Section: Doctrine of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q18. Does God control and have authority over all things?**

Yes; He rules in and over all things. He is in control of all things. God does all that He wills with creation.

Good evening church. The catechism question we have up next is one that should humble us. It’s a big topic and one that, usually, is also very interesting to most people.

In this study this week and next, I’ll quote some historic Christian theologians, but I’m also using, quoting, and paraphrasing some of Dr. James Dolezal’s work on this topic. If you don’t know of him, he’s a stellar theologian and he’ll be joining us here for a conference we’re hosting in March to teach about God…I can’t urge you enough to attend the conference.

On this topic he has some really helpful points, so I’ll weave those into all of this.

Throughout time, mankind has drummed up a lot of ideas about who or what is ruling and controlling things.

False religions often have a claim as to how their so-called god(s) run things.

And non-religious people often subscribe to pagan ideas of chance, luck, or karma in effort to explain why things work the way that they do.

Surely, you’ve heard of QUOTE “the hand of fate.” -------That’s an unbiblical idea. As Dolezal puts it about the *hand of fate* idea, “*That’s not a someone, that’s not a he, and that’s no one that loves you……..it’s just an it…………a force.*” What a terrible thing to believe—An impersonal *force* ruling things. Very unbiblical.

Unfortunately, many professing Christians have adopted some of these pagan ideas…likely some in this room *have in the past* **or** still do think like a non-believer in some of these layers, perhaps some of you attribute things to “karma.”

Karma is formally connected to the false religions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

In the minds of many who hold to something like karma, they are claiming an idea that there is an impersonal force out there that is affecting how mankind or creation experiences things—some force that *evens the scales over time*, *afflicts revenge*, or *brings about some random results*.

This way of thinking is giving layers of sovereignty or providence to that force or so-called god.

Now, the point here is that *even* many professing Christians live with a variety of wrong ideas about how things are run or why things happen.

For example, some professing Christians think that Satan is the sovereign one over this world, or some love an idea of “free will” that puts each person as the sovereign one over their own life.

Perhaps some of you in the room have thought sovereignty lies with Satan or mankind or something else *other than God*…..BUT…..what Scripture testifies to over and over, in many different ways, is that God rules in and over all things. He is in control of all things. God does all that ***He*** wills with creation.

He alone is the Sovereign One.

The historic Heidelberg Catechism speaks of God’s sovereign providence this way, QUOTE: “The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, *not by chance*, but by His fatherly hand.”

This is a great statement.

It highlights both the absoluteness and the intimacy of God’s rule.

Notice there, it says His rule is by “His fatherly hand.” *Fatherly*. God is personally, intimately, and intentionally bringing about all that come to pass.

Ruling all things is not a force, nor an “it,” nor us, nor Satan…ruling all things is the all-wise, all-powerful, loving, and just one true God…by His fatherly hand.

Here’s a summary of theologian A.W. Pink of some comments on this point: *Who is regulating things on this earth today: God, mankind, or the devil?*

*More and more, mankind is relegating God to the background based upon what is seen from our human perspective.*

*But, if we believe the Bible’s plain and consistent declarations, no room is left for uncertainty on this topic because the Bible affirms, again and again, that God is directing all things after the counsel of His own will.*

*The Bible affirms, not only that God created all things, but also that God is actively, eternally ruling and reigning over all.*

*Instead of beginning with us and our perspective and working back to God, we must begin with God and His word and work down to man.*

*In ourselves, we are unable to form a proper understating of God’s character and ways. He declares in* **Isaiah 55:8-9**, “8For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Thankfully, God has given us the Bible which is the authoritative revelation on these things. It’s so critical that we let God tell us, through Scripture, what we need to know.

Our prayer for this catechism journey has been that we all approach humbly and affirm what God has revealed in His word. That the Bible would correct our misunderstandings on this topic, increase our trust in God, bring us more comfort, and humble us.

The truth of God’s sovereignty (and all its implications) is at direct opposition with the opinions and thoughts of the fallen man. So, we must depend on God’s biblical revelation to correct and guide our thinking.

What we have the privilege to study tonight, when rightly understood, is most comforting AND produces important humility within Christians. Because of that, I am very excited to teach on this.

There are elements of this truth *that are hard* to understand and beyond our thoughts, but when we rightly understand what God *has* revealed in Scripture about these things, it leads to praise of our great God, our victorious, almighty Savior!

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon said this:

*“There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all.*

*There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne.”*

**Romans 8:28** (ESV) tells us that: …for those who love God all things work together for good…

This is a dear passage to many of us, **but** the promise of Romans 8:28 is only true if God sovereignly ordains and control all things. In our study we will see that the comfort found in Romans 8:28 is in fact true, because God is in fact the sovereign One.

As we jump into this today, I want to remind you of something we have said in these lessons several times now: God’s attributes are inseparably interconnected.

This means no one attribute of His can be separated from any of His other attributes; God is not composed of parts.

Therefore, as we learn about God’s sovereignty, we must remember that it works in perfect harmony with His wisdom, love, wrath, goodness, and so on.

Let’s look now at our primary definitions for this lesson:

First: **God’s Sovereignty** - As the one true Ruler and Owner of creation, God has rightful and complete authority over all things. He has legitimate claim to absolute lordship, and His governing is just.

Within the doctrine of God’s sovereignty is the realty of **God’s Providence** - God controls and directs all things, and He does so to fulfill His purposes after the counsel of His own holy will for His glory. God is the Supreme Being who answers to no one and who has the absolute right to do with His creation as He desires; nothing happens without His ordination.

Before we continue, I want us to take a moment to make sure we’re understanding God’s sovereignty and providence *in context*.

Our definition says “Nothing happens without His ordination”...also….”this is by the counsel of His own holy will.”

Hear this tonight: …...God is not directing things on a whim—He is not responding to what we are doing.

No, all that *comes about* does so because God (before creation) ordained all that would come about (every detail of everything in all of creation).

We’ll see Scripture to this point in our study. Before creation (before time began) He ordained all things.

And, (also fundamental to this study), we need to know that God’s ordination (His decree) was not based on anything other than Himself or outside of Himself—He didn’t observe anything to determine His decree, He did not consult anyone or anything. No, the one omniscient and triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) *decreed of His own will*—the one divine will of the triune Godhead.

The Historic 1689 Confession of Christian Faith says this this way: From all eternity God decreed everything that occurs, without reference to anything outside himself. He did this by the perfectly wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably. … In this decree God’s wisdom is displayed in directing all things, and his power and faithfulness are demonstrated in accomplishing his decree.

Now, the Bible’s teaching that *God ordained all things before creation* is a big topic in and of itself

and we’ll speak to it and show it from Scripture at various times in the catechism lessons. So, we won’t stop to cover it *in full* now. But it needs to be said and understood that God’s sovereignty and providence we discuss in these two lessons and the Scripture we see about His absolute sovereignty and providence need to be set into the context of God carrying through **His pre-creation eternal decree** perfectly and wisely.

Let me give you one more definition from Church history, Theologian Louis Berkhof wrote: “Divine providence is that work of God by which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that transpires in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.”

“Directs all things to their appointed end.” Appointed end? Appointed by whom? God of course, as we just considered.

My desire in these lessons is to show how Bible teachers in Church history have taught these things faithfully and most certainly I want to show these truths directly from Scripture.

Scripture is most important and the authority. We want you to see that the things you will hear in this teaching are not the assumptions of man, but they are God’s claims for and about Himself. So, we will see a lot of Scripture in this study.

And these passages are just an intro to all that God has said about His absolute sovereignty.

We’ll take a very systematic approach to this topic. We’ll look at what God’s word says about God’s sovereignty overall things first, and then look at His sovereignty focused in on specific categories.

As we dive into the Scripture and this topic, what we must know and remember is that all things exist for God’s purposes. (Listen very carefully.) We are not the reason for creation or our even own existence; we exist for God, for whatever He has determined. \*\*If we get this backwards then not only will *this study* be difficult, but we will struggle with so much of what God has revealed in the Bible. \*\*

**He has every right, as the Creator, Ruler, and Sustainer of all things, to do what He has willed. We must remember this.**

Let’s jump in, first up,

**God’s sovereignty over *all things***:

**Isaiah 46:9-10** (ESV)

**9**… for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,

**10**declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’

God declares “the end from the beginning” “from ancient times.” In these kinds of passages, we see, as said moments ago, that God has preordained all that has and will come about.

All that God has decreed before time began will happen, and only such things will happen. Again, the confession: “God has decreed in himself, *from all eternity*, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass.”

**Psalm 103:19** (ESV)

**19**The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

**1 Timothy 6:15** (ESV)

**15**… [God] is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords

Next we look at: **Romans 11:36** (ESV)

**36**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

We’ve seen this verse many times in this series as it is so important to understand. “From him and through him and to him are all things.” Nothing is left out of this. Everything exists by and for the sovereign God.

**Ephesians 1:11** (ESV)

**11**…[God] works all things according to the counsel of his will

We see the all-encompassing emphasis again in this passage; there is not one thing that happens apart from God’s sovereign ordination.

In this passage, we see *what* all things are based on: His will! It is His will that is supreme, not ours, not Satan’s, or anything else.

All things, based on His will.

The “according to the counsel of his will” is another declaration to the fact that all things were ordained before time—before creation—in eternity past.

He ordained all things, and omnipotently carries them through, see:

**Job 42:2** (ESV)

**2**“I know that you [God] can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

**Psalm 115:3** (ESV)

**3**Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

**John 3:27** (ESV)

**27**~~John answered,~~ “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

Do you see our dependency on God’s will here? We think far too highly of ourselves and our will. We are at the mercy of the God who actively reigns in and brings about all things!

Our next three passages really challenge the way the world has taught us to think about things—we are about to see Scripture that teach us that God ordained evil and He uses evil for His purposes.

We, unintentionally perhaps, have embraced an idea that there is some cosmic power or other force that is autonomous or at war with God, and God is running behind trying to clean up or make things right. That evil was, perhaps, not in God’s plan—so He had to put together a plan deal with it.

But as we are seeing tonight, God is the one who has ordained all things. There is no other power or will that thwarts God—and everything is happening according to HIS plan. Without sinning Himself, He uses evil in creation *for His purposes*.

This truly is a humbling doctrine—these truths challenge our natural way of thinking.

**Isaiah 45:7** (KJV) God says:

**7**I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

**Lamentations 3:38** (ESV) rhetorically:

**38**Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

**Amos 3:6** (ESV)

**6**…Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?

God is not interested in meeting our fallen expectations or ideas of what He can and cannot do. He’s not trying to protect the false image that mankind has made up for Him. With passages like these, He is displaying His absolute sovereignty and informing us of His GOOD omnipotence and providence.

We must conform our way of thinking around Him. In ourselves, we tend to think God is good *if* He does what we, in our fallible minds, define as good.

**But we can know a thing *is good for God to do* because God does it.**

He is good; therefore, we know a thing is good for God to do *because God does it*.

Listen carefully to the way the confession speaks to this weighty reality of God ordaining and being sovereign over evil:

“The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God are so thoroughly demonstrated in his providence, that his sovereign plan includes even the first fall [of Adam] and every other sinful action both of angels and humans.

God’s providence over sinful actions does not occur by simple permission.

Instead, God most wisely and powerfully limits and in other ways arranges and governs sinful actions.

Through a complex arrangement of methods he governs sinful actions to accomplish his perfectly holy purposes.

***Yet* he does this in such a way that the sinfulness of their acts arises only from the creatures and *not* from God**.

Because God is altogether holy and righteous, he can neither author [meaning, God is not to be blamed for sin and He is not guilty of doing sin] nor approve of sin.”

That quote is helpful and so important. God ordained evil, He ordained sin…but He did so in such a way He Himself did not sin. He uses sin for His purposes, and in this we cannot and must not think of God as sinning.

In the next lesson we will go deeper into some of the theological details about first cause and second causes, but while we’re here now, I’ll speak to it briefly since next week’s lesson is packed full.

The 1689 Confession is helpful again to this point, it says:

All things come to pass unchangeably and certainly in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, who is the first cause.

Thus, nothing happens to anyone by chance or outside of God’s providence.

Yet by the same providence God arranges all things to occur according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

Take from that that all things come to pass according to the decree and power of God, He is the first cause. *And* God arranges all things to occur according to the nature of second causes.

God (the first cause) ordains and is providential in our (we’re a second cause) (in our) moving and doing.

God … arranges and governs sinful actions …Yet *he does this in such a way that* the sinfulness of their acts *arises only from the creatures and not from God*.

To speak technically about this (with the help of Dr. James Dolezal): *Evil or sin is a lack of good where good ought to be*.

When sin happens in creation, it is not God who lacks good, rather it is a lack of good from creature.

The creature’s deformity alone [our lack of goodness] provides ***the formal reason*** for evil of any action.

**What this means is, when I sin (when Matt sins) it is I who do the actual sinning—Not God. It is I who lacks the righteousness—Not God.**

**He decreed what I do, but it is I *who actually provides the sin* in the desire or action. For example: When I covet, it is I who covets—not God.**

(Again, the confession: the sinfulness of [creature’s] acts *arises only from the creatures and not from God.*) There is no lack of goodness in God; there is no evil or sin in God. The creatures (humans or demons, what have you) are the ones disobeying a standard of goodness that God commands of His creation. We must know and affirm that.

And, this is seen clearly in His word. In Scripture we see that when the fault/blame/responsibility/guilt of sin is assigned to a party, it is assigned to one or more of THREE parties (none of which are God), these are:

1) Demons (especially Satan),

2) Adam (the first man, the first federal head), or

3) us (fallen men, women, boys, and girls after Adam).

Those three. Not God. Never God. Scripture says emphatically that God is good/perfect/unable to sin/unchangeable. God is *never* to be thought of as *doing* evil.

**James 1:13** for example

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

**Psalm 11:7** For the Lord is righteous ...

**Psalm 18:30** As for God, his way is perfect …

Now, look at just a few examples (of many!) where Scripture assigns fault/blame/responsibility/guilt of sin to Satan, Adam, and the fallen sinner in question:

First, Satan:

This passage is King Jesus speaking to unbelievers. **John 8:44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Here we have blame assigned to Satan. Consider:

**Revelation 12:9** that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world

That’s a lot of blame, Satan is called the deceiver of the whole world.

Second, Adam,

Portions of

**Romans 5:12-19 12**… sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, … **15**… many died through one man's trespass … **16**… the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation … **17**… because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man… **18**… one trespass led to condemnation for all men … **19**… by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners

The fall of all of mankind and all the sin that came from mankind thereafter is because of Adam’s fall. Huge blame. Yikes, imagine if that were speaking about you, you alone are the human responsible for bringing sin to your spouse and all other humans born of man and woman. That’s heavy.

(By the way, in case you think you would have performed better than Adam, know that we’ll study Adam’s sin and how you would have fallen as he did if it were you in position in a future lesson.)

Thirdly,

Each of us (are ascribed fault/blame/responsibility/guilt): fallen men, women, boys, and girls.

Back to the James 1 passage,

**James 1:13-14** **13**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14***But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire*.

Blame assigned to the sinner themselves. The lack of good comes from within US. We’re lured by our own desire.

One more showing a person’s guilt. Each sinner is guilty for the sin they commit in themselves.

**Romans 1:18 & 32** **18**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness … **32**Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Blame assigned to the sinner themselves.

So, we’re seeing that, yes, God ordained evil, He ordained sin and He did so in such a way He Himself never sins— fault/blame/responsibility/guilt are in the creation, not God.

When God ordained *evil*, it is for His *good* purposes.

Naturally, we tend to think then, *He ordained evil for WHAT good purposes*?

Here again, we must humbly seek God’s answer to that from the text.

Why would He ordain evil? ------Over and over in Scripture, God reveals that He ordained evil and uses evil ultimately *for His own glory*—that His majesty would be put on display to all and for His people to know and worship.

We see this in several situations in Scripture, think about Pharaoh: For this very purpose God raised wicked Pharaoh up, that so that God could show His (God’s) power and that God’s name would be proclaimed in all the earth. Using evil for HIS glory!

Or the account in Habakkuk, God raises up evil ones, Like Babylon, a “ruthless” and “dreaded” nation, to achieve various purposes. And He humbles and punishes them later for their sin. He uses their sin this for His glory!

Now consider this….God is the God of love *no doubt*, but he is also the God of grace, justice, and wrath.

How can His grace (forgiving and restoring repentant sinners), justice, and wrath (punishment towards unrepentant sinners) be shown to creation and known by us IF there is no sin?

Perhaps there *were* other possibilities to answer this, but God saw fit, that the wisest—the best way—for us to know Him more fully (IE know of His grace, justice, and wrath) is for the existence of sin to put these attributes of His on display.

He is glorified in this!

God—more fully revealed and known in this way—is for His glory, we studied this already in this catechism journey so far, we’re just adding more context and layers here for understanding to increase.

Look at this in the text, it is what God, through the Apostle Paul, teaches via a rhetorical statement in

**Romans 9:22-23** **22**What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,**23**in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, decreed sin/evil in creation to glorify himself.

Listen carefully: There is no wrath made known or grace made known (in the best way) without sin, the fall, redemption from said sin through Christ alone, etc.

These things were prepared beforehand, before creation, based on His decree for sin.

In this way of ordaining things, His people come to know Him more fully, and that is GOOD for us. It’s a blessing to know these attributes of grace, justice, and wrath.

We want to know of Him rightly and as much as humanly possible, right? Of course.

And that is why He ordained sin—again, in such a way that the sinfulness of their acts arises only from the creatures and not from God.

Do not leave this teaching unclear on that, He ordained sin in such a way that the sinfulness of their acts arises only from the creatures and not from God. God is good, perfect, and never sins.

The great theologian, Herman Bavinck said: “Just as a father forbids a child to use a sharp knife, though he himself uses it without any ill results, so God forbids us rational creatures to commit the sin that he himself can and does use as a means of glorifying his name.” Bavinck is careful there: God uses sin, not commits sin.

To be frank, we (the created) don’t get to declare how God must act—what terms God must follow.

God is above us.

*The creation does* ***not*** *get to question the creator*. ------And that is fundamental in Christianity—is it not?

Isn’t the Christian humility to say that ‘God is God and we are not’ fundamental to our faith?

Isn’t agreeing with God that ‘He is good (Psalm 106:1)’ fundamental to our faith?

Isn’t agreeing with Him that “[His] thoughts are not [our] thoughts, neither are [our] ways [His] ways…[His] ways [are] higher than [our] ways and [His] thoughts than [our] thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9) fundamental to our faith? -----**Yes, Yes, and Yes.**

A thing is good for God to do, because He does it—that’s how we know it’s good for Him to do: He does it.

He is and always has existed in a way that is so far above and beyond us.

“Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” Church (and guests), let us be very careful to not call God into question, OR apply our creaturely standards, thoughts, or ideas to Him.

 “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?” (Lamentations 3:38) Yes, it is, and never by sinning Himself.

We must humbly agree with Scripture and know that He is the one, true, GOOD God. Whatever the LORD pleases, He does. Period. Let us put off any prideful thoughts that call Him into question.

This is heavy—no doubt. If there is still some wrestling with this in some of you, please know that we’re here to walk with you through that. We’ll be patient with you, walking with you.

Be patient and peaceable in your journey of coming to know God more truly through the text. More clarity comes in further sermons and lessons, and perhaps you’d like additional resources as well.

Our calling (the three elders of this church) is to teach the word of God faithfully. Not to appease fallen humans, but to glorify God and inform the saints. Hopefully that’s what you’re here for…God’s word taught faithfully, not the tickling of ears.

You’ll need to remember these things we just saw next week when we focus even more on God’s sovereignty over all humans and Him being the first cause of all things.

God has ordained all things and carry’s out His perfect will for His purposes, never doing wrong, never sinning.

God’s sovereignty over all things can be summed up in the last passage for this section:

**Psalm 135:6** (ESV)

**6**Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

Let’s move on to:

**God’s sovereignty over *nature and weather***:

First weather:

**Psalm 147:16-18** (ESV)

**16**He gives snow like wool … he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

A quote from A.W. Pink’s book on God’s sovereignty struck me the first time I read it and has remained with me ever since. He said, “Earth and air, fire and water, hail and snow, stormy winds and angry seas, all perform the word of His power and fulfill His Sovereign pleasure. Therefore, when we complain about the weather we are, in reality, murmuring against God.” Complaining about the weather is a real temptation for us in this city (hot summers and all), but we should remember that God ordains all the weather we experience. To complain about it is to complain to our sovereign Savior.

Let’s see now a passage about nature:

**Psalm 104:14** (ESV)

You [God] cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth

Let’s be clear: there is no “mother nature” …rather, there is the Father God.

I included some additional passages for this section in your notes for further study.

We’ll move now to:

**God’s sovereignty over *non-human, living, physical creatures (such as animals and insects)***:

**Exodus 8:22** (ESV)

**22**But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, *so that no swarms of flies shall be there*, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.

**JUMP PAST Exodus 9:3-6** for time sake

**Matthew 10:29** (ESV)

**29**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

God controls *bugs and animals*. He determines what they do, when they live, and when they die.

**Numbers 22:28** (ESV)

**28**Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she [the donkey] said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”

Surely God is sovereign over animals. He can make animals talk in human language. …God is sovereign.

Let’s now see:

**God’s sovereignty over *the affairs of nations***:

**Psalm 22:28** (ESV)

**28**For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

**Job 12:23** (ESV)

**23**He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.

**Daniel 2:21** (ESV)

**21**…He removes kings and sets up kings …

**John 19:11** (ESV)

**11**Jesus [told Pilate], “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above...”

**Romans 13:1** (ESV)

**1**Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

God’s sovereignty over the affairs of nations and temporary human authorities is an area that we struggle to accept and reconcile, and one I’d like to talk more about if we had more time.

In the meantime, we must affirm that God is working all things according to His will, even lame or evil human governments, and in this we must joyfully trust His plan. We must shed the all-too-popular political worry.

Despite how it all doesn’t make sense to us (from our perspective), God is working in all things, even politics and governments.

Moving on to the next category…In the past when I have taught this content, we look at

**God’s sovereignty over *angels: both demons and good angels.***

We'll cover this element more in our next midweek question, in the meantime, a quote from A.W. Pink: "It is clear from Scripture, that the angels, good and evil, are under God's control, and willingly or unwillingly carry out God's purpose."

Further Study: 1 Chron. 21:15, 27, Acts 12:11; Rev. 22:6; Matt. 13:41; Matt. 24:31; Judges 9:23; 1 Kings 22:23; 1 Sam. 16:14; Matt. 4:11.

Next, we have:

**God’s sovereignty over *seemingly* “random” or “chance” *events***:

I say “seemingly” here because there are things that *seem to us* to be random or chance or luck, but there is no such thing. When we talk about chance or luck we diminish God’s active sovereign reign in all things.

**Proverbs 16:33** (ESV)

**33**The lot [the die] is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

No roll of the die in monopoly, no trip to Vegas, no incredible play in football is random. Everything, down to the smallest thing, is decreed by God. That’s humbling and mindboggling to think about.

The late Bible teacher RC Sproul Sr. taught rightly that there is no rogue molecule in the universe. This is a helpful point; there is nothing random-nothing outside of God’s sovereign decree and power. Everything is at and doing exactly what God has ordained!

Earlier we considered a few common false beliefs--such as karma. Let’s take a moment here to consider another popular concept—one that possibly sounds more biblical to some…namely, “Divine Intervention.”

This is idea that God intervenes *at times* but otherwise is hands off—so to speak.

Even some of us who rightly know of God’s absolute sovereignty tend to sometimes limit our use of the term “providence” for the unexpected or extra ordinary, but *we need to be careful not to think of providence as intervention into an order that isn’t providential.*

It is inconsistent with Scripture to think of providence as a breaking into something that’s going along on its own course.

Since God’s providence is what’s carrying along *all* things, it’s faulty to think of God merely intervening at times along the way. It’s ALL from His hand. *God’s providence is universal and comprehensive*.

As Dr. Dolezal has said, technically, “God *cannot intervene* in what God *is already doing*.” It’s all from His hand.

HURRICANE….

Record Setting Hurricane With 215 MPH Winds

By official ratings: Fastest intensification & Most intense hurricane ever recorded.

From our perspective when something unexpected or extraordinary happens (for comfort or for calamity) it may seem like intervention. But God is not becoming providential as if He weren’t already.

He’s not more providential in those moments, He remains the same—absolutely sovereign, always providentially involved.

It’s right and good to celebrate God’s awesome work in creation, so we can and should say things like, “God providentially changed the course of that incredible hurricane, praise be to God!”

*But, it’d be wrong to* ***think*** *of that as Him stepping into (intervening) in something He wasn’t already providentially doing*.

The hurricane’s course was entirely determined by God, before, during, and after it’s “change of course.”

Look again at the confession:

All things come to pass unchangeably and certainly in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, who is the first cause. Thus, nothing happens to anyone (or anything) by chance or outside of God’s providence.

Next week, we’ll focus in on the important discussion of God’s sovereignty and providence as it relates to mankind. We’ll go with this topic where the Bible goes, *to the personal*. We are going to look at God's sovereignty over mankind: each and every person to ever live.

As a primer, I want to quickly read a powerful passage about God’s sovereignty over *all aspects of our lives*. This will set the stage for next week.

* **According to His Will among the Inhabitants of the Earth—Preparing for Next Lesson**

God brought discipline onto Nebuchadnezzar and after humbling him, Nebuchadnezzar said this:

**Daniel 4:34-35** (ESV)

**34**At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; **35**all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

What a passage. We will further dive into the Bible’s declaration that God does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth, next week. Stay tuned!

Let’s finish this lesson with some application.

**How does the truth of God’s sovereignty help us?**

These are big truths, weighty truths.

We must understand that the heart can only rest upon and enjoy the truths of the absolute sovereignty of God if *faith is in exercise.*

Paraphrasing AW Pink…

Faith is focused on God. Faith is trusting in God—That is the character of faith; that is what sets it apart from merely intellectual head knowledge.

Faith endures the disappointments, the hardships, and the heartaches of life, *by recognizing that all comes from the hand of Him who is too wise to make a mistake*.

If we are denying or ignoring God’s sovereignty, there will be neither rest for the heart nor peace for the mind. But when we receive all that enters our lives as from His hand, then, no matter what may be our circumstances or surroundings, we shall be enabled to say with the Psalmist, **Psalm 16:5-6** (ESV) "**5**The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. **6**The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." As we’ve seen, this is the language of faith, not of sight, nor human philosophies.

Here is the fundamental difference between the person of faith and the person of unbelief. The unbeliever is "of the world," judges everything by worldly standards, views life from the standpoint of time and sense, and weighs everything in the balances of his own fallen perspective.

But the person of faith brings in the word of God, looks at everything from God’s standpoint, understands realities by biblical truths, and views life in the light of eternity. Doing this, a person’s heart is calm in the midst of the storm. Doing this, a person rejoices in the hope of the sovereignty and glory of God.

As I said in the beginning of this, only if God *is as sovereign as* He declares in Scripture can **Romans 8:28** be true: ***28****And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

And that is our comfort, Christians: God is who He says He is. He works how He says He works. And He has ordained that all comes to pass for the ultimate good of those who are called by Him, all who truly love Him. This is such a comforting doctrine.

Every truth that is revealed to us in God’s Word is there *not only for our information* but also for our inspiration. The Bible has been given to us not to gratify an idle curiosity but to edify the souls of its readers. The sovereignty of God is something more than an abstract principle about Divine government. A true recognition of God’s sovereignty *humbles as nothing else does or can humble*, and *brings the heart into submission before God*, causing us to *relinquish our own desired self-will and making us delight in the reality and performance of the Divine will*.

 THE VALUE OF THIS DOCTRINE

The doctrine of God’s sovereignty is packed full practical value; it produces a powerful effect upon Christian character and the daily walk.

It produces gratitude in prosperity and patience in adversity.

It exhibits the inscrutableness of God’s wisdom.

It guarantees His promises will be kept.

It magnifies His grace.

It puts away the heresy of salvation by our own works.

It refutes many other false teachings, including one that claims God’s will can be thwarted by man’s will.

It is deeply humbling.

It provides us a sense of absolute security in the sovereign God.

It supplies comfort in sorrow.

It begets a spirit of sweet resignation.

It evokes a song of praise.

It guarantees the final triumph of good over evil.

It provides a resting place for the heart.

It does all, and much more, than I have just said, because it ascribes to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the glory and power which is His, and it places the creature in our proper place.

So, let’s focus in on three:

**Practical Implications**

First, Let us humble ourselves before God, and obey what He has called us to.

In our flesh, in pride or laziness, we may be tempted to think, “Well, God’s going to do it all anyways, why should I give effort or obey?” We’ll look at this more next lesson, but in the meantime, let me say, this is a serious error.

God doesn’t stand for us to play games with these things.

God didn’t reveal these things to us, so we would find reason to disobey Him. **He has given us commands, and we must take Him seriously. He never excuses inaction where He has called us to action.**

*If you are feeling tempted not to live every moment with zeal for obeying and honoring the Lord then you need to do business with why you long to respond that way*. If that is our response to God telling us about His sovereignty, then we must repent of that mindset and be biblical with our thoughts and actions.

God’s sovereignly works in such a way that His redeemed hear His commands and act on them as says **Philippians 2:13** (ESV) **13**for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. If you are His, then you will long to obey His commands in Scripture and work hard, all for His glory. We will not do this perfectly, but we will do it as He wills it for us.

Second, a note about prayer:

Lifting up our requests, cares, and anxieties to the Lord is something He calls us to.

**Psalm 5:3** (NIV1984)

**3**In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

**1 Peter 5:7** (ESV)

**7**[cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** (ESV)

**16**Rejoice always, **17**pray without ceasing, **18**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

What I want you to realize is that if God is *not* sovereign, then our prayers are empty wishes to an ineffective being. But since God *is* sovereign in and over all things, He can bring about change in creation!

He can heal, He can provide, He can change our circumstances, He can give a sinner a new heart and saving faith, and so on. We have the privilege to pray to the One who is sovereign! And when our prayers are in alignment with His will (Matthew 6:10), He can and will do it.

If God is not sovereign over all things, He cannot answer our prayers.

So, I hope your enhanced understanding of God’s sovereignty leads you to pray more often…for yourself and for others!

Finally, third, another important implication of God’s sovereignty is honoring God’s design and call on us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God is sovereign over who will believe the gospel and be saved. We also need to affirm that the way God has ordained to bring this about is through His faithful children proclaiming the good news—the gospel.

After Paul teaches much detail about God’s sovereignty in salvation in Romans 8 and 9, he tells in Romans 10 that he prays for his unsaved peers (as we just discussed we should!), and he teaches that God saves where the gospel is being proclaimed:

**Romans 10:1, 14-15, 17** (ESV)

**1** Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

**14**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15**And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

**17**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The *prerequisite* that God decreed for the Holy Spirit to give new life and give saving faith is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us take the gospel to the world with boldness, knowing that our sovereign God is able, and, by his will, saves!

Ultimately, people are not saved because we have convinced them or because by their own will they have decided to choose to believe in God. People are saved because God has chosen them; He sends us to share the good news, and if they are elect, in His timing, He regenerates them by His Spirit to understand and love the gospel, and He gives them saving faith in which they repent and believe. Let’s go with confidence!

There are many more great implications of the biblical understating of God’s sovereignty. Our hope is that you seek biblical truth in all of them.

As the one true Ruler and Owner of creation, God has rightful and complete authority over all things.

God controls and directs all things, and He does so to fulfill His purposes after the counsel of His own holy will for His glory.

I’ll leave us with this:

**Psalm 97:1** (ESV)

**1** The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice … !

Let’s pray.