

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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Pastor's Bible Study

If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series
Based on the book
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

Part XVIII

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Meaningful Human Choice and Divine Sovereignty Working Together

☉ God's Influence on Our Wills

- **God invites us and sovereignly empowers us to choose to come to him.**

- God's invitation to come to him assumes the possibility of a real and meaningful choice to accept it.

- ☉ *Matthew 11:28 (HCSB)*²⁸ "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

- ☉ *Revelation 22:17 (HCSB)*¹⁷ Both the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Anyone who hears should say, "Come!" And the one who is thirsty should come. Whoever desires should take the living water as a gift.

☉ God's Influence on Our Wills

- People genuinely respond to God, yet God first opens their hearts:

- ☉ *Acts 16:14 (HCSB)*¹⁴ A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was spoken by Paul.

- God calls us spiritually dead without Christ. We did not, by acts of our will, make ourselves alive. Rather,

☉ *Colossians 2:13 (HCSB)*¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses.

- Lazarus serves as an illustration of what it means to be dead, then made alive. When Jesus said, “Lazarus come out!” (John 11:43), the dead man lacked the capacity to obey until Jesus made him alive. Who’s more helpless than a dead man?

☉ **God’s Influence on Our Wills**

- Still...God extends a *genuine*, not a *pretend* invitation to choice-making people to come to him. They can do so as he sovereignly empowers them.

☉ **God’s Influence on Our Wills**

- **Without Christ, we have freedom to act upon our desires, but by nature we do not desire to please God and cannot obey him.**

☉ *Romans 8:7 (HCSB)*⁷ For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, for it is unable to do so.

- In our sinful state, we have no innate ability to follow God. People who lack the Spirit cannot begin to understand spiritual things.

☉ *1 Corinthians 2:14 (NLT)*¹⁴ But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

☉ **God’s Influence on Our Wills**

- Our problem is both our unwillingness to understand *and* our incapacity to turn our wills toward God. Once we grasp the depths of this problem, we will fully appreciate the wonders of his grace.
- Without that insight, we might imagine ourselves in Heaven congratulating one another that had the savvy and strength of will to run to Christ. But God leaves no room for such boasting.
 - *Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

- *Titus 3:5 (NLT)*⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

☉ **God's Influence on Our Wills**

- God's amazing grace doesn't end at our conversion. Even the regenerated human will depends upon the divine will to live as it should.
 - *Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT)*¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.
 - We must will and work, *and God* must will and work.

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- **Because God wills things in two different senses, God's will does not always get done, yet his will is never frustrated.**
 - I've heard b people say, "God's will cannot be thwarted." If by "God's will" we mean his ultimate, decreed purpose, then yes, that is true.
 - ☉ *Ephesians 1:11 (NLT)*¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- But if you mean that God's moral laws and stated desires cannot be violated, that is clearly wrong.
- Wherever evil exists, we see violation of God's moral will.
- The prayer, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) assumes that God's will often is *not* presently done on Earth.
- Jeremiah says of God,³³ For He does not enjoy bringing affliction or suffering on mankind. *Lamentations 3:33 (HCSB)* – and yet the prophet writes in the context of the God-ordained destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Jesus wept over Jerusalem when he wanted one thing and Jerusalem wanted another:

- ³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me. *Matthew 23:37 (NLT)*
- Remarkably, the same Greek word for “wishing, wanting, or willing” (thelo) is used for what Jesus wanted and what the people of Jerusalem wanted. Yet Jesus didn’t get what he said *he* wanted, while Jerusalem did, successfully resisting *his* will (to its own ruin).

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Of course, as God’s Son, Jesus could have overpowered the will of Jerusalem’s people and forced them to accept him. But he sovereignly chose not to do so. One day Jesus will reign over the New Jerusalem, filled with people who love him and willingly and eagerly bow to his lordship.
- So Christ’s will shall *ultimately* prevail, even though he permitted it to be *immediately* resisted.
- Ironically, Jerusalem’s immediate *rejection* of his will was necessary to accomplish the ultimate *fulfillment* of his will through his redemptive work.

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- **Scripture does not teach that God wills everything, in the sense that he forces everything or is pleased with everything that happens in this fallen world.**
 - Fatalism holds that everything, including evil and suffering, happens in a predetermined and inevitable way, with humans beings being powerless to effect change.
 - Fatalism predominates among many, though not all, Hindus and Muslims. The term *Insha’Allah* implies that whatever happens is God’s wills. Unfortunately, some Christians also think like fatalists.

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Where does this logic take us? If God permits racism, slavery, child sex trafficking, then why should we battle them?
- Here’s why: the Bible speaks much about God’s sovereignty, yet constantly calls upon people to take action, and to speak up for and help the poor and needy, this is the polar opposite of fatalism.

- ⁸ Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. ⁹ Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice. *Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT)*

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Humans can resist God and do reject him:
 - *Isaiah 63:10 (NLT)* ¹⁰ But they rebelled against him and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he became their enemy and fought against them.
 - *Acts 7:51 (NLT)* ⁵¹ “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That’s what your ancestors did, and so do you!

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Scripture teaches that humans make real choices and that we must resist evil, yet God remains sovereign in a nonfatalistic way, offering us choices and encouraging us to pray for him to bring changes, and to do what we can to change our lives and the world itself.

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- **If anything in the universe can happen outside of God’s control then ultimately we can’t trust his promises.**
 - We wince when a movie character goes off to battle and promises a child or a spouse, “I’ll be back,” or, “You’ll be safe.” the person means well, but he or she lacks the power to keep that promise. God, however, does not.
 - The Bible overflows with promises, but if things happen outside the sovereign control of God, how can he guarantee those promises will be kept?

◎ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- Paul said, *2 Timothy 1:12 (HCSB)* ¹² and that is why I suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know the One I have believed in and am persuaded that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.
- Hymn writer, Margaret Clarkson, wrote, “The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God...All evil is subject to Him, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it. God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family.”

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- **We should seek to be consistent with the Bible, not with a particular theological persuasion.**
 - Any position that denies either God’s complete sovereignty or our meaningful choice does not stand up to Scripture.
 - The Bible is God-breathed, theological systems aren’t. they are valid *not* to the extent that they are self-consistent, but to the degree that are consistent with Scripture

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- **God’s sovereignty is consistent with human responsibility.**
 - We can believe in God’s sovereignty and still lock the door.
 - ☉ *Ecclesiastes 10:18 (HCSB)* ¹⁸ Because of laziness the roof caves in, and because of negligent hands the house leaks.
 - ☉ *Proverbs 20:4 (HCSB)* ⁴ The slacker does not plow during planting season; at harvest time he looks, and there is nothing.
 - These verses don’t simply attribute sagging rafters and leaking houses to God’s sovereignty. They lay responsibility on people to take action. Students who don’t study and set the alarm to get up for class aren’t trusting God; they are just being irresponsible.

☉ **Sovereignty and Human Choice-Making**

- The book of Nehemiah reflects God’s sovereign plan to rebuild Jerusalem. Yet it repeatedly shows Nehemiah preparing, strategically positioning, and arming the people: *Nehemiah 4:9 (NLT)* ⁹ But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.
- No contradiction exists between praying, “Lord, please protect us and the children on this drive,” and then putting on the seat belts.
- Prayers for healing do not conflict with the common grace of medical treatment.