

The Sovereignty of God

Part 3: God's Purposes

The Display of His Glory and Excellence – The Ultimate End

God created the world for many purposes. Indeed, everything He created fulfills a specific purpose in His grand scheme for the ages. As we have already seen, all things work out in conformity with His sovereign purposes.

Proverbs 16:4: **The LORD has made everything for its own purpose,** Even the wicked for the day of evil.

Question #62: For what most basic reason does every created thing (even the wicked) exist? _____

Now, consider these verses:

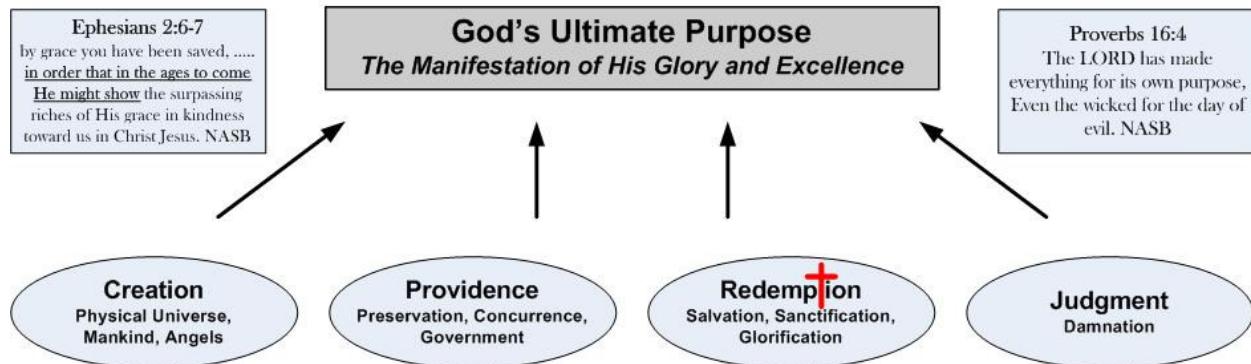
Ephesians 1:11-12: ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** ¹²**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Question #63: According to Ephesians 1:11-12, how did we obtain an inheritance? _____

Question #64: According to Ephesians 1:11-12, for what purpose (end) did we obtain our inheritance? _____

Ephesians 1:11-12 reveals that although the salvation of the saints was predestined according to God's purpose, the salvation of the saints *is not God's highest purpose*. God's predestination of the salvation of the saints was "*to the end that we.....should be to the praise of His glory.*" Note well that the salvation of men and women supports the higher purpose of the *praise of the glory of God!* How then should we answer the question: What is God's *highest* purpose in creating all things? In other words, what ultimate purpose do all of God's other purposes serve? To paraphrase the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: What is the chief end of God? The following chart clearly shows us the answer.

"The chief end of God in the creation of all things is to manifest the Glory and Excellency of His own nature as God, and to express through creation, providence and redemption the manifold perfections of His divine character"



ALL PURPOSES OF GOD SERVE THE HIGHER PURPOSE OF THE DISPLAY OF HIS GLORY!

Question #65: Is the idea presented in the chart a new one for you? _____ If so, what is your initial reaction to it?

(If you are confused or troubled by this idea, please continue studying the lesson with a prayerful willingness to submit your heart and mind to the truth of Scripture.)

Dear reader, God is a Being of such awesome wonder and exquisite beauty that the expression of His being is the highest and most glorious concept conceivable. Furthermore, *reflecting God's character and nature in an intimate personal relationship with Him* is the most fulfilling and exhilarating of all human experiences. Thus, this is the highest purpose for which we were created. As the Westminster Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." This assertion is well-supported in Scripture.

1 Chronicles 16:28-29: ²⁸Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ²⁹Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him; Worship the LORD in holy array.

Isaiah 42:12: Let them give glory to the LORD, And declare His praise in the coastlands.

Isaiah 43:7: Everyone who is called by My name, **And whom I have created for My glory**, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

Psalm 99:9: **Exalt the LORD our God**, And worship at His holy hill; For holy is the LORD our God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Matthew 5:16: **Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

1 Peter 2:12: Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Corinthians 10:31: Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

Question #66: From the above verses, list several *specific ways* in which we are commanded to give God glory.

The Bible consistently subordinates all human purposes to our ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Dear Reader, here is the meaning of our lives! The Lord Himself taught the same thing when He answered a Pharisee's question by identifying the great commandments. He said all the Law and Prophets (in other words, the whole Old Testament) are summed up in these two commandments.

Matthew 22:34-40: ³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, to test Him, ³⁶"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷And He said to him, "**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'** ³⁸**This is the great and foremost commandment.** ³⁹**The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Here Jesus tells us that the chief purpose for our existence is to *love God*, i.e., to worship Him with everything within us. The meaning of worship is **to ascribe worth or value to something**. Consider this definition in relation to God's highest purpose for us. God seeks to manifest or show forth the excellence of His character and commands us to love, praise, and revere Him. Sin, therefore, is an abominable failure to fulfill our chief end because it doesn't reflect love for God and, consequently, doesn't glorify Him. Therefore, it fails to fulfill the high purpose for which He created us. This is also why even one sin violates the whole law of God. When we Christians sin, we fall short of our chief end of glorifying and enjoying God. And He takes action immediately to get us back on track! He faithfully convicts us of our failure and drives us to confess and repent through the work of His Holy Spirit. When we respond in love to His conviction, we return to glorifying God by reflecting His merciful forgiveness to those around us.

James 2:10: For whoever keeps the whole law and **yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**

1 John 1:8-9: ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Question #67: In your own words, describe how repentance and confession of sin glorifies God.

Question #68: Explain why the fact that repentance and confession of sin glorifies God must not be used by a Christian as a license to sin.

God's highest purpose is NOT the salvation of mankind.

Many people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of men and women. They wrongly reason that since we are created in God's image and are therefore the pinnacle of His creative work, God's highest priority must be preventing us from falling into damnation. This idea is foreign to the Bible's teaching, however. Scripture affirms that God ordained the fall of mankind from eternity for His own immutable purpose and by His eternal decree. He purposed from the beginning for mankind to fall, so that He could redeem some to eternal life while others were damned. How can we be so sure these are God's purposes? Because this is in **fact what happens**, which is the definition of God's sovereign will. Everything that unfolds in the course of history must be the outworking of the sovereign decree of God. Not only is this reasonably inferred by a common sense understanding of sovereignty, but the **Bible plainly states** that God is responsible for the fall and that He planned redemption from before the creation of the world.

Romans 9:14-24: ¹⁴What shall we say then? **There is no injustice with God, is there?** **May it never be!** ¹⁵For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” ¹⁸**So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” ²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? ²¹**Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?** ²²What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?** ²³And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon **vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,** ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

I Peter 1:20-21: ²⁰For He was **foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹**who through Him are believers in**

God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Question #69: How do people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of mankind?

Question #70: How do Romans 9:14-21 and 1 Peter 1:20-21 affirm that God purposed from the beginning that some would be redeemed and others would be damned?

Many who claim that it is God's will that all men and women be saved quote the following verses:

1 Timothy 2:3-6: ³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴**who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** ⁵For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

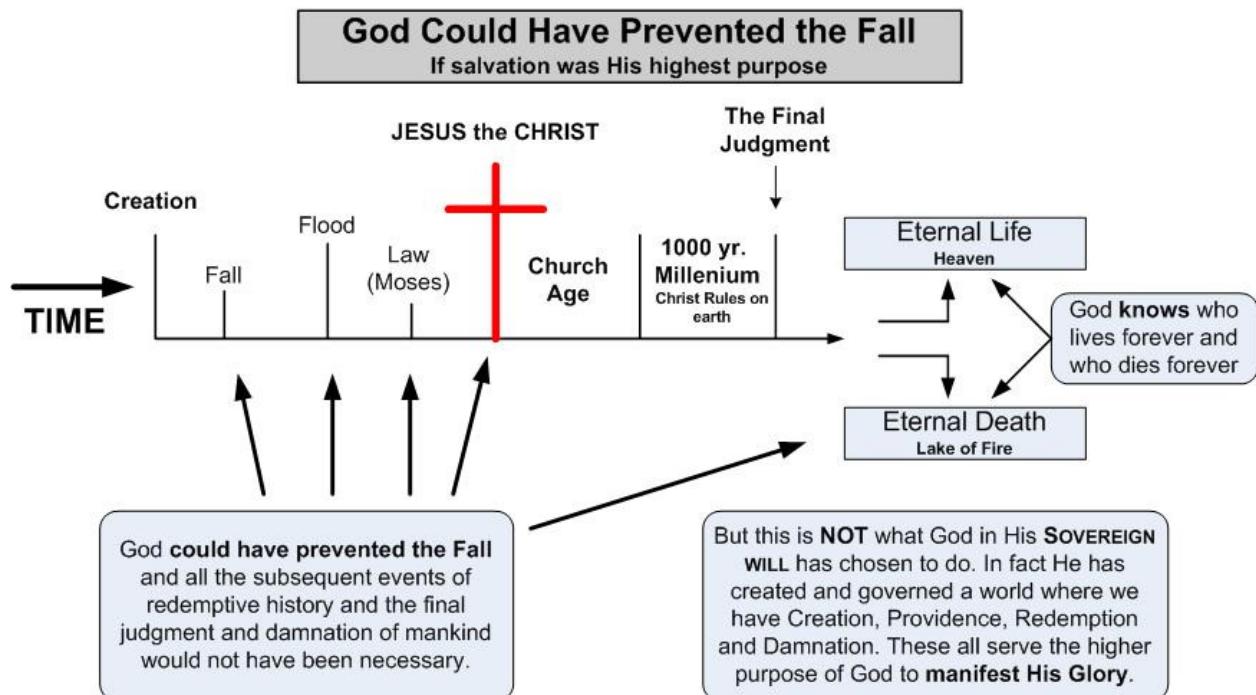
Romans 11:32: For **God has shut up all in disobedience** that He might show mercy to all.

They fail to consider, however, that if God's highest purpose were to save all mankind, then that is exactly what God would do. God would not have shut up all people into disobedience if He desired to save them all; rather He would have simply prevented the fall from happening. He could have done this in many ways, not the least of which would have been to NOT create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil nor to give a law not to eat from it. These verses then, simply reflect the **moral will** of God.

God does not delight in the death of anyone, even hardened sinners (Ezekiel 18:32). However, He will judge and damn hardened sinners because doing so displays the excellence of His goodness, justice, and wrath. So even though in His **moral will** He does not delight in the death of the wicked, in His **sovereign will** He demands it. God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves. Consider the following quote from John Piper:

The misery and the suffering that judgment brings upon the impenitent, in and of itself, does not delight the heart of God. He is not malicious or bloodthirsty. That's what Ezekiel 18:32 is warning us NOT to believe about God. Rather, when He brings judgment on the impenitent and unbelieving and wicked, the delight that He takes in that act is delight in the vindication of His justice and His

truth and righteousness, and the value of His name which has been profaned by unbelievers. God's heart is capable of grieving over the misery and the sin, considered in and of itself, of any unbelieving lost person (Ezekiel 18:32), while at the same time, rejoicing and exulting exuberantly in the vindication of His righteousness and His name as He destroys them in hell (Deuteronomy 28:63). If that does not fit together in your own mind and heart, you are finite and God is infinite. **Do not shape God into your limited image**, let the Holy Scriptures stand, and may God build His true character in your heart and in your eyes.¹



Question #71: How can God **not** delight in the death of the wicked while acting decisively to destroy them in hell?

God's Glory displayed in all things

Consider then, how God displays His glory in all things. Listed below are a few of the divine excellencies that are seen in the works of God.

¹ John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All He Does," Sermon: February 1, 1987. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see: John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, Appendix: "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire For All to be Saved." (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 313-340.

- **The creation of the universe** reflects His power, wisdom, beauty, and perfection.
- **His providence** reflects His power, wisdom, grace, mercy, patience, and omnipresence.
- **The salvation of His people** reflects His love, grace, mercy, goodness, and justice.
- **The damnation of the wicked** reflects His goodness, justice, wrath, and power.

Dear reader, when we consider the almighty power and wisdom of God, we must respond with worship and awe! **The Scripture plainly teaches “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.”** God is indeed the beginning, middle, and end of all that He has purposed to do.

Romans 11:33-36: ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? ³⁵Or 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.

Numerous biblical texts explicitly state that God seeks His own glory. Listing them all would take several pages and examining them all would be exhausting. Here are just a few of them:

Isaiah 48:9-11: ⁹**For the sake of My name** I delay My wrath, And **for My praise** I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off. ¹⁰Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹**For My own sake, for My own sake**, I will act; For how **can My name be profaned?** And **My glory I will not give to another.**

Isaiah 43:7: Everyone who is **called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory**, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

Jeremiah 13:11: “For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,” declares the LORD, “that **they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory**; but they did not listen.”

Psalm 106:7-8: ⁷Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Thy wonders; They did not remember Thine abundant kindnesses, But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. ⁸Nevertheless **He saved them for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.**

Romans 9:17: For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and **that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.**”

John 7:18: He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but **He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him**, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Matthew 5:16: Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, **and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

John 12:27-28: ²⁷“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But **for this purpose I came to this hour.** ²⁸Father, glorify **Thy name.**” There came therefore a voice out of heaven: “**I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.**”

John 17:24: Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, **in order that they may behold My glory,** which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.

1 Peter 4:11: Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; **so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory** and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let us learn then: the **Bible plainly declares** that chief among God’s purposes is the pursuit of His own glory and the fame of His great name!

Question #72: Describe your initial reactions to the Bible’s teaching that the display of God’s glory is His highest priority in everything that He does.

Question #73: What specific changes in your priorities, attitudes, and pursuits are in order as you seek to live each day in the light of this biblical teaching?

The Sovereignty of God

Part 3: God's Purposes

The Plan of Redemption, the Gospel, and Missions

Consider then how God, in His infinite wisdom, has planned the outworking of history to achieve this great end of displaying the glory of His name. As we look at Scripture, we see that even the earliest passages speak of God's plan to "save and redeem."

Genesis 3:15: And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And **between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head,** And you shall bruise him on the heel.

Indeed, the entire Bible declares how God is working out His plan for the ages. **Scripture plainly teaches** that it was always God's plan for mankind to fall, for Jesus to die upon the Cross, and for God to redeem for Himself a company of people whom He has "**destined for Glory.**" Scripture is replete with passages testifying that these events were "**predestined according to His purpose**" and done by the "**predetermined plan and foreknowledge**" of God.

Ephesians 1:10c-12: ^{10c}In Him ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose** who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹²to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Acts 2:22-23: ²²Men 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—²³this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Acts 4:27-28: ²⁷For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

Ephesians 1:3-6: ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵**He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will,** ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 3:11-12: ¹¹This was in accordance with the **eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Titus 1:1-2: ¹Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of **those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, ²**in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,** ³**but at**

the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior;

2 Timothy 1:8-11: ⁸Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹**who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling**, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, ¹⁰but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹for which I was appointed a preacher, and an apostle and a teacher.

Question #74: What specific words and phrases in the above Scriptures reveal that God planned, from the beginning, to “save and redeem” a number of fallen sinners? _____

Question #75: How do these passages speak to the *absoluteness* of God’s sovereignty in your mind? _____

Since these things in God’s Word are necessarily true, we must now consider the means God ordained to carry out His plan for the ages. The **Bible plainly declares** that God uses the proclamation of the Gospel message in this late age to bring about His purpose of glorifying Himself in the redemption of sinners. He has charged His church with the great task of evangelizing the nations (missions). He has done this both for the sake of His great name, and so that the Lamb will receive the reward of His suffering. Since God has created both mankind and angels as morally responsible, He holds them accountable to His standard of morality. Scripture therefore affirms that both mankind and angels will stand in judgment before God and are accountable to God’s sovereign authority.

2 Peter 2:4: For if **God did not spare angels when they sinned**, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, **reserved for judgment**;

Hebrews 2:16: For assuredly **He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.**

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: ¹³The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, **because this applies to every person.** ¹⁴**For God will bring every act to judgment**, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Romans 3:19: Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and **all the world may become accountable to God**;

Romans 14:12: **So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God.**

1 Peter 4:1-5: ¹Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; **"but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."**

Question 76: According to the above verses, what do mankind and angels have in common? _____

Question #77: According to the above verses, how has fallen mankind been blessed astoundingly more than have fallen angels? _____

Question #78: Ponder this astounding blessing; then write a short prayer of gratitude to God for it. _____

God expects His creatures, whom He has made for His own purposes, to live according to God's standard of moral character which requires perfection, purity, and holiness. Because all of mankind has fallen short of the glory of God (His perfect standard of moral character), they stand in great need of redemption – a need God provided for long ages ago in His **plan of redemption**. In our late age, God's plan of redemption is coming to pass through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As God's people proclaim the work of Jesus, who was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind and God's required redemption price, the purpose of God in redemption is being accomplished as He calls out His chosen people from every tribe and nation.

Romans 3:23: for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

Romans 16:25-27: ²⁵Now to Him who is able to establish you **according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,** ²⁶but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, **according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;** ²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Question #79: Why do all people everywhere need to be redeemed? _____

Through this gospel (the message of the person and work of Christ), the judgment of God for the sins of mankind has been cancelled for all who believe. By faith in Christ they enter into a state of redemption. Their debt of sin has been paid as God's wrath and judgment were satisfied at the cross. Christ Jesus Himself, in His perfect life and atoning death, fulfilled the law of God (God's perfect standard of moral character) and paid the just penalty for the wages of sin. This we call **justification by faith**.

Romans 3:21-28: ²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** ²⁷Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but **by a law of faith.** ²⁸For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

Question #80: According to Romans 3:21-28, what did Christ do that makes it possible for God to freely forgive fallen sinners?

Because of this great work, God has exalted Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God and the man, to be the sovereign king and judge of the living and the dead. Therefore all nations and all people, in every age and generation, will bow the knee before the sovereign authority of Christ when judgment comes at the consummation of God's plan for the ages.

Ephesians 1:18-23: ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹**far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.** ²²**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, ²³which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

2 Timothy 4:1-2: ¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and **of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead**, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Philippians 2:9-11: ⁹Therefore also **God highly exalted Him**, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,**

of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Question #81: According to the above scriptures, do any nations or people exercise *sovereign* ruling authority on this earth? _____ Explain your answer. _____

This message of the Gospel is the *means* by which God brings to pass His eternal purpose in Christ to redeem. This is why missions is a key element of God's glory in the church. Scripture commands us to carry the Gospel to the far corners of the earth.

Mark 16:15: And He said to them, “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**”

Ephesians 3:8-12: ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, **to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,** ⁹and **to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God,** who created all things; ¹⁰in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Matthew 24:14: And **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.**

Romans 10:14-15: ¹⁴How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how shall they hear without a preacher?** ¹⁵And **how shall they preach unless they are sent?** Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!”

So then God fully intends to save all those whom He has purposed to save. This He will accomplish by His great missionary people, the Gentile Church. The accomplishment of His purpose is *certain!* Scripture affirms that our sovereign God will save *all* of the people He has intended to save. Every last one *will* be saved.

John 6:37-39: ³⁷**All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹And **this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing**, but raise it up on the last day.

Revelation 5:9-10: ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and **didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** ¹⁰And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

Question #82: Describe the significance of the missionary activity of Christ's Church. _____

Christ did all that was needed to **secure** the salvation of His church.

John 19:30: When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is finished!**” And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.

In all of this great plan to redeem, God’s people magnify the *glory* of His grace in salvation. All of God’s redemptive acts throughout history work to the *end (the ultimate purpose)* of the praise of the glory of God’s excellency and nature as our Savior.

2 Corinthians 4:15: For all things are for your sakes, that **the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.**

Ephesians 1:3-14: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,** who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ **to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He *freely* bestowed on us in the Beloved.⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,⁸ which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him¹⁰ **with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ**, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose** who works all things after the counsel of His will,¹² **to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ **should be to the praise of His glory.**¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, **to the praise of His glory.**

Even the very *state of being* to which God’s people are destined is said to be “glory”!

Ephesians 1:18: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are **the riches of the glory of His inheritance** in the saints,

Romans 9:23-24: ²³And He did so in order that He might **make known the riches of His glory** upon vessels of mercy, which **He prepared beforehand for glory**,²⁴ even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Question #83: For what ultimate purpose did God purpose and act to save fallen sinners? _____

Question #84: Look back through this section (pages 10 to 16) and select one or more passages to memorize that will help you remember God's ultimate purpose for saving you.

The Sovereignty of God

Part 3: God's Purposes

God's Decrees and Foreordination

The Certainty of God's Purposes Being Fulfilled

Since God is clearly all-powerful and all-knowing, governs His creation by a mighty providence, and inevitably brings His plans and purposes to pass, we see that God's purposes are **immutable (unchanging and certain)**. The **Bible plainly declares** that God's purposes will be established in history because His counsel (plans and purposes) are certain.

Psalm 33:11: The **counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart** from generation to generation.

Proverbs 19:21: Many are the plans in a man's heart, But **the counsel of the LORD, it will stand.**

Hebrews 6:17-18: ¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise **the unchangeableness of His purpose**, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸in order that by **two unchangeable things**, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.

Question #85: List words and phrases from the above passages that affirm the immutability of God's plans and purposes._____

Question #86: If even one of God's plans and purposes failed to come about, what would we have to conclude about the Bible?_____

This discussion of God's decrees is clearly related to His sovereign authority. Since God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, He necessarily decreed everything that happens. He has **declared** or **proclaimed**, according to His counsel and will, everything that comes to pass. This **decree of God** cannot be thwarted or hindered, because His **invisible hand** providentially carries it out in history. The **Bible plainly declares** that **God will bring to pass what He wills in His sovereign decree.**

Isaiah 46:9-11: ⁹Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰**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**"; ¹¹Calling a bird of prey

from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

Consider the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* on the Decrees of God:

Question 7: What are the Decrees of God? **Answer:** The Decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Ephesians 1:9-11: ⁹He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**

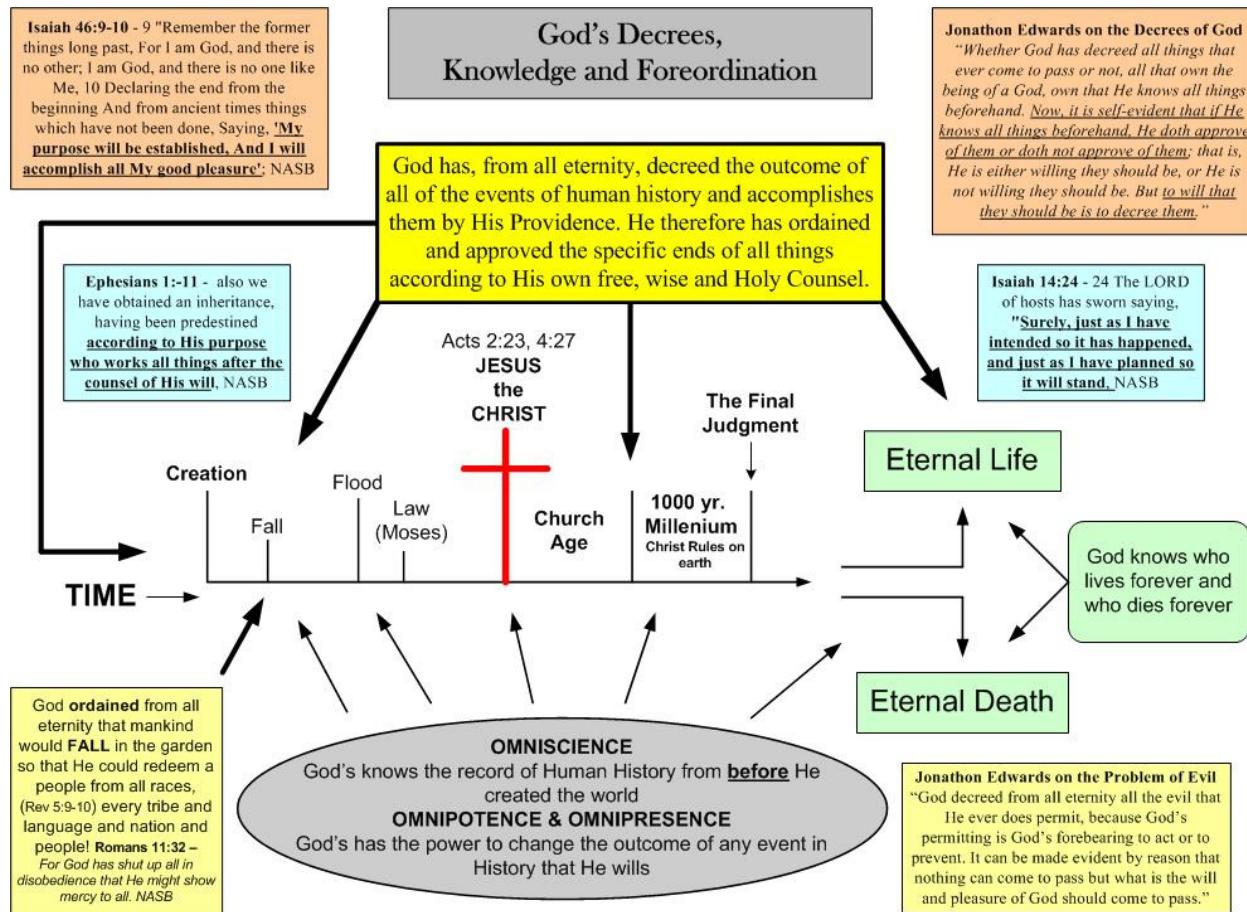
Whatever comes to pass has been *eternally decreed by God*. This means that God has *approved* (in the sense of permitting or preventing them) all of the events of history. This we call *foreordination*. God has *fore* (from before time began), *ordained* all that ever has happened or will happen in history. Jonathan Edwards described *foreordination* like this: “*Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He doth approve of them or doth not approve of them; that is, He is either willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. But to will that they should be is to decree them.*”

Numbers 23:19: God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; **Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?**

Jonathan Edwards also addressed God’s decrees in relation to the problem of evil: “*God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God’s permitting is God’s forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.*” (Job 12:13-22; Proverbs 8:14-16; Isaiah 40; Acts 2:23, 4:28) Learn then that history is the product of God’s eternally wise planning, creative purpose, providential preservation, and common grace. God fills space and time with His presence, sustains it, and gives it purpose and value. The omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent One is Lord of time and history, not vice versa. His purposes are providentially accomplished in time and space.

Isaiah 14:24-27: ²⁴The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, **“Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,”** ²⁵to break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. ²⁶**This is the plan devised against the whole earth;** and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. ²⁷**For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?”**

Question #87: On what basis (bases) did God foreordain whatever comes to pass? _____



The Nature of God's Decrees and Foreordination

As we consider the decrees of God (His eternal purposes and plans), let us understand that they reflect His very nature. Reflecting on God's attributes helps us define and understand His purposes. In relation to His decrees then we must recall that God's nature is:

- **Holy:** God is absolutely perfect and pure.
- **Omnipotent:** God is all-powerful and free to do all His holy will.
- **Omniscient:** God is all-knowing, having perfect knowledge of past, present and future events.
- **Omnipresent:** God exists in all space and in all of past, present, and future eternity.
- **Eternal:** God has always been, is now, and always will be.
- **Self-Existent:** God had no beginning, will have no end, and is the source of all beings, things, knowledge, and power.
- **Sovereign:** God is the supreme authority; His decrees are irresistible.

- **Wise:** God's plans all work together in harmony to accomplish His purposes.
- **Just and Righteous:** God cannot do anything evil, unjust, or wrong.

Therefore in light of God's nature, let us now consider the nature of His decrees.

God's Decrees are:

- **Glorious:** The chief end or final cause contemplated in all God's decrees is His own glory. Because God is infinite and perfect, the revelation of His glory and excellency is the highest of all existing purposes. All other purposes of creation, therefore, are properly and necessarily subordinate to that end.

*Romans 11:36: For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever.* Amen.

Question #88: What is the chief end of all God's decrees? _____ Why is it right and proper that this be the chief end of all God's decrees? _____

- **Many and one:** God's decrees are all reducible to one eternal purpose. All of the manifold events of history form one great purpose or plan. Because God's knowledge perfectly encompasses past, present, and future, He approved of His plan, from beginning to end, at the time He made it. Charles Hodge explains, "*It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that He ever purposes what He did not originally intend: or that one part of His plan is independent with other parts. It is one scheme and therefore one purpose.*"²

Isaiah 41:4: Who has performed and accomplished it, **Calling forth the generations from the beginning?** **I, the LORD,** am the first, and with the last, I am He.

Isaiah 46:9-10: ⁹Remember the former things long past, For I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like me, ¹⁰**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."**

Isaiah 48:3: **I declared the former things long ago** And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. **Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.**

Question #89: Explain in your own words how God's decrees reduce to form one great purpose or plan. _____

²Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 537.

- **Free:** God's decrees are free and sovereign, determined by the counsel of His own will. Charles Hodge again explains, "*God adopted the plan of the universe on the ground of His own good pleasure, for His own glory, and every subordinate part of it in reference to the whole. His decrees are free, therefore, in a far higher sense than that in which the ordinary purposes of men are free.*"³

Psalm 135:5-6: ⁵For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.** ⁶**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

Isaiah 46:10: ¹⁰**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.**"

Isaiah 40:13-14: ¹³Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? ¹⁴**With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?**

Question #90: On what basis are God's decrees *free*? _____

- **Reflected in all things:** God's decrees comprehend all events. Whatever God does and permits is according to His plan. Divine foreknowledge necessitates this. Since God knows the end from the beginning, nothing can happen that He did not know from eternity past. Therefore nothing happens that God did not intend. Since God is providentially controlling nature and history, His purposes and plans are perfectly and exclusively fulfilled.

Psalm 139:16: Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And **in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.**

Matthew 10:29-30: ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet **not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** ³⁰But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Isaiah 22:10-11: ¹⁰Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem, And you tore down houses to fortify the wall. ¹¹And you made a reservoir between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, **Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago.**

Question #91: Explain in your own words how divine foreknowledge necessitates that God's decrees comprehend all the events of human history. _____

³Hodge, 540.

- **Immutable:** God's decrees are perfect and therefore cannot change. This is to say that whatever God has determined will come to pass, because He has also determined the means by which they come to pass.

Jeremiah 4:28: For this the earth shall mourn, And the heavens above be dark,
Because I have spoken, **I have purposed, And I will not change My mind, nor
will I turn from it.**

Psalm 33:11: The **counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart**
from generation to generation.

Question #92: What specific comfort do you derive from the fact that God's decrees are perfect and therefore cannot change? _____

- **Inclusive of the ends and the means:** God's decrees ordain all of the means by which His purposes are established. Since God's purpose is being carried out in an infinitely complex world of causes and effects, His purposes include all of the causes and effects necessary to accomplish them. Clearly, His eternal plan includes all of the means by which His ends are attained. *The Westminster Confession of Faith (On Providence: articles 1, 2, 3)* explains:

1. God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.
2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.
3. God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

Consider how even the free choices of people ultimately accomplish the eternal purposes of God. Scripture clearly affirms that the decisions we make every day are part of God's means of fulfilling His decree.

Acts 4:27-28: ²⁷For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

Ephesians 3:8-12: ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ¹⁰in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** ¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

Question #93: After considering the infinite number of complex causes and effects involved in the carrying out God's purposes in this world, write a short prayer of praise extolling God's amazing providence.

- **Efficacious:** God's decrees will surely come to pass. Consider how predictive prophecy has affirmed this time and again.

Daniel 11:36: Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, **for that which is decreed will be done.**

Lamentations 3:37-38: ³⁷Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it?** ³⁸**Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?**

Isaiah 25:1: O LORD, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; **For Thou hast worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.**

Consider how the decrees of God not only declare the certainty of all of His promises but also His threatenings. When God threatens the wicked with destruction, He is not playing games. He will make good on His threats if His warnings are not heeded.

Psalm 145:20: The LORD keeps all who love Him; But **all the wicked, He will destroy.**

Genesis 6:13: Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and **behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.**"

Matthew 10:28: And 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.**

Likewise, when God promises to bless His own people, He will surely do it. The promises of God are as sure as the sun is bright! God's faithfulness in blessing His people, and their delight in glorifying Him are in accord with God's eternal purposes which He has purposed in Christ Jesus.

Romans 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.

2 Corinthians 1:20: For **as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes;** wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

1 Peter 1:3-7: ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴**to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,** ⁵**who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷**that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Question #94: Describe the confidence and security you have in your faith because God's decrees are efficacious.

The Sovereignty of God

Part 3: God's Purposes

Divine Sovereignty and Prayer

Many object to the idea of foreordination, arguing that if all things are decreed or ordained from the beginning there is **no reason to pray**, since God's decree cannot be changed. This objection cannot stand, however, because it misunderstands the fundamental purpose of prayer. When God commands us to pray, He is not giving us veto power over His decree. Rather, prayer is a divinely-ordained means of communicating with Him and bringing His sovereign will to pass. In this section, we will study God's purpose for prayer as it relates to His sovereignty by considering the following points:

- Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty.
- Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence.
- Prayer changes the way we see things in time and space.

Prayer is fundamentally an acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty: Prayer's primary purpose is to honor and glorify God. Prayer fundamentally recognizes God's sovereignty, acknowledges His power, and submits to His will. Prayer, as it is defined and illustrated in the Bible: (1) seeks to align human thought and will to God's divine purposes; and (2) appeals to His power and ability to meet legitimate needs and desires. Consider, for example, the pattern of prayer given by Jesus to His disciples:

Matthew 6:8-13: ⁸Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. ⁹Pray, then, in this way: (1) **"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.** ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done,** On earth as it is in heaven. (2) ¹¹**Give us this day our daily bread.** ¹²**And forgive us our debts,** as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. **For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.** Amen."

Question #95: List words and phrases in Jesus' pattern of prayer that reflect desire to align human thought and will to God's divine purposes: _____

Question #96: List words and phrases in Jesus' pattern of prayer that reflect appeals to God's power and ability to meet legitimate needs and desires: _____

When we pray according to Jesus' instructions, we do not tell God how to run His world. Rather, we humbly acknowledge His Sovereignty, and appeal to His Fatherly willingness to care for us. **When we pray for our needs to be met**, it is not for the purpose of informing God of our

needs, because Scripture says He already knows them (Matthew 6:8). All we need to do is acknowledge God's ability to meet those needs. God does instruct us to bring our needs and requests to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6) **for our benefit**. When we identify our needs and seek His specific provision for them, we entrust ourselves to His perfect care and are blessed with peace beyond all comprehension (v. 7) Furthermore, **when we pray for someone to be saved**, we acknowledge God's sovereign authority to save by granting repentance and regeneration (spiritual life) to a sinner who is dead in transgressions and sins. If we do not believe this but rather believe that God has already done everything needed for people to be saved and is simply waiting for them to respond, praying for God to save people is pointless.

Question #97: How does praying for God to meet our needs affirm His sovereignty? _____

Prayer is a humble expression of our dependence on God: In prayer we humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our complete dependence upon Him. We do not dictate to God what His Divine will ought to be. Rather, we seek to align our thinking with His all-wise and powerful, loving and good will. Shall we instruct God about what is lacking in His wise plan? Shall a worm crawling through the earth tell the Almighty God how to govern His world? Silliness!

Romans 11:34-36: ³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord, **or who has become His counselor?** ³⁵**Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?** ³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen

Prayer is rather a confession of our weakness, even our inability to help ourselves. In prayer we appeal to the Almighty for His gracious enablement. We acknowledge that there is nothing in us to merit God's favor, but only sin and rebellion that offends His holiness and merits our utter destruction. **Humble prayer expresses submission to His Holy will and utter dependence on His gracious provision** of our needs. The Scripture plainly declares that He supplies our need.

Acts 17:24-25: ²⁴The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, **since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;**

Philippians 4:19: **And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus**

Consider the prayers of tax gatherer and the Pharisee in Luke 18. Which was heard?

Luke 18:9-14: ⁹And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all

that I get.' ¹³**But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'** ¹⁴**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;** for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

James 4:10: **Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord,** and He will exalt you.

Scripture plainly declares that God hears and answers the prayers of those who bow before the sovereign authority of God seeking His loving and gracious provision.

Question #98: In your own words, explain how each of the following passages present prayer as a humble expression of our dependence upon God.

Romans 11:34-36: _____

Acts 17:24-25: _____

Philippians 4:19: _____

Luke 8:9-14: _____

James 4:10: _____

Prayer changes the way we see things in time and space: The Scripture plainly declares that God responds to prayer and acts either to grant or deny our requests.

James 4:2b: You do not have **because you do not ask.**

John 14:13-14: ¹³**And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do,** that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴**If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**

Psalm 91:15: **He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;** I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him, and honor him.

Jeremiah 29:12: **Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.**

Jeremiah 33:3: **Call to Me, and I will answer you,** and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9: ⁸Concerning this **I entreated the Lord three times** that it might depart from 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, that the power of Christ my dwell in me.

1 John 5:14-15: ¹⁴And **this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** ¹⁵And **if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**

Question #99: According to the above Scripture passages, in what ways does God respond to our prayers?

Scripture also reveals that God makes conditional promises based on the prayerful obedience of His people to His commands and or warnings.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14: ¹³**If** I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or **if** I command the locust to devour the land, or **if** I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴and My people who are called by My name **humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then** I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

This kind of interaction between God and mankind occurs often in Scripture and has generated many questions about how all things can be foreordained. Since both are expressly taught in Scripture, there must be a way to reconcile them. The best solution is to understand that prayer and free moral choices are a means by which God brings to pass His sovereign will. God has ordained that our prayers and choices in time and space actually bring to pass elements of His plan for the ages. Divine sovereignty and free moral agency work harmoniously on the pages of Scripture. One clear example is the story of Jonah. Consider how God providentially directed the sea and the weather in the context of Jonah's disobedience. The other men in the ship realized this, prayed to God for deliverance, and are saved by throwing Jonah into the sea. Jonah was, by God's design, swallowed by a fish and prayed to God for deliverance. God responded to Jonah's prayer by causing the fish to spit him up onto dry land.

Jonah 1:4, 14-2:1, 10: ⁴And **the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea** and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. . . . ¹⁴Then they called on the LORD and said, “**We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish** on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; **for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased.**” ¹⁵So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, **and the sea stopped its raging.** ¹⁶Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. ¹⁷And **the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah**, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

^{2:1}Then **Jonah prayed to the LORD** his God from the stomach of the fish, . . . ¹⁰Then **the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up** onto the dry land.

Scripture reveals to us what Jonah himself knew – that God was accomplishing His eternal plan through the willing choices of people who were morally accountable for their actions. In ways unexplained to us, most likely because they are incomprehensible to us, God *caused* them to make *willing choices* that accomplished God's purposes. The following passages also illustrate this truth. See also **Genesis 25:21-34; 2 Chronicles 33:10-13; Acts 2:22-23, 4:27-28**

Genesis 25:21-34: ²¹And Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; **And the older shall serve the younger.**" ²⁴When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. ²⁶**And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel,** so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them. ²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. ²⁸Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game; but Rebecca loved Jacob. ²⁹And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; ³⁰and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished." Therefore his name was called Edom. ³¹**But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."** ³²And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" ³³And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; **so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.** ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

2 Chronicles 33:10-13: The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. **Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them**, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains and took him to Babylon. When he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. **When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom.** Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

Acts 2:22-23: ²²Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus of Nazareth, 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—²³this Man, **delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.**

Acts 4:27-28: ²⁷For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, **whom Thou didst anoint**, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸**to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

Question #100: How do these examples from Jonah, Genesis, and Acts help you understand how God can make conditional promises even though He has foreordained everything that comes to pass? _____

Scripture plainly declares that God's sovereign purposes are accomplished as He interacts with the prayers and legitimate choices of moral agents. Divine sovereignty and human moral agency exist side by side on the pages of Scripture. Oh the wonderful mystery of God's providential outworking of His eternal purposes through the choices of millions of people everyday! How evident it is that we should live our lives in humble acknowledgement of God's sovereign lordship by continually seeking understanding of His will as we lay our requests before Him. How our prayers should reflect our humble dependence on His gracious love and our deep gratitude for His desire to be our God and meet our needs. May our whole lives glorify Him in thankfulness for His goodness and mercy!

Deuteronomy 4:39: Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**

Question #101: Write a prayer thanking our sovereign God for the great privilege of prayer. _____
