



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 42
Issue 1039

Is Man Autonomous?

by — Mike Owens

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Key Points:

God is in charge of everything, or He is in charge of nothing! 8736 Once you realize this, your life will forever change. 8736

Most Christians today consider themselves to be autonomous, or in control of their own destiny. Many pastors will state that God has two wills: His perfect will and His permissive will. Some also promote the idea that man has a “free will,” entirely free from any influence or determination by God.

Some important questions to think about with regards to man’s “free will”:

Is man completely free in his ability to make choices?

Does God have any role in our decisions?

Does God determine the events and situations that influence our decisions?

If so, to what degree?

Can man’s will alter God’s will?

What does the Bible say about this?

The Scriptures never tell us that humans are autonomously able to make decisions that are not caused by anything. “Free will” is often assumed without any evidence from God’s Word.

On the other hand, Scripture clearly teaches that God



is absolutely sovereign. “His Sovereignty rules over all” (Psalm 103:19, NASV), and He “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). He does whatever He wants, and no one can stop Him.

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps ... The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Proverbs 16:9, 33).

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23).

The interconnectedness of everything is incredible. While one small event can influence other events as time goes by, it is remarkably easy to see that God is either in control of everything or nothing at all.

Consider this example: what if Adolf Hitler’s grandparents, Johann Baptist Poelzl and Johanna Huettler, had not lived in the same village and married? The course of history would have been changed. In fact,

[\(see AUTONOMOUS, page 8736\)](#)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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Volume 42, No. 1039 – September 30, 2024

Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6);
- adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of ordinary men intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

We are always open for discussion, but never for disputation. – André Sneidar

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Jonathan and Scott

by — Mike Owens

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The following fictional case study helps to show why God must have been in charge of seemingly insignificant, as well as major events, in the past in order for things to be in place today.

In 1509 a young man named Jonathan fled London as another plague was beginning to devastate the city. He walked toward Bedfordshire, about fifty miles north, where he came to a fork in the road and for no particular reason decided to go left rather than right. As evening approached, it looked like rain. He saw a farmhouse and decided to ask the owner if he could sleep in the small outbuilding for the night. Early the next morning the old farmer came out to ask Jonathan if he would be interested in a job helping him with his crops and animals. He gladly embraced the opportunity.

A couple of months later the farmer learned that a young couple who owned a small dairy about a mile away had been attacked the night before. The young wife had been raped and her husband murdered. Jonathan's employer and his wife went to see the young widow three to four times a week to help her and to see how she was doing.

Jonathan went along often, and over a few months, he and the young widow became interested in each other and eventually married, remaining together for many years. They had five children, including the son who was conceived the night of the rape. That son married and also had children and grandchildren.

Ten generations later, Scott was born. He joined the

British military in 1775 and found himself the next year fighting the Continental Army in New England. In one battle a sniper shot a lead ball at Scott, the very instant at which his horse tripped – crushing Scott's leg. He survived the battle and was taken to an infirmary where a young Hessian nurse took care of him. They fell in love and eventually had a daughter.

Four generations later your grandfather was born.

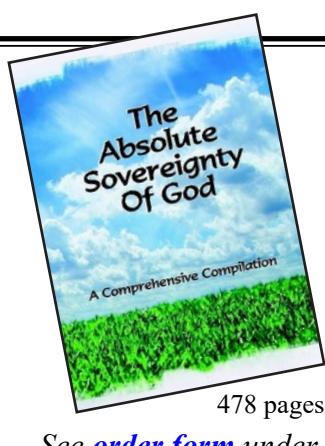
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Consider these details, asking yourself whether you would be here today if any of these had been different:

- 1) If Jonathan had made a right turn, instead of a left in 1509.
- 2) If the weather had not looked bad that night, causing Jonathan to stop at the farmer's house.
- 3) If the marauders had not murdered the young farmer and raped his wife.
- 4) Consider the hundreds of other situations that had to take place in order for all of the people to marry and have children at the right times and places so that Scott would eventually be born.

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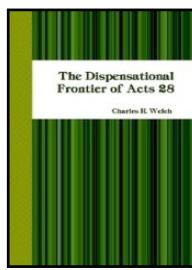


- 5) If the sniper had pulled his trigger one second earlier.
- 6) If the young Hessian nurse had not been assigned to take care of Scott when there were many other injured soldiers.
- 7) Consider all of the trivial details as well as the major events that had to occur in order for your grandfather to have been born.
- 8) Most of us reading this scenario should consider that we might not be here if the world had not been thrown into the turmoil of World War II. What if Hitler had not somehow turned Europe upside down? Would you have met your spouse? Would your parents or grandparents have been where they were?

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed (Psalm 139:16, NLT).

But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace. Then it pleased Him ... (Galatians 1:15, NLT).

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him Who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of



The Dispensational Frontier of Acts 28

by — Charles H. Welch
(1880-1967)

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His will (Ephesians 1:11).

O LORD, I will honor and praise Your name, for You are my God. You do such wonderful things! You planned them long ago, and now You have accomplished them (Isaiah 25:1, NLT).

We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall (Proverbs 16:33, NLT).

A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand His way? (Proverbs 20:24).

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding (Daniel 2:21). **BSN**

TOPICS:

Major: Free Will; Sovereignty
Minor: Predestination

The Deity of God

by — John Henry Essex (1907-1991)

Nottingham, England

Creation cannot help itself that all of its achievements are futile because of the slavery of corruption, but we take immense comfort from the fact that, in spite of all of its present "groaning and travailing," it was subjected to vanity in expectation of the eventual realization of that glorious freedom which is now already being enjoyed by the children of God.

It is in the prison epistle of Paul to the Ephesians that we find the most absolute expression of the Deity of God in relation to the points we have been considering. Here we find the phrase which puts all other Scriptures into their perspective:

According to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will (1:11).

God is the captain of the ship of the universe; all of His creatures are its passengers. He is guiding the vessel across the ocean of time from the port that is called "All in God" to the haven that is termed "God in all."

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God's Will

by — Mike Owens

[Click here to listen to this article](#)

Relax and know that I am Elohim (Psalms 46:10, CV).

Key Points:

There is only one will - the will of God.....8735 You're in the middle of God's will!.....8736

Many of us struggle to a degree, some more than others, to know God's will for our lives. My hope is that you will see that this does not need to be a confusing matter. As we increasingly understand God's sovereignty – in all things – we can relax.

The next time you get into your car, suppose that your first three turns are left-hand turns, then a right-hand turn which takes you to a red light. Five seconds later a blue Ford will pull up behind you. Twelve seconds later the light will turn green.

Was every detail of this scenario in God's will?

Was every detail planned by God?

Does God care about only the “big stuff”? Do the little details fall from His concern or control?

Does God have multiple options that He places before us each day, with a new “program” that is set into motion tomorrow as we make choice A, B or C today?

You have likely heard that God has two or three different wills. This leaves some with the misconception that our Creator might suffer from divine schizo-

phrenia. The other option is that many theologians, pastors and Sunday school teachers suffer from severe interpretive confusion.

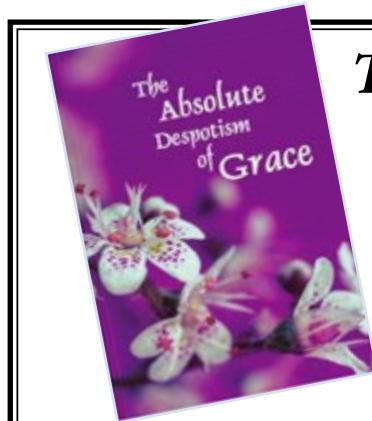
The latter is surely the case.

We have been presented with the thought that God has multiple wills associated with a slew of names and descriptions. The following list helps to show the confusion that exists about this important question: “Does God have more than one will?”

Several names have been used to describe God's will:

- Permissive will
- Perfect will
- Effectual will
- Decreed will
- Sovereign will
- Efficient will
- Secret will
- Revealed will
- Moral will

Scripture is quite clear that there is **only one “will of God”** – no matter how many names and descriptions theologians formulate, God is all-powerful, and all



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things that happen are in His control and part of His will. Otherwise, we must assume that God is not omnipotent and omniscient.

In essence, this is what God does by His unlimited power and knowledge: He exerts His sovereign will. He causes what has been ordered and determined to happen from the beginning, all for His glory.

In fact, we should know that *God acquires everything He desires*. He is God. His will should be thought of in two distinct ways: (1) What has happened before this moment. (2) What will happen after this moment.

Everything that has ever happened before this moment, 100 percent of the time, is His sovereign, perfect and decreed will.

What will happen after this moment will be His sovereign, perfect and decreed will, just as *all* of the things that have happened in the past. The difference is that we do not yet know what this will is; *it is not revealed to us*.

AM I IN GOD'S WILL? HOW DO I KNOW?

Attending a Baptist church in Texas when I was young left me with the idea that I needed to focus on staying

AUTONOMOUS (*continued from front page*)

your parents or grandparents might not ever have met without the far-reaching influences of World War II.

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed (Psalm 139:16, NLT).

Since Scripture tells us that God planned your life, then hundreds of people before you had to meet and cross paths – and if any one person in your lineage had taken a different direction or had perhaps the slightest change in their life, you would not be here.

If God did not direct every detail of human history, then He could not plan your life. He is in charge of everything, or He is in charge of nothing.

in God's will. Knowing whether I was in God's will or not was a silent mystery; but it sure seemed like there must be two or more wills for God. So how was I supposed to know how to "stay" in God's will?

As the years went by, it seemed like there were times when I could say, "Yes, that's God's will," and other times I knew (or so I thought) that I was definitely *not* in God's will. Still, my premise was unsound and certainly not based on good biblical training.

The best answer I've heard to the question, "How do I know if I'm in God's will?" is this: "Look around. You're right in the middle of it."

What if you're attending a school that you're not sure about, or married to someone who makes you doubt your judgment? Suppose you're working in a factory and wondering why you didn't study harder in school? Or perhaps you're sitting in jail. *The fact is, wherever you are, you're smack-dab in the middle of God's will.*

If God had two or three alternative pathways that could somehow lead us to where we are to go, then we would certainly have a reason to wonder if we are in His will, but that's *not* the case. **BSN**

TOPICS:

Major: Free Will; Sovereignty
Minor: Predestination; Relax

As God reveals His sovereignty to you, this amazing truth will completely change your thinking. Every aspect of one's outlook is transformed when he or she comes to a deeper understanding of God's amazing plan that includes every leaf that falls, every cancer cell that develops or dies, the finest details of a sunset, and the precision of a deadly tornado that destroys a home.

Laying hold of this truth in your mind is important. It is vitally basic to a proper understanding of the Scriptures. When this awareness gets deep into your heart, your life will forever change. The result is a heart of trust. **BSN**

TOPICS:

Major: Free Will; God; Sovereignty
Minor: Predestination



God's Graciousness

Bible Student's Courses

Course 1: GOD / Unit 5 - The Sovereignty of God / Lesson 9 - God's Graciousness

by — Mark D. Vogt (with Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.)

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... the God of all grace ... (I Peter 5:10).

... the riches of His grace ... (Ephesians 1:7).

Key Points:

Grace cannot be withheld because of unworthiness.....	8737
In this dispensation, if God cannot act in grace, He will not act at all.....	8737

The last lesson dealt with God being merciful. We learned that mercy and grace go hand-in-hand in Scripture. Mercy is God *not* giving us what we do deserve, while grace is God giving us what we *do not* deserve. Thus, mercy leads to grace.

Grace is God's *unmerited favor*. As precious as God's attribute of mercy is, more so is that of His of graciousness. It is one thing for God to have compassion on His creatures and be merciful to them, but an entirely different matter for Him to bestow His favor on them and be gracious to them.

Concerning grace, E.W. Bullinger's *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* says,

The word denotes specially, God's grace and favor manifested towards mankind or to any individual, which, as a free act, is no more hindered by sin than it is conditional upon works.

Grace is the undeserved and unrecompensed favor of God. Grace cannot be withheld because of unworthiness (Romans 4:5-8). Absolute grace cannot be exercised where the slightest degree of human merit or goodness is recognized. Grace cannot be lessened because of unworthiness. Much sinfulness calls for much more grace (Romans 5:20-21).

God has always been gracious toward mankind. He

has demonstrated grace in His dealings with humanity throughout the ages. For example, in Genesis 6:8 we find that,

Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah (YLT).

Yet, there's quite a difference between grace *in* a dispensation and a dispensation *of* grace.¹

Thus, that God is gracious is particularly true in "*the Administration of the Grace of God*" in which we live, also called "*the Administration of the Secret*" (Ephesians 3:2, 9, CV).

God has the infinite capacity to shed favor, or grace, upon anyone, but in this *Secret Administration* He sheds favor upon all humanity. So much so that, in this dispensation, if God cannot act in grace, He will not act at all. This is God's present purpose.²

The ultimate and highest expression of God's grace toward mankind is *the Dispensation of the Grace of God*. As one traces God working through the ages we can see Him, in an ever-increasing manner, reveal Himself to His creation, and that ultimate expression of His revelation is *absolute grace*.³

1. See "Grace in a Dispensation? or, a Dispensation of Grace?" J.C. O'Hair (1876-1958), (Tidbits of Truth) [Bible Student's Notebook 877](#), p. 7438.

2. For more on this vital theme, see:

– "God's Present Purpose: The Dispensation of Grace," Otis Q. Sellers (1901-1992), [Bible Student's Notebook 1010](#)

3. For a greater look at the doctrine of pure grace, see:
– [The Absolute Despotism of Grace: A Compilation](#), Bible Stu-



God is not mad at anyone. Even before the *Secret Administration* of Ephesians and Colossians was revealed through the Apostle Paul, we find that God, through Christ, had conciliated the world to Himself. God is not putting anybody's sin to their "account." He's not keeping a record.

Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us the Word of the conciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19, CV).

In Ephesians 1 the apostle of the Gentiles powerfully extolls "the riches of His grace" (:7), and it is here that we learn that God *delights* in being gracious to us.

*... in love designating us beforehand for the place of a son for Him through Christ Jesus; in accord with the **DELIGHT** of His will (:5).*

*... making known to us the secret of His will (in accord with His **DELIGHT**, which He purposed in Him) (:9).*

God *delights* in His heart to pour out His grace to wayward humanity, all in due time, as God works His plan to bring the greatest glory to Himself and the greatest blessings to those whom He created.

dent's Press (on the [order form](#) under "Compilations")

Wonderfully has Peter Lord written,

There is nothing I can do to make God the Father love me any more. There is nothing I can do to make God the Father love me any less. His love for me is not based on my performance. This is what grace is.⁴

Thus, Paul wrote,

*For **in grace**, through faith, are you saved, and this is not out of you; it is God's approach present,⁵ not of works, lest anyone should be boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9, CV). **BSN***

TOPICS:

Major: God, Attributes of; Grace; Secret Administration

Minor: Colossians; Conciliation; Ephesians; Salvation of All

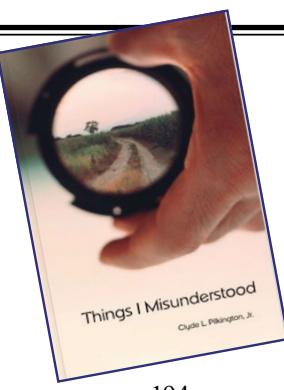
4. *Bless and Be Blessed* (2004), page 93.

5. For more information on the *Approach Present*, see:

– [The Undoing of Adam \(and the Approach Present of God\)](#), Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student's Press, on the [order form](#) under "Clyde Pilkington."

ALL OF US HAVE
ABSORBED MUCH
TRADITION WHICH
WE IMAGINE TO BE
GOD'S TRUTH.

A.E. KNOCH (1874-1965)



194 pages

Things I Misunderstood – ... about God ... about Salvation ... about Christ's Sacrificial Work ... about the Rich Man & Lazarus ... about Prophecy

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Early on in his life and ministry, what the author knew and taught about the themes found in this book were simply what he had learned since childhood: traditional Evangelical Christian doctrine. However, in time he would come to see things quite differently. In this work he shares with the reader things that he had misunderstood, and after fifty years of personal Scripture study, what he now understands – realizations that have brought him great peace.

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