

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Sovereignty and Chance

John Lee

The sovereignty of God is one of the basic tenets of our faith. To be sovereign means that God has the power and authority to do anything He wants that does not violate His nature (lying, sin, etc.) and that He is in complete control of his creation. His sovereignty stems from the fact that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. **1 Chronicles 29:11-12** gives a great declaration of God's sovereignty.

In Christian circles, however, the issue is seldom "Is God Sovereign?" The Bible is clear on that, but the issue is to what extent and how God exercises His sovereignty. While God has the absolute power to control all things, does He choose to control all things at all times? Is everything that happens God's will, His choosing, or directed by Him?

We know that much of what happens on earth is not God's will. If it were, Jesus would not have instructed His disciples to pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This petition affirms that on earth, man often conducts himself outside God's will. The most dominant thing on earth is sin, and sin is never God's will.

But how can that be if God is sovereign? If God is in control, wouldn't His will always be done? The key lies in that God has a *desired will* and a *permitted will*. God's *desired will* is what He wants or desires to have happen. It is, for instance, His *desired will* that all be saved (see **2 Peter 3:9**). But we are told many will not be as they reject Him.

To give our love and obedience value, God permitted us (His *permitted will*) to have the free-will to choose whether to serve Him or not. Only volitionally-given love and obedience have real value. Only then is it meaningful to God.

So how or does *chance* fit in? The word chance appears six times in scripture (see **Deuteronomy 22:6** **1 Samuel 6:9**, **2 Samuel 1:6**, **Ecclesiastes 9:11**, **Luke 10:31** and **1 Corinthians 15:37** in the KJV). And it brings one of the more perplexing tensions in Christian thought. How does *chance* fit into the Christian concept of a sovereign God? Or are they mutually exclusive? Should the concept "chance" or "luck" even be part

of our Christian thought and vocabulary?

When considering chance, we must consider God's providence. Our sovereign God rules in a variety of ways. Sometimes He rules directly, sometimes indirectly. Sometimes He intervenes miraculously and sometimes providentially.

Providence comes from the word "provide," which has two parts: "pro" (Latin: "forward," "on behalf of") and "vide" (Latin: "to see"). So "God's providence" means the act or state of providing for, seeing to, or sustaining and governing the universe by God.

But providence is not provided in a singular way—there are

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two ways God's providence is experienced. Sometimes God actively manifests and directs His guidance over certain individuals or events. This is called Specific Providence. At other times God's providence is passively manifested to all His creation through the natural laws He has established. This is called *general providence*.

In *specific providence*, God actively uses his designed laws of nature to accomplish a specific event or outcome for an individual, group, or nation of people. An example can be seen in the story of Ruth, "*Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech*" (**2:3**).

Ruth "happened" to come to the field of Boaz. This shows the event from the standpoint of something unknown to Ruth, a chance occurrence, but this is a story of God's Providence. It seems that God had a special purpose in bringing Ruth and Boaz together and incorporating her into the lineage of Christ.

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He accomplished this without going outside His natural laws but providentially directing His guidance on Ruth.

Jeremiah provides another example: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born, I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (**Jeremiah 1:5**). God's *specific providence* brought about Jeremiah as a prophet within the natural laws of conception and birth.

These examples used the forces of nature under God's direction to accomplish a *specific* aim or need. In *general providence*, God allows His established laws of nature to continue at work, and God allows them to serve His creation *without* His direct or preferential involvement.

This is similar to what is sometimes called *general grace*. Grace has a general element that is bestowed on all (both believer and non-believer) as well as a specific (salvational) element that is bestowed only on those believers who accept Him. "...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (**Matthew 5:45**). This is a classic example of God's general grace or general providence. All mankind receives these blessings as a result of the natural laws He established. They are not directed to only certain individuals (as *specific providence*). And they occur independently of one's level of righteousness.

When we are faced with reconciling chance and sovereignty, we can say that events of chance in nature are governed by God's *general providence*. If the accident or event happens only because God set up the law of gravity, it will result from God's *general providence*. In this case, God does not actively will the accident or event but permits it by not intervening to alter the laws of nature. General providence acknowledges God as the source of our intricately designed universe while not making God a micromanager who directly causes the event (be it good or bad).

God is always sovereign.

- 1) Sometimes He is actively involved: He directly causes it to happen as in examples like the Red Sea.
- 2) Sometimes, He is passive: God does not directly cause it but allows the law of nature He established to dictate events, as Jesus taught in the Tower of Siloam (see **Luke 13**).

Does God's sovereignty rule out the possibility of chance events occurring? No, scripture contains both, but when and as

"chance" occurs, it is not outside the boundaries God has set for His creation.

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Cleansing Our Way

Louis Garbi

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (Psalm 119:9). This scripture beckons us to think of prospects and possibilities beyond imagination. Youth is filled with promise. Energy and talent are ready to emerge. When youth has faded, there is an assurance of something more. Cleansing the way is key for the young and a threshold for the old.

There is a wayward tendency in us all. Solomon wrote, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (**Proverbs 22:15**). This illustrates the weakness of mankind -- foolishness. Growing up begins by recognizing that our way of life should be honorable and upright. Cleansing is a matter of preparing our life so our potential will be as God intends. No degradation of behavior, no ugliness of temperament, or spirit of selfishness can be acceptable. Recognition and removal of such must be paramount. What is the wisdom that enables us to evaluate and desire transformation? By "taking heed according to Your word." The word of God is outside of our thought processes and capabilities. It is a revelation beyond human invention. As the scripture says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (**Isaiah 55:9**). Cleansing begins by attention to the wisdom of God.

God must be first in our lives. Jesus cited this great commandment,

The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment (Mark 12:29-30).

The love for God causes us to seek His will. Subsequently, we obtain a clearer discernment between right and wrong. His priorities for our lives come into focus. Jesus continued, "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (**Mark 12:31**). If it were all about "God and me," then we

would not need the second commandment. Love for God directs us to love our neighbor.

A lawyer, willing to justify himself, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). A related question would be, "Who is the first neighbor in my life?" Our parents are our first neighbors. Here is an important step in cleansing our way.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Obedience "in the Lord" points to the child having grown sufficiently to be responsible for obedience, and to recognize the value of their parent's care. The importance of this commandment is underscored by a promise of a good life – "that it may be well with you." Obedience to our parents or those raising us shows our willingness to submit to authority. That teaspoon of submission nurtures strength of character. If we reject our parents' authority, we will have a hard time governing ourselves. It can have consequences dogging us into old age. Jesus honored his mother by supplying wine for the wedding feast even though He reasoned, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). We sometimes think we know better than our parents. Jesus did indeed know better, but the great command to honor father and mother was more important.

Sometimes we see the weakness and sins of our parents. What is to be done? Ham talked about the drunken condition of Noah, his father. Shem and Japheth covered the nakedness of their father. They didn't even look at him but backed into the tent (see Genesis 9:20-23). Showing respect and decency to our parents, even though we see sin and do not approve, demonstrates love and speaks of a tacit understanding. We may grow and have children see us in our weaknesses. Do we want them to scorn us or to be merciful? Do we want them to degrade our name or honor us? For most of us, being raised by our parents is God's plan. Honoring them prepares a clean way for the future.

"The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head" (Proverbs 20:29). The energy of youth and wisdom of age are contributing assets to society. The strength of youth is very potent and requires self-control to harness. We are bumped and carved by our inadequacies. However, we can be remade by the grace of God. This provides a kind of wisdom that cannot otherwise be attained.

On the other hand, excess and abuse can lead to an unhappy outcome – the spry foolishness of youth degraded from stupidity into bitterness. Self-control is the answer. We were

never designed to be moved by our passions and desires. Self-control involves recognizing what is right and holding to it, even though we feel like letting go. Our cleansing is detailed by such resolution.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:7-8).

Upon this path, repentance is our constant companion since "we all stumble in many things" (James 3:2).

Cleansing of the way comes from modeling ourselves after the Lord.

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

Again, it is accomplished "by taking heed according to Your word." Thus, He becomes clearer, and we become cleaner.

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Glory to God!

The angels rejoiced with the brethren in **Martinstown, MO** when God united **Vanessa Bondy** with the death and resurrection of Jesus in baptism on August 1.

The brethren who meet on **Prince Road, Alton, IL** were overjoyed with **Olivia Tutterow** was buried with Christ in baptism on August 7.

Blessed Are the Dead

The **South Fairfax Church of Christ, Bakersfield, CA**, lost a dear sister on June 5 when **Louise Brown** laid aside her life of service to others and went to be with the Lord. She was an outstanding and inspirational example of hard work and generosity in the Kingdom of God in many ways, and especially in her sacrificial labors for the sake of others, and her quiet spirit. She admirably demonstrated her faith with

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strength, tempered by love, and is missed by her family, both physical and spiritual, and her many friends.

Alene Fleener, 91, of Salem, MO, went to be with our Lord on July 13, 2022. Sister Alene was born June 1, 1931, in **Summersville, MO** to **John Wesley** and **Nora Victoria (Bates) Bandy**. She married **William "Bill" Fleener** July 7, 1951. They were the parents of six children. Later they fostered at least ten foster children. Sister Alene served the **church in Summerville** as an elder's wife for many decades. Many of us fondly remember the Fleeners from the Midwest Bible Campout at which they were a fixture for many years. Sister Alene is survived by Brother Bill and a host of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and extended family and friends.

Special Meetings

Please make plans to join the church in **Braymer, MO** for a special one day meeting on **September 25**. The morning service begins at 10:00 a.m. with guest speakers **Gordon** and **Gerald Clevenger**. Both of these men grew up at the Braymer church and now serve as elders elsewhere. Evangelists **John Morris** and **Wade Stanley** will speak after a meal at noon.

The churches in **Unionville, MO**, **Martinstown, MO**, and **Memphis, MO** have planned a **Fall Campout** for **September 30-October 2** at Unionville City Park and the Putnam County Fairgrounds. The weekend begins with a fellowship event on Friday, September 30 at 7 p.m. **Joshua Riggins** will lead a study of "Christian Hospitality" the morning of October 1. **Michael Eldridge** will lead a gospel singing Saturday evening. The Sunday morning worship service will include speakers **John Lee** and **Louis Garbi** who will speak on "Do Not Worry" and "Standing on the Rock."

All camping and events for the weekend will take place at the Unionville City Park. The park has forty-five camping sites with electricity available. Some sites also have water and sewer. The city of Unionville does not accept reservations, so it will be first come, first served. For tent campers, shower

facilities are available onsite. In the event of rainy weather, the meeting will take place inside the county's 4-H building on the Putnam County Fairgrounds that sits adjacent to the city park. For those who are not interested in camping, rooms can be reserved at The Square View Inn and the Alamo Inn, two local establishments whose contact information can be found online.

2022 Meetings

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|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| September 3-4..... | Pleasant Hill, IA |
| September 25..... | Braymer, MO |
| Sept 30-Oct 2..... | North MO Fall Campout, Unionville, MO |
| October 15-16..... | Nixa, MO |
| December 27-29..... | Winter Youth Rally, Gregory Blvd. |
| December 27-29..... | College Rally, Lone Jack, MO |

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