

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Healing	Acts 19:11-22	Divine Determinism?	01.13.18
Website Writeup:			
To say 'God allows', is to say we're devoid of responsibility in our actions & choices & denies the evil forces at work in the world. Today we explore how Divine Determinism hamstrings our ability to, like William Carey said, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God!"			

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TITLE SLIDE UP FIRST

Acts 19:11-22 - *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs & aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured & the evil spirits left them. ¹³Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."*

¹⁴Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them & overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked & bleeding.

¹⁷When this became known to the Jews & Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸Many of those who believed now came & openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together & burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰In this way the word of the Lord spread widely & grew in power.

²¹After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia & Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²²He sent two of his helpers, Timothy & Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

Last week we had looked at Acts 19:11-22 & had used the principles discussed there as an impetus to look at the issues of healing, demonic activity & God's response to them. We're not breaking down the passage verse by verse, but using it as a springboard to discussion of these things. We'd said...sometimes our theology needs healing. Our own thinking about God, holds us back from experiencing the power & abundant life he wants for us. And we asked, what sets our message apart, or validates it, from all the rest?

Because words & good moral teaching are limited in power, we'd said we serve a living active God who cares about & intercedes in, the physical nature of the universe. God heals & delivers. We identified four theological roadblocks to our view of God's

interactive nature in the physical world, (1) *Sanctification through Sickness*, (2) *Divine Determinism*, (3) *The Faith Formula*, and (4) *The Secular World View*.

This week we will look at the second theological roadblock: **Divine Determinism**.

A pastor in Beverly Hills, in response to a *Times* article on the theological problems of suffering, wrote this: *“I feel compelled to affirm that any view of God which denies that He controls all events makes the idea of God irrelevant...The real question is not ‘Why does God allow suffering?’ but ‘Why does God show mercy at all?’ God loves some of us and He does not love others in the same way. That is why there is suffering for some and salvation for others.”*

I have a few problems with that statement, but, at the least, when we say God controls all events, then we also say, he decrees pain & comfort, wherever they're found. Divine Determinism, that God controls & orchestrates all events makes prayer for healing both futile & irrelevant. Futile, since God has decreed sickness & there's nothing we can do about it. Irrelevant, since if he's decreed healing, then he'll do it with, or without, our prayer. Ever feel like that? That it doesn't matter if you pray, that it won't make any difference anyway?

Many of us pray over the sick in this way: “If it pleases you Lord.” Or, “If it be your will.” Have you ever felt such statements betray our doubt as to what God wants in this area? I may be splitting hairs with my assessment of those statements, but I think we have to say there's some truth to it. That when we pray, we often do so with some doubt. Not that we can be fully assured of results, but deep down we doubt what God really wants for the person standing in front of us.

Questions always help us to think through an issue, so let me ask one. What if I was told by a man, he was deliberately infecting my daughter with the AIDS virus, because he believed it would make her character stronger. What do you suppose I would do when he brought the syringe full of infected blood to her arm? I would not come short of killing the man, would I? I'd resent the man at the least. Sometimes our unspoken theology says to us that God's doing these things to us; that it's His will. Which seems to fly directly in the face of the God of the Bible I know. That thinking very much may create resentment & hatred towards God.

Pastor Russell Dicks observes: *“If you believe, as traditional Christianity has taught, that God is sovereign...that is to say, He personally and with careful foresight determines the birth, the health, the handicap, or freedom from handicap of every baby, that He sends the illnesses, that He determines the major events of each person's life...then resentment towards God in some form or another is inevitable.”*

He mixes the concepts, sovereignty & determinism, in this quote, but I do understand what he's saying. However it does help to separate the two out. God has sovereign right to rule, but isn't deterministic in every detail of life. Many people who use the terminology of sovereignty unwittingly seem to be speaking more of determinism.

If I woke up in the middle of the night, as I often have, with my child in a fever & throwing up, what's my reaction? I pray, get medicine & call the doctor. If, as a father, I'm that concerned & rightly convinced, that my child is better off healthy, why do I question the will of God in this matter? Neither prayer, nor medical attention, is 100% guaranteed to bring healing - but that doesn't mean we should question God's heart.

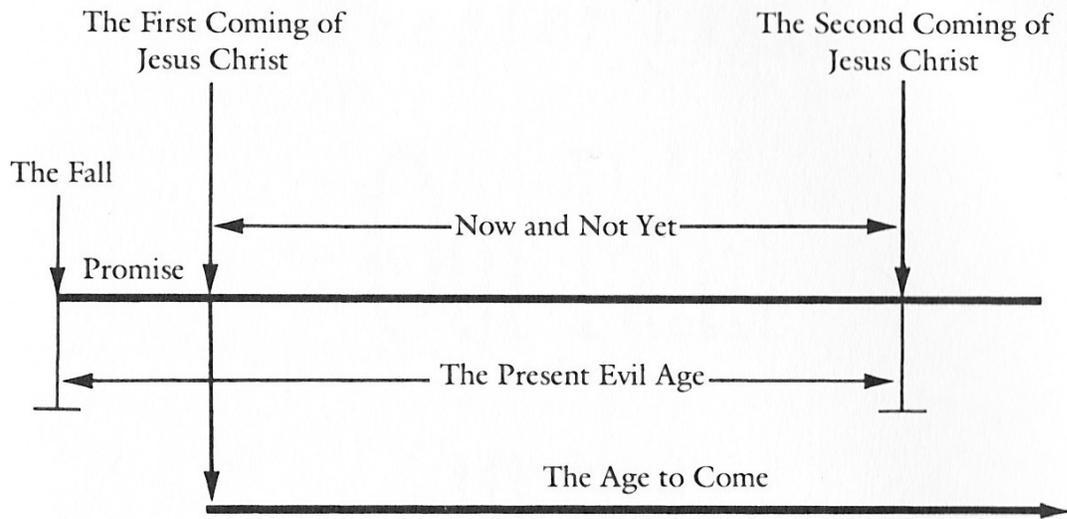
At times the Church has done the same with the concept of Evangelism. We would never say now as modern evangelicals that we're *not called* to go & make disciples (Mt 28:18-20). Yet, evangelism has been a recent development for some modern Christians. There have been times & in some churches it's still true, evangelism isn't seen as their responsibility. William Carey, when asking to be sent to India to evangelize, was told, if God wanted to save India he would do it without Carey's help - that it was not his responsibility to bring the message to them. Thank God Carey didn't listen. He was quoted as saying, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

Good mantra! The reason there's been so much drive towards missions in this day & age is largely due to William Carey, whom we call the Father of Modern Missions. A man who didn't view his role in God's Kingdom as irrelevant or futile, a man who didn't grow despairing, or passive in faith.

And, in the same way many of us have the divine deterministic view prayer for the sick is unnecessary. Because in this thinking, God's caused sickness & if he wants to heal, will do it without our intervention. Divine Determinism breeds despair & passivity, fostering hostility towards God - because God's either viewed as uncaring, aloof, or even sadistic.

When the Bible speaks of God's sovereignty, it doesn't mean God predetermines & controls all the events of history. Peter said, "*You stiff-necked people ...You are just like your fathers; You always resist the Holy Spirit!*" (Acts 7:51). In other words, we can resist the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to move in a certain area, we resist, it doesn't happen. Now, does that mean God's overall will has been thwarted? No, it doesn't, but it does show us a correlation between God working & our obedience.

In Matthew 23:37, Jesus laments the frustration of God's will by his people: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets & stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together...but you were not willing.*" In Mark 6:5, the evangelist reports Jesus himself was prevented from doing God's will, or working miracles, in his hometown specifically because of his neighbors' resistance. This all tells us, human choice is an issue; when we choose not to follow, God's will's not done in a certain instance. For some reason, God has chosen to work through his people. And if this is true, then obedience & trust in an open relationship with God's Spirit is of utmost importance in our spiritual journey with him.



In God's sovereignty there will come a day when his will's done in heaven & earth entirely - fully accomplished. But that day has not yet come; we're still in the days of the already & not yet. We stand in the time before the second coming of Christ.

At this point in history, some people & a significant number of angels oppose God's will. Sometimes, His will's opposed unwittingly by God's people, because, like we said last week, there may be a cowardice to face new truth, laziness content with half-truth, or arrogance which thinks it knows all truth.

We must realize, some things are accidents, some come in a line of successive events which makes them inevitable & some are the aftermath of bad choices by humankind or angels. If you don't understand how bad choices lead to bad situations, just watch LOST.

Many people gave up watching since you never get answers, just more questions, but it's clear, much of what happened to them was out of their control due to evil forces, or bad choices on their part. People are left with more questions than answers when watching, but we're all convinced the right choices should be made no matter the confusion; that good choices in community would bring better life to them.

For instance, instead of thinking, God determines every little flinch & step in my life, what if I looked at it differently? What if I viewed my life as if I was living in a field; a field fenced in by the love & grace of God. And, in this fenced in field, I can't be separated from God's love in Christ, God accepts me in grace, and I know he wants what's best for me. In this field, I'm free to make choices & in relationship with God I learn obedience to his law while under his grace. Sometimes I make good choices, sometimes bad. And, in this field there are also enemies around me, enemies who want to do harm, trip me up & wound me. But ultimately & in the future, those outside evil forces will be eradicated, and I'll live under God's perfect & good will.

So, when Christians use terminology like “God permits” or, “God allows” in reference to sickness, it seems to be an inadequate attempt to give an answer to something we just don’t fully understand. Just because we don’t understand, doesn’t mean we refrain from acting on who we know God to be. To say ‘God allows’, is to say we’re devoid of responsibility in our actions & choices & denies the evil forces at work in the world.

What we want is to have our theology tied up in a neat package with a bow & for all responsibility to lie in the hands of God. We want to have our god figured out as a mathematical equation; $a+b=c$ and then to use him like a magic wand. We’re uncomfortable & embarrassed with the unknown, and agitated with the grey areas of relationship with him - we’re embarrassed by a God who chooses to act out of love & limit himself in certain ways.

The answer lies somewhere in the realm of understanding the issue of already & not yet - that God won’t control all things due to his goodness & love for us & there’s hope for the future no matter what. That for some reason he’s chosen to do his work through us in relationship with him. Do I understand that fully, no. But at the least I have solace in knowing something about the character of God now & ultimate hope for the future. Simply because God doesn’t will illness, or predestine it, doesn’t mean he no longer accomplishes his will despite it, or even through it. We should be clear, it’s Satan’s will to cripple; it’s God’s will to heal, even if it doesn’t happen in every situation. Remember, Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he died again - he isn’t living somewhere in NJ running a 7 Eleven, driving a truck, or selling iPhones.

So, when we read passages like Acts 19, which deal with healing & demonic activity, we have an internal struggle. We don’t understand, since our theology may not be open to new truth, or satisfied with half-truth, or arrogantly saying that we know all truth; healing & spiritual power just don’t fit our view of God. It could be that unknowingly, we’re resisting the Holy Spirit; our theology may need healing before our bodies can be.

In other words, God wants us to experience him for who he really is, not based on faulty notions of him. And if we’re honest, the nature of not understanding all this, forces reliance on who he is, not what we expect, or want him to be.

Kim & I went to a Vineyard Pastor’s meeting years ago. While there we worshipped, and as usual, people broke out of worship & approached different folks with something they felt the Lord was saying to them, or just to pray over someone. A man, who’d never met my wife & knew nothing about her, approached & asked if he could pray, and before doing so stated he thought he was hearing something from the Lord about her. He proceeded to say things, using terminology I’d been saying to my wife for 18 years. Kim cried. Following that, two others, who hadn’t heard any of this did the same. That was spiritual healing! The Holy Spirit had spoken. Afterwards Kim & I talked. She expressed something interesting. She said, “I’m not used to all this, hearing from the Holy Spirit, ministry like this. Up until now, I have blamed it on my past church culture, and thought that I was just entering a new church culture. But now I see, I can’t blame-shift

anymore, God wants to speak to me, heal me & also for me to minister in this way to others!” She didn’t feel guilty about her past, but just saw a new door opening for her to experience the power available to her in Christ.

If I’ve not seen & experienced healing, it isn’t the fault of God; most likely, it’s me who resists his Spirit; or there are evil forces at work which I don’t understand. But, if it’s me who stands in the way, that’s not something I need to feel guilty about, it’s just another step into understanding the love of my Father more deeply; it calls me to faithful action. It’s a matter of whether you want to look back in shame on our past faulty thinking, or forward in hope seeing more clearly who God is. We should rejoice in the fact that there’s more to be learned & experienced in our life with Christ! God desires healing in all ways & suffering for the name of Christ is expected to be endured joyfully; two separate things. God’s sovereignty doesn’t extend to decreeing sickness & death, these are a result of the Fall, never a part of God’s plan.

So, in conclusion, if we act as a Divine Determinist, thinking God decrees all things good & bad, it breeds the sense of futility & irrelevancy. We must make no mistake about it, we’re in war. We must remember, we stand in the already & not yet, there are still opposing forces outside & within us which fight against God’s desire in these areas.

Military Strategists agree, in WWII when the Allied Forces landed on the beach of Normandy, it secured ultimate victory for them - it was the move which won the war, although the war continued. There were still skirmishes & battles to be fought. Some won, some lost, but the war was won at Normandy. Normandy for the Christian is the cross & resurrection of Christ; that moment secured victory for God over evil, but we’re still fighting out the few small battles until the final ending of the war.

We’re at war with spiritual forces which oppose God, but that doesn’t negate God’s goodness, or that he’s all powerful. It’s not so much as he allows these things, as much as it is creation’s chosen to oppose him. The war’s won, but it’s still being fought at the same time. For God to step in & control every detail would negate his character of love & goodness; however, it doesn’t negate his desire & love for all of creation. And, for some reason, He’s chosen to work through his people as he works in them. So, you & I aren’t futile & irrelevant in the battle. We need not despair, nor grow passive, we need to engage the battle. God will use you & I if we can learn not to try to figure it all out, but to act on what we know God’s character to be.

Next week we’ll look at another theological roadblock; The Faith Formula. Remember, sometimes our theology must be healed before our bodies can. I’m praying we’ll learn to Stand on the past work of Christ & operate in the current power of the Spirit. And in this issue of sickness & healing let’s... “Expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God.”