

Is God In Control?

Some years ago, I talked with an old gentleman who refused to believe in God. "How can I believe in a loving God", he said, "when I can see all the evil in the world around?" As far as he was concerned, natural disasters like earthquakes and floods were evidence that, if there was a God, he was not the 'God of love' which Christians kept on talking about.

We sometimes have the same problem, especially when faced with the horrors of disease or famine, even when we can see clearly that man is responsible, such as in wars and large-scale accidents. "Where was God?" we ask ourselves, or maybe we find ourselves without much of an answer when other people ask us the same question.

One way round the apparent problem is to become fatalistic, beginning to believe that 'whatever happens is God's will'. (See * below) We may try to dress our fatalism up in biblical clothes, by saying that only God understands the whole situation. It still leaves us in the same position as the Muslims, who believe that 'the will of Allah' will take place whatever else happens, and that they are powerless to do anything about it. We start to believe that whatever has happened really **was** God's will. Unfortunately, that also gives us problems!

For example, we all know some individuals (personally or in world affairs) who are so determined to get their own way that they manipulate circumstances and other people so that everything works out as they want it to. Does that prove that what they have engineered is actually God's will? We know that the answer is 'no', but may have some difficulty understanding what is going on.

Part of our problem is that we have absorbed the idea that, as the poet Robert Browning put it, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world". The New Testament has a very different picture to show us!

Jesus calls Satan 'the ruler of this world' (**John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11**). Paul calls him 'the god of this age' (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and 'the prince of the power of the air' (**Ephesians 2:2**) The apostle John was under no illusions. In **1 John 5:19**, he says that "*the whole world lies in the evil one*". So it seems pretty clear cut, doesn't it? If anyone is ruling this world and the way the world system works, it is not God but Satan.

We need to understand that this was not how God originally intended things to be. Whatever way we may interpret the early chapters of **Genesis**, the Bible makes it clear that God created man to live in open

relationship with him but that man's rebellion has alienated him from God. As a result, the whole of creation, put under man's control by a loving Creator, is doomed to suffer the limitation of that rebellion. What is more, mankind chose to follow Satan, who had instigated the rebellion, so allowing him to usurp God's place of authority and worship.

Paul shows us the present position in stark clarity in **Romans 8:18-25**, but he also shows us the way that God has planned to bring the whole of creation back to him as it was designed to be. He is not going to take away man's control of creation. On the contrary, he is working to produce a new breed of mankind, 'the sons of God', under whose control creation will be set free from the futility of rebellion into the *"freedom of the glory of the children of God"*.

The whole of creation is just aching for the day when these children will be revealed, when they will be seen for who they really are and take their position of godly rule.

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If this sounds like just so many words and philosophical ideas, perhaps we need to look again at what the Bible calls 'the Gospel of the Kingdom'. John the Baptist, Jesus and the early church all spoke about the coming of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, but it was not a new idea. All the Old Testament prophets from Samuel onwards speak of it.

Daniel saw a vision of the Kingdom and was given understanding of it in **Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 18, 22 & 27**. This looks forward to that wonderful passage in **Revelation 11:15**, where John hears voices in heaven saying, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."*

So, where do we fit into all this? The answer to that question rests on our reaction and response to the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of the early church, as shown in what Peter said on the day of Pentecost, was very clear: *"Escape from this perverse generation!"* (**Acts 2:40**)

The way for them (and us) to escape was by following the direction to *"repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."* (**Acts 2:38-39**)

Peter is clear that repentance and faith in Jesus is the only route to escape from the 'world system', the whole way that the culture of

rebellion operates around us. In **Colossians 1:13-14**, Paul describes what has happened to the believer in Jesus. We used to be under Satan's "*domain of darkness*" and now the Father has "*transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*".

There are many implications of being in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially as we still live physically on this earth, which remains under enemy occupation and control by the forces of evil. Maybe because we live in what was once supposedly a 'Christian country', the battle lines do not seem quite so clearly drawn but perhaps we need to be more keenly aware of them.

If we looked at a country which was occupied and controlled by enemy forces, and could see groups of people who seemed cosy and at ease there, what questions might we ask about them?

- 1) "Are these people part of the enemy forces themselves, or perhaps collaborating with them?"
- 2) "Don't these people realise that their country has been invaded and is under enemy control?"
- 3) "Do they perhaps know the real situation but are more interested in their own comfort and personal ambitions?"
- 4) "Have they resigned themselves to enemy rule, with perhaps the vague hope that someone might rescue them eventually?"

Could we imagine that any group like one of these would form part of the new government of that country when the rightful ruler of it was restored to his place of authority? It seems unlikely, doesn't it? When he came back to take over again, he would place in positions of authority those who had been keenly aware of the enemy occupation and had done all they could to hasten the day of his return. (Jesus talked about this in **Luke 19:12-27**.)

We are in the same position. There are many verses in the Bible which make it clear that we are to reign with Jesus in his rule on earth, but some of them have conditions attached. See **Romans 8:17**, **2 Timothy 2:12**, **1 Peter 4:13**, for example.

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Perhaps this perspective is new to us; maybe we have not seen that, when we live our daily lives in the new life which we have in Jesus, we are actually living in the power of the Kingdom of God in an alien environment, in a godless world which does not acknowledge its Creator

and (perhaps not surprisingly) rejects the message of the Son of God. After all, Jesus' declared mission was ". . . *to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (**Luke 19:10**) We can hardly be surprised if 'the god of this world' is very unwilling to see any defectors!

As we begin to see ourselves as 'outposts' of the Kingdom of God, the reality of the Church starts to be even more essential. It is perhaps not surprising that the Church seems to flourish in countries where our Christian brothers and sisters are a persecuted minority. They know that they are not a cosy and 'acceptable' part of the world system around them, and it is brought home to them frequently as they suffer, simply for being followers of the Lord Jesus, for declaring his message or just for meeting together.

We can see in the New Testament that the church in a locality is the company of people there who have come under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and have been rescued by him from the world system which had been directing their lives. In many ways, they are already learning to live in the Kingdom of God, as they acknowledge his rule personally and make it the over-riding factor in their relationships and dealings, both with each other and with the rest of the world.

Like those early believers, we are very conscious that God is **not** in control of the world, because it is under enemy occupation. But we look forward to the day when we shall hear the proclamation that

**". . . the kingdom of this world
has become
the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ;
and He will reign forever and ever"**

(Revelation 11:15)

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* For the believer who has committed his life wholly into the Lord's hands and is learning to live 'in Christ', there is the certainty that, as we live in our Father's will, nothing can reach us that he has not allowed to do so, even if it is actually evil in itself. See **Romans 8:28** and Peter's comments in **Acts 2:23** on how the Jews had Jesus executed.

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