

**THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE, PART 3:
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, PART 2**

- I. THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE AS A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
 - A. The need and purpose of systematic theology
 - 1. To instruct us in doctrine
 - 2. To protect us from false teaching
 - 3. To enhance our worship
 - B. The methods of systematic theology
 - C. The foundations of systematic theology
 - D. Holding fast to biblical tensions in systematic theology
 - E. The spirit of the debate
 - F. The dangers of systematic theology
- II. A BRIEF HISTORY AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT
- III. A CONTRAST OF ARMINIANISM AND CALVINISM
- IV. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
 - A. God's sovereignty defined
 - B. God's sovereignty defended
 - 1. The nature of God's sovereignty
 - a) Sovereign freedom and pleasure
 - b) Sovereign power
 - c) Sovereign mercy
 - d) Sovereign blessings, including and especially salvation
 - e) Sovereign purpose
 - (1) His purpose in evil and suffering for the wicked
 - (2) His purpose in evil and suffering for the righteous
 - 2. The scope of God's sovereignty
 - a) Over creation
 - (1) Nature
 - (2) Life and death
 - (3) Animal kingdom
 - b) Over angels, both good and evil
 - c) Over suffering and evil
 - d) Over nations, governments and groups of people
 - e) Over individuals
 - (1) Over the hearts of men
 - (2) Over the decisions of men
 - (3) Over the salvation of men
 - C. God's sovereignty and human responsibility
 - 1. The dual testimony of sovereignty and responsibility in Scripture

clarification about statement last week

- ❖ I said at one point, responding to Bill's question about babies being born with birth defects that "God causes sin." I want to clarify what I mean and don't mean by that. I should have clarified then and didn't. What I intended by that is to say that God ordains,

allows, permits and sometimes causes events that the world perceives as sinful or evil but are not.

- ❖ **Example:** Tsunami – God was in complete control of the tsunami (hurricane Katrina, F5 tornado in 1999, etc.) that caused tremendous suffering. But that act does not make God evil nor should we think of that necessarily as evil. When man takes innocent life, it is always wrong. It is never wrong for God to take life. Therefore we must place upon God the same restrictions that we ourselves have. For us to intentionally cause a defect in a child (through drug abuse, physically abuse, etc.) is wrong – we don't have the right to do that. God can and does do whatever He wants with life because He is the creator of it. All life is His to do what He pleases. So when God takes life, it is not sin – the life belongs to Him. When God makes a child with Down's syndrome that does not make God evil.
- ❖ What God does is always good. There is no evil in Him nor does He ever think or commit any evil. So even things that seem to us as 'evil,' (such as taking life) God can do with perfect holiness. God never does sin or tempts anyone to do sin or forces anyone to sin. He is not the efficient cause of evil. But God is the ultimate cause of everything, because He created everything. **Example:** Satan is a morally responsible free agent who was and is the immediate, direct, efficient cause of much evil. Yet God created Satan with the infallible knowledge that he would commit that evil. And God did not have to create Satan (or anything). He could have prevented that evil by not creating the devil. So ultimately God is responsible for everything that happens in the universe, because He created the universe with the full knowledge of everything that would happen. Knowing that evil would result, and knowing that millions would be damned forever, He still chose to create this world to bring Himself glory. And that is a good and righteous act!

2. Examples of God's sovereign control and man's responsibility as complementary truths

- Does God **decisively** and **determinatively** control the actions of man without destroying his responsibility?
- **Abimelech:** Turn to Genesis 20:1-6. **Gen. 20:6** says, "I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her." Now what this teaches us that Abimelech was responsible, but at the same time was "kept" by God from sinning against Him. "I did not let you touch her." That is sovereignty. But God also says, "I know that in the integrity of your heart, YOU have done this" You see the responsibility and sovereignty right next to each other. "you have done this [**responsibility**], and I also kept you from sinning [**sovereignty**]."
- **Pharaoh:** **Ex. 9:34-10:3** - 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses. 1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for **I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants**, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 2 and *that* you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, *that* you may know that I am the Lord."

3 Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.

- Notice – v. 34 Pharaoh and his servants hardened their heart. 10:1 – God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and the heart of his servants. There is God’s **sovereignty**. Why did God do this? So that God could perform His miracles, the Israelites could tell of God’s wonders (Ps. 145:5) and that Israel would know that He is the Lord (the Master, the Sovereign God).
- Then look at 10:3. God says to Pharaoh “How long will you refuse to humble yourself?” There is Pharaoh’s **responsibility**. Verse 1, God’s sovereignty; verse 3, Pharaoh’s responsibility.
- **the people of Jerusalem: Lk. 19:41-44** - 41 When He [Jesus] approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now **they have been hidden from your eyes** [**sovereignty**]. 43 “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, 44 and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation [**responsibility**].”
- **entire kingdoms: 2 Chr. 17:10** - Now the dread [fear] of the Lord was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat.
- The implication here is that if the fear of God had not fallen upon the kingdoms surrounding Judah, they would have gone to war with Judah. So the restraining power of God prevented them from going to war. Had their own desires been allowed to take place, they would have gone to war with Judah. Yet God did not make those kingdoms robots or machines without any freedom or responsibility. So God not only sovereignly restrains individuals, but nations as well when it pleases Him to do so. You can see this same principle in **Gen. 35:5**, “As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.”
- **the inspiration of Scripture: 2 Pet. 1:20-21** - 20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
- key words – “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human **will**” but “**men spoke**”
- **2 Sam. 23:2** - The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.
- Now why is it necessary for God to operate in this way? Because God wanted His Word perfectly recorded. He wanted an inerrant, infallible, perfect revelation given to men. **No mistakes, no errors, no accommodation to human imperfection.** Like Solomon said in **Pr. 30:5**, “Every word of God is tested.” The problem is that man is sinful – even the prophets and apostles are sinful. So if God does not prevent them from error, they will sin and err in their recording of Divine revelation. Therefore, God the Holy Spirit exercises His sovereignty in the

process of inspiration by controlling man as writes Scripture. At the same time, God is using man's **freedom**, his **knowledge**, his **background**, his **intellect**, his **style**, his **vocabulary**, etc. to accomplish His purpose. **He made sin impossible** while they were writing Scripture. And no author of Scripture lost one ounce of his responsibility and freedom.

- **QUOTE**: J. I. Packer: "We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity...as...concurrent; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was **both free and spontaneous on their part** and **divinely elicited and controlled**"¹
- **Jer. 1:9** says, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."
- Was Jeremiah a robot? NO! Did Jeremiah have any freedom while God was putting words in His mouth? YES! Was he controlled by God? YES! The lost man recoils at the truth of being controlled by anybody. The message of the entire world is "You control your own destiny." That's a lie! We don't. And that we don't is one of the great blessings of God! **Beloved – I want to be controlled by God!** I want God to completely control everything about me – my **actions**, my **intentions**, my **thoughts**, my **desires**, my **marriage**, my **ministry** – I want God to control my life forever. And it is His sovereignty that promises He is able to do that!

D. God's sovereignty applied

1. It magnifies God's character and produces worship

- One of the most flagrant sins of our age is **irreverence**. Modern theology has re-created God in the image of man, rather than allowing the revelation of God to magnify His glorious attributes. Man opinions and traditions sits in judgment of God rather than God's Word sitting in judgment of us and correcting our opinions.
- God's sovereignty (and the D.O.G. in general) magnify all of God's righteous character. It magnifies the grace and mercy and wisdom of God in creation and redemption.
- **Rom. 11:33-36** - 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or **who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?** 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.
- It exalts God to the highest place in heaven as **King** over all. It honors Him in our **thoughts** and puts Him on the throne in our **hearts**. It reminds us that we are but "dust and ashes" before a Holy God. And it amazes us that such a God would call us His children and bless us for all eternity.

2. It produces profound humility

- **God's sovereignty is a great battering ram against human pride.** It destroys humanistic autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-esteem. It places man where he should be – at the feet of His Lord, ready and willing to obey His command.

¹ James I. Packer, "*Fundamentalism*" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 82.

- It lets us praise with the Psalmist in **Ps. 115:1** - Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.
- It causes us to agree with the apostle Paul in **1 Cor. 15:10**, “By the grace of God I am what I am!”

3. It provides absolute spiritual security

- **Rom. 8:35-39** - 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, or life, or angels, or principalities, or things present, or things to come, or powers, 39 or height, or depth, or any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **Is 54:10** - “For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness [*hesed* – steadfast love, loyal love] will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,” says the Lord who has compassion on you.
- **Ps. 118:6** - The Lord is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?

4. It gives enormous courage in times of fear

- **Mt. 10:28-30** - 28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
- **APP:** God’s sovereignty means that the **Christian soldier** can go into combat ready to die without fear.
- **Psalm 91**
- **APP:** God’s sovereignty means that the **missionary** can go to ends of the earth and preach the gospel to the most wicked and dangerous people on the planet and have no fear because of the rock solid promise that God will accomplish His purpose and He has the power to do it.
- **APP:** God’s sovereignty means that you can **tithe** when you don’t have money to pay the rent and God will give you shelter and provide all your needs.
- **APP:** God’s sovereignty means that His people can face cancer, plagues, tornadoes and hurricanes with courage instead of terror.
- **APP:** God’s sovereignty means that when we hear the message of secular media that tells us every day that America is self-destructing and going to hell, we can say, “**God’s reigns in America!**”

5. It supplies great comfort in sorrow and suffering

- The world says that because of all the evil and suffering in the world, either God does not exist or He does exist and is good, but not powerful enough to overcome all evil. **QUOTE:** **Rabbi Kushner** wrote that sometimes “it is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims.”²

² Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York, Avon Books, 1983), 42-43; quoted in Bridges, *Is God Really in Control?*, 35.

- **Rom. 8:28** - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
- **APP**: Our suffering is not by chance or some devilish conspiracy, but is designed and ordered by God for our good. God is not only infinite in power, but also infinite in **goodness** and **love** toward His people. God makes us like Jesus as we suffer and that means it a blessed place to be when we are suffering under the sovereign hand of God.
- **APP**: **When you lose a loved one** – a child, a spouse, a parent, a dear friend – suddenly and unexpectedly, the only comfort is that God ordains the death of everyone and so He designs that death for your good. And if the person who died was either a believer or innocent (as with children), He designs it for their good as well!
- **ILL**: When I lived in Blanchard, a young girl who has a junior in high school was driving home one night, crashed on a country road, and died on the way to the hospital. She had been saved six months before her accident. She lived just up the street from us on Blanchard Drive. And I will never forget going to her candlelight vigil outside her home with hundreds of people and then attending her funeral at First Baptist a couple days later, where the church was completely filled and every hallway in the building was packed with people standing to hear the message. And a fellow minister, who did not share a lot of my convictions – he didn't like me much – approached me and whispered in my ear, "**Don't you dare quote Romans 8:28 to me!**" I didn't respond. But I pitied him, because he had no reason that girl should die at 17. He saw no purpose, no reason, and had no hope that God would take tragedy and turn it into glory. He had no grasp of the sovereignty of God. Now I'm not saying I didn't have sorrow over that event. But in my sorrow, I had complete hope, complete comfort and great JOY that God saw fit to save her and then take her life!
- **God's sovereignty secures the promises of His love.** It assures us that what He promises us about the future will indeed happen because He causes it to happen.
- **QUOTE**: Jerry Bridges says there are **three truths that we must believe if we are to trust God in adversity**. First, God is completely sovereign; second, God is infinite in wisdom; third, God is perfect in love. "God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about."³
- **2 Cor. 12:7-10** - 7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

³ Bridges, *Is God Really in Control?*, 19.

- **QUOTE:** Author Margaret Clarkson wrote: “**The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling.** The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God....All evil is subject to Him, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it. God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family.”⁴
6. **It solves the problem of evil**
- Evil is only a problem for people. It is not a problem for God. Furthermore, evil is not just a problem for the Calvinist, who says that God controls everything, including evil. Even an Arminian says that God created everything in the universe. Therefore, if God wanted no evil to exist, He could have created nothing. Or He could have created a world in which it was impossible for evil to exist. But He chose to create this world in which evil does exist everywhere. So the problem of evil is indiscriminate of your particular view of God’s sovereignty.
 - Since God can and does prevent sin in some, could he not prevent sin in everyone? **YES!** Could He not have stopped Adam from sinning in the Garden? **YES!** Could He not have kept Satan from falling? **YES!** Then why didn’t He? Because sin (Adam’s sin, Satan’s sin, your sin and my sin) is part of God’s purpose to bring glory to His Name.
 - **Ps. 76:10** - For the wrath of man shall praise You.
 - To recognize that God ordains all the activities of evil is to recognize that He **governs** evil. He **controls** evil. He **regulates** its boundaries and **directs** it wherever He pleases.
 - **God never sins, nor does He ever tempt anyone to sin. Jam. 1:13** - Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. **God never causes evil**, but He does **ordain** it and **plan** it and **allow** for His creatures to do it.
 - **QUOTE:** A.W. Pink: “although God is not the author of sin, and though sin in contrary to His holy *nature*, yet the existence and operations of it are not contrary to His will, but subservient to it. God never tempts man to sin, but He has by His eternal counsels (which He is now executing) determined *its course*.”⁵
 - **APP:** Sin has always been part of God’s plan to glorify His Name. The knowledge and experience of sin among His people is what makes redemption so sweet and glorious! Had there not been **sin**, we would never know how great is the salvation of God. Had there never been **suffering**, we would never appreciate the blessings of prosperity. Had there never been **sickness**, we would not praise God for our health. Sin and all its consequences remind us of how wicked we are and how holy God is and how amazing His grace is toward us.
 - **Furthermore, God’s sovereignty guarantees the ultimate triumph over evil.** Because He ordained evil and controls it and directs it, He is Lord over it and will someday defeat it totally and completely. Read to end of the book. The

⁴ Margaret Clarkson, *Grace Grows Best in Winter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 40-41; as quoted in Bridges, *Is God Really in Control?*, 31.

⁵ Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 287, emphasis in original.

prophecies of Revelation (and all Scripture) are not merely God **seeing** what will happen in the future, but God **planning** what will happen in the future and **declaring** it to us in prophesy.

7. It assures success in evangelism (and all ministry)

- Without the sovereignty of God, evangelism would be completely futile. As we will see thoroughly next week, lost people are **evil** from youth (Gen. 8:21), **enemies** of God (Rom. 5:12), **slaves** of sin (Rom. 6:6, 14, 16-17, 20; 7:14), **hostile** toward God (Rom. 8:7; Col 1:21), **dead** in sin (Eph. 2:1), and children of **wrath** (Eph. 2:3). **1 Cor. 2:14** says, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” Therefore, **as a human enterprise, evangelism is totally hopeless.** Only if God can and does overcome human wickedness can evangelism ever. And the sovereignty of God guarantees that He will.
- **QUOTE:** “we must never forget that it is God who saves. It is God who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel, and it is God who bring them to faith in Christ. Our evangelistic work is the **instrument** that he uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is **not** in the instrument: it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument. We must not at any stage forget that. For **if we forget that it is God’s prerogative to give results when the gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them.** And if we forget that only God can give faith, we shall start to think that **the making of converts depends, in the last analysis, not on God, but on us,** and that the **decisive factor** is the way in which we evangelize. And this line of thought, consistently followed through, will lead us far astray.”⁶
- Evangelism is the preaching of the true gospel, irrespective of the response to it. The **results** of evangelism depend not on the desires of men, but on the will of God. Our job is to proclaim, explain, teach and invite all people to the gospel. But God alone saves sinners! We call people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and He converts whom He wishes.
- **1 Cor. 15:58** - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.
- **QUOTE:** Jerry Bridges: “Our *duty* is found in the *revealed* will of God in the Scriptures. Our *trust* must be in the *sovereign* will of God, as He works in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives for our good and His glory.”⁷
- **Phil. 2:12-13** - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
- **Php 2:13 [NET]-** 13 for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort – for the sake of his good pleasure – is God.

⁶ Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 34-35.

⁷ Bridges, *Is God Really in Control?*, 77, emphasis in original.

- **1 Cor. 15:10** - But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.
8. It motivates us to pray
- **Neh. 4:9** - But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.
 - **Prayer assumes God's sovereignty.** It assumes that God has the power, ability and desire to fulfill what we ask. Yet **prayer is not divorced from prudence.**
QUOTE: "Prayer is the acknowledgement of God's sovereignty and of our dependence upon Him to act on our behalf. Prudence is the acknowledgement of our responsibility to use all legitimate means."⁸
 - **1 Jn. 5:14-15** - 14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.
 - That verse sings of a sovereign God who can answer and wants to answer prayer!
 - Rather than becoming **fatalistic** (saying 'Well if God determines and control everything, why should we do anything?'), we should be encouraged to pray for what God wants because we know we have it!
 - **Ps. 57:2** - I will cry to God Most High, to God who accomplishes all things for me.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.