

God's Sovereignty & Human Responsibility

*God is in control of all events in
which we are responsible for our
actions.*

Romans 8:28

Richard Wurmbrand

“Unless a person distinguishes well, he cannot think well.”

Proof's of God's Existence (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 1988), 16.

*How can we believe
that God is in control
of all events while we
are held responsible
for our own actions?*

1) Is God in control of all events?



2) Does God sin when we sin?



James 1:13-15 “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.
¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

3) How can we explain God's control of all events and acts of human evil?

Presuppositions/Assumption:

- ✓ Western culture: If God exists, He owes us life, health, and the certainty of happiness.
- ✓ Western culture: I have the right to be able to control my own destiny.

Biblical Presuppositions



- All have sinned - Romans 3:23
- All are born with a sin nature - Romans 5
- All are deserving of judgment - Jesus: Luke 13:1-9
all persons are willful rebels against God and God's justice obligates Him to give them judgment. Thus, even life itself is mercy because it is an extended offer to repent.

FIVE POSITIONS



- 1) Open Theism: God doesn't know the future



The God Who Risks

A THEOLOGY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

JOHN SANDERS

REVISED EDITION

FIVE POSITIONS



1) Open Theism: God doesn't know the future

Genesis 6:5-6 *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”*



✓ “Repent/regret” can be translated “relent” or “change one’s mind” or “have pity or compassion” as well as “be sorry” or “have regret.”

✓ Illustration: 1 Samuel 15:11,35

“describes God’s own feeling of sorrow or regret that Saul had turned out as he did (and does not even address the question whether God knew of it beforehand).” *ESV Study Bible*, 516.

FIVE POSITIONS

- 1) Open Theism: God doesn't know the future but He's constantly learning.
- 2) Arminianism - God foresees the future.
- 3) Molinism - God places persons in positions where their free choices will result in God's will.
- 4) Compatibilism (Soft Calvinism) - God determines the future w/o violating one's freedom.
- 5) Hard Calvinism - God determines the future.

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“The most powerful theological concept that I've ever encountered” - William Lane Craig
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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfhIkiT3g8A>

Sovereignty of God in the OT



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- ✓ Isaiah 14:24-27 “The Lord of hosts has sworn: “As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, ²⁵ that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder.” ²⁶ This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. ²⁷ For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”



Isaiah 22:11 “You made a reservoir between
the two walls for the water of the old pool.
But you did not look to him who did it, or
see him who planned it long ago.”



Psalm 139: 16 “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

Proverbs 16:4 “The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.”



Daniel 12:1 “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”



Zechariah 1:6 “But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, ‘As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.’”

Sovereignty of God in the NT

Destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) – Luke 21:20-22 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.”

Sovereignty of God in the NT

Betrayal of Jesus – Matthew 26:24-25 (Mark 14:21), “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’
²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, “You have said so.”

Luke 22:22 “For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!”

Sovereignty of God in the NT



That Judas would die unsaved – John 17:12 “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Sovereignty of God in the NT



Crucifixion of Christ – Acts 2:23

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Acts 2:22-24

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

23 *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*

24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

23 τοῦτον τῇ ὠρισμένῃ βουλῇ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἔκδοτον διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες ἀνείλατε,



Very literal translation of Acts 2:23:

“This the having been determined/marked off by boundaries (the idea is that the event was determined and pre-arranged according to a specific set of criteria), counsel and foreknowledge of God a given over one through/by the hand of lawless men, was fastened (nailed) to a cross, done away with (killed).”

‘Ὀρίζω ‘predetermined plan (NASB)/definite plan (ESV)

- ① from the basic meaning., ‘to separate entities and so establish a boundary’, derives the sense ‘to define ideas or concepts’: *set limits to, define, explain.*
- ② to make a determination about an entity, *determine, appoint, fix, set*

βουλῆ ‘plan/council’

- ① that which one thinks about as possibility for action, *plan, purpose, intention*
- ② that which one decides, *resolution, decision*

W. Arndt, F.W., Danker, & W. Bauer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 181.

Πρόγνωσις ‘foreknowledge’

① *foreknowledge* πρ. λαμβάνειν τελείαν *receive complete foreknowledge* 1 Cl 44:2.

② *predetermination*, of God’s omniscient wisdom and intention.

The Greek word translated here as “Foreknown” is a compound word. The first part is Προ usually meaning “before” or “preceding,” is followed by γινώσκω which is usually translated “to know.” Thus, “to know before.”

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed.) (866867). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1 Peter 1:20



“For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (NASB).

The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* on verse 20 reads,
“Christ’s suffering was no emergency. It was
God’s best plan in view of man’s sin.”

C.F. Pfeiffer, & E.F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

Kenneth Wuest on 1 Peter 1:20

“Foreordained” in the Greek text means “to designate beforehand” to a position or function. In the councils of the triune God, the Lord Jesus was the Lamb marked out for sacrifice. “Foundation” is the translation of a word meaning literally “to throw down,” and was used of the laying of the foundation of a house . . . Before this universe was created, the Lord Jesus had been foreordained to be the Saviour of lost sinners, and the saints had been foreordained to become recipients of the salvation He would procure for lost sinners at the Cross (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29).

Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament* (1 Pe 1:20). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1997), in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

Q# Does this mean that persons are not morally responsible for their choices?

Acts 2:17,21 “And in the last days it shall be, God declares . . . And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Sovereignty of God in the NT

Book of Revelation – How
can prophecy be prophecy
if it is uncertain?

Robots?

Does God's sovereignty and control of all events, including the future, require that we be robots?



Human Responsibility



Deuteronomy 30:19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,”

Human Responsibility



Joshua 24:15 “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Human Responsibility



1 Kings 18:21 “And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.”



John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The Story of Joseph



Case studies: Joseph

Gen. 45:5-8 *And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

Case studies: Joseph

Gen. 50:19-20

“But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Case studies: Joseph

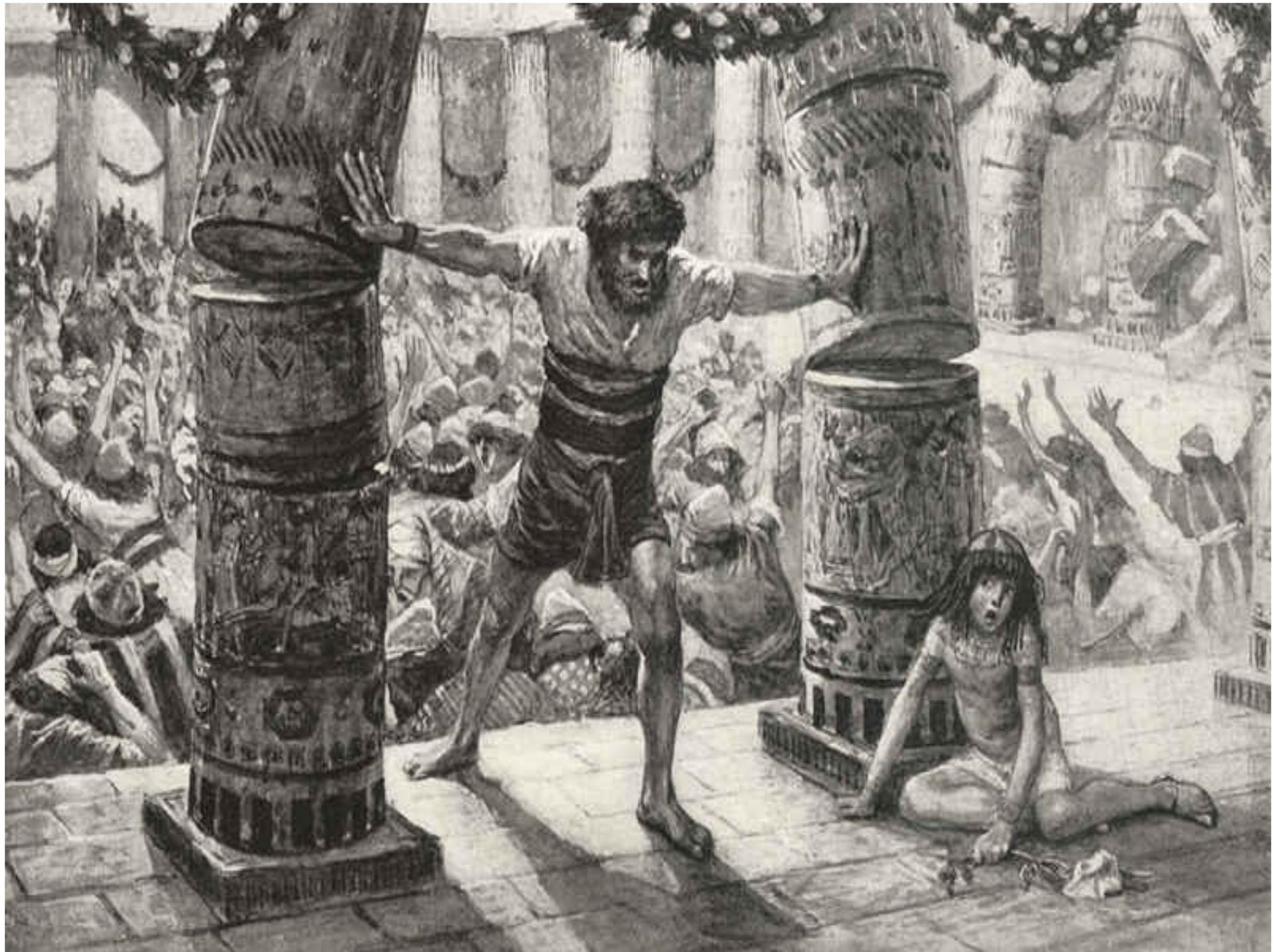


Psalm 105:17-24 *“He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. 18 They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons; 19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him. 20 The king sent and released him, The ruler of peoples, and set him free. 21 He made him lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions, 22 To imprison his princes at will, That he might teach his elders wisdom. 23 Israel also came into Egypt; Thus Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. 24 And He caused His people to be very fruitful, And made them stronger than their adversaries”* (NASB).

The brutality Joseph endured...



“It did not please God; it was not consistent with what he is like. God did, however, will to permit it; he did not intervene to prevent it. And interestingly enough, God used their action to produce the very thing it was intended to prevent-Joseph’s ascendancy” Erickson, 117.



Case studies: Samson

Judges 14:1-3 *“Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. ² Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.” ³ But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.”*

Case studies: Samson



Judges 14:4

“His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.”

Case studies: Hophni & Phineas



1 Samuel 2:17

“Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt.”

Case studies: Hophni & Phineas

1 Samuel 2:22-25 *“Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³ And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ²⁴ No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. ²⁵ If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.”*

*God hardening the heart? Pharaoh scenario?



Case studies: Jonah



Jonah 3:4-5 “Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.”

Case studies: Judas



Matthew 26:24-25 *“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”*²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, *“Is it I, Rabbi?”* He said to him, *“You have said so.”*

Case studies: Crucifixion

- ✓ Acts 2:23, 46 “*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

Case studies: Romans 8:28-30

✓ Romans 8:28-30

Q# Do things “work together” on their own?

Q# What does God use to “work together” all things?

*“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

Q# But if God has rendered the future certain, do my choices make a difference?

- 1) God's plan includes the means to the end of that plan.
- 2) God's plan includes our obedience (witnessing, missions, etc.).

Total Mystery?



God is sovereign over human affairs in this sense:

1. God created moral beings who know the difference between good and evil.
2. God's purposes ALWAYS trump evil human purposes so we have a chance, through repentance and humble obedience, to align our lives with God's will as revealed through His Word.

See Psalm 2





3. God sovereignly orders the events of one's life where we can respond in obedience or disobedience.

4. God cannot be charged with *making* people do evil because every person has the knowledge of God, right and wrong, etc.

*Is obedience always an option?

*View the mysteries through God's clear actions

Romans 2:14-16

✓ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

How free are we?

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
- Romans 3:10-12 “as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”
- Ephesians 2:1,4-5 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”



“Freedom is freedom from constraint or external compulsion. It is freedom from unwilling action. This is freedom to act consistently with one who is. It is freedom to act as one chooses, and to choose as one wishes.” - Erickson, *God the Father*

Almighty, 208.

Is it possible to be truly “free?”



Galatians 5:1 *“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”*

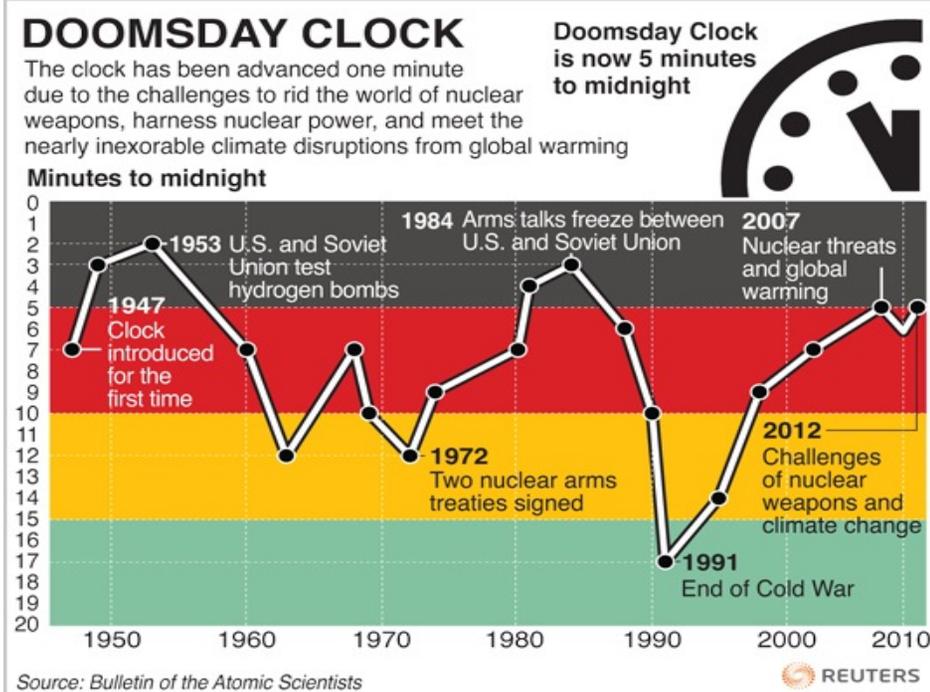
God's sovereignty & its effect on how we view the future

1) Eastern philosophy: History & the future
is cyclical - Hopelessness



God's sovereignty & its effect on how we view the future

2) Western philosophy: History & the future is doomed - Pessimism



Richard Dawkins on suffering



“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” *River out of Eden* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 133.

***God's sovereignty & its effect
on how we view the future***

3) Biblical Eschatology (End Times): Jesus is coming again



Application

1. Because of God's total omniscience, His love for me is far deeper than I could ever imagine (Total knowledge=Total Love)
 2. Because of God's total sovereignty, I can have confidence that my suffering will not be wasted and is not in vain.
 3. Because of God's love, *revealed in the Cross*, I can have confidence that He truly loves and cares for me.
 4. Because of the Resurrection, I can have confidence that His power is sufficient to defeat evil and rescue me.
- *A.W. Tozer: Cruise ship – Your choices on board the ship will affect the quality of your ride but will not affect the final destination of the ship.

Conclusion: Richard Wurmbrand “Tortured for Christ”

- ✓ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ytiuVBqxHQ&feature=related>

How does fuse together God’s sovereignty
and our responsibility to be obedient?