

Does God Control Everything?

Crucial Questions

R. C. SPROUL

Does God Control Everything?

Crucial Questions booklets provide a quick introduction to definitive Christian truths. This expanding collection includes titles such as:

Who Is Jesus?

Can I Trust the Bible?

Does Prayer Change Things?

Can I Know God's Will?

How Should I Live in This World?

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?

What Is Faith?

What Can I Do with My Guilt?

What Is the Trinity?

TO BROWSE THE REST OF THE SERIES,
PLEASE VISIT: **REFORMATIONTRUST.COM/CQ**

CQ

Does God Control Everything?

R. C. SPROUL

Does God Control Everything?

© 2012 by R.C. Sproul

Published by Reformation Trust Publishing

a division of Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org ReformationTrust.com

Printed in China

RR Donnelley

0001018

First edition, thirteenth printing

ISBN 978-1-64289-049-5 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-64289-077-8 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-64289-105-8 (Kindle)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, Reformation Trust Publishing. The only exception is brief quotations in published reviews.

Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

All Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sproul, R.C. (Robert Charles), 1939-2017

Does God control everything? / R.C. Sproul.

p. cm. -- (The crucial questions series ; no. 14)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-56769-297-6

1. Providence and government of God--Christianity. I. Title.

BT135.S744 2012

231'.5--dc23

Contents

- One** What Is Providence?1
- Two** God Makes It All Happen13
- Three** God or Chance?27
- Four** Is God Responsible for Human
Wickedness?39
- Five** What About Human Freedom?53

Chapter One

What Is Providence?

One day, while I was watching a news program, an advertisement appeared for a series of books about problems of life in the past. One of the images in the commercial depicted a Confederate soldier from the Civil War lying on a stretcher and receiving care from a nurse and a battle-line physician. The narrator then informed me that reading this book would help me understand what it was like to be sick in the mid-nineteenth century. That caught my attention, because many people of the twenty-first

Does God Control Everything?

century are so strongly bound to this time that they rarely think about how people lived their daily lives in previous ages and generations.

This is one area where I find myself out of step with my contemporaries. I think about the lives of previous generations quite frequently, because I have a habit of reading books that were written by people who lived, in many cases, long before the twenty-first century. I particularly like to read the authors of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

In the writings of these authors I consistently notice an acute sense of the presence of God. These men had a sense of an overarching providence. We see an indication of that sense that all of life is under the direction and the governance of almighty God in the fact that one of the first cities in what is now the United States of America was Providence, Rhode Island (founded in 1636). Likewise, the personal correspondence from men of earlier centuries, such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, is laced with the word *providence*. People talked about a “benevolent Providence” or an “angry Providence,” but often there was a sense that God was directly involved in the daily lives of people.

The situation is vastly different in our own day. My late

friend James Montgomery Boice used to tell a humorous story that aptly illustrated the current mindset with regard to God and His involvement in the world. There was a mountain climber who slipped on a ledge and was about to plummet thousands of feet to his death, but as he started to fall, he grabbed a branch of a tiny, scraggly tree that was growing out of a crack in the face of the cliff. As he clung to the branch, the roots of the scraggly tree began to pull loose, and the climber was facing certain death. At that moment, he cried out to the heavens, “Is there anyone up there who can help me?” In reply, he heard a rich, baritone voice from the sky, saying: “Yes. I am here and I will help you. Let go of the branch and trust Me.” The man looked up to heaven and then looked back down into the abyss. Finally, he raised his voice again and said, “Is there anyone else up there who can help me?”

I like that story because I think it typifies the cultural mentality of the present day. First, the climber asks, “Is there anyone up there?” Most eighteenth-century people assumed there *was* Someone up there. There was little doubt in their minds that an almighty Creator governed the affairs of the universe. But we live in a period of unprecedented skepticism about the very existence of

Does God Control Everything?

God. Yes, polls regularly tell us that between ninety-five and ninety-eight percent of people in the United States believe in some kind of god or a higher power. I suppose that can be explained partly from the impact of tradition; ideas that have been precious to people for generations are hard to give up, and in our culture a certain social stigma is still attached to unbridled atheism. Also, I think we cannot escape the logic of assuming that there has to be some kind of foundational, ultimate cause for this world as we experience it. But usually, when we pin people down and begin to talk to them about their idea of a “higher power” or a “supreme being,” it turns out to be a concept that is more of an “it” than a “He”—a kind of energy or an undefined force. That’s why the climber asked, “Is there *anyone* up there?” In that moment of crisis, he recognized his need for a personal being who was in charge of the universe.

There is another aspect of that anecdote that I think is significant. When he was about to fall to his death, the climber did not simply ask, “Is there anyone up there?” He specified, “Is there anyone up there *who can help me?*” That is the question of modern man. He wants to know whether there is anyone outside the sphere of daily life who is able

What Is Providence?

to be of assistance to him. But I think the climber was asking an even more fundamental question. He wanted to know not only whether there was someone who *could* help, but whether there was someone who was *willing* to help. This is the question that is foremost in the minds of modern men and women. In other words, they want to know not only whether there is providence, but whether it is cold and unfeeling or kind and compassionate.

So, the question of providence that I want to consider in this booklet is not merely whether there is anyone there, but whether that someone is able and willing to do anything in this world in which we live.

A Closed, Mechanistic Universe

Among the ideas that have shaped Western culture, one of the most significant is the idea of a closed, mechanistic universe. This view of the world has persisted for a couple of hundred years and has had tremendous influence in shaping how people understand the way life is lived out. I would argue that in the secular world, the dominant idea is that we live in a universe that is closed to any kind of intrusion from outside, a universe that runs purely by

Does God Control Everything?

mechanical forces and causes. In a word, the issue for modern man is *causality*.

There seems to be a growing outcry about the negative influence of religion in American culture. Religion is held to be the force that keeps people trapped in the dark ages of superstition, their minds closed to any understanding of the realities of the world that science has unveiled. More and more, religion seems to be regarded as the polar opposite of science and reason. It is as if science is something for the mind, for research, and for intelligence, while religion is something for the emotions and for feelings.

Yet, there is still a tolerance for religion. The idea is often expressed in the news media that everyone has a right to believe what he or she chooses to believe; the main thing is to believe *something*. It does not matter whether you are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian.

When I hear comments like that, I want to exclaim, “Does truth matter at all?” The main thing, in my humble opinion, is to believe the truth. I am not satisfied to believe just anything simply for the sake of believing. If what I believe is not true—if it is superstitious or fallacious—I want to be liberated from it. But the mentality of our day seems to be that in matters of religion, truth

We publish books that proclaim the historic Christian faith to new generations.

These are books you can trust.



*Order your copy of this title, download the ebook version, or browse our entire collection at **ReformationTrust.com**.*

Who or what is in charge? Fate, free will, or God?

Many people today believe that, even if there is a God, He is not actively involved in this world. Biblical Christianity has taken a very different view, teaching that God, not fate or free will, is the primary cause of what is and what happens.

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul explores the Christian doctrine of providence, the teaching that God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. Dr. Sproul then answers some common questions: What is chance? Is God responsible for human wickedness? What about human freedom?

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

Dr. R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



ReformationTrust.com

ISBN 978-1-64289-049-5



9 781642 890495

RELIGION / Christian Theology / General