

## **The Sovereignty of God as Portrayed in THE RED SEA RULES**

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In his book, THE RED SEA RULES, Robert Morgan has taken the story of Exodus 14 and developed ten rules or principles to live by when you feel trapped by adverse circumstances such as Israel found itself at the Red Sea. God had led them by His glory in the cloud to the Red Sea. Then they were trapped by the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them—there was no way out! This was literally an unsolvable problem in their view. Have you ever had one of that kind of crisis situation? Many years later a priest in Jerusalem named Asaph had such a crisis, but he remembered how God had delivered Israel in Exodus 14. Therefore he wrote Psalm 77, "You (God) made a way through the sea and paths through the deep waters, but your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by using Moses and Aaron". This proved to Asaph as it does to us that God did this in a history making fashion that even in unsolvable problems, "God will make a way when there seems to be no way". When the author Morgan was studying Exodus 14, "ten rules unfolded like rubber rafts, ten ways of handling dilemmas and discouragements—a divine protocol for handling life when we find ourselves between the devil and the deep Red Sea". Morgan has found in Exodus 14 a biblical method to process difficulties by faith in light of God's presence with us, and His providence and His power. Rule number one is "REALIZE THAT GOD MEANS FOR YOU TO BE WHERE YOU ARE". Naturally, this assumes God's sovereignty over all things. God's sovereignty is the Christian doctrine that God, as the all powerful creator of all things, has the right and power to control all things. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass." Many Christians flinch at the word "predestination", but believe in the foreknowledge of God. Perhaps it would be valuable to discuss the relationship between the two.

In many passages such as David's prayers in 1 Samuel 23, David asked the Lord if he went up to Keilah to defend it against the Philistines, would he prevail—God said yes. Further David asked would the people there inform King Saul of David's whereabouts, so Saul could come capture him—God said yes they will rat you out. Therefore David did not go to Keilah, the Philistines were not defeated and Saul did not capture David. Now we know that God's foreknowledge does not require predestination. Foreknowledge and predestination are separable. What we know about predestination that all Christians should believe is that God has predestined certain BIG events like the incarnation of Christ, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. Also in the future God has predestined the second coming and our resurrection. God not only foreknows certain events but causes them to happen no matter what. God's love required Him to send Jesus into the world to intervene as our Savior no matter what, and God has already set a date for Christ's return.

### The Debate Over Free-Will vs. God's Sovereignty

Several questions have arrived and have been debated by the church for over 1600 years. In the creation account, God made man in His image giving man a free will to obey or disobey, therefore how do you balance God's control over all things with man's free will moral decision making ability? People recognize immediately that the doctrine of God's sovereignty raises a problem between God's control and humans' moral activity. If God is in control, how can we be truly free to choose? The first great theologian in the church was Augustine around 400 A.D. and he said, "We know that humans have a free will and are held responsible, but we also know that God is sovereign. How these truths relate to each other is hard for us to understand." A related question is that if God is all powerful and in control, how do you explain the existence of evil? I remember in my Freshman religion class in College, the professor proclaimed, "I can prove to you logically that the God of the Bible does not exist! If God is good He could not tolerate evil, and if God is all powerful He could prevent evil. Therefore there is no God". At the time I had no answer to that, but now I know there are several holes in his argument. First of all, he failed to realize evil is not a created thing, but a consequence of mankind's rebellion and disobedience to God. Before man sinned, God had said "If you disobey Me you will surely die". Augustine wrote that the entry of evil into the world is generally explained as punishment for sin and its continued presence due to humans' misuse of free will. God's goodness remains perfect and without responsibility for evil and suffering". Therefore, God did not create evil, but he created the possibility of evil by giving mankind free will. Another important truth my professor overlooked is that God can actually bring good out of evil. God can allow evil, but in the future somehow use it to bring about good. As in the case of Exodus 14, Pharaoh meant it for evil with the intention to slaughter the people of Israel, but God used it for good by revealing Himself to His people and teaching them to have faith in Him. Literally in every story in the Bible this happens. Jacob lied and cheated his brother and father, and then as a consequence Jacob ended up a hostage to Uncle Laban for 20 years. Laban lied to and cheated Jacob many times during this period, yet we see that in Jacob's prayer 20 years later (Genesis 32), that he was a totally changed man. God had used all the evil of Laban to humble him and transform Jacob's character. The ultimate example is Joseph in Genesis 50:20. Joseph's brothers had beaten him, thrown him in a pit, and then sold him into slavery in Egypt, but by God's providence he ended up being the Prime Minister of Egypt. In a terrible famine he was able to save his brothers, but his brothers expected him to seek revenge. Joseph told them, "You meant it for evil, but God used it for good." In the New Testament, Acts 8:1, Saul was heavily involved with persecuting Christians, arresting them, and killing them, yet through God's providence he ended up being one of Christ's biggest witnesses, and he wrote almost half of the books in the N. T. When the Apostle John was arrested and

exiled on the tiny island of Patmos, who would have believed that he would write the book of Revelation? The great Augustine himself had been a hedonistic womanizer, but he became the greatest theologian in church history. Of course the ultimate example was Jesus, who was falsely convicted, cruelly beaten and whipped, and then crucified. How could any good come from this? God used it to save all of us who believe in Jesus as our Savior, so literally the greatest good came from the worst evil!

## Divine Providence

God's providence is closely related to God's sovereignty. Providence comes from two words—Pro and videre. Pro means before and videre means "to see", therefore providence comes from the idea that God sees beforehand. Divine providence is the governance of God by which He with wisdom and love cares for and directs all things. If you are like me you think God's will only comes from His intervention or miracles, but providence means God somehow uses all the circumstances and decisions of people to fit together for good in the end. In the short run it may look like evil is winning, but in the end God will somehow through natural means bring about good out of it. In order for God's plan and will to be carried out, God works through the natural order of things. When Joseph's brothers sold him and he spent years in a dungeon, I'm sure he wondered how any good could come out of it, but in the end he saved Israel. God hated the sin of Joseph's brothers, but in God's providence all their sin worked together toward a greater good that millions of people including Joseph's brothers would be saved. Think of the evil betrayer Judas Iscariot who lied, deceived, stole, and betrayed Jesus. This was wicked, but all of Judas' sins led to the greater good—the salvation of the human race. God provisionally allowed Judas the freedom to commit a series of evil acts, but somehow it led to the greatest good ever done.

Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good"

This passage is perhaps the most well known and quoted concerning God's providence. First let us see what it does NOT mean. It does not mean that whatever happens is good. It does not mean that whatever happens is enjoyable, comfortable, and pain free. It does not mean we will be healthy and rich. Just look at the context of Romans 8:18, Paul had been arrested, beaten, whipped, stoned, and destitute, yet he wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Suffering and enduring evil were a way of life to Paul, but he had a forward view and assurance from God that in the future God would bring great good out of it. How certain was he? Read Romans 8:35-39, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or peril, or sword?...But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." What God's sovereignty and providence does mean is that He is in control, and even though He allows men to exercise their free will, it will end up how God decrees it. Look back at Romans 8:28-29. After saying all things will work together for good, the author Paul defines God's view of "good". Verse 29 says that God's decreed will is that we become conformed to the image of Christ—this is GOOD! The sovereignty of God is how it will all come together that we be resurrected into God's glory, and we will be conformed to the image of Christ.

## The Sovereignty of God

About half of professing Christians wrongly believe that God created all things, and created all the natural order and laws of nature like gravity, and then when God created man He gave man free will, and God does not intervene or exert His power over the creation. Man has free will to believe or not, and all our circumstances are according to natural laws and chance. Still others believe that God is like an absentee landlord that built a building and then left town leaving the tenants in charge. Deists believe that God never gets involved in His creation, and so do not believe in miracles, or God's providence. Yet hundreds of biblical passages explicitly teach that God is in control and He exerts sovereignty over everything. Remember what Daniel said in Dan.2:20-21 to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for all wisdom and might are His, and He changes the times and the seasons, He removes kings, and puts kings in place". In John 19:11, Jesus answered Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given to you from God above". Solomon said that even random events are controlled by the Lord, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov.16:33), also "Many are the plans in the mind of man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand". James 4:13-15 states "Come now you who say 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and trade and make a profit—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. Instead you should say 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'".

## Conclusion

What application should we have to the reality of the sovereignty of God? We should find rest and peace in God's providence. We can fall back on the love of God and the promises of God. Someone told me there are 3,000 promises in the Bible God has made to believers. Although I have not counted them I know there are a bunch of them and they are all good. Nobody had any more trouble than David, but he wrote "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" Psalm 46:1 David's advice was to be still and wait on the Lord, meaning don't give up, don't compromise, and don't sin, but expect God to come through for you in the end. Our ultimate promise is that Jesus is coming back for us, and we will be resurrected into glory, and dwell forever in the Kingdom of God. As Morgan put it in THE RED SEA RULES, "How can you not worry when the Red Sea faces you, the desert surrounds you, and the soldiers of Egypt are speeding toward you with drawn swords? Accept that God has placed you in that situation, and then convert your worries into prayers and your fears into faith".

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