The Sovereignty Of God

Prayer and faith

One view is that God will not do things in His physical creation and in the affairs of believers unless:

- some person prays to Him asking Him to do these things, and/or
- some person exercises faith – trusting Him to do these things.

The above statements are true in some or many circumstances, but not in all situations. For example, God miraculously made the universe and the human race without any person asking or trusting Him to do so (see Genesis Chapters 1 and 2).

The Scriptures reveal that on most occasions, God sends rain whether or not people ask or trust Him to do so. Matthew 5:45 says in part: “…your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” This verse also says that He makes the Sun shine on people. He does this without any person asking or trusting Him to do so. The Scriptures reveal that only on some occasions does God require humans to ask or trust Him to restore or stop the rainfall. Revelation 11:6, 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1 and James 5:17-18 show this.¹

The Bible emphasises the importance of our praying to God (see Matthew 6:6-8, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, 2:8, 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and James 5:13). Also, the Scriptures teach that God wants us to ask Him to do various things in our lives (see Matthew 7:7-8, 18:19, 21:22, John 14:14, 15:7, 16:23 and 1 John 5:14).

Verses like Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:11-20, Ezekiel 22:30-31 and Psalm 106:23 show the importance God places on intercession for others. Ezekiel 22:30-31 records God’s Words: “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads, says the Lord.” Psalm 106:23 states: “Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.”

But such verses must be balanced by others like Jeremiah 15:1 which show God is the Supreme Ruler and does not have to do whatever His intercessors ask: “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be favorable toward this people…”

¹ Refer to the sections “As Creator, God owns everything” and “A common modern error” in Chapter “God the Supreme Ruler”. In these sections, you will see the great error of the view that after the Fall of Adam and Eve, Satan became the owner of the Earth and as a result God cannot intervene in the affairs of the Earth unless some human asks Him.
God can sovereignly do whatever He chooses. Psalm 115:3 declares: “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.” Psalm 135:6 states: “Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.”

**Reasons why God requires a faith response sometimes**

But we must remember that in many instances, He waits until we trust Him to do something (that He has revealed is His will), before He will miraculously move on our behalf (see Matthew 9:2, 9:22, 9:28-29, 13:58, 14:31, 17:14-20, Mark 10:52, Luke 7:9-10, 8:48, 17:19, Acts 3:16, 14:9, Hebrews 11:11, 11:29 and 11:30). One of the reasons He does this, is that this teaches us to trust more and more in His love and power and to rely more and more on Him living within us.

Also, if He always performed miracles without first revealing that they are His will and without secondly having us focus ourselves on trusting Him to do these things, we would very likely not realise that He was the One Who had done these things for us. We would possibly think that these things were coincidences or luck or events caused merely by so-called “Mother Nature”.

**Avoid “Christian” fatalism**

“Christian” fatalism involves the idea that it is useless asking God to do anything because He has supposedly already predetermined what He is going to do in every circumstance regardless of the prayer requests and/or faith responses of His sons and daughters. “Christian” fatalism suggests also that all of the present circumstances of this world are God’s highest will and that it is wrong or useless to ask Him to change any of them. This type of fatalism involves twisting the Biblical doctrine of the “Sovereignty of God” into something similar to the false fate teachings of various pagan religions.

“Christian” fatalists argue that because the Bible reveals that God has a perfect foreknowledge of everything that is going to happen in the future and already predetermines everything that He is going to do before He even does them, there is no foundation for the idea that prayer requests or human faith responses have any effect in our lives or the lives of others.

The major flaw in these fatalistic arguments is that in His own awesome sovereignty and foreknowledge, God has already taken into account His future granting of some requests of His children. Even before the foundation of the world, God already knew which future prayer requests throughout the history of mankind, that He would grant and which He would deny. Before the world began, God had already decreed His will partly on the basis of His foreknowledge of future prayer requests.

The teachings of Christian fatalism provide a seemingly “good religious excuse” for its followers to avoid praying for others. They argue, “God will do His own predetermined will anyway, so why should I waste time interceding for others or requesting things from Him?” Such false reasoning is similar to the idea that it is of no use evangelising the unsaved, because God already foreknows who will be saved. 

---

2 Christian fatalists and people who regularly pray in presumption form two opposite extremes. Presumption in prayer occurs when we expect God to do something for us even though it is not His will for us. Presumption is attempting to
Balance between God’s sovereignty and human faith response

Some churchgoers over-emphasise the place of human responsibility for exercising faith in God for Him to do something. Others over-emphasise God’s sovereignty in His performance of miracles.

The Holy Scriptures emphasise both the Sovereignty of God and human responsibility to exercise faith in some situations when God performs miracles. If we ignore either Scriptural teaching, we will become unbalanced in our walk with God.

God is not limited by time

God is not limited by time, whereas humans are. Humans live in the present, not in the future or past. God sees all of the future before it even happens, because He is not limited by time.

To relate to finite humans, our infinite God must “enter” the world of time and relate to humans mainly in present time. He may tell them brief details of the future or help them to recall some events from the past, but He mainly relates to them in the present.

Genesis 22:1-18 records how God tested Abraham about his son Isaac. After Abraham had shown that he trusted God enough to obey Him in this situation, Genesis 22:12 states that God said to Abraham: “And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’”

Here we see in the world of time God telling Abraham what His attitudes were to Abraham’s actions. But in the world of no time, God already knew what Abraham would do even before he did it.

The above is a simple Biblical illustration which reveals why, it is so hard for humans, who are limited by time, to understand how God can have already predetermined His will and purposes before the human race began, while having already taken into account every future human prayer request and total faith response.

Old Testament examples of God’s sovereign miracles

By studying the Old Testament, we see that before the Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection, God did things miraculously in the lives of those who loved and knew Him, even

believe with our hearts and speak with our mouths that God is going to do a specific miracle for us, even though this miracle is not His will. Presumption involves trying to get God to build our kingdom, instead of His kingdom. Presumption involves trying to use God’s miraculous power in ways not specifically promised in the Bible or by the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Refer to my book “Praying with powerful faith” for details about the differences between praying with faith and praying with presumption.

If we wish to pray as God desires, we should aim to avoid presumption prayers. But also we should not go to the other extreme of being so afraid of praying in presumption that we never ask Him for anything. We can all make mistakes, either misreading God’s guidance or asking for something which God reveals later is not His will. God will not hold such genuine mistakes against us.

Therefore, we are wrong to allow a fear of praying in presumption to prevent us asking God to do certain things for ourselves and others. But we must be willing to accept His guidance if He then says that what we asking is not His will or that He is not willing to change His will in the circumstances.
when they did not ask or trust Him to do so. This is despite their great weaknesses and sinful nature – see James 5:17. An example of this is recorded in Genesis 19:16. This is when sovereignly, the Lord told His two angels to take Lot, his wife and two daughters by the hand out of Sodom in order to save their lives. The Lord did this even though Lot hesitated about going.

A second example is seen in Genesis 19:1-11. In these verses, we observe that neither Lot nor anyone else asked or trusted God to have his two angels pull Lot back to safety inside his house when the homosexual men threatened him. Neither did Lot or anyone else ask or trust God to have his angels strike these homosexuals with blindness.

A third instance is found in Isaiah 59:15-17.

Elijah’s fear and negative attitudes

Another example of God performing miracles sovereignly when faith is not present can be seen in the life of Elijah. 1 Kings 19:1-8 records: “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, ‘So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one them by tomorrow about this time.’ And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’ Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, ‘Arise and eat.’ Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on the coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. Then the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, ‘Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.’ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Here we see that Elijah was greatly afraid when he heard Queen Jezebel’s death threats against him. According to many books about faith and miracles, fear prevents God from miraculously helping us. But in this situation, God sent His angel to miraculously provide Elijah with a cake and a jar of water. Elijah’s fear did not stop God from helping him.

Not only was Elijah full of fear in this situation. 1 Kings 19:4 reveals that he became very depressed. Despite his negative attitudes, God still sovereignly performed a great miracle for him. This miracle was so marvellous that one cake strengthened Elijah for forty days and forty nights, enabling him to walk about 180 miles or 300 kilometres to Mount Horeb.

Abraham and Isaac’s fear

Yet another example of God sovereignly performing a miracle despite the person’s fear and lack of faith can be seen in the life of Abraham. This event is recorded in Genesis 20:1-18. Abraham was afraid that the Philistines of the city of Gerar would kill him and then steal his wife Sarah (see Genesis 20:11). Because of this fear, Abraham told his wife to tell the people a half-truth. This was that she was his sister and not his wife (see Genesis 20:2). Sarah was in fact Abraham’s half-sister. They had the same father, but different mothers (see Genesis 20:12).

As the result of the spreading of this half-truth, King Abimelech of Gerar took Sarah to become a part of his harem (see Genesis 20:2)
Despite the terrible mess that Abraham’s fear and lack of faith had gotten him into, God sovereignly miraculously helped Abraham. God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and told him that he was as good as dead unless he returned Sarah to Abraham unmolested (see Genesis 20:3-7). Not only did God do this. He also miraculously closed the womb of every woman in Abimelech’s household in order to reveal His displeasure at the king taking Sarah (see Genesis 20:17-18). Abraham had not asked God to do these things.

So despite Abraham’s fear, lack of faith and resultant partial deceit, God still miraculously helped him and Sarah.

It is amazing but Abraham’s son Isaac later did a similar thing. Because of fear, Isaac lied, telling the Philistines in the city of Gerar that Rebekah, his wife was only his sister. Genesis 26:7 records: “And the men of the place asked him about his wife. And he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘She is my wife,’ because he thought, lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold.”

From the above two instances, we see that neither Abraham or Isaac had enough faith in God to entrust totally the time of their deaths into His hands.

**New Testament examples of God’s sovereign miracles**

**Zechariah and Elizabeth**

Luke 1:5-25 records an example of God in mercy performing a miracle for someone. This is even though the person did not trust God to perform this miracle. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, had never had a child. As we can observe in verse 13, however, Zechariah had prayed to God, asking Him to give them a child. It is not clear in this verse or surrounding verses whether he had been asking God for a child or specifically for a boy.

As recorded in verse 13, the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that it was God’s will for his prayer request to be granted. Gabriel added that this God-given son would be the fulfilment of prophetic predictions that God had spoken through the prophets Malachi and Isaiah (see Luke 1:16-17 and compare to Malachi 4:5-6 and Isaiah 40:3).

Zechariah’s response to these revelations of God’s will through the angel was not a faith response such as given by Abraham when Abraham was told by God that God was going to give him a son and many descendants. As seen in Romans 4:18-21, Abraham totally trusted God to perform the miracle of giving him a son through his wife Sarah. Abraham trusted God to do this even though Sarah was physically too old to have children. But in Luke 1:18, Zechariah said: “...How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.”

This verse and Luke 1:7 reveal that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were old. It is not clear whether they were as old as Abraham and Sarah or not. But whatever the case, we can see from the angel Gabriel’s words that Zechariah doubted the Word of the Lord – the revelation of God’s will spoken by the angel. Luke 1:19-20 says: “And the angel answered and said to him, ‘I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.’”
Gabriel said that Zechariah did not believe what God had told Gabriel to tell Zechariah. As seen in Luke 1:18, Zechariah allowed his natural mind to focus so much on the seeming impossibility of his physical circumstances – the old age of himself and his wife – that he could not trust God to do the promised miracle. Even though Zechariah was a priest (see Luke 1:5) and righteous in God’s sight (see Luke 1:6), he had not learnt from Abraham’s example I’ve quoted above.

Despite this lack of believing, God gave Zechariah the promised son. As Luke 1:58 says, God still acted with mercy – unearned compassion and kindness for humans in great need – towards Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth: “When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her…”

In many books, we see quoted the example of Abraham trusting God to miraculously give him a son in seemingly impossible circumstances. But in order to have a sound Biblical balance in our understanding of God’s teachings, we need to study not only the example of Abraham and similar examples which emphasise the importance in some situations of faith being expressed for God to perform a miracle. We need also to study other examples in God’s Word, which show God performing miracles out of His sovereign mercy alone – without anyone trusting Him to perform the miracle.

“Where is your faith”

Another example of God sovereignly in His great mercy and love performing a miracle to help some people, even though at the time they were exercising no faith in Him at all, is recorded in Luke 8:22-24. In this instance, the Lord Jesus had spoken to them in a way which revealed God the Father’s will. Remember, the Lord Jesus never did or said anything which was not the Father’s will (see John 5:19).

Luke 8:22-24 records: “Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, ‘Let us go over to the other side of the lake.’ And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm.” These words showed the disciples that God wanted to get them to the other side of the lake. This Word from the Lord Jesus gave them the God-given right to be sure that His power would get them to the other side of the lake.

After sailing a while, a strong wind caused their boat to begin to fill with water. The natural human minds of the disciples ignored what Jesus had said was the Father’s will and were filled with fear. Even though they had a promise from God the Father, through the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they would get to the other side of the lake, they did not believe Him. Jesus’ Words to them in Luke 8:25 reveal their lack of faith in Him and in His promise to them. Jesus said to the disciples: “But He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’”

But note the Lord Jesus in His sovereign mercy and love still performed a miracle to help them. He did this despite their lack of faith. They did not exercise faith through their words or actions, but this did not stop Him from miraculously helping them by commanding the wind and the stormy water to be still.
Peter walking on water

Matthew 14:22-23 records a third example of God miraculously helping someone even though the person was not believing Him to do so.

In this situation, the disciples were in a boat on the lake. Between three and six o’clock in the morning, the Lord Jesus began to walk on the water of the lake towards the boat. At first when they saw Him, the disciples were terrified, thinking He was a spirit.

After they recognised that it was Jesus, He said, “Come”, to the Apostle Peter. This Word revealed that it was the Father’s will for Peter to be given His miraculous power to be able to walk on water from the boat to where the Lord Jesus was.

At first, Peter trusted the Lord to give him power to do this. But note Matthew 14:30-31 says: “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

These verses reveal that:

- because it was God the Father’s will for Peter to walk on water and because at first, Peter trusted the Lord to give Him power to do so, miraculously the Lord helped him to do this.
- because Peter began to doubt that the Lord would continue to enable him to walk on the water, the Lord ceased enabling Peter to walk on the water.
- as soon as Peter cried out to the Lord for help, the Lord saved him from drowning. Peter was full of doubts in the Lord when he asked the Lord for help, but miraculously the Lord still saved him.

Even though Peter changed from believing the Lord to enable him to walk on water, to not trusting Him, the Lord did not say to Peter, “You are not trusting Me to help you. Since you are not exercising faith, I am not going to help you. I am going to let you drown.” The Lord answered Peter’s cry for help because of His enormous love and sympathy.

Miraculously, the Lord will often help us just like this, even when we are not exercising strong faith for Him to do so. In His tremendous mercy, the Lord sometimes helps us in spite of our feeble attempts to trust Him to do so.

In this example, the Lord answered Peter’s request to help him. This does not mean that God helps us only when we or someone else asks Him to help us. There were probably many times that we were unaware of in our lives that miraculously He helped us or saved us from tragedy – keeping a poisonous spider away from us and so on.

Many times, the Lord waits for us to ask Him to help us, so that we will recognise that He is the one Who is helping us. Otherwise, we may think foolishly that the help we obtain when we are in desperate need is just luck or good fortune or fate – evil pagan ideas.

There are some situations in which He will not help us miraculously unless we ask and trust Him to do so. These are the situations that He uses to teach us to trust in and depend on Him more. These are important learning times for us. For instance, the Lord in mercy saved Peter miraculously from drowning despite his lack of faith. But the Lord did not allow Peter to continue to walk on water when he began to doubt the Lord. This was to teach Peter the importance of trusting totally in Him.

---

3 The Lord Jesus never did or said anything that was not the Father’s will (see John 5:19, 8:28, 12:49 and 14:10).
A sovereign miracle saved my life

I know what it is like to be protected by a sovereign miracle from God. This miracle prevented an horrific accident.

Picture the scene! It was sometime between 12 to 2pm on a sunny peaceful day in the mid-1980’s. I was running through a supermarket carpark because I was late. There were no cars moving anywhere I could see. No danger was apparent.

Just as I was reaching the end of the carpark and about to enter the driveway next to a bank, I heard in my mind the word “STOP” being screamed. I halted immediately. A second after I stopped, a large van accelerated quickly from behind a large brick wall that was just before the entrance to the bank’s driveway. This van could not previously be seen by me as I was running. Nor did I hear its engine. My head was only 30 centimetres or so from the end of the brick wall. The van missed smashing my head and body by only this tiny amount. I would have been killed or received terrible injuries.

With no concern for the lives of others, the van driver had accelerated very quickly from a standing position. Throughout the day, many people walk past this wall through the small area that led to the bank’s driveway. The driver would probably have been aware of this.

I believe that God sovereignly screamed the word “STOP” in my mind to save me from death or terrible injury. It was not His time for me to die. I had not been praying beforehand asking Him to protect me. He worked without any prayer request or faith being expressed by me that day about Him saving my life.

Bible Study Questions

1. Give examples of Biblical verses which prove God wants us to ask Him to do various things in our lives?
2. Provide examples of verses which teach us to intercede to God for others.
3. List verses which show God sometimes requires a faith response from one or more humans before He will perform a miracle?
4. Why does God sometimes require a faith response before working miraculously?
5. List examples of verses showing that God often does things in the natural sphere on Earth without any human asking or trusting Him to do so.
6. What does 1 Kings 19:1-8 reveal about God performing miracles?
8. Both Abraham and Zechariah received sons through miracles of God. Explain their two different responses to God’s Word in relation to these promised miracles.
10. Discuss what Matthew 12:22-23 teaches us about God performing miracles.
11. What is wrong with the teaching of “Christian” fatalism?