

**SPECIAL EDITION**

# The Sovereignty of God, Part 1

by Aaron Welch

Hello, everyone. Martin Zender here. Today, in honor of Romans, chapter 9, I am re-printing Part 1 of an article titled “The Sovereignty of God,” written by my friend Aaron Welch. With both brilliant words and unassailable logic, Aaron knocks home his vital message at a time when God’s absolute control of the universe—as well as His control of the beings *in* that universe—is doubted at every turn, even by those among us who should know better. You are aware that both Dan Sheridan and Rick Farwell are champions of the teaching that not everything is out of god. I call this teaching, the “*non-sovereignty of god*,” or the “*god-does-not-know-everything*” teaching. The lower-case deity of these human philosophies deserves the downgrade. The so-called deity being promoted here, not only by these men but by nearly every teacher in Christianity, is too busy to care about the details of our lives, too nice to employ anything that we humans would consider evil, and too limited of vision to know what will happen next. Where does this leave our comfort concerning the past and our confidence concerning the future? In a fog of uncertainty—that’s where. With aplomb and clarity, Mr. Welch identifies the misapprehensions of Scripture and the flaws of logic contributing to this compromised view of the Almighty. Paul destroyed the “*non-sovereignty-of-god*” teaching in Romans, chapter 9 and elsewhere (Acts, chapter 17, for instance); Aaron Welch destroys it here in this special edition of the ZWTF. I am proud to publish him. Few writings will reward your scrutiny more than this one. Enjoy. —MZ



Among those who see the Bible as a reliable and authoritative source of truth (as I do), there are few doctrines as polarizing as that which affirms God’s minute, providential control over—and absolute responsibility for—everything that takes place in the universe. Some denounce this belief as “fatalistic” and as promoting apathy and passivity in the lives of those who believe it. Others claim that a God Whose purpose requires the existence of evil and sin (even their temporary existence) must Himself be sinful and evil. However, my understanding of what Scripture reveals simply does not permit me to believe that anything has occurred or can occur in the universe—whether good or evil, whether seemingly trivial and mundane or of obvious importance and significance—apart from God’s intention, or outside of His sovereign purpose.



### **God is Operating All in Accord With the Counsel of His Will**

Ephesians 1:11 is one of the clearest and most concise affirmations of God’s absolute responsibility for what takes place in the universe found in Scripture. There, the apostle Paul declares that the predestination (or “pre-designation”) of believers to their eonian allotment among the celestials is “... according to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will ...”

What Paul is affirming here is not merely that God accomplishes the salvation of believers according to the counsel of His own will, but that He “is operating *all* (or everything) in accord with the counsel of His will.” God’s work of salvation on behalf of those chosen beforehand to be members of the body of Christ is grounded in the truth that He alone is in control of what happens in His universe. The certainty of the believer’s eonian salvation is based upon the fact that God’s purposes will never fail, and His unfailing purpose is grounded in the more basic and fundamental truth that He is “operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.” Thus, Paul’s point here is that believers may be confident of their eonian inheritance *because it reflects one aspect of the larger purpose of God, in which He is operating all in accord with the*

*counsel of His will.* The words “counsel of His will” emphasizes the fact that God does what He does apart from human counsel or advice. He is “operating all”—everything that has or will take place in His universe—without consulting His creatures or conforming to their fallible and often mistaken views on what is wise and good.

The scope of God’s plan and responsibility over what takes place, rather than being confined to a limited number of things or events, is universal. Absolutely speaking, God is not passively “allowing” anything in the universe

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to take place; rather, He is the one actively causing it to take place, in accord with the counsel of His will. He is, as Paul says in the above translation, “operating all.” Nothing that one could possibly think of as being excluded from that which God is “operating” is, in fact, excluded. There

are no exceptions. Yet, because God's operative power in bringing things about is rarely obvious (nor is it necessarily direct), it is typical for many who profess to believe that "God is sovereign" and "in control" to deny (whether explicitly or implicitly) that His operative power is truly universal and all-pervasive. However, the popular doctrine of human (and angelic) "free will" cannot be consistently affirmed without denying the truth of Ephesians 1:11. If what Paul says is true, there is simply no such thing as absolute "chance" or "coincidence" in the universe (which, as I've argued in another article, the doctrine of "free will" ultimately affirms; see link below).

"Randomness" and "chance" are only relative—i.e., they exist only from the perspective of the creature (who is limited in knowledge), rather than the Creator (Whose knowledge has no limits, embracing everything that exists and takes place). If what Paul says is true, then everything that occurs must ultimately be attributed to the divine influence. It is ultimately irrelevant whether we like this fact—or are able to "wrap our minds around" it—or not.

### All Things Are Out Of, Through and For God



In Romans 11:33-36, Paul ends His doxology (which was evidently inspired by His reflection on God's sovereign dealings with Israel and the nations) with the following simple but startling words: "...out of Him and through Him and for Him is all." What does Paul mean by this? It would be a mistake to limit the application of these words to God's dealings with Israel and the nations. Is it really reasonable to believe that when Paul spoke of God's riches, wisdom and knowledge He had in view *only*, and *exclusively*, God's dealings with Israel and the nations?

Was Paul, in His doxology, only praising God for the untraceable and inscrutable nature of God's judgments and ways with regards to His dealings with Israel and the

nations, and nothing else? Or did Paul instead have in mind God's wisdom, knowledge, judgments and ways in general? I think the latter is more likely the case. God's sovereign dealings with Israel and the nations is just one notable example of the depths of His riches, wisdom and knowledge, and just one notable example of how God's judgments are inscrutable and His ways are untraceable.

The truth that "out of Him and through Him and for Him is all" is a basic principle. Rather than having to do exclusively with God's dealings with Israel and the nations, the fact that all is "out of Him and through Him and for Him" is the very foundation of God's dealings with Israel and the nations. To attempt to limit the "all" that is out, through and for God merely to God's dealings with Israel and the nations is no more legitimate than limiting the "all" that Christ is over merely to all Israelites (Rom. 9:5), or limiting the "all" of 1 Cor. 8:6 to those believers who had knowledge that an idol is "nothing in the world."

Trying to limit the "all" of verse 36 is a misguided attempt to escape and deny the truth that God is, in fact, in control of—and ultimately responsible for—everything. One's own personal misgivings (or rather, unbelief) regarding God's ultimate responsibility for all the evil that takes place in the world, or His control over the "trivial" and "mundane" details of life, is no justification for attempting to limit the "all" that is out of, through and for God. Concerning Paul's words in Romans 11:34-36 ("For, who knew the mind of the Lord? Or, who became His adviser? Or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid him? Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!"), Martin Zender rightly observes:

The *all* that is out of God is related to ("seeing that") the *nothing* that anyone can give Him first. If the "nothing" could become "something," only then would the "all" not be everything. Why? Because the phrase "seeing that" vitally relates these clauses. Likewise, if the "nothing" of the former clause is absolute (and it is), then so is the "all" of the subsequent clause. This brief passage of Romans 11:33-36 proves logically (to the sound mind) that everything that exists and everything that happens is, indeed, out of God. Otherwise, someone has given something to Him first. If it can be proven that someone has given something to God that He didn't already possess (impossible), only then can it be proven, from this passage, that all is not out of God (impossible). (<http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF3.38.pdf>)

Some may object that everything being “out of” God only refers to the fact that God is the original source of everything, without necessarily being responsible for, and in control of, what happened to His creation after He brought it into existence. According to this view, much of what has taken place subsequent to God’s originally bringing the universe into existence has—to some extent or another—been contrary to His original intention and plan. In response to this, it need only be pointed out that Paul also declares that everything is “through God.” Even if everything’s being “out of God” doesn’t necessarily imply that the present state of affairs (which would include the evil actions of many of His creatures) is in accord with God’s plan and intention, the fact that everything is also “through God” surely does.

In addition to what Paul writes in Romans 11, we read a similar affirmation of God’s sovereignty in 1 Corinthians 8:5-7:

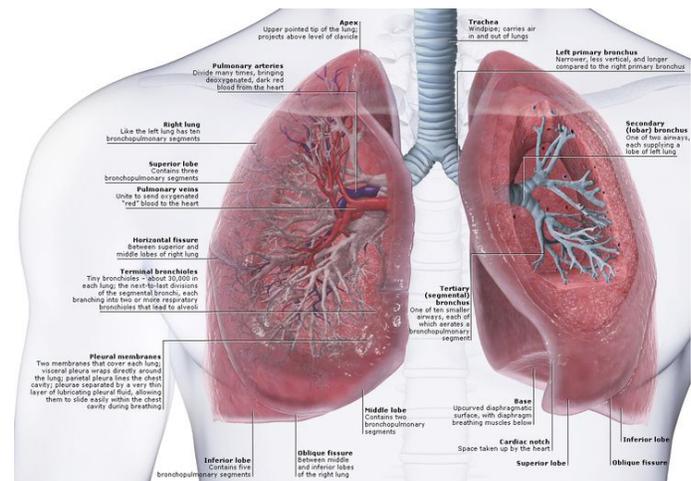
For even if so be that there are those being termed gods, whether in heaven or on earth, even as there are many gods and many lords, nevertheless for us there is one God, the Father, out of Whom all is, and we for Him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom all is, and we through Him. But not in all is there this knowledge.

As is the case with what Paul says in Romans 11, there is nothing which limits the “all” that is out of God and through Christ. Paul is evidently expressing the same foundational truth-principle as that expressed in Romans 11 (and the same can be said for what Paul says in 1 Cor. 11:12, 2 Cor. 5:18 and Heb. 2:10). It should be noted that what Paul said was “through” God in Romans 11:36 is said to be “through” the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Cor. 8:7. Is this a contradiction? Not at all. Everything is still through God, absolutely speaking. However, we must keep in mind that “all authority in heaven and on the earth” was given to Christ after His resurrection (Matt. 28:18), and that Christ is consequently “carrying on all by His powerful declaration” (Heb. 1:3). In other words, the authority that God gave Christ when He made him “Lord of all” after rousing Him from among the dead means that nothing in the universe can take place, or is taking place, apart from Christ’s declaration that it be so; it is all “through Him.” *But the fact that Christ’s will is in perfect harmony with that of His Father’s means that what God is operating in accord with the counsel of His will (which, as we’ve seen, is “all,” or everything) is exactly what Christ is declaring should be.* Thus, when the time comes for Christ to subject all to Himself so that God may be

“all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24-28), we know that the “operation” which will enable Christ to accomplish this (Phil. 3:21) will be the same divine operation to which Paul refers in Eph. 1:11. As Christ himself declared in John 5:30, “I can not do anything of Myself,” and “I am not seeking My will, but the will of Him Who sends Me.”

### God: Giver of Life, Breath and All

In his message given in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:25-28, Paul again affirms the fact that God is ultimately responsible for what His creatures have and undergo in life. There, Paul declared that God “gives to all life and breath and all,” and that “in Him we are living and moving and are...” These simple but profound words spoken to the Athenians are perfectly consistent with Paul’s written declarations that God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will, and that all is out of, through and for God. No human being—whether believer or unbeliever—can take a single breath or step apart from God, whose plan involves exactly how long each person will live on this earth and (consequently) all that takes place between the time of their conception and the time of their death. No human being lives one moment longer or shorter on this earth than what God has ordained. And since this is



the case, it follows that God planned and is intimately involved with even the smallest details of each person’s life and the decisions that they make.

Now, when Paul includes the little word “all” after the words “life and breath,” he is including anything else that one could think of as being had or experienced by human beings. There is nothing we have in this life—including our very thoughts, desires, values and affection—that is

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not ultimately given to us by God. He is the source of all. Does this fact mean that we are not really persons, or that we don't really make choices or have a will? Does it mean that our personal relationship with God is an illusion? Not at all. It simply means that our personhood has nothing to do with having personal autonomy; our power to choose has nothing to do with our being the absolute cause (and ultimate explanation) of anything that happens in this universe, and that our relationship with God is not like our relationship with created, finite beings.

It should be noted that the inspired truth Paul was making known to the Athenians was not a new revelation made known to Paul after Christ appeared to him. Long before Paul spoke these words in Athens, it had been declared by Job, “In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10). Job went on to say that “man's days are determined, and the number of his months is with You [God], and You have appointed his limits that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5-6). Daniel understood the truth of God's absolute sovereignty over the entirety of man's life (including everything He does) as well, for we read that he told King Belshazzar, “But the God in Whose hand are your life-breath and your ways,

you have not glorified” (Dan. 5:23). Not only the life and breath but the very “ways” of this pagan, ungodly king were in the hand of God! Consider also Psalm 139:16, where David used the imagery of a book to demonstrate that the details of our lives have been ordained by God and embraced by His sovereign plan: “In your book were

written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”

There are innumerable variables that go into making the substance of each and every one of our days. The only way this verse could be true is if God has absolute control over all of these variables, and is thus in sovereign command of all the contingencies and future choices that will happen in regard to our lives.

—*Aaron Welch*



Aaron Welch with his wife Chrissy and daughter Miriam.