

Our God The Great Shepherd Part 1 HANDOUT



One would be hard pressed to find in the history of the Church – or the pages of Scripture, any notion that God - as the rightful Creator and Owner of all that exists, does not exercise sovereignty (rule/governance/control) over His Creation as the means to seeing that His plans, promises and prophecies are accomplished. How exactly God does that - or what level of success He is able to achieve in regard to His plans, promises and prophecies, does not enjoy the same consensus. Within the Evangelical Church there exists two opposing views. Because they are so popular, it behooves us to not only understand them, but also reject them, as neither represents the view presented in Scripture (the view I call, “God the Great Shepherd”).

1. Theistic Determinism

All things – including the decisions, actions and paths of humans and angels, are predetermined to the degree that free-will cannot exist. Our lives are instead fixed in eternity past versus being the result of our free choices in the present. As such, our future fates – or eternal states, are also fixed or predetermined (e.g. Calvinistic election: those going to heaven or hell were decided before we were created). The reasoning behind such thinking is that by allowing any level of free-will you are inviting the possibility of God failing to accomplish His will in all things. He must therefore preprogram all things in His Creation to secure His intended outcome¹.

1.1. Who is crazy enough to believe this heresy?

1.2. Why should you view it as crazy and heretical?

1.2.1. B/C it makes God the author _____.

1.2.2. B/C it would mean that we are not _____.

1.2.3. B/C if that were true, then justice _____.

1.2.4. B/C in Scripture, God reacts and plans according to the _____.

1.2.5. B/C the early church also viewed theistic determinism as _____².

1.2.6. B/C theistic determinism is not much different than the view held by many popular _____.

1.2.7. B/C God's plans, promises or prophecies do not require it to be _____.

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: Determinism (the view of Calvinists and Atheists alike) is *not* the view presented in Scripture. And neither is the other view held by Evangelicals. What other heresy regarding God's sovereignty do they embrace?

¹ “If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.” – RC Sproul

² 1) “Let some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever occurs happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Now, if this is not so, but all things happen by fate, then neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it is predetermined that this man will be good, and this other man will be evil, neither is the first one meritorious nor the latter man to be blamed. And again, unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions... We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestinated that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions—whatever they may be.” – Justin Martyr (Christian apologist, 100-165 A.D.); 2) “Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary.” – Clement (Bishop of Alexandria, 150-200 A.D.); 3) “We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God [He is not its author]. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it.” – Tatian (Christian apologist, 120-180 A.D.); 4) “This expression, ‘How often would I have gathered my children together, and you would not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the precepts of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God... And in man as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice... If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things and to abstain from others?... But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff.” – Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyon, 130-200 A.D.); 5) “Men... have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice for you would not either honor the good or punish the bad; unless vice and virtue were in their own power, and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them, and others faithless...” – Athenagoras (Christian apologist, 150-190 A.D.); 6) “There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man.” – Melito (Bishop of Smyrna, 100- 180 A.D.); 7) “I find, then, that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as by this constitution of his nature. For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of his will... Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.” – Tertullian (Christian apologist, 155-225 A.D.); 8) “This also is clearly defined in the teaching of the church that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition... There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will.” – Origen (Christian theologian, 185-254 A.D.); 9) “Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.” – Methodius (Slavic missionary, 260-315 A.D.); 10) “The soul is self-governed: and though the Devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to us the thought of fornication, if you will, you can reject it. For if you were a fornicator by necessity then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, wherefore did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness; since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature.” – Cyril of Jerusalem (Christian theologian, 312-386 A.D.); 11) “All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost... it depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help... It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end.” – John Chrysostom (Archbishop of Constantinople, 347-407 A.D.); 12) “He [God] has revealed to us, through His Holy Scriptures, that there is in man a free choice of will... God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards.” – Augustine (Bishop of Hippo and adopted saint of the Evangelical/Calvinistic Reformers, 354-430 A.D.).