

# Does the Bible Say That?

## "God is in Control" (nuanced)

### Texts

There is no passage in any word-for-word version (e.g., ESV, NASB or NKJV) that says "God is in control." The statement comes from the idea that God is "sovereign" (used to define any person who has supreme power or authority). We agree that the Lord is "sovereign," although that word is used rarely in the ESV, NASB and NKJV, and not always applied to God. In the NASB, the term is applied to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:18), to Damascus (Isaiah 17:3) and to Christ (I Timothy 6:15).

The issue is not whether God is in control, ultimately. It's whether the statement needs context to be meaningful (it does).

We will stipulate the following so we do not need to discuss these things in detail: (1) God *inherently* has complete power and authority over all creation, in heaven and in earth (Psalm 93:1-2 and many others). (2) Presently, God has given all authority in heaven and in earth to his Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). However, at the end of time, Jesus will give the kingdom back to God, so that God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28). (3) At any moment, God could intervene in the lives of people to change their circumstances or bring about whatever change he will (that's why we pray). (4) God can use any means – natural or providential – to bring about his will if he so chooses (the question of whether God ever uses miracles in these times is a separate question, in a class of its own).

### The Issue: Should Christians make the statement "God is in Control" without further explanation?

Does God control *all* events, at *all* times, in *everyone's* life? If we make the statement at issue, "God is in control," without further explanation, then we run the risk of identifying with those who believe that God is controlling everything, down to the *nth* degree (see #2) below.

### Questions

1. Why is the question at issue relevant and important? Or is it?
2. Psalm 103:19, in the NASB, says, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." In the ESV, the verse reads: "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." Are these statements synonymous with "God is in control"? Why or why not?
3. Critique these statements, all uttered by highly regarded theologians:
  - "There is no maverick molecule in the universe; God controls every thought and twist and turn of every molecule in the universe." R. C. Sproul
  - [John Calvin] asks his readers to imagine a merchant who enters a wood (forest) with a company of companions and unwisely wanders away from them and is slain by thieves. He concludes "His death was not only foreseen by God's eye, but also determined by his decree."
  - John Piper (in an interview with CNN): "God did not merely foresee or permit the terrorist attacks of 9/11 but designed and governed them... the recent tornadoes were not merely permitted by God but sent by God..."
4. We all agree that it is sinful to ascribe words to God that he has not spoken. Is it any less sinful to ascribe actions to God that he has not ascribed to himself?

5. There are many occasions, especially in the Old Testament, where God explicitly states that he took or commanded some specific action, whether defeating an enemy in war or raising up or bringing down a nation or hardening a heart, etc.
  - Are we justified in assuming that, therefore, God always acts in the same way in similar circumstances today?
  
6. If God is in control, as described by Sproul, Calvin and Piper above, what can we logically conclude about God's part in history and politics, in church life, in our personal actions and decisions, and our personal spiritual condition?
  - Describe some specific events or results that are difficult to square with God's character.
  
7. Consider a few serious inconsistencies that result if God is controlling *every* "thought and twist and turn..." in the universe. For example, "God hates divorce" (Mal. 2:16) – why, if every divorce is "determined by his decree"? Give some other examples.
  
8. Some people make the statement, based on a false reading of passages like Jeremiah 29:11, for example, that God has a specific plan for each individual. This is known as the "dot theory."
  - God *does* have a plan for each individual on earth. What is it?
  
9. Here are a few statements that have been mined from Facebook, emails and information that people have sent to me. In analyzing these and similar statements you may read or hear, ask (1) is this person speaking "as the very utterance of God"? (1 Pet. 4:11) (2) Is God's name being used in vain? (3) If faith comes from hearing, is this statement based on faith? (4) Does this accuse God of evil? (see Habakkuk 1:13). (5) Is the speaker being careful in his use of words? (Mt. 12:36-37). (6) Is the speaker being presumptuous? Mt. 4:5-7 (7) Is the speaker boasting? (8) Is the speaker speaking "truth, in love" (Eph. 3:15)?
  - Just before the election in 2016, after debate between parties on one side or the other: "Oh, well, God is in control." Does this slogan apply to 1933-1945, when Hitler ruled Germany? Does it apply to Planned Parenthood?
  - After a tragic event: "Why would God do this to us?"
  - "I need to pray and find out what God wants me to do in this situation."
  - "I prayed and God gave me this great job!"
  - Or, speaking of financial success, or the lack of health issue: "God has blessed me..." [Are physical benefits necessarily blessings from God?]
  - "God must have wanted me to have \$100 because Ticketmaster never ran my credit card for the concert I attended!" [Actual post on Facebook]
  - "I can't sleep. There's A LOT on my mind right now... I'm going to be entering a week of praying, fasting and waiting on God to make His will clear to me."

Conclusion: Write out a statement that honors God's power and sovereignty in a way that is consistent with the issues we've raised in this class, and without leaving the impression that we have adopted the extreme Calvinistic view of God's sovereignty. Be as succinct as possible.

# The Will of God

## God's Sovereign Unrevealed Will

The Realm of God's Providence

God's Sovereign Unrevealed Will

**God's Revealed Will**

God's Revealed Will

A man in a dark suit and light-colored trousers stands in the center of a red rectangular area. He is holding a grey rectangular sign with the text "God's Plan for Me?". The background of the red area is a solid red color.

God's Revealed Will

**God's Revealed Will**

God's Sovereign Unrevealed Will

## God's Sovereign Unrevealed Will