

God's Sovereignty

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[0 : 0 0] It's so terrifying that God will unleash the fury that many will face the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne.

The wrath of the Lamb, as the Revelation says. Man is in utter rebellion against God. Who can deny it? And countless other things we have not mentioned here.

It's in all of us. And who really is in control? God or the devil? Does God fail to accomplish his purposes because of evident human rebellion? Put this back on.

So how do we account for the sheer quantity of evil and calamities in the world? Many Christians want to take God off the hook for evil and calamities.

And they rightly see that sin vandalizes God's good creation. Sin affects creation itself. Like putting graffiti on a beautiful painting in the Louvre.

[1 : 1 4] God is not only the king, he is the judge. People recognize that. And many women will one day give an account before the judgment seat of Christ. And with this we must all agree. But in arguing of how to understand evil in the world, some want to say God cannot prevent evil because that would destroy our freedom to choose good and evil.

He just kind of rolls the dice and hopes for the best. And humans have the power to choose good and evil. And because it's up to us, he can clean up the mess afterward, but he is helpless to prevent it.

Our freedom is so valuable that he's willing to pay the price of human suffering. And God cannot prevent evil. After the tsunami in Southeast Asia, a Christian was asked this, whether God had anything to do with a disaster.

No, he replied. This question has to do with geology, not theology. So putting aside the profound theological statement that person's making in that statement, I want to say the scripture has much to say to us about this topic.

And the scripture appears to cut in a different direction than that statement. Isaiah 45, verse 7, The same God who is good, in which there is no darkness, says to the people, I form the light and create darkness.

[2 : 3 3] I bring prosperity and create disaster. I, the Lord, do all these things. And Daniel 4, 35, up here, says, All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand or say to him, What have you done?

In the midst of severe misfortune, including winds which swept in and caused the collapse of a house, killing all the young inside, Job refused to curse God.

He says, Shall we accept good from God and not trouble? In surveying the ruins of Jerusalem, Jeremiah asked, Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?

So in the scripture, when suffering happens, I think pastorally the writers of scripture want to draw our attention to God's sovereignty. The disciples asked Jesus, Who sinned, this blind man or his parents?

Jesus answered, Neither, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. So we know the creation is cursed because sin creates disabilities like blindness.

[3 : 48] God created everything and called it good. There was no blindness before sin. But this man's blindness was no accident, according to Jesus. He was born blind because God had a purpose for this man, that he would have a chance to glorify him through his suffering.

And one of the priceless truths, the pillow we can lay our heads on at night, is the truth of God's sovereignty. All things are under God's rule and control, and nothing happens without his direction or permission.

God doesn't work some things out, but all things out, according to the counsel of his will. And this is good news for us, that God controls every molecule, atom, even the smallest subatomic particle unseen by the most powerful microscope on earth.

Something that the human eye has never seen, God is in control of those things. From the forces of nature, we'll see, to the rise and fall of nations, over good and evil, even the deeply painful events in our lives.

God is in control. And so this means your suffering is not meaningless. We will see. And Christian, though you can't see it now, one day you will see that God is working out these painful things for our good.

[5 : 03] And my hope and prayer is that by the end of our time together, we will see God's sovereignty as the bedrock of our trust, and God's sovereignty would lead us to rest in the fatherly hand of God.

So let's begin with, what do we mean when we say sovereignty of God? Well, a sovereign is a ruler, a lord.

To discuss the sovereignty of God is to discuss his lordship, his kingship. A.W. Tozer defines it as, God's sovereignty is the attribute by which he rules his entire creation.

And to be sovereign, God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free. The word Yahweh in the Old Testament expresses this sovereign rule.

The name revealed to Moses at the burning bush. I am who I am. He depends on no one. He always was and always will be. And the word Lord, Yahweh, is found 7,000 times in the Old Testament.

[6 : 01] He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God. Psalm 115, verse 3, Our God is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. And the prefix omni means all.

So he is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. Omniscient. He knows everything. You combine all the knowledge by all the people at Yale, and it is comparable to a kindergarten reading lesson compared to what God knows.

He knows everything there is to know. Omnipresent. Scripture says he's everywhere. You go 36,000 feet to the bottom of the ocean, God is there, if you aren't crushed by the pressure.

So we see this as the premise of God in the Exodus. It was God, not Pharaoh, who reigns over all things. Exodus 3, verse 19 to 20, But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand, so I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it.

After that, he will let you go. The sovereignty of God means God as a king is in control of the world. He is in control of Pharaoh. And to what purpose does God exercise his sovereignty?

[7 : 13] Well, God tells the Israelites in the Exodus, So that the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt to bring out the people of Israel from among them. God does everything for his own glory.

So think of God speaking to Isaiah, Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory. We have been created to display the glory of God.

Like a master painter whose canvas is the entire universe, he governs every detail to bring himself glory. And one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, as Sabaccic says.

So how does the scripture portray the sovereignty of God? So we'll begin with the macro and then we'll narrow down to the micro as it hits closer to home. So first, God is sovereign over the decisions of nations.

Over the decisions of nations. Proverbs 21, verse 1. The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will.

[8 : 21] He controls kings. He has unlimited power. He has the power to summon a king to pound swiftly and destroy another nation. And that's precisely what he did when he summoned Cyrus and Isaiah to crush Babylon.

Isaiah 46. I am God and there is no other. I am God and there's none like me, 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.

Calling a bird of prey from the east, a man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed and I will do it. And that bird of prey that God is referring to is him summoning Cyrus, the king of Persia, to abruptly and swiftly conquer Babylon and liberate the Jews from captivity.

God is sovereign over the very fortunes of nations over Syria and Babylon and Persia. He is sovereign over Russian tanks coming into Ukraine. He is sovereign over Vladimir Putin and Zelensky.

He is sovereign over China and Taiwan, over North Korea and South Korea, Lithuania. He is sovereign over the elections in the United States, the polar bears and the penguins in Antarctica.

[9 : 30] He reigns supreme as the king over all the nations and his purposes always prevail. When he stretches out his hand, there is none to turn him back because there is no one over him and beside him. So we see God is sovereign over the decisions of nations.

And second, God is sovereign over calamities, over calamities. We saw this previously in Job's life. And also besides that, who sent the flood during Noah's time?

God is not making a point of meteorology, but theology. Genesis 6, verse 17, I'm about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes.

Everything on earth will die. God wants them to know ahead of time who sends the storm. He is the God of the storm. He judges sin. And he will send the storm to judge the nations.

He is sovereign even over calamities. Who sent the plagues in Egypt? In Exodus 9, God brings a terrible hailstorm upon the Egyptians, but he leaves one area untouched, the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

[10 : 38] He makes distinctions in the plagues through natural events. And for what purpose? Again, God says, the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. He does it so that they know that he is king in control, even of nature itself.

And at his word, the sun stood still so Joshua could win the battle. According to Genesis, he sends famine. The disciples said to Jesus, what kind of man is this? Even the winds in the sea obey him.

God is in control of the weather, even over calamities. And do you remember that terrifying episode of the sons of Korah in the book of Numbers? Do you remember the sons of Korah were rebellious men, challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron as God's appointed leaders?

And Moses in number 16 says, if they die a natural death, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord opens up the earth and swallows them up with everything that belongs to them and they go alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt.

And what happened? As soon as Moses was done talking, the earth split open and swallowed them up and the earth closed over them. What an awesome and mighty God. He can send the earthquake to swallow up rebels.

[11 : 54] And we can say with the psalmist, be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. And God reveals himself in nature so that we will know his power.

And God is sovereign even over calamities. Wow. God is not only sovereign over calamities and nations, God is sovereign even over circumstances, even if evil is being done to us.

You recall that well-known passage in Joseph's life, at the end of his life, in Genesis 50, verse 20? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

To bring it that many people should be kept alive as they are today. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. Joseph had been sold into slavery because of his malice and hatred.

Was a heinous evil done to Joseph? Yes. Yes, it was. It was very evil. Was God sovereign over those circumstances? Yes.

[13 : 00] God was sovereign. And what was God's purpose? That the people should be kept alive. Ultimately, God is preserving the line of Abraham. Right? And all the nations of the earth would be blessed through the line of Abraham.

Through Joseph's suffering, God keeps his promises. And think for a moment with me. Think of Joseph's life. An innocent man, even if unwise, with his rainbow coat, who was loved by his father, Jacob, stripped of his rainbow coat, betrayed by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown into a pit with criminals.

But through his suffering, he saves his people from death. Through his suffering, God ultimately delivers his people from famine. And Joseph takes a Gentile bride and he is exalted at the right hand of Pharaoh.

And his brothers bow down before him. And he intercedes before Pharaoh on behalf of his family. And ultimately, he will extend kindness and forgiveness to those who betrayed him. Through Joseph's life, suffering and exaltation in Egypt, God, he keeps his promises.

Now, does that story sound familiar to you at all? Does that ring an echo of a greater story in the Bible? And God will actually orchestrate Joseph's life to be a shadow of the greater Messiah who would come to rescue his people.

[14 : 19] Not from famine, but from God's white-hot judgment against sin. And Jesus, fully God and fully man, was rejected. Even though he had committed no evil, he never sinned.

Not even for a millisecond. Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, falsely accused, and suffered at the hands of Pontius Pilate, stripped of his robe, and crucified next to two criminals, and then was raised to the right hand of the Father and now intercedes for us to deliver us from death and judgment, taking for himself a bride from the nations.

That sounds like Joseph's life. Not one-to-one, but there are echoes of how Joseph was a signpost for Christ. Now, were the details of Joseph's life an accident?

Well, clearly not. Clearly not. If you've been at Trinity long enough, you've heard Christ preach from the Old Testament. And examples like this abound. And for those who came to the biblical theology class last year, you know that this is called typology.

And typologies are shadows in the Old Testament wherein Christ is the reality. And this is the hermeneutical framework that the apostles used in the New Testament to interpret events and people and foreshadowing the work of Christ and the Messiah.

[15 : 42] And this way of interpreting the Old Testament assumes that God is sovereign over all of history, even the small details. And God isn't just controlled generally, but meticulously controlled.

And the supreme example of this is the cross of Christ. Jesus' death is a result of events outside his control, even when evil is done to him. God superintends every detail precisely for his glory.

Everything that happened on Good Friday was a fulfillment of Scripture, wasn't it? Peter says as much while preaching in Jerusalem after the resurrection. Acts 2. This Jesus delivered up to the, according to the definite plan and fuller knowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

So according to Peter, was a heinous evil done to Jesus? Yes. The Lord of glory was crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. An innocent man was condemned.

A heinous evil was God's sovereign over those circumstances. Yes. He was delivered up to the definite plan and fuller knowledge of God, according to Peter. So the cross was not plan B after human beings messed it up according to our sin, but it was God's plan A.

[16 : 58] The cross was God's plan from eternity past. Revelation says, in the mind of God, the lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. But he accomplishes his purpose through the hands of the sinful mob who yelled, crucify him, crucify him.

So we were in that crowd. We sinned with them. We wanted to crucify the Lord of glory, but through the sinful acts of men and women, God accomplishes his plan of redemption.

Just like in Joseph's life. The precise details, in Matthew chapter 26, will say, all this has taken place so that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

The precise details were fulfilling the scriptures. Judas, a close friend, betrayed by Jesus, fulfilled Psalm 41. The Pharisees selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

And then Judas, using that to buy a field, God then moves Judas to return the blood money in fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah and Zechariah, as Matthew tells us. So all the precise details, we can go to Isaiah 53.

[18 : 07] He was pierced for our transgression. He was crushed for our iniquities. All the details are precisely, sovereignly ordained by God. And all the attributes of God meet at the cross.

The supremacy of his grace. The supremacy of his kindness towards sinners. The supremacy of his holiness and wrath against sin. Both are there.

As Jesus, the Lamb of God, hangs as our substitute, the line of Judah shows his supreme strength. And the king is crucified willingly. Nothing external held him there, but he willingly laid his life down and was condemned and submitting himself to the Father.

And so, God is sovereign even over circumstances, even if evil is being done to us. And in no way does that diminish human responsibility for sin and evil.

And so D.A. Carson makes this point. God is absolutely sovereign. Yet his sovereignty does not diminish human responsibility and accountability. Human beings are morally responsible creatures.

[19 : 13] Yet this fact in no way jeopardizes the sovereignty of God. At Calvary, all Christians have to concede the truth of these two statements or they give up their claim to be Christians. So we must affirm them both.

God's sovereign over the cross and the evil that was being done to Christ. That's what D.A. Carson is saying. So he's sovereign over circumstances. Even if evil is being done to us, I want to take a moment and see if there are any questions before we continue.

Does that make sense? When you're talking about all his attributes, the only thing that I would beg to differ is that all his attributes are his attributes because of his holiness.

His holiness is not an attribute. His holiness encompasses everything that he is. he's completely and wholly other. That's why his omniscience is other.

His sovereignty is other. It's the highest form of omniscience. That's good. It's not another attribute. evil. We talk about the simplicity of God.

[20 : 23] So the simplicity is all his attributes are one and there's no division within God. He's not like he's half holy and he's half loving. No, he's all holy. He's all loving.

He's all rapture. He's all love. And so I would say his attributes all kind of overlap with each other. His power, right? He's powerfully loving. He's powerfully strong.

I know what you mean. So we have to keep that in mind. He doesn't have division within himself. The simplicity of God. Yeah, Matt. A comment.

D.A. Carson seems to me to be echoing something from the Westminster Catechism about God determines all things that happen yet in such a way that doesn't make him the author of evil or violating human freedom or establishes human freedom.

Something maybe such a conflict. Yes. Yes. And we're going to get to man's responsibility toward the end. But that is the two truths that the Bible gives to us.

[21 : 30] Sovereignty and responsibility. Right. And Carson is a different Carson quote. Yes. Yes. Carson. So there may be some people who can put those together logically.

You know, I can't. And so I, you know, I'm left with what appears to be a paradox. But that's okay. You know, science, there are paradoxes.

Yes. There are paradoxes. It's not surprising that I don't understand God. Join the club. God is one. God is three. Three and one.

My puny mind doesn't understand that. I mean, I'm not going to understand how and Spurgeon said there's not one line, there's two lines and you have to look at them both. And I think the moment you take one side and make it the whole thing, that's when you run into error.

You have to keep them both in tension to be, to really keep in tension what the Bible keeps in tension. Yeah. So he's sovereign over nations.

[22 : 31] He's sovereign over calamities. He's sovereign over circumstances even if evil is being done to us. Now, that's a hard truth and that also gives us I think that the battlefield of faith when evil is being done to us is in the mind.

Right? We have to keep three truths in tension together in our minds. God is good, God is for me, and God is sovereign. God is good, God is for me, God is sovereign.

You have to keep those three things in your minds when we suffer unjustly from others. I think the moment you take God's sovereignty out of it, God is good in God's form, but he's not really sovereign, and that's kind of cold comfort.

You know, God is really powerless to help you in your struggles, in your weakness. But the scripture presents those three things in unity together, and I think that's where the battlefield happens in our minds as we try to hold God's sovereignty and his goodness together.

So point number four, point number four, he is not only sovereign over our circumstances, he is also sovereign over our decisions. And we see that in the decision that Joseph's brother made to sell him into slavery.

[23 : 55] And the decision to crucify the Lord of glory was according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. God is sovereign even over the hearts of sinful men and women. Proverbs 16, verse 9, the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

And so even in that verse, you can see that human beings have freedom to make their own decisions, right? The heart of man plans his way, but at the same time, our choices are under the sovereign determination of God.

The Lord establishes his steps. Can that Proverbs 16, 9 apply to a cartel drug dealer? Yes, it could.

Yes, it could. Yes. God is sovereign over our decisions. And we're going to see that that does not diminish the drug dealer's responsibility and accountability toward God.

Yes. So point number five, God is sovereign not only our decisions, but God is sovereign over our salvation.

[25 : 05] Now, when God determines to bring someone to faith to Christ, he cannot fail. Now, I suppose this is where we must draw our daggers. As Charles Simeon once said to his friend John Wesley, but before you draw out your dagger, let's consider together God's sovereignty in this area.

I'm convinced if you are a Christian, we all recognize in our hearts that God is sovereign. And I don't need to persuade you that this is true. How do I know that?

You're like, Tyler, you don't know me. I'm actually a really staunch anti-sovereign type. Well, friend, have you ever thanked God for your conversion? Yes, of course.

But why would you do that? Do you pat yourself on the back because you are smarter, more intelligent than other people who refuse to believe? Not for a moment would you ever say that.

Instead, you give God glory. You realize that you once were foolish, blind, and could not see, but then you say with Paul, but by the grace of God, I am what I am. And although you have labored hard for Christ, you can say, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

[26 : 14] You give God glory for your salvation. But there's a second thing that you do that shows that you believe that God is sovereign. And what is that? Well, you pray, don't you?

You pray for the salvation for someone who has a hard heart, a family member who has rejected the gospel so many times. Well, what do you pray for for that person? Do you pray that God gives them eyes to see and ears to hear?

That God removes their heart of stone? That God would show himself to them? I think all these prayers acknowledge at a heart level that God is in control and he is powerful to save by his grace.

And we understand that at a heart level when we are on our knees before the throne of grace, we cry out to God and we recognize that God is sovereign. And so before we draw our daggers, listen to this conversation between Charles Simeon and John Wesley.

And two godly men who are on opposite sides of this. And John Wesley had this conversation in his diary with Charles Simeon. Simeon said, Sir, I understand that you were called an Arminian and I have sometimes been called a Calvinist and so I suppose we are to draw daggers.

[27 : 26] But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission, I will ask you a few questions. Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God if God had not first put it into your heart?

Yes, says Wesley, I believe that indeed. Simeon says, Sir, do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?

Yes, Wesley said, solely through Christ. But sir, suppose you were first saved by Christ, are you not somehow now or afterward to save yourself by your own works? No, Wesley said.

Simeon continues, What, then are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God as much as an infant in its mother's arms? Yes, altogether, Wesley says. And this is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?

Yes, I have no hope, but in him, Wesley says. Then sir, Simeon continues, with your leave, I will put up my dagger again for this is all my Calvinism. This is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance.

[28 : 29] It is in substance all that I hold and I hold it and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things where we agree.

And that's a spirit I think we all should have as we encounter our brothers and sisters who differ with us on this. That's what we ultimately agree on is that God gets glory, we depend on him every single day, and that there's nothing in us that God saw that wanted him to save us.

It is God's mercy and love alone. And I think we all can agree on this. That is the heart of a Christian. And that's the spirit I want to proceed in this conversation.

What's at stake here, I don't want it to be definitions, but I want us to see that God is to be relied upon every moment and he is to get glory. So, 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 13 to 14 says, But we are always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, beloved by the Lord.

Why? Because God chose you as the first for us to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. So, God chooses those to be saved through belief in the truth.

[29 : 45] And some call this irresistible grace. God the Father chose certain individuals to be saved based on his sovereign good pleasure. Christ would say, No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

All the Father gives me will come to me. So, Jesus is saying, You can't come to me unless the Father first draws you. You have the golden chain of salvation in Romans 8.

The golden chain of redemption. So, those whom he predestined, he called. And those whom he called, he justified. And those whom he justified, he glorified. So, the golden chain, those chains cannot be broken.

If God has predestined you, you will be glorified according to Paul in Romans 8. And the Scripture which emphatically teaches that God is sovereign over salvation and that his sovereign determination is decisive is Romans 9.

Romans 9, verse 15. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then, it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who has mercy.

[30 : 56] For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose I have raised you up that I might show my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So then, he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.

And verse 21, Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump some vessels for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 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 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory?

So ethnicity in Romans 9 or family heritage is not decisive. That's the point that Paul is making. Your ancestors, your mom or your grandmother, right, that doesn't determine whether you're a Christian.

God's mercy is decisive. And I was telling Jonathan there's an old southern song called God Ain't Never Had a Grandchild. It goes something like this, God Ain't Never Had a Grandchild, Only a Child Will Do.

If you're not a joint heir, then you ain't going there. No cousin, niece, or nephew will be among the chosen few. God Ain't Never Had a Grandchild, Only a Child Will Do.

[32 : 14] And what a richly edifying song. But what they're saying is what Romans 9 is saying, is that your ethnicity or family heritage is not decisive.

God's sovereign decision to save and to show mercy is decisive. And Romans 9 is not a popular truth, but it says He created the wicked for the day of wrath. You can go back in your Bible, Romans 9, make sure it's there after this.

So to our finite minds, admittedly, this sounds absurd. How can God be sovereign over salvation if He is a judge and who will condemn those who do not believe?

How does that make sense? And Paul anticipates this complaint in Romans 9. You will say to me then, why does God still find fault?

For who can resist His will? And Paul responds not by a comprehensive explanation of how these two things work together, but he rebukes the spirit of the question. But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?

[33 : 18] We have no right to find fault in God's ways. Our part is to acknowledge these facts and worship God and His righteousness as both sovereign king and judge.

And we see that there's no part of the universe that exceeds God's authority and that includes those whom He calls to be His. The Lord alone will be exalted before that great white throne.

And we will say with Him, why have you shown me mercy? Nothing in me caused me to be here, but your grace alone. And He will get all the glory for that. So I want to stop there and ask questions.

Feel free. If you have a question in your mind, throw it out for the group. So I'm just, so I think these are really difficult things for humanity, for people like me.

Everything you said, I believe, is true. But how do you respond to the person who isn't just arguing for the sake of arguing, isn't just trying to pinpoint, isn't just intellectualizing and like, well, it doesn't make sense or it's not fair.

[34 : 30] But the person whose heart is really torn about these things. Like the person who's genuinely, yeah, feeling this isn't fair or, like how do you respond to that person?

Like, everything you said is true, but I'm thinking about how's that going to land with someone who's really struggling with this, not someone who just wants to check off the doctrinal box. I just wondered.

I completely agree and it depends on the heart of that person. Is it an intellectual problem? Is it maybe a past history of abuse?

Like, are you saying God is sovereign over what happened to me when I was a child? How is God good in that? How is he sovereign over that? And I think those, depending on where they are, those are two different answers.

Well, I think that's what I'm getting at. The person who's really suffering or has, you know, so I have a history of childhood abuse. I had to work really hard to get through that in a way that maintained my faith in a good God.

[35 : 34] So, that's, I think that's the person I think. Yeah. I will say, I would go back to the cross and someone said, you know, we, sometimes we don't know why he does certain things, but we know that it's not because he doesn't care about us.

That much we can say for sure. Because at the heart of the cross, we see that he does care for us. And he did give us his own son. He will give us all things. And I don't know if we can answer the question of why, which I think people want to know why did this happen to me when I was younger.

And, of course, Christians are to lament and to weep at those who are weeping and there's true injustice and evil. God's sovereignty provides comfort and patience in tribulation knowing that these are not random acts outside of God's control.

And he does have some... Say it again? I have a full view in faithfulness. That's what God says in his word. I was in rehab six times, three rehabs, two heart attacks, 16 months in a homeless shelter, molested by my dad, my uncle, raised with hardcore porno, my father beat my mom.

It's like I never questioned God. I never said why. I never questioned. I just knew that he was working. And then finally my eyes were opened up and there he is.

[37 : 08] Yeah. You know, you find out that when God is the only thing you have, you find out that God is the only thing you need. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You know? And it's because him, because in my natural state, I hate God.

He drove me to the cross. Mm-hmm. Nobody is sincerely looking for God. Nobody. Mm-hmm. They all hate God. No matter how it looks outside.

You know, you can get this close to God and end up in hell. And it looks like he's really wanting to find God. But no. God is sovereign. You're not going to make it.

Yeah. God knows who are his. And his sovereignty, to your point, we can look back and this is the doctrine of providence, which we'll get to in future weeks.

Sovereignty is God's attribute, but providence looks backwards and sees how our lives were orchestrated for our good. I think Flavel said providence is like the Hebrew alphabet.

[38 : 14] It's read backwards. So you have to go backwards and see. I remember that. You have horrible circumstances in your life.

If you're a Christian, you can look back on those things and see how God was orchestrating events to bring you to himself. Oh, Jesus had a great life on earth. Yeah.

No, man of sorrows. Look at Paul. When he came to Christianity, he lost everything. Everything. And he was raised in a male culture.

He had the education. He had the money. He had the reputation and he came to Christ, beaten, robbed, jailed, shipwrecked. I mean, he lost everything.

You know? It's not a fun walk. Yeah. But he gained Christ. Yeah. So, I'll take that math right there. It's all worth it. Yeah. It's all worth it.

[39 : 11] It's all worth it. And God's sovereignty is, it is, it is a mystery and I think most things in the... Sorry, Amos, go ahead. I just want to add maybe, it's a bit, a bit cliché, but I think that there's greater glory in different testimonies all pointing to the same holiness of God.

And everybody had identical testimonies of like, we all had idyllic childhood and then came to Christ and then died. Like, if everybody's testimony was identical, I think it would say less about God than...

I was long schooled and raised in Nebraska. Which, I've been saying that there's, that there's, that there's, that those, that that also demonstrates God's power.

But it's, but there's greater testimony in the diversity of stories that people bring. That, you know, it's kind of like the all, all nations, all races, all walks of life.

But our stories all melt into one story, his story, of what he's doing in history for us and for his glory. My story doesn't mean anything. You know, I'm saying it's a story.

[40 : 23] No matter how bad it is, it means nothing. It's his story. His utter sovereignty and my utter dependence on him. That's the story.

And that's what Dorothy Sayers said in the 40s. He says, the drama of Christianity is in the doctrine. Crossing the Red Sea. The prophets of Baal and Mount Carmel.

The cross. All the miracles. Man, what drama. You can't even make a movie like this. You know? And, again, this is hard to keep in our minds at once.

But, the challenge of most truths in the scripture is that there are tensions and we have to keep them both in our minds at the same time.

And those who aren't comfortable living in that tension tend to shirk one for the other and that is where you get error. I think the intellectual part of this, the objection is, look, if God commands that we believe or to obey the gospel, then that must somehow imply the moral ability to do so.

[41 : 47] How can God command something if we have no ability to follow that command? that is the part where I think people have a hard time with.

And there's something that makes sense. That's a logical argument that makes sense. I think the answer that I can see is that the command to obey is given but we always act in accordance with our nature.

I think that's the answer that scripture gives us. We have complete freedom to choose what is in our hearts. But we always choose sin apart from God's grace.

In our natural estate, we always choose sin. And that's what our hearts love. And you get that in the language of being slaves to sin.

you get that in Genesis even from the beginning. You had the fall of Adam and then right after the fall who comes next? Cain. And you have Cain's line of murderers.

[42 : 59] But then you have Seth, the appointed line, the heir of God's promises and you see that Seth's line are recipients of God's grace. grace. And so you have those in our natural estate apart from God's grace, we are slaves to sin.

Paul says that right in Ephesians 2. You were slaves to the prince of the power of the air, but God rich in mercy has made you alive with Christ. So this state, we always act in accordance with our nature.

God gives us the commands, but we never choose Christ apart from the Spirit's intervening grace in our lives. So we must emphatically say that man's responsibility cannot be minimized and that we are responsible for the choices we make.

Yeah, I'm sorry, I just want to add something here. I think, I mean, you were kind of camped out in Romans 9 a little bit here, which is good. And the end of Romans 9, I think, gives us life, it's like we get to the edge of this mystery, and then we're all like, wow, like, we're at the edge of a real mystery here, and God says, basically, this far and no further, but then we go on and try to explain it, which is, we just can't help it, right?

We go on to apply our human reason to try to make it make sense. And I think a helpful thing to do, back to Laura's question, is to ask ourselves, why did God put this, if we have the scripture he intended us to have, I think most of us believe that, what is the point of Romans 9?

[44 : 45] Like, what, why is he telling us as much as he is telling us? What question is God trying to answer in this particular passage? And one thing we know for sure is not to give us answers that are going to satisfy our human reason.

like, he could, he, well, it's a debate whether he could do that at all, but he's definitely not done it. And so, when we're chasing our tails, trying to figure out, make it all work, what are we missing?

realizing, why is God telling us, if you think you had a hand in your, like, if you think, you know, there's 8% where you stepped up to the line and made a good choice, and he's saying, no, you didn't, what are we supposed to take away from that?

because we can miss that most obvious thing, and I think that can become, if not a bomb, it can become a more livable thing that we walk away and say, God's trying to tell us all something, and we want to argue about how it fits in the human categories, when we all are all sitting here agreeing, Jesus is fully man, fully God at the same time, there, pop goes the weasel, I mean, you did the Trinity last week, it's like, all we're doing is observing the inner workings of biological reality that we haven't even the first clue how it works, you know, and I think, just if I just make it one step further in Romans, God's bringing Jewish believers together and Gentile believers together, humanly speaking, it's like a miraculous thing that's happening, and guess what, they hate each other, guess what, half of them are like, well our Bible tells us we have to do this, and the Gentiles are like, no we don't,

Paul's on our side, blah, blah, blah, and the context is, believers have their daggers out, and he's like, hey, none of y'all can be, I think, some of why we're told that salvation is not of us, is to allow a platform actually for unity, ironically, because once we acknowledge that we're only here because of an intervention of God and a supernatural miracle in our hearts to open our eyes, how can I turn to some guy that's like, okay, but we have to really hang on to some of the things God said in the Old Testament in this way, well, okay, great, because if you believe that, it's sin for you not to do it.

[47 : 20] Like, the context that Paul's dropping these hard truths, I feel like if we miss some of the purpose, and there are other places that touch on God's sovereignty and salvation, and we always have to ask ourselves, why is God revealing this at this time to these people in this place?

Because if we go down the road of trying to figure this out, at the expense of actually sitting there and humbly saying, can we receive what God's actually trying to say in this passage, we're off track.

Yeah, if I can. Yeah, I agree. It doesn't make someone feel better who had a three-year-old worn behind a dumpster to a drug addict. You know, to me, the harder questions are, what about, like, it's one thing to say as Christians, God's at work in my trials, God's at work in my suffering, like, this is to refine my character.

What about a three-year-old who's born to two godless drug addicts and gets raped a hundred times and dies at 15 and had no, like, we have to, if that doesn't humble us and insult our conversation here, we're off track again.

Yeah, yeah, no, thank you, brother, appreciate that. It's, the sovereignty of God is not a dagger for us to hit each other with, it's a pillow to put our heads on at night. problem.

[48 : 39] Why does God tell us to do something that we have no ability to do? Because he shows us, like, we can't keep the Ten Commandments, I break them every day, so what is the result?

You run to Jesus. He kept it. God shows me that I can't keep his law every day, but he shows me every day somebody kept it for me.

Yeah, that's good. That's it. That's the answer. Jesus did it all. Instead of me trying and trying and trying and failing and failing and failing, but little by little, he's conforming me to his image, and I trust him.

It's trust, yeah, amen, brother. Trust, to underline the mystery here, and then we'll get into some application before we close, you know, we see this all over the place, right?

The Spirit sanctifies us through diligent self-discipline. Who lives your Christian life? You or the Spirit? Well, Philippians 2, verse 12, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, but it's God who's at work in you, both willing to work for his good pleasure.

[49 : 50] How does that work? I have no idea. I don't think Paul understood completely. He's saying, look, the Spirit works in you, but work your salvation out with fear and trembling. Paul, another part, it says, if you sow, you will reap.

But then another part, it says, well, it doesn't really depend on human exertion or trying hard, it just depends on God's mercy. And so, these tensions are all over the place in the New Testament.

And let's go into some application before we close. So how does God's sovereignty help us in our sorrow? Well, again, we talk about the three things keeping in your mind at once.

God is good, God is for me, and God is sovereign. And that's the battlefield in your mind to keep those things together. I love what Elizabeth Elliot said, a woman well acquainted with suffering.

She said, I'm convinced that there is nothing that can happen to me in this life that is not precisely designed by a sovereign Lord to give me the opportunity to learn to know him. And so what she's saying is suffering is not random, but even if others mean evil against me, it's an opportunity for me to know the Lord.

[51 : 01] He means it for my good. So how does the Baptist faith and message put it this way? God as Father reigns with providential care over his universe, his creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of his grace.

So God reigns with providential care for us. how does God's sovereignty, I'll throw this out here, how does God's sovereignty help us in our decision making as we battle tough decisions in our future?

How does that help us? You know, he has our good in his mind. And his glory.

Yeah. Yeah. So some of you who are facing tough decisions, God's sovereignty helps us to have peace in our decision making. If God wasn't sovereign, I mean, we should be more anxious than we actually are.

Can you imagine? Can you imagine the uncertainty of each decision we make? Did you not have your quiet time this morning?

[52 : 11] Man, you better be careful. The sovereignty of God helps us to have rest in our decision making. and that doesn't diminish, again, human responsibility to choose each day to follow Christ.

And the last thing, how does God's sovereignty help our evangelism? Because some say, well, doesn't that just kill evangelism? What's the point of evangelizing if God is sovereign, he's going to save anyone who he decides to save?

And of course, the gospel invitation can and often is resisted and rejected, but God's sovereignty tells us God can save anyone, even the most hard-hearted person.

And that should make us bold. The first reaction of your parents when you share the gospel with them is contempt for God. Such a reaction should not surprise us, because no heart is too hard for the grace of God.

And I think Luther had it right, and then we'll end in prayer. It leaves no doubt who is in charge and all these skirmishes that we face in our life. Though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.

[53 : 24] The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can't endure, but for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall follow him. Amen, brothers and sisters.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the time together and your word. Lord, I do pray that you would help us to live in the mystery, help us to humble us, Lord, before your throne, to give us confidence and assurance that you are working out all things for our good, for those who love you and are calling according to your purpose.

Father, we give you all praise and thanks. May you get the honor and glory forever and ever. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.