



God's Unfailing PURPOSE

Psalm 115:3

How goes the world? How goes life? Reflecting on these questions tends to evoke discouragement since time seems to advance only from crisis to crisis. Whether the problem occurs in our personal lives, our family, our neighborhood, our nation, or our planet, each exigency seems to precipitate the next. In this cycle of crises, everything appears to be upside down. Evil is considered good; good is considered evil. Truth has fallen and is trampled in the streets by academic processions, political machinery, and populous parades. It seems that Christianity has become an ever-shrinking minority with lessening influence and dwindling numbers. Who is in control? If God is great and good, how can these things be?

Unfortunately, unbiblical answers to these questions invade Christian thought and further sink the soul into despair. Some Christians thrive on

conspiracy theories. To them, every world, domestic, or financial crisis is orchestrated by some secretive few who rule absolutely—although surreptitiously—from some secluded conference room. Others console themselves with a last-day theology that generates a fatalistic passivism that contradicts biblical faith. They have a pie-in-the-sky optimism that in the end all will be well as God regains His control of this world that is now under satanic government. The rampant evil of the present day happily heralds the soon end of time. Some professedly Christian thinkers and theologians have even postulated an “open theism” that claims bad things happen because God cannot prevent them from happening. God’s good intentions are eclipsed by His basic inability to effect His will. God is good enough, but not great enough. These attempts to resolve the tension between God’s

goodness and greatness range from a happy worry to blasphemy.

I confess that I do not know why things are the way they are, and I often wish that things would more obviously, at least to my sight, work together for that good God has promised. Stumbling by sight has always been easier than walking by faith. But notwithstanding what I think I see, I have to believe that the Bible is true and that there is a throne that, while secluded from natural sight, governs absolutely with an unthwartable agenda. That throne is God's, and that agenda is His perfect will. Two things are certain: the kingdoms of this world will fail, and the kingdom of God will prevail.

No Christian denies the ultimate triumph of divine rule, but in the meantime we are confronted with circumstances that seem to belie divine control. Spiritual myopia distorts the perception of time since it focuses on the immediate. Because the isolated nows of life are so vivid to sight, faith often fails to see what really is. Faith knows that appearance and reality are not the same, but what appears is, nonetheless, what we see. Faith must resolve the constant tension between experience and truth. The more it rests in the truth, the less the tension. This exercise of faith is not a wishful or positive thinking that crosses the fingers and squints the eyes, making believe that all is well. Faith's value is always defined in terms of its object. In His goodness, God has provided sufficient evidence both by His works and in His word to keep us legitimately encouraged regardless of the circumstances of time. Having a biblically based theology of time is good for life.

A biblically sound theology of time flows directly from a proper view of the Lord Himself. How we view the Lord determines how we view life. How we view life mirrors how we view the Lord. Here is the simple fact of the matter: God is in absolute control of all things—the big issues of the world as well as the seemingly bigger issues of our lives. This is true whether man knows it or not, believes it or not, or likes it or not. Believing cannot make something true, nor can not believing make it untrue. The inviolable truth is that God is the sovereign king whose kingdom is universal; nothing is outside His domain. He

does not try to control a democracy; He rules an absolute monarchy. Recognizing His rule and submitting to Him form the bedrock for a scriptural and practical time theology.

A theology of time centers on the divine work of providence. Providence is the temporal operation of the eternal God, through which He accomplishes His unending purpose. Providence is the constant and ordinary work of God whereby He preserves and governs His creation to the designed end of His glory. Included in that glory is the ultimate good of God's people. Every passing and progressing moment from the beginning of creation until the end of this age is planned and implemented by the all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good God. Don't confuse this wonderful truth with some pagan concept of fatalism that produces a "whatever-will-be-will-be" resignation. Belief in the sovereignty of God is the very opposite of fatalism; it never excuses passivity but rather motivates a confident activity. The affairs of life do not happen by blind chance; they happen as the all-wise God, who both knows and also determines the end from the beginning, orchestrates them in perfect harmony.

Not only are the affairs of life in God's hand, but His purposes are secure and unfrustratable. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes affirmed: "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him" (3:14). Living in the constant awareness of God (i.e., fearing Him) puts a spiritual slant on things that is essential to a biblical philosophy of life, or, in other words, a theology of time. Providence assures us that there is a reason for everything, even though that reason may be hidden from our understanding. Faith lays hold of the great and good God and dispels the despair that so frequently grips us when we consider time and life apart from Him.

The old spiritual is far more accurate than the notions and denials of many theologians and expresses simply the essence of the truth I want us to see: "He's got the whole world in His hands." Truth is unaffected by either ignorance or denial. The biblical answer is unequivocally to the point: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath

pleased" (Psalm 115:3). In another place, the Psalmist confessed, "For I know that the Lord is great" and that "whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psalm 135:5–6).

In other words, there is no place outside the sphere of God's interest and involvement. This is good because not only is God great, He is also good and does only good things (Psalm 119:68). Since, therefore, God's goodness is just as infinite, eternal, and immutable as His greatness, His governing all things everywhere to accomplish His pleasure is a happy prospect. What could possibly be better than for the creator and sustainer of the entire universe to accomplish His good and perfect will—particularly when we know Him as well as our Saviour? We may not always understand what God is doing with us at any given moment to accomplish His good will, but the more we rest in the reality of His goodness and greatness, the more we will accept it peacefully and joyfully as that which is best for us.

The absolute and supreme sovereignty of God is perhaps the most comforting theological truth that God has graciously revealed to us about Himself—at least with reference to living out our time in this world. It is strange to me that this truth that reveals so much for the believer's comfort and assurance has been so commonly degraded to theological controversy, thus robbing so many Christians of its practical application. Understanding time—whether past time, future time, or our time—requires trusting that absolute and supreme sovereignty of God. The bottom line brings us back to the spiritual: He's got you and me, brothers and sisters, in His hands right along with the whole world. God's providence is unending. ■

This article was adapted from Dr. Barrett's book *God's Unfailing Purpose*, which is available from Ambassador Emerald.

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