

## **THE PROBLEM WITH SIN**

Does God actually cause or determine sin? This concept of God determining everything can be traced back to Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century and is especially popular among a branch of Protestantism known as Reformed Theology, also known as Calvinism. It is a religious philosophy that adheres to the teachings of John Calvin (1509 - 1564 A.D.)

The concept of God's sovereignty is the foundation of Calvinism. Reformed theologians take great pride in their lofty ways of speaking about God. Calvinism can be summarized in five false religious ideas known in the acronym as TULIP: **T**otal Heredity Depravity, (babies are born guilty of the sin of their parents), **U**nconditional Election, (God arbitrarily chooses independent of any known standard - who will be eternally saved and who will be eternally condemned), **L**imited Atonement, (Christ did not die for everyone), **I**rresistible Grace, (you do not have a choice as to whether or not you will obey the gospel). **P**erseverance of the Saint, (it is impossible for a Christian to rebel against God). Here is the problem, the Bible's sovereign God and Calvinism's sovereign God are two very different Gods. Calvinists have redefined the concept of sovereignty. The belief that God determines, causes, and orchestrates everything in history according to His preconceived plan, including sin and evil, is known as divine determinism. Calvinism says that if someone does something terrible, it must have been God's will for it to happen in the first place.

**De jure** is a Latin word that means God has the right to rule. **De facto** is a Latin word that means God carefully controls everything that happens. Calvinists believe God is both sovereign **de jure** and **de facto** all the time. N. T. Christians believe that God is always in charge **de jure**, but that He chooses to limit His power **de facto**. In other words, God has the ability to meticulously control everything, but in His wisdom and love for mankind, He has chosen not to determine everything yet.

The Bible is permeated with the implication that God has given men the choice to serve Him, the freedom of choice. How could God extend His kindness if people are unable to choose repentance (Rom. 2:4)? How can we be commanded to "grow in the grace" of the Lord Jesus Christ if we are unable to choose to do so (2 Pet. 3:18)?

The Bible does, in fact, teach that God is sovereign, but it certainly does not teach that God determines mankind's decisions and preordains mankind's actions.

## **WHY DOES SIN EXIST?**

If God is truly sovereign over the affairs of the earth, why does He allow evil to exist? If God has all power and authority, does this make God responsible for sin? God can give people freedom without giving up His sovereignty His control. Since God rules His creation, He has granted mankind the liberty to serve Him or rebel against Him. This fact has been evident since the beginning of time.

## **IN THE BEGINNING: GOD MADE MAN IN HIS IMAGE**

Genesis 1:26-28 tells us the terms on which human beings were made. We have been created in the image of God to rule over God's creation. Humanity has been entrusted with the responsibility of ruling over creation as God Himself would rule over it. (Psalm 115:16).

## **THEN MAN SINNED**

God gave Adam and his wife an entire forest of trees, yet two were set apart: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). They could eat from any tree - *except* the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam existed by the pure grace of God and was given free reign over the earth, but that freedom had some terms, limits and conditions listed in the small print. Adam and his wife were free to obey or disobey God, but if they chose to disobey, the penalty would be death. God's sovereignty is in no way jeopardized by His allowing mankind a degree of freedom. Likewise, a parent's sovereignty over his child is in no way threatened when the child disobeys and the parent performs appropriate punishment.

## **AN ODD KIND OF SOVEREIGNTY**

We serve a God who has demonstrated His sovereignty - not by absolute control, but by sharing His power with His creation for the sake of a relationship with Him. God's sovereignty does not mean that God desires to micro-manage every decision or action we take. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the sovereignty of God than His own Son. (Phil. 2:5-8). God shared His sovereignty with mankind when He gave mankind the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and God shared His sovereignty with mankind as He hung on that tree at Calvary (Acts 5:30).

## **THE REASON FOR SIN**

(John 3:20; cf. Matt. 7: 13-14). Not even God in His sovereignty could create creatures who were both free moral agents and who are guaranteed to obey Him. It is logically impossible. "Free moral agency" and "guarantee" are exclusive of one another. God is a realist. (1 Cor. 13:7); (2 Pet. 3:9).

## **"ROMANS CHAPTER 9 TEACHES THAT GOD PREDESTINES PEOPLE."**

In Romans 9, Paul begins by grieving over the fact that the majority of the Hebrew people are lost, despite all of the blessings God has given them (Rom. 9:1-5). God had chosen to give the Israelites the "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2) and to bring Christ into the world through the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom. 9:5).

Paul reminds them that God alone is sovereign (Rom. 9:14-18) and He alone has the right to set the conditions for salvation (cf. Rom.1:17; 2:12-13).

**CONCLUSION:** For man to have the freedom to love and serve God, man must logically also have the freedom to disobey and sin against God. Because God loves us and wants to sincerely be loved in return, God in His grace has given man this choice.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – The Problem of Sin**

1. Where did the idea that God determines everything originate? Can you name the five tenets of Calvinism?
2. What is divine determinism?
3. Why would it be tempting to believe that God determines everything?
4. What critical mistake do Calvinists make in defining sovereignty?
5. What is the difference between God's sovereignty de jure and de facto?
6. What does it mean that man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27)?
7. Why do you think God gave mankind the ability to choose?
8. What Biblical example do you think best illustrates God, in His sovereignty, choosing to limit His power?
9. Do you think it diminishes God's power in any way to share some of His sovereignty with man? Why or why not?
10. Does Romans 9 prove divine determinism? Why or why not?