

God is in Total Control – Part 1

After every catastrophe, tremendous loss of human life, or national crisis, someone asks the inevitable question: “Where was God?”

There are three possibilities for God’s role in humanity. The first is that God is in complete control of everything that happens. The second is that God does intervene but only at select times. The third possibility is that God – for whatever reason – has no role in humanity, and we control our own lives. Let’s examine all three.

From at least the Christian perspective, there is a school of thought that God is in control of everything that happens in our lives. This conviction may not include most Christians but it does have a sizable following in the Christian community.

But if God is controlling all events in our lives then some natural dilemmas arise.

The first problem is that of free will. If God constantly intervenes, then how is it possible to have free will? If God determines our friends, spouse, employment, finances, and health, then what is left for us to decide?

Some things do seem predetermined. Where we are born, our parents, our height, skin, eyes, and natural hair color are all determined at birth. These factors clearly influence how we start out in life.

Many people are born into poverty but some struggle through the lean times, work hard, and lead successful lives. Did their hard work and determination shape their success or did God simply choose them to succeed?

There are unsettling implications if God is solely responsible for our success. It would mean that every one of our accomplishments is the result of God’s intervention. Many people of faith do give glory to God for their achievements. They see His hand in job promotions, stock market gains, purchasing a dream home, and even sporting events. Does God actually alter the trajectory of a ball in motion so that it goes through a hoop, past a goalkeeper, over a fence, or through metal uprights to manipulate the score of a sporting event? Some fans believe this.

Is God also the source of our failures? If ten people applied for a job and all were righteous and moral, does that mean that the nine who did not get the job failed because God played favorites? Did God give

the job to the one He judged to need it the most? Does He have better jobs in mind for the other nine applicants? If years pass and those nine still cannot find employment, is that also God's will?

Is a person overweight because they consume more calories than they metabolize or because God rendered that person overweight? Does God favor a thrifty person because they have more money in the bank than someone who spends extravagantly? Or did the thrifty person's actions play a role in their accumulation of wealth?

What of great tragedies? Are tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes all the result of God's will? Did He create smallpox, polio, cancer, the Bubonic plague, or any of the countless, crippling diseases that afflict humanity? Was God behind 9/11 or did He just allow it to happen? We could ask the same questions of the two horrific World Wars or the tens of millions slaughtered by Stalin and Mao.

One common Biblical argument is that humanity unleashed evil upon itself by committing the original sin in the Garden of Eden. However, even if that is true and our suffering is both just and due to our own transgressions, it still suggests that God allows terrible things to happen. If God is in total control of every detail of our lives and tragedy strikes, then God either allowed it to happen or caused it to happen. Both possibilities are troubling.

I am not sure how anyone can accept the premise that God decides every detail of our lives. His intervention on behalf of one person would nearly always affect someone else. If He chose one person to win then another would almost certainly have to lose. It means that God selects those who achieve or acquire anything in life, and for those who struggle with little it means God did not select them.

In addition, I have never been convinced that all things work out for good for those that love God – certainly not while we are here on Earth. Ask a rape victim, a child rendered paralyzed by a drunk driver, or anyone molested as a youth. Human beings persevere, move on with their life, and overcome tremendous obstacles. They may even lead productive lives that inspire others. Yet, if we believe in the premise of the original argument, we are still left with the disturbing realization that God either directed or allowed these tragedies to happen.

If we learned that the atrocities and failures that highlight our existence were either the direct or the indirect hand of God, would we ever again regard God as moral, loving, or just? I believe that humanity's faith would be permanently shattered in disillusionment.

Personally, with all the considerable suffering in the world that could be alleviated by divine intervention, I would be sincerely disappointed if I learned that God was even determining the outcome of sporting events.

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