

It's All in God's Hands

- But What Does That Mean?

Derek had undergone major surgery and was recovering. The surgeon had given him a list of instructions of what to do and what not to do during recuperation. Derek, however, had a mind of his own, and ignored this professional advice. "I'll be all right" he said. "He was a good doctor and I have confidence in him. I'm sure he's in control of my recovery." Sadly, Derek did not make a full recovery and the operation was unsuccessful.

The outcome of an operation cannot be guaranteed, but if things do not work out it is seldom as simple as blaming the doctor. Of course, we cannot know what would have happened if Derek had followed the doctor's instructions. Nevertheless, the doctor was not "in control" when Derek had deliberately ignored his advice. In fact, Derek was acting in a foolish and unreasonable way. While claiming that he trusted the doctor, he disregarded him.

Don't Presume on God's Care

Unfortunately, many people are equally unreasonable in relation to God, where the implications can be disastrous. While they might *claim* that they believe in God they do not actually believe Him, and consequently make little or no effort to obey Him.

People can seem to have faith by making statements like "It's all in God's hands" or "God is in control of my life and destiny. There's no need for me to worry". This may all sound very virtuous but it can be misleading -

presumptuous, fatalistic or even superstitious.

God most certainly can control situations and take care of people. The Bible is full of inspired accounts of this happening, especially when He oversaw the lives of people who trusted in Him. Examples are the Jewish nation (Deuteronomy 28), Joseph (Genesis 45:5-8) and the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:11). He can still do this, although we cannot always be sure of the specific occasions when He does.

God is in control

Most certainly, in world politics God is in ultimate control and nothing can spoil His plans. He raises up leaders of various sorts, in spite of our voting systems and despite any personal preferences individuals may have. While people imagine that they choose their leaders, the Bible is clear that we do not:

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:17).

Moreover, when God has determined that something will happen nothing and no one can prevent this (see Acts 5:33-42).

There are many personal situations where we are not in control. Our every breath is by the mercy of God, Who could withdraw it at any time (see Job 34:14-15, Psalm 104:29, Acts 17:25). Consequently, we cannot guarantee that the plans we make for tomorrow

will actually materialise, and we should therefore commit them to God.

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:14-15).

God Allows Choice

Despite this awesome power of God, He does not force us to obey Him. Many day-to-day choices are just a matter of preference with no serious consequences. However, decisions about God and the way He asks us to live are a matter of life and death.

He has always looked for voluntary obedience and humility (Isaiah 57:15). In the past God pleaded with the nation of Israel to obey Him, and in a parable about a vineyard — representing Israel — the prophet Isaiah (5:1-7) asked 'what more could He do?' to save them. This was because the people repeatedly ignored the prophets God sent, preferring to do what they themselves thought best.

The stark answer came many years later. Jesus, also telling a parable about a vineyard, said that God finally sent His 'beloved son' (Luke 20:9-19). God gave Jesus as a sacrifice for sin and then raised him from the dead to immortality. Since then God has commanded men and women who want eternal life to turn to Him:

These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

He has told us what to do, and offered many wonderful promises. But these

promises are conditional and require action on our part.

We Need to Decide

We all have a decision to make — do we go our own way or take notice of God? Our ultimate destiny is determined by our response to this question. 'No decision' is, by default, a decision not to respond and it has dire consequences.

Worse than Derek who did not obey the surgeon and so forfeited the benefits of the surgery, we forfeit salvation if we do not try to do what God asks of us (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). God IS in control, but He asks us to act, and the outcome for us depends on our response to Him.

The reasoning "God is in control, so I don't need to do anything" is totally wrong. We cannot blame Him if we are not accepted in the day of judgement (Daniel 12:2). He has already done His part and will continue to so do, but His promises of protection and salvation only apply to us if we also do ours. If we do really trust God and follow His instructions, then the 'cure' is wonderful: eternal life in a perfect world (1 Corinthians 2:9).

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