He could only hope and pray and try to influence that it would “freely” decide to submit to Him, but He could never make it submit —unless He is sovereignly working all things after the counsel of His will.

## Foreknowledge

Okay, here’s a big one. Foreknowledge. Here’s one that a lot of people hang their hopes on. And I did too at one time. Here’s a *biblical* word that seems to solve the problem of God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom. It’s in the Bible right there! See!

*this {Man} , delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death. Acts 2:23*

*[we are] chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, 1Peter 1:2*

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, Romans 8:29*

So God foresees what we will do. Since He is outside time, He looks ahead and sees what we will do and then predestines us according to that foreknowledge of our choices. This is called “middle knowledge” by theologians, and I clung to it in a desperate attempt to hold onto my autonomy. But when I examined the texts more closely, I soon came to realize that not only is this “middle way” absurd but it is unbiblical.

Regarding the first verse, as already related earlier, however you define “foreknowledge,” you *cannot* define it as a passive observing on God’s part because then He is doing nothing and the concept of predetermined plan means nothing. God can’t have a plan behind something He is not Himself *doing*. If all those who crucified Christ did so with complete autonomous freedom from God’s control, then God was *doing nothing*. He was just sitting there watching everything happen, *doing nothing*. But as we proved, the Scriptures a little later state that it was not only the hands of godless men who engaged in the crucifixion of God’s own Son, it was *God’s hand* as well.

***“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. Acts 4:27-28***

The hand is an active force, not a passive one. The hand of God operates, it does not merely observe. The foreknowledge of God is not a passive observation of what will happen in the future. It is an active operation of God’s hand and plan and purpose.

But what of this second and third use of foreknowledge? God chooses us on the basis of knowing in advance what we will choose freely? Not on your life. The Greek for “foreknowledge” in these texts is not a removed observation, but a relational intimacy. God knows His children in advance *in a relational sense*. The Greek word is what is used for sexual intimacy as well. It is not that God foresees our choices (although He does do this) but rather that He knows us personally in advance, before the foundations of the world, he has a relationship with His children. When the Romans 8 passage mentions the great chain of salvation, it does not say that God *foresees* what His people will do, it says that He *foreknows* His people! This is what the prophet was alluding to when he said,

***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you...” Jeremiah 1:4***

This is not merely an expression of special love that God has for His prophets, this is how God feels toward each and every one of His children! Remember what we proved earlier about Jacob being loved before he was born (Romans 9), and how he was a theological example used by Paul to refer to how God knows and loves all those He saves? This is what it means to be chosen before the foundations of the earth (Ephesians 1:4)! God knows His children, intimately and relationally, before we are even born!

But that’s not all. His foreknowledge is an active causative foreknowledge. Look closer at the verses before and after the Romans 8:29:

***And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30***

There it is again! God causes *all things* to work together for good for His children. God doesn’t merely cause *some* things, for then He would not be able to promise complete security. He cannot cause all things to work together for good if He is not *causing all things* in an ultimate sense. God does not merely foresee our choices, He foreknows His children in a relational sense long before we were created, and then caused each step of the chain of our salvation. He brought us to our redemption and caused every step of the way. He foreknew us, He predestined us, then He called us, justified us, and will eventually glorify us. It is a done deal, as the past tense in the verses indicate. Even though we have not yet been

glorified as saints, it is determined by God's active predestination that we will be. With God, it is no sooner said than done, because God is the ultimate determiner of all things. This is not the crystal ball gazing of "middle knowledge," of "foreseeing" free acts, this is ultimate causality and ultimate relational knowledge of His children as people.

So as you can see, upon closer examination, I came to realize that the desperate attempt to maintain my autonomy from God in my "free-willism" through the notion of God foreseeing or knowing my choices in advance was simply not biblical. Foreknowledge is a biblical term that talks about God's intimate loving relationship with His people before they even knew God (Romans 11:2 *God's people, whom He foreknew*). A beautiful testimony to God's sovereign loving hand.

## Depression

Somewhere along the path, I lost my control. God changed my heart. I started to understand God's glorious sovereignty. I started to see that God controls all things, that His hand predetermines whatsoever comes to pass. And it scared me to death. A feeling of terror swept over me, leading to depression. Because you see, if God was somehow in control of all things, literally decreeing everything, if I am not the ultimate cause of my choices, then that means even my faith in God is not up to me. I did not choose God, God chose me. I did not choose to believe in God, God resurrected me, regenerated me, even while I was dead in sin. He *put* faith *into* me. It is totally up to God whether or not I believe in Him. And it is totally up to Him whether or not I remain true to that faith, whether or not I am the good soil that brings forth fruit, or the rocky or weedy soil that does not. The point is *it is totally up to Him*. Everything is totally up to Him. I came to realize that for many years, I had placed my confidence in myself, in *my* faith. I felt secure because *I* believed in God and therein laid my security. My belief in "free will" appealed to my American self-reliance. You know, rugged individualism and all that. No matter what the rest of the world says and does, I know that *I* have faith, and therefore salvation. My choice to believe in God and follow him was ultimately up to *my* "free will." It was ultimately up to *me* whether or not I would believe, whether I would be saved. It was ultimately up to *me*.

I soon realized that "free will" was another form of self-salvation. If God has done everything He can for our salvation by sending His Son etc. etc., and now it is up to us to choose "freely" whether or not we will have faith, then *our salvation is up to us*. God can only sit and hope that we will choose Him because after all, He doesn't violate our free will. Once I repented of this rebellion, once I gave up control in my heart, I felt very unstable. My salvation was finally and truly out of my hands. I had surreptitiously relied upon myself for so many years as a Christian while claiming to rely on God. My clinging to "free will" was an attempt to keep myself as the ultimate authority of my destiny, while simultaneously proclaiming the authority of God over my life. I realized that to claim God is my ultimate authority but to believe in my free will as the ultimate cause of my submission is to undermine God's authority with my own. It is to say that *I make* God my authority, which is really saying that *I am the authority* and I delegate to God some of that authority while maintaining ultimate authority with my free will. May it never be! May God be true though all men are liars!

Well, this terror that I felt was proper. We are supposed to be in awe of God, we are supposed to fear Him. And this fear of God that we are commanded to do over 200 times in the Bible is not merely

some mealy-mouthed “reverence” that some liberal theologians try to deceive us into. This fear is real fear. And it is cleansing fear. It is freeing fear. It is beautiful fear, joyful submission. Fear that is followed by a flood of grace and peace, because it is seeing God for who He really is as sovereign benign Controller of the Universe, the Alpha and Omega; the Beginning and the End; the author and perfecter of my faith. To God be the glory. Everything is in His hands—literally. And that is the way it ought to be.

## Acceptance

### Both/And not Either/Or

By now, I couldn't escape God's controlling hand of power. I was backed into a corner, being forced by the Bible to give in. I had gotten to the point where I had to resign myself to what I had fought against for so long. I had to give up my cherished notion of “free will” that I had held onto for so long. But where did this leave me? I mean, what does the Scripture then say of my will? Am I a puppet? Are we all just pawns in God's big chess game he plays against Himself? Well, fortunately, no. And the answer is really rather simple. The Scriptures say that God decrees whatsoever that comes to pass, but they also say that man is responsible for his choices.

*But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. {There will be} tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. Romans 3:5-11*

Understand here, that in the course of all my going on about God's ultimate control, I never once said man was not responsible for his choices. Chances are when you read what I wrote, you probable concluded that I meant man is not responsible because it seems like a logical conclusion. And herein lies the most common error of people's response to the Biblical expression of God's sovereignty. We have an improper reasoning that we have been conditioned to believe. We think that for God to control someone automatically necessitates that person to be forced against their will, and therefore not responsible for their actions. But I maintain that this is a fallacy. Because of our human capacity, or lack thereof, we cannot conceive that God's predestination can operate without violating free will. But remember how this definition of free will *assumes* free will is absolute and ultimate? Just because *we human beings* cannot predestine other people's actions without forcing them against their will, does not mean God is limited by our same limitations.

**Bottom line:** Scripture says God predestines the acts of men and Scripture also says man is responsible for his actions, therefore, somehow, *God predestines the free acts of men*. Man is free, in that he is responsible and not forced, but his freedom is not an absolute freedom—as in the common idea of

“free will”— it is freedom *within* God’s ultimate control. This is not a contradiction, but it is a mystery. A mystery is not something that is irrational or false but we believe it anyway. A mystery is something that our finite understanding of rationality cannot fully comprehend, yet we can express it in its truth. Think of the Trinity. We cannot fully comprehend how God can be both ultimately One and ultimately Three, but it is not contradictory. God is three *persons* in one *being*. This is how we best express the mystery. Now if we said, God is three *persons* in one *person*, that would be contradictory and false. But this is not what the Trinity is. Somehow God is both three and one, and His threeness does not violate His oneness because they are of different *essences*: being and personality. Well, so God somehow predestines mans’ actions in such a way that man is not forced and is still responsible for his behavior. A mystery, yes, contradictory, no. Mysteries are not irrational, they are transcendent. That means they transcend our own limited minds, because they are revelations from God who does not fully explain them to us.

Here is the original definition of God’s sovereignty stated earlier from the Westminster Confession. I have added the rest of the paragraph to show the true biblical balance that the Confession so accurately maintains:

---

**Definition: *God’s Sovereignty***

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will,  
freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: **yet so,  
as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to  
the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency  
of second causes taken away, but rather established.**

*Westminster Confession, III:1*

---

The best way that I came to understand this dilemma was the following: Behind every act of man are two active intentions: man’s and God’s. Behind every act of man is the action of God. I came to this conclusion because that is what the Scriptures quite literally reveal. Remember the verses I used earlier to show how God predestined the worst evil in the universe, the murder of His own Son? Well, let’s look at those verses again and see something very interesting.

***“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. Acts 4:27-28***

***this {Man}, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death. Acts 2:23***

See where I underlined? See how the same event of evil had two hands behind it? Both the hands of godless men *and* the hand of God. Remembering that the hand is a reference to action, not passivity.

Another powerfully clear expression of this dual intention behind every act is found in Joseph's two proclamations about his brother's evil against him:

***“Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:8***

I think it is clear that Joseph is not denying that his brothers sold him into slavery. He is trying to explain that his brothers selling him into slavery is not the ultimate cause; *they* are not ultimately in control of what they do. God is predestining even the evil acts of men so that no matter how evil they are, they cannot thwart God's will, because God's will is behind everything. God is the one who ultimately sent Joseph into Egypt because God's will is more ultimate than man's. Be careful to understand that I am not saying that man is not the cause of his actions, I am saying that Scripture says that man is not the *ultimate* cause of his actions. Man is still at cause for his actions, it's just that he is the proximate cause, while God is the remote cause. Regarding the same event, Joseph later says,

***“And as for you, you meant evil against me, {but} God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. Genesis 50:20***

There it is again, as plain as day. One *act* of evil, two *intentions*, man's and God's. And those two intentions are often opposite, which further affirms that there are two people acting behind every action, man and God. One act, two persons (remember the Trinity? One *being*, three *persons*). God predestines even the evil that occurs, but He does so for a morally sufficient reason. Even though man is acting with evil, God's action behind that evil is not itself evil, since God, as potter, has the right to do whatever he wants with his clay. Let's look again at that passage about the King of Assyria.

***Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets. Yet it does not so intend Nor does it plan so in its heart, But rather it is its purpose to destroy, Isaiah 10:5-7***

Behind the single act of evil of Assyria attacking Israel are two active participants with two different intents, Assyria and God, and God is more ultimate and in control. But just because Assyria is not the ultimate cause of its own actions does not mean Assyria is not therefore without responsibility.

***“I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.” For he has said, “By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did {this.} Isaiah 10:12-13***

Notice how some of the judgment God brings upon the King of Assyria is precisely because he does not acknowledge the sovereign control of the living God. The King of Assyria believed in free will.

***The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps. Proverbs 16:9***

## God is not the Author of Evil

Understandably, this ultimate causation of God behind every action and event can make one start to think that God is therefore the author of evil. If God is causing evil, then how is He not guilty of that evil? Again, I think the answer is a mystery. The Scriptures do not make God out to be the author of evil, in that He is somehow guilty of the evil that He predestines, but as we have seen, they do present God as the ultimate actor or intention behind the evil acts (The hand wielding the hammer).

The conclusion: Somehow, God predestines or decrees evil—even controls it—without Himself being guilty of evil. How He does this, I do not know. I cannot explain. I can only prove that the Scriptures show God as being both holy and good, without evil, and yet also that he predestines the evil acts of men. Therefore, God is not evil, while somehow predestining it. Again, this is not contradictory, it is transcendent. If you demand to understand this Scriptural mystery before you submit to it, then you cannot know the heart of God, because you are making God accountable to your understanding. Remember that classic verse?

***Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding.  
Proverbs 3:5***

Well, here it is again, only with a harsh indictment for those who would challenge God's mysteries:

***[God says to Job] "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it." Job 40:2-4***

Let all of our hearts respond like Job to this chastisement:

***Then Job answered the LORD and said, "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. Job 40:4***

## God is Just, Man is Guilty

But there is another way of understanding how God can predestine evil without Himself being guilty of evil. How can one evil act have two actors and two intentions behind it, one evil and one good? Well, as Christians, we believe that God will punish guilty sinners in hellfire forever, right?

***"So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:49***

***"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night..." Revelation 14:11***

Now, if we also believe that all people are inherently evil, born with a sin nature, and are therefore guilty sinners before God, then we certainly accept the Scriptural condemnation of those sinners to hell, right?

***both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... Romans 3:10-12,23***

So, if we are all guilty of sin and deserve the torture and fires of hell, then how is it that God would be guilty of evil for killing us, or even torturing us in this present life? You see, evil is only evil if it is done against an innocent person. If I torture or kill someone, I am guilty of evil because that person does not deserve punishment from me. They are innocent before me and I am therefore guilty of murder. But for God to kill that person using me as his instrument, God is not guilty of murder because from God’s perspective every person is guilty and deserving of the tortures of hell. So, my act of murder would make me guilty of the fires of hell, yet God, predestining that murder through me, would not himself be guilty of evil, because He can kill and torture anyone He wants, because everyone is worthy of judgment before God. Sound just like the King of Assyria passage, doesn’t it? Well, this certainly explains God’s just behavior in punishing evil on this earth, but what about God predestining evil *done to His children*? Doesn’t God forgive the sin of His people and therefore they are no longer guilty, yet God still predestines evil and suffering against them?

## **Hidden Will versus Revealed Will**

We are right back to the logical argument against God from the existence of evil. If God predestines evil against his own children, whom He has forgiven and declared innocent, then how can He be good? Very simply because He has a morally sufficient reason for the evil He predestines and he doesn’t have to tell us what it is. Just because we can see no good reason for evil doesn’t mean God can’t have a good reason that we don’t know about. We must trust that God causes all things to work for the good to those who love Him. And we must stop demanding that God tell us what it is. When evil is done against us, somehow, we must trust, like Joseph, that God has a bigger plan that He is not revealing to us.

***“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29***

## **A Confession**

By this point, gentle reader, if you have been patient enough to endure this self-indulgent stream of consciousness, then I have a nugget of revelation you will probably appreciate. As I have written this doctrinal pilgrimage, God has seen fit to reveal to me how utterly pathetic I am in living it out in my heart and life. Those of you who know me and disagree with me will no doubt be able to accuse me of

inconsistency. But fear not. Let me pre-empt such accusations by admitting that I am already keenly aware of my own shortcomings.

The fact is, I am a driven person. This can be good or bad. Good if channeled in and through God's Spirit for the purposes of God's Kingdom; bad, when I become so obsessed with my drive that I take my focus off my Driver, Jesus. And when this happens, patience wanes, temper may flare, and frustration steals the victory. I simply have to admit that I still have bouts with an impatient heart. I am ashamed of the words that come out of my mouth sometimes when my goals are blocked —and even with simple things like the cares of life stealing me away from my goals. God has made me keenly aware that when I get frustrated with blocked goals or any inconveniences of life, I am not merely “losing the victory,” I am disobeying God. I am not merely lashing out at circumstances, I am lashing out at the God who controls all circumstances. I have had to repent many a time for my despicable attitude. I should know better. I have even had to hold back on making this very paper available because my impatient actions have often spoken so much louder than my words. In short, I have been a hypocrite, spewing words of God's grace and sovereignty, while faithlessly denying those truths with my self-centered fleshly reactions against Him. God forgive me. And I hope you do too.

But just remember, the truth of a doctrine is not dependent on the adequacy of those who promote it (“ad hominem fallacy”), but rather upon its veracity with Scripture. If you can keep that in mind, I'll try to remember to practice what I preach or I'll be a clanging gong.

May God bless you in your journey towards death to self (“free will”) and life toward our sovereign glorious and potent Lord Jesus Christ.

**Brian Godawa** is the screenwriter for the award-winning feature film, *To End All Wars*. Most recently, he adapted to film the best-selling novel *The Visitation* by author Frank Peretti for Ralph Winter (*X-Men*, *Fantastic Four*). Mr. Godawa's articles on movies and philosophy have been published around the world. He has traveled around the United States teaching on movies and culture to colleges, churches and community groups. His book, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment* (InterVarsity Press) is in its seventh printing.

## **Suggested Further Reading**

If any of this rambling diatribe wrapped in personal storytelling rings a bell with you, and you would like to examine the issue a bit more in-depth, then you owe it to yourself (and God) to check out the following books written by eminent yet popular scholars for us laymen types. But I warn you. Be prepared to have your world turned upside down; to have your most cherished assumptions Biblically challenged and shaken; to see through new eyes. But also be prepared to have your spiritual life reinvigorated and deepened like never before.:

•

*The Potter's Freedom* by James White. Strong Biblical answer to the most common Free-Willism beliefs as expressed by popular theologian/apologist Norm Geisler.

•

*Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* by R.C. Sproul. A great historical survey of all the issues and how brilliant men of God on both sides handled them.

•

*Grace Unknown* by R.C. Sproul. Understandable popular introduction to the Reformed doctrines of Grace.

•

*Putting the Amazing Back Into Grace* by Michael Horton. A simple and understandable popular introduction to the Reformed doctrines of Grace. More basic than Sproul's.

•

*The Providence of God (3 tapes)* (from the series *Systematic Theology*) by Greg Bahnsen. Cassette tapes for those of you with no time to read, but time to listen. This guy is my absolute favorite, and this is very thorough. You can order the tapes from [www.cmfnow.com](http://www.cmfnow.com). They are \$5 each and their order numbers are: GB1210, GB1211, GB1212. Or you can order them by calling: **1-800-553-3938**.

•

*Difficult Doctrines: Predestination* by Greg Bahnsen. One Cassette tape. You can order the tape from [www.cmfnow.com](http://www.cmfnow.com). It's \$5 and its order number is: GB1197. Or you can order it by calling: **1-800-553-3938**.

•

*The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther. A lively, scathing, scholarly attack by the mighty Reformer against the free-willism of fellow scholar Erasmus. For the theologically astute and demanding.

•

*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Loraine Boettner. For the theologically astute and demanding.

•

*The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur W. Pink. For the theologically astute and demanding.