

# Adoring the God of Glory

October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Class 6 – Adult Equipping Center  
God's Omnipotence and Sovereignty (cont'd) – Teaching Notes

## Recap

Omnipotence - ability unlimited

Sovereign – authority over creation

Providence – exercise of sovereignty over....

- Examples of from last week – inanimate creation, animals, human choices, nations
- Three Aspects to Providence: preservation, concurrence, **government**

“God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he:

- 1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them...
- 2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do...” (Grudem)
  - Divine cause and Secondary cause
  - Not Deism or Pantheism

## Finishing Aspects of Sovereignty

### *Government*

“God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.” (p. 331, Grudem)

Relationship of Preservation, Concurrence and Government –

- Erickson: God's ends don't exclude the use of means (concurrence)
- Preservation heading somewhere!

## Overarching Scripture

Dan. 4:34-35 - ...for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; 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?” (ESV)

Eph. 1:11 - In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (ESV)

“To speak of God as “king” is utterly fitting; the government of the universe is not democratic, nor aristocratic, nor republican, nor constitutional, but monarchical. To God belongs the one undivided legislative, judicial, and executive power. His sovereignty is original, eternal, unlimited, abundant in blessing...This rule is comprehensive and definitive; no opposition stands a chance against him; his kingdom will come; he will be king over the entire earth; his kingdom is forever.” (305, Bavinck)

## **What about evil and suffering? How is God sovereign over evil and suffering without being responsible?**

### Two Wills of God

- Will of Decree (Secret) – God’s sovereign and sure plan
  - Decree: “the eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything happens.” (Grudem, 332).
  - Mt. 10:29-31, Deut. 29:29, James 4:15
- Will of Desire (Revealed) – God’s stated desire
  - 1 Thess. 4:3-4

### Two Wills in Scripture

- The Garden – Gen. 3
  - Decree: God created Satan and was sovereign over the entrance of sin
  - Desire: Adam and Eve are deceived by the serpent, they sin and are judged.
- Joseph – Gen. 50:20
  - Desire: You meant it for evil,... (mistreatment of brothers)
  - Decree: ...God meant it for good. (save humans)
- Pharaoh – Ex. 9:15-17 – God hardens Pharaoh’s heart for his purposes
  - Decree: God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (4:21, 7:3, 10:20, 27, 11:10, 14:4, 8).  
Promises are made prior to Pharaoh taking action.
    - Exodus 9:15–16 – (God to Pharaoh) For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. [Paul refers to Ex passage in Rom. 9:17]
    - God hardens the hearts of the Egyptians to follow in after them at the Red Sea – Ex. 14:17 – And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen.
  - Desire: Pharaoh sinned (hardened his heart) and Egypt was judged.

- Samson – Judges 14:1-4 – God provokes Samson to choose a Philistine wife
  - Desire: (v. 1-3) Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife.” But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.
  - Decree: (v. 4) His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. (ESV)
  
- Sons of Eli – 1 Sam. 2:25 – God’s will was to put the sons of Eli to death
  - Desire: 1 Samuel 2:22–25 – Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?”
  - Decree: But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death. (ESV)
  
- Job 1:12-15, 18-19, 20-22
  
- Babylonians – Jer. 25:8-12
  - “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. (ESV)
  - Desire: Israel sinning / Babylonians bloodthirsty and power hungry
  - Decree: God appointed Babylon for His purposes (“servant”)
  
  - God sends enemies to Israel, yet Israel warrants such chastisement. (1 Kgs. 11:14, Is. 10:5, Jer. 25:9, Ezek. 14:9)
  
- Acts 2:22-24, 4:24-30 (earlier example),

How the Two Wills lens helps us to communicate with others on the problem of evil:

1. God is sovereign over evil while preserving willing choices.

- a. "In permitting evil, God does not simply let it happen but determines how far he will let it go and how he will overcome it for good...God therefore can be considered neither the author of evil nor the passive spectator of evil. He only actively determines to permit evils that he has already, at great personal cost, determined to overcome for his greater glory and our ultimate good." (Horton, 358, 359)

#### Scripture

- b. Is. 45:7 – I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things. (ESV)
  - c. Amos 3:6 – Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (see also 4:6-13)
  - d. Lam. 3:37-38 – Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? (ESV)
2. God's providence utilizes evil for different purposes.
    - a. Prevents it (Gen. 20:6, 31:7)
    - b. Helps people escape it (1 Cor. 10:13)
    - c. Allows humans to follow their lusts/foolish counsel (Ps. 81:11-12, Rom. 1:24-28)
    - d. Tests people with difficult situations (Deut. 8:1-10, Job, Mt. 4:1)
    - e. Stops it with judgment (Noah account, Ex. 15)
    - f. Outsmarts it to demonstrate His wisdom (Lk. 4:1-13, 1 Cor. 2:7-8, Col. 2:13-15)
      - i. Example: football player recovering a fumble and running wrong direction
  3. God isn't to be blamed for evil.
    - a. Rom. 9:19-20
    - b. Lk. 22:22, Mt. 18:7; James 1:13-14; Deut. 32:4-5, Job 34:10
      - i. Luke 22:22 – For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" (ESV)
  4. God uses all things to fulfill His good purposes, including evil and suffering.

#### Q: How does suffering serve God's good purposes in Scripture?

- To cause reliance on Him / sanctification (thorn in Paul's flesh)
  - Example of Jesus – clearly not rooting out sin, growing in dependence
- To discipline us
- To witness to the truth
- To glorify Himself

This issue causes us to reevaluate how we define good and evil

Q: How should we define "good" when it comes to God's purposes?

- Good = God's will and being
- Good assumes an understanding of what's beneficial long-term – temporary pain for lasting satisfaction
  - "...even in the realm of human experience, we know that we can will and carry out something that is painful and that we do not desire (such as punishing a disobedient child or getting an inoculation that temporarily makes us ill) in order to bring about a long-term result that we desire more than the avoidance of short-term pain...And God is infinitely greater and wiser than we are. Certainly it is possible for him to will that his creatures do something that in the short term displeases him in order that in the long term he would receive the greater glory." (Grudem, p. 332)
- Good - we tend towards a narrow and individual definition
  - Example: Rain on a picnic-bad, rain for the farmer-good
- Good = His glory
  - i. God is glorified in judging the wicked. Prov. 16:4, Ps. 76:10, Rom. 9:14-24, Ps. 5:4-6
- Good = His people's good
  - ii. Rom. 8:28 - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (ESV)
  - iii. Lk. 24:25-27

5. God is glorified in ultimately resolving the problem of evil and delivering His people from suffering.

- a. God grants victory over Satan's schemes daily.
- b. God uses Satan's seeming victories for His good plan.
- c. God's victory over Satan is certain and scheduled.
- d. God will completely remove evil and suffering in time.
- e. 1 Cor. 15:24-27

6. God is mysterious and incomprehensible.

- a. Calvin: "When we do not grasp how God wills to take place what he forbids to be done, let us recall our mental incapacity." (Institutes, 1:233-34)
- b. Story of the angel and master (p. 123-124)

Q: How do we capture this nuance in describing God's sovereignty over evil with others? Do we use the word allow, cause, ordain? What is the strength and weakness of each?

- What is the strength and weakness of saying that God “allows” evil?
  - “We might think that permission makes God out to be merely an interested spectator who sits in a watchtower instead of working all things according to his will. But when God permits an evil act, he does so not passively but actively. God’s permission of evil thus involves an indirect act of God’s will.” (Jones, 121)
- What about God “causes” evil?
- What would be an accurate way of stating it? Ordains evil through real choices

Alternatives to the problem of evil are far worse:

1. God does evil (and therefore is evil)
2. God doesn’t use evil - how do we know he will extinguish it when he returns?
  - a. “If evil came into the world in spite of the fact that God did not intend it and did not want it to be there, then what guarantee do we have that there will not be more and more evil that he does not intend and that he does not want?” (Grudem, p. 329, Systematic Theology)
2. Stefan’s apologetic - working from the objection to making an argument for God.
  - a. Sin – deviation of the way it should be
  - b. There is a way it should be
  - c. There is a moral law
  - d. A moral law means a moral Lawgiver
  - e. Moral Lawgiver is God

Practical Considerations with the Problem of Pain

1. The problem is normally personal, and sometimes philosophical.
2. The problem of pain is more real to those in pain.
  - a. Many voices in Scripture testify to the reality of the problem of pain
  - b. The issue is not helped through pain denial, or minimizing the pain
3. The problem of pain is specific, and the answers to the problem are general.
  - a. Why did God do \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - b. Why didn’t God do \_\_\_\_\_ ?
4. God is personally and experientially familiar with the problem of pain. Heb. 5:7-9

## Implications

1. God is always able to do whatever He pleases. Difficult circumstances in our lives or amongst His people are not the result of God lacking power to effect change.
2. God also has the right to do as He pleases. He never needs permission or approval, including ours.
3. Because God is constantly sustaining creation, it is purposeful. This matters in the small, day to day living that to us can seem unimportant or insignificant.
4. God's sovereignty doesn't negate but incorporates human freedom. Our decisions are real and have results, therefore, God's sovereignty calls us to activity and accountability.
5. **God directs all things to serve His purpose and will, even evil and suffering as Jesus has supremely demonstrated.**

## Groups?

Q: How does God's sovereignty over all things, including evil and suffering, change our perspective on our own lives right now?

On the world's calamities and problems?

On how we think about the future?

On how we react to pain when we go through it?

## Conclusion:

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## Reacting and Reflecting on the God of Glory

1. Dwell on Eph. 3:20-21 and consider what God is capable of doing. How does this meditation change how you think about the main stressors in your life?
2. When have you been disappointed or confused by God's seeming unwillingness to act? When do you slip into thinking that God owes you answers for something?
3. Consider all that God is currently sustaining this very moment. How might God's preserving sovereignty be a part of your regular thinking? How does it change something mundane in your week this week?
4. What is it important to affirm that God is the ultimate cause and that we are secondary causes? How are both of those things important for the people you love right now?
5. What feels out of control right now? What evil or suffering are you having a hard time believing are under God's sovereign control even now? Share your concerns with Jesus now, knowing that He Himself underwent suffering to accomplish God's will.