

Who Do You Think Is in Control?

This topic could easily have been covered in our document *"How Do Your Current Beliefs Align with Believing in Christ?"* but we feel that this topic (or belief) is important enough to warrant its own PDF document. Why? Because we think anyone who chooses to have a healthy and vital relationship with Christ will find that the correct answer to the question, *"Who Do You Think Is in Control?"* is the foundation for building that relationship. So, we ask you: Who do you think is in control?

Nine out of ten people, when asked this question, would most likely respond with: "In control of what?" A reasonable response, right? So, let's clarify things a bit and answer that response with: "Okay, who's in control of your life?" Most would probably answer, "Well, I am in control of my life. I am responsible for how my life turns out." If we then asked, "Who's in control of rain and wind and snow and stuff like that?", most people would answer, "Well, Mother Nature, of course." If we were to ask, "Who's in control of the universe?", a common answer might be, "Who the heck knows?" Would you like to know the answer to that question?

Followers of Christ believe that God is in control of the universe. Furthermore, we believe He is in control of everything else too, including our lives and the weather. Now, before you get too upset with our answer (and you would certainly not be alone if you do get upset), we ask that you just stop and work with us for a minute. Where we end up just might surprise you.

Let's start with the weather because we all know the weather is something that is clearly out of any one person's control. (Just ask any weather forecaster – at best, they are probably right only 50% of the time, and they can't even tell you which 50%). So, we say it's Mother Nature that controls weather. Yes, but who is Mother Nature? Where did she come from?

Ah, science to the rescue. A scientist will tell you exactly what atmospheric conditions need to be present for rain to occur (or hurricanes, tornados, snow blizzards, etc.) Fine. They would, of course, be correct. Science confirms it. So, who is in control of rain? Anyone with the knowledge and the necessary tools, coupled with the necessary atmospheric conditions, can most likely create rain. Hence, we could argue that technically, we can make it rain. This is true, but only if we have the right knowledge, tools and conditions to begin with. Certainly, one can successfully argue that man could compile the knowledge and build the tools; but who created those necessary atmospheric conditions in the first place? Sure, we can replicate them – science is great at this – but where did the conditions that cause rain come from? We are only copying what someone else has already created. Right? Well, just who do you think that someone is?

Those atmospheric conditions have been with us since the dawn of time, so it isn't you or me or any scientist we have read about in the history books who invented them or created them. Whoever created those original weather conditions was someone with a far greater power – some power far "bigger" than we are. As believers in Christ, we call that power God. Obviously, there are others who call this "power" by a different name, like Mother Nature. Okay, what's important here is that we recognize that whatever label is used, it is a power far bigger than we are. God is just the label we use.

Before we get too heavy on this topic, let us interject some quick humor. A bunch of brilliant scientists from many different disciplines had gathered with the sole purpose of creating Man from dust. After years and years of research, and a multitude of failed experiments, they finally found the solution. They planned a great celebration so they could demonstrate to the whole world via online conferencing how science could finally create Man from dust. The cameras were rolling, the dust was gathered, and just as the scientists were about to demonstrate their solution, a roaring wind appeared and blew the dust away and a loud and thunderous voice called out to the scientists saying, "Find your own dust." Not a great joke, but hopefully you get the point.

When you boil it down, it probably isn't too difficult for all of us to admit that some power other than us is really in control of such things as Mother Nature, the universe, and the creation of Man from dust. As we mentioned, Christians call this power God. Muslims call this power Allah. The Lakotah Native American tribe call this power "Wakan Tanka" which means Sacred Spirit. Orthodox Jews have a name for this power that is so revered they won't even speak it.

The fact is, labels don't really matter, but beliefs do. What is important in this discussion of "who is in control" is that you are willing to believe there is a power, greater than you, that is in control – at least of things like the weather, the universe or creation. And frankly, what you call this power is entirely up to you – just as long as you realize it isn't you.

Now, Down to the Nitty Gritty

The real issue we all need to face is not so much who is in control of the weather, or the universe, but rather, who is in control of us – our lives and our destinies. As we mentioned, most people think they are in control of their life and their destiny. We feel this answer is only partially correct. As Biblical Christians, our belief is that God is in control of what happens in our lives and that He also defines our destiny – but as Biblical Christians, we also think that while God is in control, it is up to us whether to believe that or not. Our belief in this matter is, indeed, our choice and within our control. And what we choose to believe makes a world of difference. Here's why.

Being in control of your life, and ultimately your destiny, is an awesome responsibility. You know how heavy this burden of being responsible for your life and your destiny is because you have carried this burden. We all know it, because we all have carried the burden of being responsible for ourselves at one time or another. It's hard, it's heavy, and it's anything but heavenly. And most of the time, we have gotten so used to carrying this burden that we don't even feel the pain. We just carry the lift and that's it.

However, we bet there have been times in your life when that burden of being in control of your life and your destiny has been a burden too heavy to carry – at least to carry alone. And when those times came, you most likely uttered the words, "God, help me please," or words to that effect. And in that moment, for a fleeting instant, something inside you hoped there was a power bigger than you – and if only for an instant, you wanted, needed, that power to help you carry your burden.

And when the pressure of carrying our burden passes, as it most always does, we feel in control again – that carrying our burden is back to being our responsibility. And that's the problem. We truly believe that we are in control of both what happens in our life and our destiny, and that we are capable of carrying these heavy burdens alone – all the time, up until that moment when we can't. Aren't we just deceiving ourselves believing that these burdens are always ours to carry? Perhaps there is a better choice – a choice that lifts these burdens off our shoulders when they are too heavy to carry alone and puts them on shoulders far stronger than ours who can carry them for us. We'll reveal that choice below.

The key to relieving yourself of your burden is, of course, to rid yourself of the belief that you are the one in control in the first place. And frankly, when you get right down to it, the issue that probably bothers most people is not so much the actual burden of being in control as much as it is the fear of not being in control. Please think about this for a moment. When your burden and the responsibility of creating your own destiny are too heavy to carry on your own, you'd love to turn them over to somebody else to carry. Right? Well, why haven't you? Even better, why don't you rely on that person all the time? Our guess is that while you would be willing to welcome some temporary relief in carrying your burden, you are not willing to bank on the possibility of permanent relief. In essence, giving someone else control of your life and your destiny permanently is not something you are willing to gamble on. Is that a fair assessment?

So, at the heart of the matter, the issue really isn't the act of giving up control, but rather the timeframe surrounding it – temporary being okay, permanently, not so much. That certainly makes sense – especially if you believe you are ultimately in control of your life and your destiny in the first place.

The abject fear of voluntarily and permanently surrendering control of our life and our destiny to someone else is well founded. Why? Because if someone else is in control of our life and our destiny, then where does that leave us? We think the answers to three questions will adequately address this worry:

- 1. Just who do I turn the responsibility for my life and my destiny over to?** Important question, yes? Let's go back to that power we concluded is in control of the weather and the universe – that power which we concluded is bigger than we are. We call this power God, and we believe that His full powers are also manifested in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son and the One who died on the cross to pay our debt to His Father for our having sinned. Why not voluntarily turn the ultimate control of our life and our destiny to Jesus Christ – the One who loved us so much He sacrificed His life to save us from His Father's wrath by paying the penalty of our sins so we won't have to? It certainly seems like an obvious choice. Jesus even tells us in the Bible that if we turn our lives over to Him, He will give us the relief we seek from carrying our burden:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

2. **Can Jesus, with the powers of God, carry my burden better than I can?** Well, if you don't believe in God, the answer is moot. With no God in charge, then the good news is that you have complete control and only you are always responsible for your life and how it turns out. The bad news is that life is a hell of a burden to carry, and you are on your own with no opportunity for relief. Sure, there are many addictions that will provide some temporary relief. But are you willing to be a slave to addictions just so you can continue to deny God and think you are in control of your life and your destiny? Ask your heart if you really think this is a wise choice.

However, if you are willing to accept that God created our universe and all that is in it, and that His power is truly unimaginable and incomprehensible and fully manifested in His Son Jesus Christ, then ask yourself, how do you think your capabilities compare with God's? Yeah, we thought so. Face it, a power that is as unimaginable and incomprehensible as God's, and which is fully manifested in His Son Jesus Christ, is certainly more capable of carrying your burden than you are.

3. **If I let Jesus, with God's powers, be in control of my life and my destiny, where does Jesus stop, and I start?** While this is a great question, especially for those who feel they must have at least some control, it unfortunately assumes two falsehoods: (1) that Jesus is going to do everything for you (He certainly is not), and (2) it assumes you and Jesus are going to share *ultimate* control and responsibility (and you are not). But there is really great news here.

We think perhaps the best way to look at where God stops, and you start is to think in terms of what we call God's role and what we call your role.

God's Role goes like this: Hey kid, I knew when you were going to be born and I know when you are going to die – how? Because I know all that there is to know. And I have a plan for you. I am going to use you to help fulfill My Will on earth. I have the power, as My power is unimaginable and incomprehensible (by man); so don't question Me on this. The good news is that you get to relax. The burden of your life and your destiny is on Me and My Son. It's like riding a bus. You get to kick back and ride, and We get to drive. We knew when to pick you up, and we know when We're going to drop you off. We're in control and only We know the time and place of your destination.

Your role goes like this: Hey, if God/Jesus is in control and already knows my fate, what's my role? What are my responsibilities? Well, continuing with the bus analogy, you get to pick where you sit on the bus. Are you going to sit in the back, in the dark, next to the bathroom where it smells, and by the engine where it is hot, or are you going to sit on the upper deck, away from the smell and the heat, where there's fresh air, and a great view? That big choice is up to you.

Here is where God's role and your role intersect: By your decisions, you can influence what *might* happen tomorrow, but what actually happens tomorrow is not up to you; it is up to God. Defining tomorrow is His burden, not yours. But can you influence the outcome of tomorrow? Yes, through your communications with God. God hears every thought you have and if you pray for something that is within His Will and aligns with His Word, He will always answer. (But keep in mind, “no” and “wait” are answers, and God is not limited by time.)

Another aspect of God's role versus your role is the difference between burden and consequences. While God has the burden of destiny, you have the consequences of your decisions. Look at it this way: while God knows when and where your bus will come to its final stop, you – through your decisions – get to determine, for the most part, how smooth the ride will be. And depending on your age, while you don't know the arrival time and location of your final destination, you probably already have an inkling of how smooth your ride is. For the most part, how smooth your ride will be is almost always up to you. We say “for the most part” because while God always hears your prayers if you believe in Him, His Will may not always align with your prayers if He has something else in mind.

We also say “for the most part” because even if you do everything right (and by that we mean living a righteous life in Christ), you may, on occasion, experience the unexpected. Could be a serious accident where you are badly hurt. Could be the loss of a child. Could be any number of bad things you didn't expect given the choices you made. When these unexpected things happen, pretty much the most common question is: “Why me, God? If you are such a loving and benevolent God, and I have chosen to turn my life over to you, why are you doing this to me?”

First, you need to recognize that your grief results from making God's actions all about you, not Him. Unfortunately, this is all too normal. Second, God gives us challenges to strengthen our endurance and it helps to think of these challenges not as griefs but as gifts. Third, God has a plan for you, remember? Right behind your grief should be the thought, okay God, what's happening to me is Your Will. I know You have a purpose. What is my role in it?

If this concept is hard to grasp, and it is for most people, you may want to read a great book (and true story) titled “The Hiding Place” by Corrie Ten Boom. The Ten Boom family were well known in Haarlem, Holland, and they were very devout Biblical Christians. During World War II, the Ten Booms were a major part of the underground trying to give safe haven to Jewish families escaping the Nazi tyranny. Many of the Ten Boom family were eventually arrested and sent to concentration camps. Corrie and her sister Betsie were among them, but fortunately they ended up in the same group of prisoners. At one of the camps (Ravensbruck), Betsie and Corrie were housed in a barracks grossly infested with fleas. Corrie was horrified. Betsie, who had throughout her life completely given her life over to Jesus Christ, chose to rejoice, be grateful, and give thanks for the fleas, as she acknowledged the Bible tells us to rejoice always. Here is a summary of this episode and what happens in the book:

*Corrie, who almost always thought her sister was wise, was sure, in this instance, that Betsie was “wrong”. After all, how in the world could one be grateful for an infestation of fleas? However, if you look in the Bible at 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, you will find where Betsie’s faith was coming from. In these verses, the Bible says: **“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** As Corrie says in the book, “Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”*

We find out later in the book that many of the women prisoners were executed from all the other barracks, but not from Corrie and Betsie’s barracks. Why? Simple. The execution squads did not want to go anywhere near that flea-infested barracks.

And if you don’t think God had a plan for Corrie Ten Boom, think again. Eventually, Corrie was released. She went on to do incredible things for humanity that you will learn about if you read the book, including building homes of healing for many who had suffered during the war – including, as Betsie had requested before she died of sickness at Ravensbruck, the many Germans who must have suffered mentally and emotionally from the harm they were inflicting on innocent people. Yes, just as Jesus would have, Betsie prayed for the prison guards too.

During a visit to Ravensbruck years after the war, Corrie found out that one week after she was released from Ravensbruck, every woman at the prison her age and older was executed in the gas chambers. She also learned that her release, one week before all these executions took place, was a clerical error. Yes, this is a true story! And yes, obviously, miracles happen – and they happen more often than you probably think. And yes, they are not random, but are gifts from God to fulfill His purpose for you.

Choosing Your Seat on The Bus

Since we cannot accurately predict our own death, where and when the bus of our life stops will always be up to some power greater than us. However, we can choose where we sit on the bus, and as a result, how comfortable – or chaotic – our ride will be until our life bus stops. It all depends on who we ask to help us carry our burden. Should we ignore God and seek only to carry our burden alone, or should we trust God and invest our life in His powers?

Are you worried about which option to choose and possibly making a mistake? As always, Jesus says it best:

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25 – 34)

When you believe in Jesus Christ, you will learn how to seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness so that all you need to live your life as God would want you to will be provided for you. In this, you need not worry. And remember, when you genuinely believe in Christ, your final destiny is eternal life, with Him, in heaven. All other things pale by comparison.