

Adoring the God of Glory

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

Recap

Third Aspect 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.”¹

Overarching Scripture (Dan. 4:34-35, Eph. 1:11)²

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

Two Wills of God

- Will of Decree (Secret) – Mt. 10:29-31, Deut. 29:29, James 4:15
- Will of Desire (Revealed) – 1 Thess 4:3-4

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 331

² “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.” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*-Abridged, p. 305)

Two Wills in Scripture

Will of Decree

Will of Desire

The Garden

Joseph

Pharoah

Samson

Sons of Eli

Job

Babylonians

Jesus

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

1. God ordains evil through willing choices.³ (Is. 45:7, Amos 3:6, Lam. 3:37-38)
2. God interacts with evil in different ways for different purposes.⁴

³ “In permitting evil, God does not simply let it happen but determines how far 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.” (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 358, 359)

⁴ Prevents it (Gen. 20:6, 31:7); Helps people escape it (1 Cor. 10:13); Allows humans to follow their lusts/foolish counsel (Ps. 81:11-12, Rom. 1:24-28); Tests people with difficult situations (Deut. 8:1-10, Job, Mt. 4:1); Stops it with judgment (Noah account, Ex. 15); Outsmarts it to demonstrate His wisdom and power (Lk. 4:1-13, 1 Cor. 2:7-8, Col. 2:13-15); Destroys it (1 Cor. 15:24-27)

3. God isn't to be blamed for evil.
(Rom. 9:19-20, Lk. 22:22, Mt. 18:7, James 1:13-14, Deut. 32:4-5, Job 34:10)
4. God uses all things to fulfill His purposes, including evil and suffering.
5. God's definition of good isn't always understandable from a human perspective.⁵
(Prov. 16:4, Ps. 76:10, Rom. 9:14-24, Ps. 5:4-6, Rom. 8:28, Lk. 24:25-27)
6. God is glorified in ultimately resolving the problem of evil and delivering His people from suffering.
7. God is mysterious and incomprehensible.⁶

Q: How do we capture this nuance in describing God's sovereignty over evil?⁷

Alternatives to the problem of evil are far worse:

- 1.
- 2.

Turning the Argument Against into the Argument For (Stefan Gustavsson)

Story of the Angel and the Master⁸

⁵ "...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." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 332)

⁶ "When we do not grasp how God wills to take place what he forbids to be done, let us recall our mental incapacity." (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:233-34)

⁷ "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." (Mark Jones, *God Is*, p. 121)

⁸ Mark Jones, *God Is*, p. 123-124

Practical Considerations with the Problem of Pain

Implications

1. ...
2. 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.
3. God also has the right to do as He pleases. He never needs permission or approval, including ours.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. God directs all things to serve His purpose and will, even evil and suffering as Jesus has supremely demonstrated.

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.