

# Therefore Choose!

by Jonathan Duttweiler

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" I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;" Deut. 30:19

Most people, Christian and non-christian alike, have some mistaken, unscriptural, ideas about God and how He rules this world. Somewhere most have gotten the idea that because God is omnipotent His will is **always** being done and, as an adjunct of that, one should never question that fact. Whatever happens in their lives, whatever circumstance comes their way, they believe it **must** be will of God.

Now, these ideas inevitably lead to certain conclusions, even if left unarticulated. The first conclusion this idea leads to is that God is arbitrary, that is that He can and does act in whatever way He feels. A corollary of this is that He is completely beyond the understanding of human beings because so many things that happen make absolutely no sense. Now, this may *seem* logical, but Deut, 32 says that God is "the Rock , His work [is] perfect ; For all His ways [are] justice..." His ways are **just!** Not capricious or arbitrary, as Abraham states: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?" (Genesis 18:25)

Rather than being arbitrary, God acts according to His intelligence. While His thoughts and ways may be above us in their infinitude and holiness, He nevertheless calls to us, "Come now, and let us reason together..." (Isaiah 1:18) So we must ask ourselves: "Is God's will really **always** being done?"

To answer this question we must first understand how God governs this universe He has created! Ps. 145:13 declares "Your kingdom [is] an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion [endures] throughout all generations." Many believe that God has abdicated, that He is no longer interested in His creation, however such is not the case. They simply don't understand God's mode of governing and so fail to see God at work. Gordon Olson writes in *The Moral Government of God* "In God's universal rule over all creation there are two great modes of operation, which may be classified as MORAL and NON-Moral government."

## Non-Moral Government

Non-moral government is the supervision and regulation of all creation not capable of moral choice and action; it is a government of *cause* and *effect*. The most obvious example of this is the inanimate universe. Here God rules by what we call "natural laws", such as the laws of gravity and thermodynamics. This is a government of cause and effect, that is, given the right cause, a specific effect will always come about! If you jump off a building you **will** fall, there is no invariance, no question, no "maybe."

Another example of non-moral government is the animate, non-moral, creation. This is what we call the "animal kingdom" Here God's government works by instinct, and even perhaps by direct divine supervision! Consider what grand mystery enables the salmon to find very spot hatched after being as far as 2000 miles away! Or bats who are able to pick out the one species of frog they can eat from amongst all others. Because God designed and created the universe and animal kingdom to be controlled in this manner, we might say that God's will here is always being done, that is the Universe essentially operates as it was created to.

## **Moral Government**

According to Charles Finney "moral government...is the government of mind in opposition to the government of matter." In moral government God generally rules by moral persuasion in opposition to force, i.e. God seeks to appeal to the free-will of people in order to persuade them to conform to His law! The Bible is essentially the textbook of the moral government of God over humanity. While scripture states God does not desire any should perish, Jesus states: "narrow [is] the gate and difficult [is] the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.." (Matt. 7:14) There must be a reason God so successfully deals with the physical universe but is so unsuccessful in dealing with humanity!

The reason is humanity's **free-will!** Being created in the image of God, we have the ability to make moral choices, choices between right and wrong, apart from any causative force!

People always seem to be looking for what "caused" someone to do something, especially in our society today where everyone is a *victim!* The truth of the matter is, **nothing causes** us to make the choices we make.

We may be influenced, we may be persuaded, we may be motivated - but we are never **CAUSED!** Something that is *caused* cannot be *free*, and that which is *free* can never be *caused!* Again Gordon Olson writes, "It is the very essence of moral government that man is the sole author of his own actions. While God exerts strong persuasive influences, in no sense is God the cause of man's moral choices, secretly or otherwise."

In our text God has done His utmost to set before people of Israel His will for them and persuade them to do it! He says "'For this commandment which I command you today [is] not [too] mysterious for you, nor [is] it far off. It [is] not in heaven, that you should say, `Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor [is] it beyond the sea, that you should say, `Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' "But the word [is] very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.'" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14) To receive God's blessing they simply must do His will, it is their choice! Again Moses declares, "'I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live..." (Deut. 30:19) Free choice is the distinctive characteristic of God's moral government! If the

"may" or "may not" of free choice does not exist then we are simply robots, under the rule of cause and effect!

### **Providential Government**

Now there is such a thing as God's "governmental providence," i.e. the temporary suspension of moral freedom by God's direct action so that particular occurrences might take place. This is exactly what God did with Pharaoh, whom so many use as an example of God determining all our choices. In Exodus 7:4 we read of God speaking to Moses, "'But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies [and] My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I [am] the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them'." Scripture presents a wide range of illustrations of God operating providentially in human affairs in order to regulate human society or bring about specific actions. And while we may maintain that God can and does control the human will in a multitude of instances, doing so sets aside moral freedom and accountability. Pharaoh was not judged for God's hardening of his heart, but for his own hardening of his heart! And in no sense can we conclude from this passage that this is God's *normal* manner of dealing with moral agents nor that He ever does this in the realm of personal salvation. Human beings, in that respect, always determine their own destiny!

God does not leave the rule of this world solely to the selfish pride of humanity, but neither does He constantly regulate and control our actions and decisions. From what scriptures teach us, we can only conclude that it is the will of man that is being done the majority of the time on this earth, and not the will of God! (Else why should Jesus teach us to pray, "Father, *Thy* will be *done* on earth as it is in heaven"?)

Human beings are "fearfully and wonderfully made" and so also are fearfully and wonderfully responsible for their actions. God has created us in His image, as free moral agents with the ability to choose for or against Him and His Universal Law. We **must** stop blaming God for our spiritual condition and began to take responsibility for our own actions. The choice is set before us: the will of God and life, or disobedience and death! The blessing or the curse, under God's Government it is our choice - "Therefore choose ... ! "