

NORMAN L. GEISLER

Chosen But Free

A Balanced View of
God's Sovereignty
and **Free Will**



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Norman L. Geisler

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*To all my students
who for the past fifty-one years
have asked more questions about this
than any other topic.*

DR. NORMAN L. GEISLER is author or coauthor of more than seventy books. He has taught at the university and graduate levels for more than fifty years and has spoken and debated all over the world. He holds an MA from Wheaton College and a PhD in philosophy from Loyola University, and is presently Provost and Distinguished Professor of Apologetics at Veritas Evangelical Seminary (*VeritasSeminary.com*) in Murrieta, California.

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CHAPTER ONE

Ideas Do Have Consequences

In his excellent book *Ideas Have Consequences*, Richard Weaver demonstrates what philosophers and psychologists have known for centuries: Ideas do have consequences, and the mind does matter. Weaver puts his central points this way:

One may be accused here of oversimplifying the historical process, but I take the view that conscious policies of men and governments are not mere rationalizations of what has been brought about by unaccountable forces. They are rather deductions from our most basic ideas of human destiny, and they have a great, though not unobstructed, power to determine our course.¹

Why do ideas matter? Because the thoughts we entertain—especially those we seriously entertain—tend to influence our choices. Belief leads to behavior. Ideas lead to actions. History is replete with examples, both good and bad.

¹Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

It is a psychological fact that every idea entertained by the mind tends to express itself in an action. We see this in little children who learn by imitation. Even adults have models and heroes after whom they pattern their lives.

If ideas matter, and if big ideas matter a lot, then it matters whether our ideas are good or bad. In fact, if ideas have consequences, then good ideas will have good consequences. History, psychology, philosophy, and theology likewise testify to the truth of this premise: Bad ideas will have bad consequences. Jesus said hate leads to murder and lust to adultery (Matt. 5:22, 28). Pornography leads to perversion; hardcore porn even leads to violent crime.²

One tragic example of bad ideas leading to bad consequences is found in Adolf Hitler, who believed in social evolution. Hitler applied the Darwinian “survival of the fittest” to the human race and concluded the following:

If Nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile.³

This idea’s consequence? The holocaust, in which millions of people were killed.

If ideas have consequences, then good ideas will have good consequences. The Red Cross, hospitals, schools, representative government, and aid for the poor and oppressed are all examples of good ideas that led to good actions. Little wonder that the apostle Paul wrote:

Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil. 4:8 ESV)

² See N. L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). See appendix 3 on “Pornography.”

³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (orig. 1924; reprint, London: Hurst & Blackett, 1939), 239–40.

WHY IDEAS ABOUT GOD MATTER

A. W. Tozer made this observation in the first line of *The Idea of the Holy*: “What you think of God is the most important thing about you.” Once more, the reason is simple. If ideas have consequences, then big ideas will have big consequences, and the idea of God is the biggest idea we will ever have. Anselm said, “God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.”

This means our theology (our ideas of God) will have the greatest consequences in our lives. Theological or doctrinal ideas are the most relevant ones we have. God is the ultimate in our thinking, and ultimate thoughts have ultimate significance.

WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?

This book is a comparison and contrast between two great theological “ideas”: divine sovereignty and human free will. We will discover that whether one holds to extreme or moderate forms of these ideas will affect his/her lifestyle. The next chapter will explain the different ideas about how to relate these truths. The rest of the book will attempt to relate them in a balanced way and avoid the extremes at either end.

THE IDEA OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty means “what a sovereign has,” namely, control over his kingdom. God’s sovereignty—the idea that God is in control of the whole universe—is a doctrine clearly taught in the Bible (see chapter 3).

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for *everything in heaven and earth is yours*. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; *you are exalted as head over all*. Wealth and honor come from you; *you are the ruler of all things*. (1 Chron. 29:11–12)

God’s sovereignty is a good idea. Properly understood, knowing that an all-good and all-powerful God is in charge of all that happens can lead to a sense of security and tranquility.

Nonetheless, taken to an extreme, the idea of sovereignty can lead even to self-destruction. Some time ago, I received a letter of appreciation

from a woman who read the first edition of this book. She told of being in a church that took the doctrine of sovereignty to the extreme. They reasoned that if God has determined everything, then all is determined, and if everything is fixed in advance, then there's nothing we can do about it. After preaching this philosophy for some time, the pastor became so depressed he committed suicide.

THE IDEA OF HUMAN FREE WILL

Human responsibility and the ability to make free choices were part of God's plan for us from the beginning. Adam was told not to make the bad choice of eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17); he chose to disobey God (Rom. 5:19). Even now, in our fallen state, we have the free choice to accept or reject God's gracious provision of salvation.

However, like any other good thing, the doctrine of free will can be taken too far. One Process Theologian⁴ who stressed human free will to the extreme actually said that even God does not know what we are going to do with our freedom, and that God "is waiting with bated breath to see how things are going to turn out"! If God does not know what's going to happen in the future, then we cannot know there will be a good end to the human story. Surely this can lead to desperation.

WHAT IDEAS ARE COMING NEXT

We will engage both divine sovereignty and human free will and try to find a balance between them. First, we will discuss the major ways to relate sovereignty and free will (chapter 2). Then we will become more specific by seeing what the Bible says about God's sovereignty (chapter 3). Following this, we will take a look at what is meant by free will (chapter 4). Afterward we will look at two extremes: one that misunderstands sovereignty (chapters 5–6) and another that misunderstands free will (chapter 7). Then we will seek a middle view (chapter 8) and show its practical benefits (chapter 9). Finally, we will address criticism of our conclusions (chapter 10).

This book's appendices are also very important, as they give additional details on the book's main points and form a more scholarly version of the chapters' simplified material.

⁴ See chapter 7.



CHAPTER TWO

What Are the Alternatives?

There are three basic views on how to relate divine sovereignty and human free choice. The first we will call the “extreme Sovereignty” view. The second will be labeled the “extreme free will” view. The third is named the “balanced view,” by which we mean a balance between sovereignty and free will.

THE EXTREME SOVEREIGNTY VIEW

God’s Control

This position understands *sovereignty* in the strong sense of divine control over and determination of the entire universe and of all actions in it. God is in complete charge of all that happens and will happen, including all free choices of His creatures. Nothing we do can change His fixed plan, which He preordained from all eternity. The future is not open to being “helped” in its formation by our free actions.

God's Foreknowledge

God knows with certainty everything that will happen in the future, including all free actions. Nothing can change this; it is fixed and immutable. Since God is omniscient, He cannot be wrong about anything. Hence, if He knows what's going to happen—and He knows everything that's going to happen—then it must happen exactly as He foreknew it would happen.

God's Predestination

God can make infallible predictions—ones that must come to pass. Indeed, He has predetermined from all eternity every event in the universe, including the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the non-elect. Predestination is not based on His foreknowledge; His election of some to salvation is a free choice of His mercy, based only on His will. This is an unconditional election of some to salvation and of leaving others for damnation (see appendix 7).

Man's Fallen State

Fallen human beings, dead in sin, do not even have the ability to receive the gift of salvation unless God first works in them by His Spirit and gives them, and them alone, the faith to believe in Him (see appendix 9). Thus, regeneration comes before faith, and only the regenerate can believe. The rest are dead and incapable of belief.

God's Grace

Human will plays no part in our salvation; we are saved by God's will and God's will alone. Salvation cannot be sought, attained, or even received as a gift—it is wholly and completely of God (see appendix 10), whose saving love is a voluntary act of mercy. Because of man's sinful state, God did not have to save anyone, but out of sheer grace He decided from all eternity to save some. These, and these alone, are the ones for whom Christ died (see appendix 6). Only these are operated on by God's irresistible grace and brought to ultimate salvation.

Man's Free Choice

What we call “free choice” actually is determined by God; we cannot act contrary to His sovereign will. Even those who “freely” reject God do so in accordance with His sovereign will. Hence, the elect are predestined by God to heaven and the non-elect to hell (or, at least, were not chosen by God for heaven). True freedom is not freedom to do good or evil but only to do good. God is free and cannot do evil. Therefore, the ultimate freedom (attained only in heaven) is freedom from evil, not any freedom to do evil. *Freedom* means “doing what we desire,” and only God can give the desire to do good; any desire to do evil comes from our own evil nature. Fallen humans have no free will in the sense of having a self-determined choice to accept God’s gift of salvation.

In short, this view places sovereignty over free will. Any act of free will with regard to salvation comes only as a result of God producing it by His grace. Even the will to reject God is not self-determined but, rather, is an act ordained by God for the condemnation of the wicked, just as an act for Christ is one given by God for the salvation of the elect.

THE EXTREME FREE WILL VIEW

God's Control

This position maintains that God does not have rigid control of the universe; He gave away some of His sovereignty to His creatures when He gave them free choice. God does not determine human free acts; He reacts to them as He becomes aware of them. The future is not fixed—it’s open to our free choices to help determine it. What we decide can change the future.

God's Foreknowledge

God knows with certainty only what flows from a necessary order of causes. Since our free actions are not necessary but based on choices, God cannot know them for sure. So the future is not immutable. Omniscience is limited to what is possible for God to know, and it is not possible for God to know future free choices that free creatures will make. Since His knowledge about the future is not infallible, He can make predictions that

do not come to pass; what He foretells can have only relative degrees of probability. Nonetheless, because of His great knowledge, God is highly accurate in His forecasting.

God's Predestination

God has not predetermined individuals to heaven or hell. Election is corporate, not individual; each individual must choose his own salvation. God has predestined the bus (Christ) for heaven—people can get on (salvation) or off (reprobation) by their own free choice. Predestination is based on God's foreknowledge of who will choose Him and who will not. Hence, His election is conditional—it is conditioned on our accepting or rejecting Him.

Man's Fallen State

Fallen human beings are spiritually dead in that they have no spiritual life. However, God's image is still present in them. As such, they are able to hear His voice and respond to His offer of salvation, and they must believe before they are regenerated. All people are capable of this belief that brings salvation.

God's Grace

God's saving love is for all people. Christ died for all humankind, and God is trying to save everyone. His grace, however, is not irresistible: Some accept and are saved, while some reject it and are lost (though some proponents of this view deny any eternal conscious punishment). We cannot work for our salvation, but we must work from it. Those who do not perform the proper good works can lose their salvation, for if salvation can be gained by a free choice, it likewise can be lost.

Man's Free Choice

Free will means the ability to do otherwise. Humans are truly free, having the power of contrary choice. God's choice of some to salvation is based on His foreknowledge that they would believe in Him. True freedom here on earth is the freedom to do good or evil. Only in heaven will there be freedom from evil; here we are free to reject God and His

gift of heaven. Indeed, the free choice to accept salvation can later be used to reject and lose it.

In short, this view places free will over sovereignty. God does not completely control the universe. His work on free creatures is persuasive but not coercive. In the final analysis, our destiny is determined by our own free choices. God's sovereignty is limited by the free creatures He has made.

THE BALANCED VIEW

A third view attempts to balance sovereignty and free will, accepting both as basic biblical truths and seeking to reconcile them without making one or the other dominant to the exclusion of the other.

The extreme Sovereignty view is held by extreme Calvinists.

The extreme free will view is embraced by extreme Arminians (also called Open Theists).

The balanced (or middle) view is maintained by moderate Calvinists and moderate Arminians. This is not to say there are no differences between moderate Calvinists and moderate Arminians. For example, moderate Calvinists believe in eternal security (once saved, always saved), and moderate Arminians do not. However, they hold many things in common, including their views on the following.

God's Control

According to the balanced (middle) view of sovereignty and free will, God is in "control" of the universe of free creatures by His foreknowledge. He does not force anyone's freedom, but He knows in advance from all eternity exactly what everyone is going to freely do and how much persuasion will be needed for them to do it.

Further, God was free to create or not create, to create free creatures or not create them. Knowing exactly what would happen in every possible world, He freely chose to create this one to achieve the greatest good. His omniscient foreknowledge assures that it's going to come out exactly as He knew it would.

God's Foreknowledge

God knows with certainty what flows from a necessary order of causes. But He also knows for certain what free choices we will make. So, in advance, He infallibly knows the entire future of the universe; it must come to pass as He knew it would, otherwise, He would have been wrong, and an omniscient mind cannot be wrong. Since God's knowledge about the future is infallible, His predictions must come to pass—they are not “probable forecasts.” The future (including free choices) is determined from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge but free from the vantage of our free will.

God's Predestination

God has predetermined some individuals to heaven. Election is not merely corporate; it is individual. Election of an individual is based on (or else according to)¹ God's foreknowledge of their free choices. He never predestines anyone contrary to their free will but elects only those He foreknew would accept His saving grace. There are no conditions for God *giving* the gift of salvation, but there is one condition for *getting* it—one must receive it by faith.

Man's Fallen State

Fallen human beings are spiritually dead in that they have no spiritual life. However, God's image is still present in them; hence, they're able to hear His voice and respond to His offer of salvation. They must believe as a condition for being regenerated, and everyone is capable of exercising this belief that brings salvation. But no one ever believes who has not been persuaded by God's grace to do so.

God's Grace

God's saving love is for all people. Christ died for all humankind, and God is trying to save everyone. His grace, however, is not irresistible; it is persuasive but not coercive. Those who accept Christ are saved, and

¹ There are two different views. See chapter 8 for an explanation.

those who reject Him are lost. We cannot work for our salvation, but we must work from it.

Man's Free Choice

Free choice in this life means “the ability to do otherwise.” Humans are truly free. True freedom here on earth is the freedom to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation. In heaven we will be free from evil; here we are free to do evil.



CHAPTER THREE

Who's in Charge?

The sovereignty of God is a biblical doctrine. How it relates to free will is another question (see chapter 8), but the Bible clearly teaches that God is in charge of His universe. To deny this, one has to ignore a mass of Scripture. God's sovereignty, deeply rooted in His attributes, is revealed by (1) His characteristics and (2) His control.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

Once we understand who God is, we can understand why He is in charge of everything. His essential attributes include the following.

God Is Before All Things

God is "*before all things*" (Col. 1:17). As the first verse of the Bible puts it, "In the beginning God . . ." Before there was anything else, there was God, the Uncreated One. "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2 KJV). There never was a time when God was not. In fact, He existed forever before all things. He is "the First," "the Beginning,"

and “the Alpha” (Rev. 1:8; 1:17; 21:6). Often the Bible speaks of God as being there “before the world began” (John 17:5; cf. Matt. 13:35; 25:34; John 17:24; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

God was not only before all things, but He was before all time. That is, He is eternal. God was there “*before the beginning of time*” (2 Tim. 1:9). In fact, He brought time into existence when He “framed the worlds” (literally, “the ages,” Heb. 1:2, Rotherham trans.). God “alone has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:16 NKJV). We get it only as a gift (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53; 2 Tim. 1:10). And our immortality has a beginning; God’s does not.

God Created All Things

Not only is God before all things, but He created all things. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1 KJV). “*Through him [Christ] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made*” (John 1:3). “By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16).

God Upholds All Things

God not only created all things, He also upholds all things. Hebrews declares that God is “*sustaining all things by his powerful word*” (1:3). Paul adds, “He is before all things, *and in him all things hold together*” (Col. 1:17). God not only brought all things into existence but He keeps them in existence. Both are true, for “*they were created and have their being*” from God (Rev. 4:11). There is “one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and *through whom we live*” (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Rom. 11:36). Hebrews asserts “it was fitting that God, for whom and *through whom everything exists*, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering” (2:10).

God Is Above All Things

The God who is before all things He created and who is upholding all things is also beyond them: He is transcendent. There is “one God and Father of all, who is *over all* and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6). “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have

set your glory *above the heavens*" (Ps. 8:1). "Be exalted, O God, *above the heavens*; let your glory be over all the earth" (57:5). "For you, O Lord, are the Most High *over all the earth*; you are *exalted far above all gods*" (97:9; cf. 108:5).

God Knows All Things

What is more, the God of the Bible knows all things. He has omniscience (*omni* = all; *science* = knowledge). That God is all-knowing is clear from numerous passages. "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; *His understanding is infinite*" (Ps. 147:5 NKJV). God *knows "the end from the beginning"* (Isa. 46:10). He knows the very secrets of our heart. The psalmist confessed: "Before a word is on my tongue *you know it completely*, O Lord. . . . *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*" (139:4, 6). Indeed, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. *Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*" (Heb. 4:13).

The apostle exclaimed: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! *How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*" (Rom. 11:33). God knew who would eventually be saved (1 Peter 1:2) before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). By His limitless knowledge God is able to predict the exact course of human history (Dan. 2, 7), including the names of persons generations before they were born (cf. Isa. 45:1). God made nearly two hundred predictions about the Messiah, not *one* of which failed. God knows all things past, present, and future.

God Can Do All Things

Furthermore, God is all-powerful. He not only knows all things eternally and unchangeably, but He is omnipotent (*omni* = all; *potent* = powerful). Before performing a great miracle, God promised Abraham, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?* I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son" (Gen. 18:14). "*Nothing is impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37).

He is not only infinite (not limited) in His knowledge, He is also infinite in His power. "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. *Is anything*

too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27). God's power is supernatural, as is evident by His miracles that overpower the forces of nature. Jesus, the Son of God, walked on water (John 6), stilled the storm (John 6), and even raised the dead (John 11).

Also, God's omnipotence is manifested in His creation of the world from nothing. He simply spoke and things came into being (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11). Paul describes Him as "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness'" (2 Cor. 4:6). *God is "sustaining all things by his powerful word"* (Heb. 1:3).

Of course, God cannot do what is actually impossible to do. Since it is impossible for God to do things contrary to His unchanging nature, He cannot do any contradictory thing. The Bible says, "God . . . cannot lie" (Titus 1:2 NASB), because "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind" (1 Sam. 15:29).

For example, God cannot make a square circle. Nor can He make a triangle with only two sides. Likewise, God cannot create another God equal to Himself. It is literally impossible to *create* another being that is *not created*. There is only one Uncreated Creator (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:18). Everything else is a creature.

Nonetheless, otherwise, there are no limits on His power: God can do whatever is possible to do, anything that does not involve a contradiction. The Bible describes Him as "the Almighty" in numerous places (e.g., Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4; Job 5:17).

God Will Accomplish All Things

God's sovereignty over all things implies also that He accomplishes all things that He wills. "The Lord Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and *as I have purposed, so it will stand*. . . . For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and *who can thwart him?* His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?'" (Isa. 14:24, 27). Again, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. . . . My *purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please*. . . . *What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do*" (46:9–11). Paul adds, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the

plan of him *who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*" (Eph. 1:11). Peter confirms this, saying of Christ's crucifiers that *they did what your [God's] power and will had decided beforehand should happen*" (Acts 4:28; cf. 2:23).

THE CONTROL OF GOD

A God who is before all things, beyond all things, creates all things, upholds all things, knows all things, and can do all things is also in control of all things. This complete control is called the sovereignty of God. As *The Westminster Confession of Faith* puts it, "God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass."¹ Nothing catches God by surprise. All things come to pass as He ordained them from all eternity.

God Rules Over All Things

The Bible affirms God's sovereignty in many ways. Just as earthly sovereigns control their domain, even so the heavenly King is in charge of His creation. Isaiah's vision of God was of a heavenly king whose train filled the temple (Isa. 6). Yahweh is called "*the Great King*" (Ps. 48:2); His reign is eternal, for "*the Lord is enthroned as King for ever*" (29:10). He is King over all the earth; "*The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from his land*" (10:16). He is also the almighty King: "Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, *the Lord mighty in battle*" (24:8). As such, God rules over all things: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for *everything in heaven and earth is yours*. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; *you are exalted as head over all*. Wealth and honor come from you; *you are the ruler of all things*" (1 Chron. 29:11–12).

God Is in Control of All Things

Not only is God in charge of all things, He is also in control of them. Job confessed to God: "*I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted*" (Job 42:2). "Our God is in heaven; *he does whatever*

¹ Chapter 3

pleases him” (Ps. 115:3). Again, “*The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths*” (135:6). “*He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’*” (Dan. 4:35).

Earthly Kings Are Under God’s Control

Solomon declared that “*The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases*” (Prov. 21:1). God is the Sovereign over all other sovereigns, “*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*” (Rev. 19:16). There is no human who is not under God’s power. God said of Assyria’s king, he is “the rod of my anger” (Isa. 10:5).

Human Events Are Under God’s Control

God not only controls the hearts of kings, He is in charge of all human events. He ordains history’s course before it occurs, as He predicted through Daniel the great world kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2, 7). Indeed, King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that “*the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men*” (4:17). The Lord says, “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but [it] will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11; cf. 46:9–11).

Good Angels Are Under God’s Control

God not only rules in the visible realm but also in the invisible domain. He is over all creation, including “visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers” (Col. 1:15–16 κνν). The angels come before His throne to get their orders to obey (1 Kings 22; Job 1:6; 2:1). The multitudes of heaven worship Him (Neh. 9:6). Indeed, they are positioned before His throne, and “day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’” (Rev. 4:8).

Evil Angels Are Under God's Control

God's sovereign domain includes not only the good angels but also the evil ones (Eph. 1:21). They too will bow before God's throne one day in total subjection to Him, for "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*" (Phil. 2:10; cf. Isa. 45:22–23). Indeed, the evil spirits who deceived King Ahab were dispatched from God's very throne.

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing round him on his right and on his left. And the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?" One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, "I will entice him." "By what means?" the Lord asked. "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets," he said. "You will succeed in enticing him," said the Lord. "Go and do it" (1 Kings 22:19–22).

Satan Is Under God's Control

Satan came along with the good angels before God's throne in the book of Job (1:6; 2:1); although he wished to destroy Job, God would not permit him. Satan complained, saying to God, "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land" (1:10). God has power to bind Satan anytime He desires, and He does it for a thousand years in the book of Revelation (20:2).

Also, the devil's demons who fell with him (Rev. 12:9; Jude 6) know they are eventually doomed. One cried out to Jesus, "What do you want with us, Son of God? . . . Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matt. 8:29). Eventually Satan and all his hosts will be destroyed. The devil himself "knows that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12). While he is presently roaming the earth (1 Peter 5:8), he does so only on a leash held firmly by God's sovereign hand.

Christ came to destroy the works of the devil (Heb. 2:14). He did so officially on the Cross (1 John 3:8), and He will return to defeat the devil actually. John foretells how "the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet

had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

Human Decisions Are Under God's Control

What is more, the Scripture portrays God as in sovereign control of everything we choose, even our salvation. "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of *him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*" (Eph. 1:11). "Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). According to Paul, "he chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Peter said of Jesus to the Jews, "This man was handed over to you *by God's set purpose and foreknowledge*; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). Indeed, only those who are elect will believe, for "all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (13:48).

Other verses affirm God's actions on the human will, even in matters of salvation. We are "children [of God] born not of natural descent, *nor of human decision* or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13). Likewise, Paul affirms that "*it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy*" (Rom. 9:16 NKJV). He adds even stronger words: "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (9:18).

God's sovereignty over human decisions includes both those for Him and against Him. Peter, quoting from Isaiah (8:14), writes of Christ: He is "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because *they disobey* the message—which is also what *they were destined* for" (1 Peter 2:8). Likewise, God has destined the "vessels of wrath" who were "prepared for destruction" (Rom. 9:22 NASB) as well as the "vessels of mercy" (v. 23 NASB)—each according to His will. Even the actions of the king of Assyria were "the rod of [God's] anger, in whose hand is the club of [God's] wrath" (Isa. 10:5). "I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me" (v. 6).

Whatever else may be said, God's sovereignty over the human will includes His initiating, pursuing, persuading, and saving grace, without which no one would ever will to be saved. "There is no one who understands, *no one who seeks God*" (Rom. 3:11). "We love Him" only because "*He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19 NKJV). Indeed, no one comes to the Father unless he is drawn by God (John 6:44).

If God is sovereign, how then can we be free? Does not divine sovereignty make a sham of human responsibility? Does not a sovereign God pull the strings of human "puppets" at His will?