



God or Genie

Do we treat God as a genie rather than as a Sovereign Lord?

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- Good evening and thank you for inviting me...
 - My name is Stephen Armstrong, and I am currently teaching the Sunday night study here on Revelation
 - My class is now in its 23rd week, and I can sense the excitement in the class is really starting to build –
 - However, I suspect the students are merely anxious to find out what will come first: the end of my class or Christ's Second Coming itself
 - Truly, I am honored to answer your call to teach on Wednesday nights for this time, and I am humbled by your trust you placed in me to bring you God's Word. It's an awesome responsibility and it's one I do not take lightly
- Tonight we begin a 7-lesson series I've titled "Thy Will Be Done," the Sovereignty of God.
 - Before I begin today's lesson, I want to give you an appreciation of why I believe this topic is so important for our times
- As I have had occasion to watch Christian churches broadcasting their services on television or the radio or when I browse the popular Christian titles in a book store, frankly I'm astonished by what I see
 - I know you've seen these same things, because they're immensely popular
 - From every channel and from every book cover, I see teaching after teaching transforming (if it were possible) the God of the universe and of all creation and of all time – into a genie in a bottle
 - So many ministries and books teach about a god I've never known – a god who wants to make me rich
 - A god who can't wait to cure me of every ailment I suffer from
 - A god to who never wants me to suffer any trials
 - A god who is prepared to clear every last obstacle standing in the way of my personal success and happiness in this world
 - And yet this god is powerless to provide all these things until I enable it, or as they often say, until I release his power
 - Release his power? Huh? What kind of god needs my help in order to do what he supposedly wishes to do anyway?
- Some of the messages I've read or heard are probably familiar to you
 - One popular book tells us to repeatedly pray an obscure Old Testament passage – a virtual chant guaranteed to release god's blessing

Dear Reader, I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers. It is brief--only one sentence with four parts--and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God....

- ◦ Do these words concern you? They should. Regardless of the good things to be found in books like this, it can't excuse the serious errors in teaching that turns God into a genie obligated to respond to our selfish desires

- Other popular teachings of the day tell us to lay claim to the blessings - blessings that God is waiting anxiously to shower upon us
 - – as if they might expire – like some limited time offer – “and if you act right now He’ll throw in a bonus spiritual gifting absolutely free – pray now, St Peter is standing by...”
- I recently watched a well-known television preacher declare that if we tithed regularly, God would be obligated to repay us seven times over or He would be breaking His word – but of course, God won’t give until we do
 - As if our faith were nothing more than some cosmic multi-level marketing scheme
- Another popular perspective says that I must have the right frame of mind – I need a better self-view – so that I might achieve the victorious life in Christ
 - A recent best selling book claims to have the secret for how Christians are...

“...achieving a successful, prosperous life...The key to doing so are seven steps: Enlarge Your Vision, Develop a Healthy Self-Image, Discover the Power of Your Thoughts and Words, Let go of the Past, Find Strength Through Adversity, Live to Give, and Choose to Be Happy.”

- These misguided teachers would have us believe that our God is a God who is capable - and even obligated - to provide all we could possibly want or imagine, and yet He’s powerless to do anything unless we enable him
 - What a strange God this is...and is this the God of the Bible?
 - What has happened to the sovereignty of God?
- My brothers and sisters in Christ, the church is under attack by false teaching – and in the worst cases, the teaching seeks to distort the words of the Bible for dishonest gain
 - The teachings are often saturated by catch-phrases that sound appealing and seem sensible enough – until you compare them against the light of scripture
 - For example, is one poor self-image truly a cause of our problems in life? Would our problems vanish if we just cultivated better self-esteem? Do we believe we need more self-esteem in this culture?
 - I wonder what the Apostle Paul would think.

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

Phil. 2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- The Apostle Paul commended the Philippians church to imitate Christ in His humility and willingness to sacrifice His position of honor out of obedience to the Father
- If Christ were alive on earth today, no doubt these teachers would blame his miserable circumstances on his obvious poor self-esteem and the fact that he didn't choose to be happy
 - Self-esteem is a \$20 word for a very ancient idea: pride
 - But the last thing this lost and dying world needs is more pride
 - Scripture teaches we need far less self-esteem and we need far more Christ-esteem – we need to deny ourselves and take up His cross, the cross of obedience to the Father
- At the root of all such false teaching is a distorted view of who God is and what He desires and what he has promised to those who love Him
 - A distorted view of what it means for God to be God and what it means that we're NOT
- But if we're willing to be honest with ourselves, there's something even more troubling than simply the false teaching by itself
 - What should bothers us even more is the fact that these teachings attract such huge audiences of adoring followers
 - These men and women often find themselves preaching to tens of thousands of people who love everything they're told
 - But friends, may I suggest the shame rests with us
 - Because to attract such a devoted following, these teachers require an audience that is largely ignorant of the truths of scripture
- And we the teachers and pastor together with lay leadership have the collective responsibility to provide the instruction our fellowships so desperately need
 - to exhort all our brothers and sisters to seek after the meat of the Word
 - To not be satisfied with feel-good pabulum, porridge for the mind – milk
 - And to know and teach the sovereignty and power of God
- As the Apostle Paul was approaching the end of his life and he recognized that his time and ministry on this earth were drawing to a close...
 - He used one of his final letters to issue a solemn charge to his young protégé, a minister named Timothy

2Tim. 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2Tim. 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

2Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

2Tim. 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

- Brothers and Sisters, I fear the time that Paul warned of is sadly upon us.
 - And though we are not in control of the times nor the seasons, we can still stand against the tide that has swept so many of our brothers and sisters out into a sea of confusion and despair
 - And our weapon in this battle for the hearts and minds of Christendom is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God
 - The series seeks to bring the Word of God to bear on this issue by presenting a Biblical view of the sovereignty of God
 - Each week we will take a look at a particular aspect of God's work in His creation through the lives of His people
 - the work of prayer, healing, provision, evangelism, world events and even the Word itself
 - And examine passages of scripture to understand what God's Word tells us about His sovereignty in these areas
- Meanwhile, I know that we can all take great comfort in knowing that we aren't the kind of Christians to take God's sovereignty lightly – to treat God as our genie, right?
 - After all, anyone who truly knows the Lord, who truly knows his love and lordship and who knows his awesome power and perfect nature, the incomparable depths of the wisdom of God – would certainly never see God as merely a personal attendant who answers to our every whim.
 - Surely, we couldn't do that, could we?
- Turn with me to the Gospel of John, Chapter 2

John 2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;

John 2:2 and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

John 2:3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus *said to Him, "They have no wine."

John 2:4 And Jesus *said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."

John 2:5 His mother *said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

John 2:6 Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

John 2:7 Jesus *said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim.

John 2:8 And He *said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him.

John 2:9 When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter *called the bridegroom,

John 2:10 and *said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.”

- No doubt you've heard this story before and perhaps have studied it for yourself - but perhaps if God permits, we might see the story a little differently today
 - Jesus has recently begun to collect disciples to himself
 - And while in the region of Galilee, He attends a wedding as a guest of his mother, Mary
 - Jesus and his small group of disciples come along for the celebration
 - Weddings were a big deal in Jewish culture, and they typically included a party that could last for days
 - NIOSA only with less pushing and shoving
 - The host of this affair had a lot riding on the contentment of his guests
 - A bad party would be a disgrace and dishonor to the parents of the bride and groom
 - So at some point in the festivities, Mary takes note that the wine is running out
 - This was no small matter
 - A Jewish wedding without wine would be like German Octoberfest without beer
 - Or a church potluck without a casserole
 - At this point Mary does a very interesting thing
 - She calls Jesus over and tells him...
 - Why did she do this?
 - Why did she think Jesus should know this?
 - What did she expect Jesus to say?
 - This moment is like one of those test moments for every man
 - Like when your wife asks you, “Honey does this dress make me look fat?”
 - There's only one right answer
 - Just like there's only one right answer to Mary
 - Jesus gives her a mild rebuke
 - Now the first thing that might catch your mind is the phrase “woman”
 - In that culture it wasn't a disrespectful term
 - His next statement is where we should concern ourselves
 - He says, plainly, what does this have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.
 - Well, we know how the story ends: we know that Christ honors his mother's request and turns the water into wine.

- And not just any water, those pots were for ceremonial cleansing
- But what is Mary's motivation for going to Jesus and saying they're running out of wine
 - Except that she thought he could do something about it
 - Which tells us she must have known Jesus was capable of doing the very thing He did.
- So Jesus replies, My time has not come.
 - In other words His time to reveal himself through His public ministry, has not yet arrived.
 - Through the Gospels, Christ spent many times in the early part of His ministry trying to conceal His identity until the proper time so that His ministry could go to fruition, according to God's plan.
 - And here's Mary, essentially trying to expose her son for who He is
- As we see next, Christ honored his mother and turned her misplaced motives to good, for the sake of God's glory.
 - We know from scripture that we are to bring our needs before the Lord.
 - But James 4 says, you do not have because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.
 - So while we are to bring things before the Lord, and we should, if we bring them with wrong motives, we will not receive
 - The motives that we should bring into prayer as we seek God, and His blessings is that His will be done
 - And that our will would understand His
 - And we would receive it gladly
- What this series is designed to do is to return us to the biblical view of who God is and who we are in relationship to God
 - And if we truly understand His word, and all it has to say about how God works in this world, we will understand better our responsibility in this world.
 - But when our understanding of God's sovereignty loses the biblical centered focus that it's supposed to have, then we're tempted to think:
 - "I can manipulate God"
 - "I can do certain things, say certain things, pray certain ways, approach life in a certain way".
 - "If I please Him, then I release all this favor."
 - That's a genie, not a god
 - That's not the God of the Bible
 - It encourages our flesh to be in control – not God

- And He will not receive glory if He were to answer those prayers
- So we should look to give him glory in our petitions too