

**THE WILL OF GOD**

**WEEK 4: How do we reconcile evil in the world when God’s in control?**

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

* The goal of this six-week class is to discuss the will of God. We want to take on the subject from as many different angles as possible and discuss what is being taught in the church world today.
* We want you to have a Biblical, theological and personal understanding of how to know and then pursue the will of God in your own life.
* So, for the next six weeks, we want to explore with you all what the Bible says about the will of God and how we can apply that to our decision-making processes.
* Our schedule will look like this:
  + Week 1: What is the will of God?
  + Week 2: What are the wrong methods of interpreting God’s will?

### Week 3: What is the Holy Spirit’s role in interpreting God’s will?

* + **Week 4:** **How do we reconcile evil in the world when God’s in control?**
  + Week 5: What can we do to know God’s revealed will to us?
  + Week 6: What steps can I put into place for proper Biblical decision making?

# INTRODUCTION

* As we discussed in the first week of this class, God possesses a **sovereign will**.
  + As a reminder, God’s sovereign will, or His “will of decree”, means that He has ordained everything that has happened in the past and will happen in the future
  + **Isaiah 46:9-10** – *Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,* ***Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’***
  + **Psalm 115:3** – *But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.*
  + We see from Scripture that God is providentially in control of everything that happens in all of creation
* As we consider this, there are naturally some questions that arise when we consider God’s sovereignty in light of the evil and suffering that happens in the world.
  + If God is sovereign, why does He allow suffering?
  + If God is sovereign, is He ultimately the source of evil?
  + How can God be sovereign and good if He allows suffering?
* The issue arises when we take one or two of God’s attributes and view them in a vacuum. In fact, the question that many unbelievers voice is, if God is real, perfectly good, and omnipotent, how can evil exist? John Frame details the classic “problem of evil” as follows:
  + **Premise 1:** If God were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent evil.
  + **Premise 2:** If God were all-good, he would desire to prevent evil.
  + **Conclusion:** So, if God were both all-powerful and all-good, there would be no evil.
  + **Premise 3:** But there is evil.
  + **Conclusion:** Therefore, there is no all-powerful, all-good God.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Without a biblical understanding of evil, suffering, and God’s sovereignty, this can become a dangerous stumbling block for believers.
* For our time today, I want to walk through what the Bible says regarding the relationship between God’s sovereign will and evil, both moral (sin) and physical (natural disasters, illness, pain, death).

# PASSAGES THAT AFFIRM GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY OVER EVIL

* The first thing that we must establish from Scripture is that God **does** sovereignly ordain evils events.

**Joseph and His Brothers:**

* Joseph’s life is a clear example of God’s sovereignty over evil events.
  + Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him and hated him (Gen 37:4–11), and therefore, they conspired to kill him, threw him into a pit, and eventually sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen 37:20–28).
  + But what does Joseph tell his brothers when they come to Egypt for food and find him there?
    - **Gen 45:5** –*Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here,* ***for God sent me before you to preserve life.***

**Job:**

* In Job, we have a fascinating picture of God’s sovereignty in the suffering of Job
  + Though Job’s losses came through the wicked acts of the Sabeans (Job 1:15), the Chaldeans (1:17), and a great windstorm (Job 1:19), we see that God had permitted Satan to bring harm upon Job.
    - **Job 1:12** – *Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.*
    - **Job 2:6** – *So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”*
  + In fact, Job recognizes that beyond these sources of his suffering, it was ultimately the Lord that had ordained them.
    - **Job 1:21** – *He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and* ***the LORD has taken away****. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

**Assyria/Babylon:**

* Because of Israel’s disobedience in breaking their covenant with God, He sent Assyria and Babylon as instruments of His wrath to punish them.
  + Though we see that it was Assyria that that captured Samaria and carried the Israelites into exile (2 Ki 17:6), they were sent by God
    - **Isaiah 10:5-6** – *Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation,* ***I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury*** *to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.*
  + As with Assyria in Samaria, though Babylon came up against Jerusalem (2 Ki 24:10-11), they were ultimately sent by God
    - **Jeremiah 25:8-9** – *Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ declares the LORD, ‘and* ***I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about****; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.*

**Crucifixion of Christ:**

* We see that the greatest evil in all of history, the crucifixion of Christ, was sovereignly ordained by God.
  + Jesus was betrayed by Judas, condemned by His people, scourged, and crucified by wicked men, yet this all was ultimately ordained by God
    - **Acts 2:22-23** – *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—* ***this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God****, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*
* While we cannot deny God’s sovereignty in evil events, we must ask: who is ultimately responsible for them?

# UNDERSTANDING THE SOURCE OF EVIL

* As we view these examples in Scripture displaying God’s sovereignty over evil events, or even as we think through the evil and trials that *we* have endured in light of God’s sovereign will, we must ask: **is God the source of evil**?
* It is, perhaps, appropriate to answer this with an emphatic NT expression: **MAY IT NEVER BE!**
  + **Psalm 5:4** – *For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;* ***No evil dwells with You****.*
  + **1 John 1:5** – *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you,* ***that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.***
* Though the Scriptures tell us that God sovereignly *ordains* everything that happens, Scripture also shows us that He does not *directly cause* acts of evil.
* This is known as “Divine Concurrence” (***concurrence*** – when two things happen/exist at the same time)
  + This is the aspect of God’s providence wherein He works through created things, to bring about actions and events in ways that are consistent with that creation’s own properties.
  + Using the example above regarding Joseph and his brothers:
    - Joseph tells his brothers that it was God who sent him to Egypt (**Gen 45:5**)
    - How did God do that?
    - God ordained the events in Genesis 37, where Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery!
* God was working concurrently with His creation to bring about a certain event, though these evil actions that happened to Joseph originated from his brothers, and therefore, they are responsible for them.
  + **James 1:13-14** – *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. But each one is tempted when* ***he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.***
* With all of this said, we see that the source of sin and evil is not found in God, rather it is found in fallen creation. This is seen in the account of the fall in Genesis 1-3.
* In Genesis 1-2, we see that God created the heavens and the earth, and all they contain, and in Genesis 1:31, at the end of the sixth day, it states, “*God saw all that He had made, and behold,* ***it was very good****.*”
* On the sixth day, God created mankind. He created man in His image (Gen 1:26).
  + We possess emotion, intellect, and free will
  + Adam and Eve were made with the ability to choose good and evil.
* However, once we reach Genesis 3, Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; She eats the fruit, then gives it to Adam and he eats.
  + It was through this act that sin entered the world, and all of creation was cursed
    - Creation is subject to death – both physical and spiritual (Gen 2:17, 3:19; Rom 5:12, 6:23)
    - This created a separation from God (Gen 3:8-10)
    - This distorted relations between men and women (Gen 3:16b)
    - Women would have increased pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16a)
    - The earth itself is cursed, causing increased labor to cultivate it (Gen 3:17)
* The reason this is crucial for us to understand is we see that sin is not something that God created. This is something that originates from within His creation.
  + **Romans 5:12** – *Therefore, just as* ***through one man sin entered into the world****, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—*
* And it is not only mankind, but also the whole of the demonic realm who have rebelled against God.
  + Satan rules this world’s sinful system (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph 6:12; Rev 13:2, 4–5, 7). He is “the prince of the power of the air,” and rules over the demons (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7, 9).
    - **John 8:44 –** *“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.* ***He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.*** *Whenever he speaks a lie,* ***he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies****.*
* So, we cannot view sin and evil as originating from God, because sin and evil themselves exist as a rebellion against God and are opposed His nature.
  + Sin is neither substance, being, spirit, nor matter. So it is technically not proper to think of sin as something that was created. Sin is simply a lack of moral perfection in a fallen creature. Fallen creatures themselves bear full responsibility for their sin. And all evil in the universe emanates from the sins of fallen creatures.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Though God permits evil and uses it for His purposes (Gen 50:20), He is not the author of evil.
  + Mankind has been made in the image of God and has been given free will, resulting in us choosing to do evil. Therefore, we bear the ultimate responsibility for it.

# WHAT ABOUT NATURAL DISASTERS AND ILLNESS?

* So far, we have discussed evil in the form of sinful actions or motives that stem from fallen creatures (mankind, Satan, demons, etc.)
  + We have seen from Scripture that though God sovereignly *ordains* these evil actions, the *responsibility* for them falls on the creature doing the action.
* However, now we need to ask: What about events that happen within nature that cause terrible destruction and death (tornadoes, hurricanes, floods)? What about sickness and disease (cancer, birth defects, COVID)?
  + How do we reconcile God’s sovereignty and goodness within seemingly wicked circumstances where mankind is not directly involved?
* This is not only something that we must wrestle with as believers, but it is an argument that we will encounter from unbelievers as well.
  + In a 2017 interview, Neil deGrasse Tyson, an American astrophysicist, when asked if he believed in God, stated:
    - "The more I look at the universe, the less convinced I am that there is something benevolent going on. If your concept of a creator is someone who's all powerful and all good — that's not an uncommon pairing of powers that you might ascribe to you creator — I look at disasters that afflict Earth and life on Earth. Volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, disease, pestilence, congenital birth defects, you look at this list of ways that life is made miserable on Earth by natural causes. And I just ask: how do you deal with that? So, philosophers rose up and said, ‘***If there is a God, God is either not all powerful or not all good***."
* How do we respond to this?
  + This is really no different from what we’ve observed with sin and mankind.
* Scripture details God’s sovereignty over all of nature:
  + God created the heavens and the earth, and all they contain (Gen 1)
  + Not only has God created all things, but we know that Christ holds all things together (Col 1:16-17)
  + In fact, we see, instances of God causing natural disasters:
    - He sent the windstorm that collapsed Job’s house (Job 1:19)
    - He has brought droughts (Deut 11:17; James 5:17) and famines (Gen 41)
    - **Psalm 135:6-7** – *Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.*
* However, we understand that God ordains events, working through creation in a way that is consistent with its nature.
  + In Genesis 3, along with the curse on mankind, the earth itself was cursed (Gen 3:17–19)
  + Because of this, these events reflect the consequences of the curse on the natural world.
  + **Romans 8:19-21 –**  *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.* ***For the creation was subjected to futility****, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from* ***its slavery to corruption*** *into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*
* These same things are true of sickness and disease. Because of the fall, mankind is subject to death and decay (2 Cor 4:16). Our cursed bodies are susceptible to disease (Job 18:13), infection (Acts 28:8), disorders (Matt 4:24), and will eventually die and return to dust (Gen 3:19).
* So, in looking to sin, evil, natural disasters, sickness, and death, we see from Scripture that these ultimately, though sovereignly ordained by God, are consequences of living in a fallen world.
* But for the remainder of our time, I want to observe, from Scripture, what God’s purposes are in allowing evil and suffering.

# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE EVIL AND SUFFERING?

* How do evil and suffering fit into God’s sovereign plan? What is the purpose of them?
* As we consider this, one important thing that we must remember about God’s sovereign will is that it is the aspect of God’s will that is secretive. It is only for the Lord to know.
  + **Deut 29:29** – ***The secret things belong to the Lord our God****, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*
* Though we will never know God’s sovereign will completely, we can look to what He has revealed in His word regarding His use of these things.

**Judgment**

* One purpose in God’s use of evil and suffering may be to bring about judgment upon the wicked or disobedient
  + God brought about a world-wide flood in judgment of mankind’s sin (Gen 7:17-24).
  + God sent ten plagues against Egypt as “mighty acts of judgment” (Ex 7:4)
  + The Lord brought up Assyria (2 Ki 17:6) and Babylon (2 Ki 24:10-11) as judgment against His people, Israel, for their disobedience and the breaking of the Mosaic covenant.

**Discipline**

* Discipline is different than judgment. As human fathers are called to disciple their children, our heavenly Father will discipline His children as a means of rebuke and correction when they sin.
  + **Hebrews 12:11** – *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*
* Unlike judgment, discipline is a sign of God’s live for His children!
  + **Proverbs 3:11-12** – *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

**Conforming Believers to Christ**

* Often, God’s purpose in subjecting His people to evil and suffering is to change us through our circumstances, conforming us into the image of His Son.
  + **Romans 8:28-29** – *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.*** *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined* ***to become conformed to the image of His Son****, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*
  + **James 1:2-4** – *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*
* As believers are pursuing Christlikeness, afflictions serve as the furnace by which God purifies His people
  + **1 Peter 4:12-13** – ***Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing****, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

**Fixing Our Hope on the Coming Kingdom**

* Lastly, we see that suffering is used by God to fix believers hope and affections on the coming of Christ.
  + **1 Peter 1:13** – *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*
  + **2 Corinthians 4:17** – *For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.*
* As we endure evil and hardship in this life, we are reminded that this world is not our home. We are simply sojourners longing to be in our heavenly home (Phil 3:20).

# CONCLUSION

* Ultimately, as we observe the sin and evil in the world, believers should rejoice knowing that God is sovereignly in control of all things, and that He doesn’t waste anything. All things are sovereignly ordained by God, who is good (Ps 34:8), omniscient (Rom 11:33), and holy (Ps 99:9).
* We can also rejoice knowing that, in His mercy, God even restrains evil on the earth
  + Conscience (Rom 2:15)
  + Family (Deut 6:7; Prov 1:1-9; Eph 6:4)
  + Civil Government (Rom 13:1-5)
* And we rejoice, knowing that God is just, and will not let evil go unpunished
  + **Psalm 140:12** – *I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.*
  + **Romans 12:19** – *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*
* ***“The sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which the child of God rests his head at night, giving perfect peace.”*** (Charles Spurgeon)

1. John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A189/is-god-responsible-for-evil [↑](#footnote-ref-2)