

Spiritual Considerations...

Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.



Dave Phillips, editor

number 32

In Control of our Destiny (?)

Dave Phillips, Germantown

I wish I had a more spectacular, awe-inspiring, attention-getting title than the one I chose. It would be better to state with great confidence and assurance that there is a four-step plan for taking control of life and its eventualities. We are accustomed to well-conceived recipes and formulas that promise success.

But when we look back at the Scriptures, we are reminded who is ultimately in control – the sovereign God. Have you stopped to reflect on this truth recently? I mean reflect on the thought from the Scriptures?

The word “sovereign” dates to the 13th century and has derivation from the French and Latin term that meant “above.” Beginning in the 17th century, the British used the term to refer to a gold coin used as a part of their currency. The “sovereign” had worth and value. The concept of God as “above all” certainly resonates throughout the Bible.

For the believer, He is the sovereign God. He “has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Ps. 103:19). Listen to David’s prayer: “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all (1 Chron. 29:11, NIV).

Where is the role of man? If God is all-powerful, how does the choice of man influence the outcome of events? One man in a study recently suggested, that “we could not and would not lift our little finger were it not for the will of God that it be so.” How far does the sovereignty of God extend.

Here is where the Bible helps us understand. There is a difference between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God uses human means to accomplish his will in our lives, but he does not use coercion. He will not force us to act responsibly. He has chosen (because he is sovereign) to allow us to make decisions (responsibility). Even the crucifixion of Jesus was no surprise to God. But man chose to commit the crime and was held accountable for the consequences. Peter said to the Jews, “this man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (Acts 2:23, NASV). The people did what God already knew they would do, but they knew they were responsible for their actions, for in verse 37 they said, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

Some think they know more than God.

Do you remember Job? God finally says to Job, “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it” (Job 40:2). Job couldn’t answer. He could only cover his mouth with his hand.

Do you remember Paul’s response to Jews who thought they were the only chosen ones of God and couldn’t understand God also accepting the Gentiles? He said in Romans 9:20, “O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this, “ will it? Or does the potter have a right to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?”

God is sovereign. He is in control. There are no surprises, only plans. We have been given the gift of choice. We read His will and we choose to follow or rebel. In one sense, we are in control. Divine sovereignty does not negate human responsibility. Thank God for the choice.

The “Tour Guide” Syndrome

Andrew Phillips (from *The Messenger*, Mt. Juliet, TN)

Kathryn and I were recently in Washington D.C., and we visited several monuments and memorials. We read many of the names on the Vietnam War Memorial, and we silently watched the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We walked somberly through the Holocaust Museum, and we stood in awe at the architecture of the Library of Congress. We visited the monument to Abraham Lincoln, and toured the house in which he died. We stared at the soldiers’ haunting faces at the Korean War Memorial right after staring at Fonzi’s leather jacket in the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

I was constantly amazed at the number of people who visit these places every day. There was a crowd everywhere we went. Most visitor to these areas were tourists, like we were, and it was easy to see eyes light up and jaws drop as we viewed each site.

One group of people did catch my attention, however – the tour guides. Don’t get me wrong, we had skilled, knowledgeable guides who led us through the various museums and displays, but I couldn’t help wondering how those attractions affected them. The cashier at the Lincoln Memorial gift shop didn’t seem as taken with the monument as we were. After all, she sees it every day. The driver of our tour bus through Arlington Cemetery appeared unaffected by the rows of soldier’s gravesites. After all, he sees them every day. Our library of Congress tour guide pointed us to the Gutenberg Bible. We stopped to gaze at it, but our guide was already in the next room. After all, she sees it every day.

I wonder if we fall into that same trap. We sing every Sunday about the grace of God, yet it doesn’t sink in. After all, we sing those songs every week. We listen to passages from scripture that describe the agony of Jesus’ crucifixion and the good news of His resurrection, yet we remain relatively unmoved. After all, we have been studying the cross for a month now. We take the Lord’s Supper, yet those reflections have faded away from our memory before our Sunday supper. After all, we do it every week.

Sometimes, the blessing of regular worship can bring with it a sense of complacency. Let’s soak in the verses of our songs and the words of scripture. Each Sunday, let’s allow ourselves to be impacted by the sacrifice of Jesus all over again. The beauty of God’s grace never fades, even though our human attention spans might. Just like the song we sing, “I Stand Amazed,” let’s work hard to constantly “stand amazed” at God’s love. We may be exposed to it every week, but we look forward to one worship service that won’t end, when we spend an eternity in His presence. May God bless us as we renew our sense of awe daily!

Scathing Report on Education

President Bell of Saint Stephens College

“We are sending forth graduates with diffused minds, scarcely fit to take command of their own lives or to cooperate in the development of a social state; drifters into conformity and essential human futility; easy victims to specious crowd psychologies; followers of what seem easy ways out... They esteem themselves only creatures of their environment and so they tend to become just that. They have little or no perception of standards – of truth, beauty, or goodness; they have no goals of purposeful perfection with which to estimate values or by which to gauge achievement. All things are to them relative – relative not to absolute but to expediency. Truth means to them little more than a body of observable facts; beauty, conformity to fashion; goodness, doing things that will make one comfortable or popular. Out of our most able youth, capable of high adventure, we are manufacturing mental and ethical jellyfish.”

The statement was made in **1927!** It was printed by W.A Harper in his book, *Character Building in Colleges* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1928), 13-14. The need for men and women of character has not changed. Let’s continue to grow in grace and truth.