

Samuel D. Gordon on the Sovereignty of God

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*But the Pharisees and religious scholars hardened their hearts and **turned their backs on God's purposes for them** because they had refused John's baptism.*
(Luke 7:30; The VOICE Translation)

A couple of days ago I came home from church, turned on the TV and caught the ending of the 1951 movie "*Quo Vadis*" starring Peter Ustinov as the corrupt Roman emperor who set much of Rome on fire and then blamed it on the Christians. The movie depicts the serious and monstrous persecution of the Christians in Rome by this evil dictator.

Upon discovery of the truth the citizens of Rome began to rebel against Emperor Nero and he hid in his palace. A woman he banished showed up and tells him that he will be killed by the people because of the monster he has become. Nero then says, "I didn't wish to be a monster. The gods willed it." I teasingly told my wife, "Hey honey, Nero was a Calvinist."

The truth is, false ideas about sovereignty, whether they are found in pagan religions or within "Christianity" have been used to relieve men of the responsibility for their own careless actions. Muslims, even today, attribute everything that happens to "Allah's will". This means that no matter what they do, it was the will of Allah that they did it.

But "Christians" (particularly those who embrace Calvinist ideology) who teach these false ideas not only lead people to reject the Biblical truth in which we all have the freedom to choose good and evil (Deut. 30:15, 19), but also cast aspersions on the truth about God's loving character.

God is made out to be a monster who wills the worst types of evil upon men and women.

Not too long ago I was reading some material by one of my favorite classic authors, S. D.

Gordon, who was famous for his "Quiet Talks" series of books. Gordon gave, what I believe to be, a very good refutation of the erroneous ideas put forth by those who hold to a distorted viewpoint of God's sovereignty:

God's Sovereignty.

There has been a good bit of teaching about "God's sovereignty." Behind that mysterious, indefinite phrase has crept much that badly needs the clear, searching sunlight of day. God's sovereignty is commonly thought of as a sort of dead-weight force by which He compels things to come His way. If a man stand in the way of God's plan so much the worse for the man. It is thought of as a sort of mighty army, marching down the road, in close ranks, with fixed bayonets. If you happen to be on that road better look out very sharply, or you may get crushed under foot.

I do not mean that the theologians put it in that blunt fashion, nor that I have ever heard any preacher phrase it in that way. I mean that as I have talked with the

plain common people, and listened to them, this is the distinct impression that comes continually of what it means to them. Then, too, the phrase has often been used, it is to be feared, as a religious cloak to cover up the shortcomings and shirkings of those who aren't fitting into God's plan.

God is a sovereign. The truth of His sovereignty is one of the most gracious of all the truths in this blessed old Book of God. It means that the great gracious purpose and plan of God will finally be victorious. It means that in our personal lives He, with great patience and skill and power, works through the tangled network of circumstances and difficulties to answer our prayers, and to bring out the best results for us.

It means further that, with a diplomacy and patience only divine, He works with and through the intricate meshes of men's wills and contrary purposes to bring out good now—not good out of bad, that is impossible; but good in spite of the bad—and that finally all opposition will be overcome, or will have spent itself out in utter weakness, and so His purposes of love will be fully victorious.

But the practical thing to burn in deep just now is this, that we can hinder God's plan. His plans have been hindered, and delayed, and made to fail, because we wouldn't work with Him.

And God lets His plan fail. It is a bit of His greatness. He will let a plan fail before He will be untrue to man's utter freedom of action. He will let a man wreck his career, that so through the wreckage the man may see his own failure, and gladly turn to God. Many a hill is climbed only through a swamp road.

God cares more for a man than for a plan. The plan is only for the sake of the man. You say, of course. But, you know, many men think more of carrying through the plan on which they have set themselves, regardless of how it may hurt or crush some man in the way. God's plan is for man, and so it is allowed to fail, for the man's sake.

Yet, because the plan is always made for man's sake, it will be carried through, because by and by man will see it to be best. Many a man's character has been made only through the wrecking of his career. If God had had His way He would have saved both life and soul, both the earthly career and the heavenly character. Let us stop thoughtfully, and remember that God has carefully thought out a plan for every man, for each one of us. It is a plan for the life, these human years; not simply for getting us to what we may have thought of as a psalm singing heaven, when we're worn out down here.

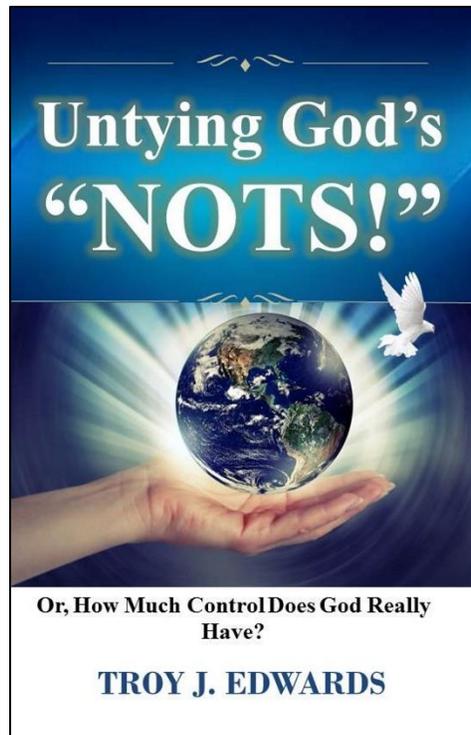
It is the best plan. For God is ambitious for us; more ambitious for you and me than we are for ourselves, though few of us really believe that. But He will carry out His plan—aye, He can carry it out only with our hearty consent. He must work through our wills. He honors us in that. With greatest reverence be it said that God waits reverently, hat in hand, outside the door of a man's will, until the

man inside turns the knob and throws open the door for Him to come in and carry out His plan. We can make God fail by not working with Him. The greatest of all achievements of action is to find and fit into God's plan.¹

Some may balk at statements like, "We can make God fail by not working with Him." Yet, this is not an inditement on God as much as it is on men who refuse to work with God in accordance to His plans for them (see Psalm 81:10-16). Therefore, we believe that Gordon gave a biblically accurate understanding of God's sovereignty that is in line with the Bible's revelation of God's loving character.

For more Biblically accurate teaching on how God operates in His sovereignty we highly recommend our book:

Untying God's "NOTS!"
Or, How Much Control Does God Really Have?



For more details, visit our bookstore at:
www.vindicatinggod.org/books.html

¹ Gordon, Samuel D. **Quiet Talks with World Winners** (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), pp. 125-128