

God Governs All Things
Proverbs 21:1; Psalm 115:3
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Why do the circumstances in your life fall out the way that they do? Is there a grand purpose or design for all that happens in the world? Who governs nations and individuals, stars and planets, every event in history and every being in this universe? There may be many responses to these questions, but I have selected four which if not specifically believed are in various ways practiced at times even by those who profess to be Christians.

1. **“Man is in control of his own destiny. Man rules life.”** But is it not rather obvious that the plans of man fail all of the time? Does man decide who will be his parents? Or what nationality he will be? Does man determine precisely how long he will live upon this earth? Can man control nature (such as hurricanes, drought, tornadoes, floods, or earthquakes)? Who is in control? It certainly is not man (Jeremiah 17:5,7).
2. **“Fate is in control. There is no rational or purposeful plan. Everything just happens by chance.”** But fatalists live each day upon the assumption that the sun will rise and set as it did yesterday. They assume that the law of gravity will keep their feet on the ground and that 2+2 will equal 4 today just like it did yesterday. Fate cannot be in control for there is an established order that exists and laws which all men use every day and expect to use in the future. In the fatalist system progress in knowledge would be impossible for nothing would remain the same from day to day. It would be like trying to make sense out of what I was saying if every five seconds I spoke a different language. It is obvious that an impersonal chance or fate is not in control (Isaiah 46:9-10).
3. **“Satan is in control. The evil in the world, the catastrophes, the wars, the murders etc. all point to the fact that Satan must control what happens in this world.”** The Bible does speak of Satan as being an evil and powerful being. But he is a created being. All his power is delegated to him. He cannot act on his own. When he tempted Job, he had to obtain permission from God (Job 1-2), just as he did when he tempted Peter to deny the Lord (Luke 22:31-32). If Satan is sovereign, why could he not keep Jesus in the grave? For the resurrection of Christ spelled the doom and destruction of Satan? Who is in control? It's not Satan (Revelation 20:10).
4. **“The Triune God of the Bible (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) is in control. He alone is sovereign.”** The Lord God Almighty knows all things, created all things, planned and determined all things, and controls all things for His own good pleasure. This is the explicit testimony of God Himself as revealed in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Psalm 115:3). Dear ones, it may be your profession today that the one true living God revealed in Scripture is absolutely sovereign over everything that exists, but do you live your life from day to day as though this is true? Are you living as a practical humanist (man is in control), or as a practical fatalist (no one is in control), or as a practical satanist (Satan is in control)? This Lord's Day let us fall upon our faces before the Almighty God and renew our faith in Him as absolutely sovereign over all His creation. Let us repent of our sin where we have in word or deed professed or lived as though the Lord was not absolutely sovereign over all the circumstances of our lives. Let us answer the following questions from our text in Proverbs 21:1: (1) Whose Heart Is in the Hand of the Lord? (2) How Far Does God's Control Extend?

I. Whose Heart Is in the Hand of the Lord?

A. The explicit answer to this question is that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Solomon does not intend to deny that the hearts of all men (male or female, young or old, rich or poor, married or unmarried) are in the hand of the Lord. He mentions the king because if the king's heart is in the hand of the

Lord, then surely the hearts of all others are in the hand of the Lord. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser: if even the king, then everybody else under the king as well.

B. It is perhaps more difficult for us to fully appreciate how this statement would likely have impacted those who heard it about 3,000 years ago when this inspired proverb was recorded by Solomon. Needless to say, kings in general at the time of Solomon had far more power and authority than do kings, presidents, or prime ministers today. Kings at that time did not usually have a congress or parliament or senate with which to share power. They may have had counselors, but generally they ruled supremely over the affairs of men delegating to those beneath them authority to carry out their wishes (Proverbs 16:14).

C. So to hear that the heart of the king was in the Lord's hand was to demonstrate to the people of that time that God was the Almighty One who even controls the acts and decisions of those who wield a supreme power over the lives of all people within their realm. Solomon teaches that the mightiest of men upon the earth are so small and so insignificant in comparison to the sovereignty and power of the Lord that they are like a little, harmless ant in a man's hand which is moved one direction with his finger or is moved in another direction as he wills (consider the testimony of one of the mightiest kings of the ancient world in Daniel 4:28-37).

D. What are some necessary implications of God's sovereign rule over all things?

1. **God is sovereign as evidenced by the fact that He created all things that exist (John 1:1-3).** He who is the Creator of all things by His mere spoken word must also be able to rule all that He has created (according to Psalm 33:6-9). The more we learn of the vastness of this universe, the complexity of the body of man, the abilities and unique functions of each creature in the world, or the power in a single atom, we are brought face to face with the might and power of the Almighty God who created by His word all that we see and all that we cannot see (even angels) in the space of six 24 hour days and all very good (according to Genesis 1). Paul teaches in Hebrews 1:3 that the Son of God who created all things also upholds all things by the word of His power. Dear ones, it is not mere impersonal laws that hold our universe together and keep it running in such an orderly manner. It is the very power of God that sustains order rather than chaos in this universe; otherwise it would destroy itself with billions upon billions of catastrophic explosions from atoms racing headlong into one another.

2. **God sovereignly rules according to His most holy will (Psalm 145:17).** As a pastor, I have heard questions like this many times: If God is righteous and controls all things, why did my baby die? Why must I suffer so much pain? Why must I die such a slow agonizing death? Why are my children who were raised in a Christian home rebelling against everything they were taught? Why did my spouse leave me for someone else? Why did I lose my job? Why do little children starve to death? Why the savage slaughter of so many people in wars? Why? Why? Why?

a. The skeptic responds to these questions as follows: "Either God is sovereign or He is righteous, but He cannot be both. For it is not righteous to permit evil, death, and suffering if God could prevent such calamities. And if God would like to prevent them but cannot do so, then He is not sovereign."

b. This is mere human sophistry (i.e. a vain and subtle argument of man). For the Bible teaches that God is absolutely sovereign, and yet He is absolutely holy. He is not the author of sin and does not physically or morally force man to sin (James 1:13-15). Man sins because he wants to. Yes, God could have prevented the fall of man which issued in God's curse upon man and all creation in bringing death (both physical and spiritual) and every misery known to man (including the final misery, the lake of fire) had He willed to do so, but He decreed the fall of man, permitting man to follow his own lustful desire in order to glorify His justice in righteously punishing man for His sinful rebellion and in order to glorify His grace in rescuing ungodly sinners from sin, death, and the lake of fire.

(1) Dear ones, if all we see is our suffering or the suffering of others, we are

not considering that which is even more important—the glory of God (Exodus 4:11; John 9:3). Yes, we must be kind and compassionate when others suffer. If we are able to help relieve their suffering, we should help. But we will never truly help anyone who is suffering if we do not seek to bring them in love for their souls to see the greatness and power of God who sovereignly rules for His own glory and for the good of His own beloved children (Romans 8:28).

(2) The comfort of the Christian is not in simply knowing that God is sovereign. For if God were infinitely evil instead of infinitely holy and good, there could be no comfort in knowing God to be all powerful. Such a fact would only bring despair and hopelessness to us all. But the truth that God sovereignly rules for His own righteous glory and for the good of His people is one of the most comforting truths in all of Scripture (consider Joseph in Genesis 50:20; and Christ in Acts 2:23). This, in fact, forms the very basis for our comfort according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:32. If God has turned the most heinous sin of man in crucifying the sinless Son of God into the greatest good for those whom He has eternally loved and chosen from all eternity, and in time irresistibly brought them to faith in Jesus Christ, how shall such a sovereign God not also freely give all good things to those for whom He sacrificed His Son? Even when you pass through the valley of the shadow of death, even when you suffer afflictions in this life, or lose those whom you love, you can know with certainty that He will never leave you nor forsake you, for all that comes your way has the evil of it removed by the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. It is all for your good.

(3) There was a time in my youth and early adulthood in which I foolishly resisted the precious and comforting doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty over all His creation. I wanted to protect my sovereignty and my lordship over my own life and the life of my loved ones. I blasphemously thought I could do a better job of governing my life than an absolutely holy, good, and sovereign God could do. God in the richness of His mercy broke my proud and stubborn heart and brought me to see that I am nothing and can do nothing apart from Him and that I live not for my own glory and honor, but for the glory and honor of Him who powerfully created me and mercifully rescued me from the guilt, power, and condemnation of my own sin. The Lord took me to Romans Chapter 9 and showed me the vanity and futility of my alleged sovereignty over my own life or my supposed righteousness (consider Romans 9:10-24).

(4) So you see, dear ones, not only are you comforted as Christians by knowing with certainty that the God who loves you from everlasting to everlasting is absolutely sovereign, but you are also humbled before Him to ask, “Why me?” “Why has Thy love and sovereign power raised me from my spiritual death to embrace Christ alone for my eternal salvation when Thou did not choose to raise so many others from their spiritual death?” The answer is simply: for His own good pleasure and holy purposes. It is certainly not because there was anything desirable, loveable, or holy in you or me. Dear ones, if that truth does not break your heart today before the living God, I don’t know what will. Won’t you humble yourself this day under the mighty hand of God that He might exalt you?

II. How Far Does God’s Control Extend?

A. Our text in Proverbs 21:1 states the God’s absolute power over the king (and thus all men) is like “the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever he will.” This is an illustration from the realm of husbandry or farming. Since farmers in the days of Solomon did not have automated sprinkler systems or electric pumps to bring water to their dry fields, they depended upon rain and other water sources (such as rivers, streams, lakes, or ponds) to provide water for their crops. From that water source, the farmer would dig small trenches which would carry water to the needy plants or bring water in buckets to those small trenches filling the trenches with water. When one row of crops had been adequately watered, the farmer would put a piece of wood, stone, soil, or even use his own foot in the trench so as to divert the water to the next row of crops where he desired the water to flow (Deuteronomy 11:10).

B. Solomon says that just as the farmer so easily moves the water flowing through these small trenches in the direction where he desires it to go, so the Lord likewise exercises His absolute sovereignty in moving the very hearts of kings to do whatever He wills to be done for His own glory (Proverbs 20:24). The key phrase here is “whithersoever he will” i.e. wherever it pleases Him. There are no boundaries placed upon the sovereignty of God if he can so powerfully control the lives of men that He may turn them in whichever direction He desires for His own holy purposes. As the Scripture so clearly teaches, even the wicked unwittingly accomplish in their sin the very purposes of God (whether in the slavery and imprisonment of Joseph by his brothers in Genesis 50:20, or in the captivity of Israel in Isaiah 10:7, or in the death of Christ as in Acts 4:27-28). The Lord causes even the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). The Lord turns the heart of pagan kings like Cyrus and Artaxerses to return captive Israel to her homeland and even to supply the materials needed to rebuild the temple of the one true living God (Ezra 1:1; Nehemiah 2:8).

C. This inspired proverb teaches rulers that they do not have absolute rule and sovereignty over a nation, but rather rule by God’s decree. Therefore, rulers ought to fear such a holy and almighty God rather than turning their backs upon Him. For rulers only set themselves up for destruction who do not kiss and officially honor the Son of God and rule according to the revealed will of God in Scripture. They deceive and fool themselves if they think they are able to escape a sovereign God, for the Lord yet sovereignly turns their sinful hearts to fulfill His holy purposes.

D. How can you, the children of this absolutely sovereign, holy, and gracious God, possibly lose if the Almighty God so tenderly loves you and provides for you all that you truly need? If such a God be for you who can be against you (Paul asks in Romans 8:31)? You may have besetting sins. You may suffer from various afflictions. You may lose loved ones. You may lose your job, your health, your wealth, or your liberty, but you can be certain that your loving Father takes nothing away that He does not replace with something even better in His grace and mercy in building His character within you and drawing you nearer to Himself to trust Him and love Him. Dear ones, when you serve a sovereign God who loves you and ordains all things for your good, there is nothing insignificant in your life. Everything has meaning and purpose. You, therefore, have hope rather than hopelessness; for God is at work causing even the wrath of man to praise Him.

1. The thought of a sovereign God should cause the ungodly to literally shake in their boots. For such an absolutely sovereign God is against the wicked. The wicked cannot prevail against Him. He will crush them as an enemy of His holiness and righteousness. There is nowhere to hide from such a God. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrew 10:31).

2. And you children of the living God who trust in Jesus Christ alone for your eternal salvation and seek to show Him your love for His kindness and mercy to you through your obedience to His good commands, let the power and sovereignty of God encourage your hearts. Do not become weary in well doing and in persevering in what is righteous, for your sovereign God will cause you to reap in due season if you faint not. What are your true needs in this life (whether material or spiritual)? Your sovereign God who is able and willing to supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus will meet those needs. “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). Even to the point of conceiving the sinless Son of God in womb of the virgin, Mary. Dear ones, the arm of flesh will fail you, but the sovereign God of the Bible will never fail His beloved child who looks in faith to Christ for righteousness, forgiveness, and every need he/she has in body and soul.

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