

## Our God The Great Shepherd Part 2



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 (however) 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 outcome<sup>1</sup>.

#### 1.1. Who is crazy enough to believe this heresy?

Anyone claiming to be Reformed or Calvinistic since this was the view of many of the Protestant Reformers (e.g. John Calvin, Martin Luther<sup>2</sup>). This is also the view of John MacArthur, John Piper, Al Mohler, the late R.C. Sproul, the Gospel Coalition and Ligonier Ministries, denominations such as the PCA, OPC, CREC, and ARBCA or seminaries such as The Master’s Seminary, Westminster Seminaries, Reformed Theological Seminaries and The Southern Baptist Seminary.

#### 1.2. Why you should view it as crazy and heretical:

1.2.1. B/C it makes God the author of sin and evil (Jer 7:30-34).

1.2.2. B/C it would mean that we are not responsible for our actions (Rom 1:19-20 – “without excuse”).

1.2.3. B/C if that were true, then justice would not be just (1Pe 1:17; 2Co 5:9-10).

1.2.4. B/C in Scripture, God reacts and plans according to the actions and potential actions of people (Gen 6:7, 22:12; Exo 13:17, 32:7-14; Jon 3:1-10; Jer 18:7-10; \*Theistic determinism is incompatible w/God reacting. Thus, to prove God does react is to equally prove determinism is wrong).

1.2.5. B/C the early church also viewed theistic determinism as heresy (e.g. Augustine<sup>3</sup>; Deu 8:2<sup>4</sup>).

1.2.6. B/C theistic determinism is not much different than the view held by many popular atheists (e.g. Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins).

1.2.7. B/C God’s plans, promises or prophecies do not require determinism to be successful/fulfilled (Consider the ability/expectations of finite humans -e.g. 1Ti 3:3-4).

#### 1.2.8. B/C it denies the important doctrine of the Perspicuity of \_\_\_\_\_.

What this doctrine teaches: Those teachings or truths of greatest importance in Scripture are made plain or clear and are meant to be discerned through literal interpretation and simple deduction (e.g. God reacting to the actions of people – Gen 11:1-9; Eze 6:9, 12:3; Jam 4:2).

### 2. \_\_\_\_\_

All things – including the decisions, actions and paths of humans and angels, are free to the degree that the future is not only unknown but open to the possibility of God being wrong about what He planned, promised or prophesied would take place.<sup>5</sup> The reasoning behind such thinking is that this (the future is so unknown that God can be wrong about it) is the only way to preserve the freedom of humans and angels while at the same time protecting God’s innocence in relation to sin and evil in the world.

#### 2.1. Who is crazy enough to believe this heresy?

Evangelicals such as Richard Rice, the late Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, David Basinger, William Hasker, Greg Boyd, local “Christian” radio hosts and pastors Bob Enyart and Gino Geraci, theological groups such as the Evangelical Theological Society, or denominations such as the Baptist General Conference, Calvary Chapel churches, or Christian colleges such as Bethel University, Messiah University, McMasters Divinity College.

<sup>1</sup> “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

<sup>2</sup> “This is my absolute opinion: he that will maintain that a man’s free-will is able to do or work anything in spiritual cases, be they never so small, denies Christ. This I have always maintained in my writings.” - Martin Luther

<sup>3</sup> “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.”

<sup>4</sup> “Church history helps to illuminate and clarify what we believe, providing a context for evaluating our beliefs and practices [as] a safeguard against error.” – Sinclair Ferguson (Church History 101: The Highlights Of Twenty Centuries)

<sup>5</sup> **1)** “God forecasts what he thinks will happen. In this regard God is the consummate social scientist predicting what will happen. God’s ability to predict the future in this way is far more accurate than any human forecasters, however, since God has exhaustive access to all past and present knowledge. This would explain God’s foretelling Moses that Pharaoh would refuse to grant his request. Nonetheless, **this does leave open the possibility that God might be ‘mistaken’ about some points...**” – John Sanders; **2)** “...it is always possible that even that which God in his unparalleled wisdom believes to be the best course of action at any given time **may [in the end] not produce the anticipated results...**” – David Basinger

2.2. Why you should view it as crazy and heretical:

2.2.1. B/C it would mean that God is – at best \_\_\_\_\_, at worst, a \_\_\_\_\_.

2.2.2. B/C it would mean a lot of legitimate prophets dying as \_\_\_\_\_.

2.2.3. B/C it denies the important doctrine of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.

What this doctrine teaches: that the original manuscripts of Scripture possess no error (intentional or unintentional) but are instead perfect and infallible in what they intend to communicate since they are the product (not of fallible men) but of a perfect and infallible God.

2.2.4. B/C the early church was unanimous in their view of Scripture as inerrant.

*“It would be pointless to call into question that Biblical inerrancy in a rather absolute form was a common persuasion from the beginning of Christian times, and from Jewish times before that. For both the Fathers and the rabbis generally, the ascription of any error to the Bible was unthinkable . . . . If the word was God’s it must be true, regardless of whether it made known a mystery of divine revelation or commented on a datum of natural science, whether it derived from human observation or chronicled an event of history.” – Bruce Vawter (Biblical Inspiration, 1972)*

*“There can be no mistaking that [the early church] held to divine, inerrant inspiration.” – Geoffrey W. Bromily (Historical Theology: An Introduction, 1978)<sup>6</sup>*

2.2.5. B/C God’s ability to perfectly accomplish His plans, promises and prophecies is what He claims distinguishes Him from the \_\_\_\_\_.

2.2.6. B/C humans, angels and the future can be truly free and unknown w/o the \_\_\_\_\_ of God being wrong or guilty of sin and evil.

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<sup>6</sup> **1)** “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them” – **Clement of Rome** (Bishop of Rome, 35-99 A.D.), **2)** “Since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion of myself” - **Justin Martyr** (Christian Apologist, 100-165 A.D.), **3)** “We must believe God who has given us the right understanding, for the Holy Scriptures are perfect, because they are uttered by the Word of God and the Spirit of God... We should leave things [of an unknowable] nature to God who creates us, being most assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit” – **Irenaeus of Lyons** (Bishop of Lyons and friend of Polycarp, direct disciple of the Apostle John; 130-202 A.D.), **4)** [The Scriptures are] an infallible criterion of faith.” - **Clement of Alexandria** (Christian Theologian and teacher of the famous Origen, 150-215 A.D.), **5)** “The statements of Holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth” – **Tertullian** (Christian Apologist, 160-240 A.D.), **6)** “Now it is the opinion of some, that the Scriptures do not agree together, or that God, Who gave the commandment, is false. But there is no disagreement whatever, far from it, neither can the Father, Who is truth, lie.” – **Athanasius** (Bishop of Alexandria, 293-373 A.D.), **7)** “The Scripture does not lie.” - **Gregory of Nyssa** (Bishop of Nyssa, 330-393 A.D.), **8)** “For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books; that is to say, that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false. It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive. I have learned to yield this [total] respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture. Of these alone do I most firmly believe that their authors were completely free from error” - **Augustine** (Bishop of Hippo, 354-430 A.D.).