

# The Sovereignty of God

## Part 3: God's Purposes

### Preface

In order to lay some groundwork for the upcoming lessons on God's Purpose and Decrees, we need to understand a few things about God's Decree, His Providence, and His Nature.

- God has many *attributes that make up His character and nature*. These attributes of God are impossible to be fully comprehended by human beings, but can be to some degree understood.
- God's *attributes all function in perfect harmony* with all His other attributes. You cannot separate one attribute of God from His person. God never does anything that denies His own character, but what God does is an expression of who He is. It is impossible for to violate His own nature.
- God made the creation, (angels, the physical universe, mankind), in order to fulfill a grand design or purpose. We call this *eternal purpose His "Decree."* The creation is like stage upon which God is working His plan for the ages.
- God's creation exists in time, and thus the outworking of all things in time or history, are *managed by God's Providence* to achieve His purpose.
- God uses different aspects of the creation as *means* to achieve certain purposes within His grand design, but they all work together for the one great goal and objective of God's eternal plan. These means of God can be categorized as; *Creation, Providence, Redemption, and Damnation.*
- *History is therefore the outworking of the eternal purpose(s) of God*, His Decree, which is carried out by Him through the means of Creation, Providence, Redemption, and Damnation.

In order to get a basic understanding necessary for understanding God's Decree, we must grasp a few basic things about God's Sovereignty, Power and Knowledge. Although God is Sovereign, All-Powerful and All-Knowing, these attributes never function independently of totality of His character. God always uses His Sovereignty, Power and Knowledge in accordance with His Holiness, Wisdom, Righteousness (Justice), and Goodness and Love.

#### Sovereignty

God is Sovereign. But what does this mean? The word "*sovereignty*" means "*SUPREME AUTHORITY*" and in earthly realms speaks of one who holds the *highest* place of authority such as a Monarch, or President or Ruler of a province or territory. But consider that when this term is applied to God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, that the meaning takes on a much fuller sense. God is in heaven and having made the world by His own power out of nothing, and is even now sustaining everything by His powerful Word, God is **THE SOVEREIGN KING** above all earthly and heavenly powers and authorities. As the Scripture says.....

**Psalm 103:19** - 19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all.** NASB

God possesses **absolute dominion** and authority over all things. So He is said to sit on a “throne” in heaven! Just think how ridiculous it would be to say that God created the universe, but He is not in control of what takes place in it. *Well the truth is God not only controls nature and history, but He literally sustains the entire universe by his power, and orders the events of his entire creation to accomplish His own purposes and plans.* Friends, we must understand that what is happening in the world is happening at the express purpose and will of God, who rules the world and all who are in it. *He is "the Lord of Heaven and Earth"*(Acts 17:24) and whatsoever happens in the world, happens because God has permitted, indeed He has decreed it to happen (**THE DECREES OF GOD**). Although there is much evil in the world, which God hates, He is allowing these things to achieve His eternal purposes which will, without a doubt, come to pass. God not only permits the events of human history, but has ordained them from eternity past (**FOREORDINATION**), and is furthermore *actively involved* in seeing that they all come to pass (**PROVIDENCE**), fulfilling all of His plans and purposes.

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

That the divine purpose could meet with frustration is *unthinkable*, for then it could not be the divine purpose! Failure of God’s purpose is failure of His sovereignty. God cannot be God and NOT be Sovereign, for then He would NOT be God. Scripture is very clear about this!

**Ephesians 1:11 - 11** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, NASB

Even Satan was created by God to achieve the very purpose for which God made him.

**Isaiah 10:15 - 15** **Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?** That would be like a club wielding those who lift it, Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood. NASB

**Isaiah 54:16 - 16** "Behold, I Myself have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, And brings out a weapon for its work; **And I have created the destroyer to ruin**. NASB

Consider all the aspects of God’s Sovereignty in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13.

**1 Chronicles 29:11-13 - 11** **Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all.** 12 Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. NASB

## **Power – Omnipotence**

Consider how God’s power is related to His Sovereignty. If God be All-Powerful, than He has the ability to do as He pleases and is therefore by default the **SUPREME AUTHORITY**.

**Job 23:13 - 13** "But He is unique and who can turn Him? And **what His soul desires, that He does**. NASB

**Isaiah 43:13 - 13** "Even from eternity I am He; And **there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?**" NASB

**Psalms 115:3 - 3** But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases**. NASB

Let us see then how the Scripture speaks of God’s mighty power, indeed it describes Him as Omnipotent or All-Powerful. The **Scripture plainly declares** that *God can do anything and nothing is too hard for Him*.

**Jeremiah 32:17 - 17** "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, **Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee**, NASB

**Matthew 19:26 - 26** And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, **but with God all things are possible.**" NASB

**Job 42:2** - 2 "I know that **Thou canst do all things**, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. NASB  
In fact, God had the creative power to make the universe from nothing, and He sustains the same universe by His power. He made the world for His own pleasure and by His own will.

**Revelation 4:11** - 11 "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for **Thou didst create all things**, and **because of Thy will they existed, and were created.**" NAS  
His creation is just a *small example* of his mighty power. In the creation of the universe, God's resources were not depleted in any way, they are infinitely vast! Since God therefore created all things, He also transcends them, and ***His power and dominion are infinitely greater than everything He created!*** God is actively sustaining everything in creation, He exercises His power in every moment of time, being sure to bring to pass "all His good pleasure." He made all things with a very purposeful will, and He possesses the **power to execute** His divine will and bring His intentions to an expected end. He began alone, and created all things out of nothing, and by this great truth is known as "The Almighty."

**Isaiah 40:26** - 26 Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; **Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power Not one of them is missing.** 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? **The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth** Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. NASB

**John 1:1-3** - :1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 **All things came into being by Him**, and **apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being** NAS

**Colossians 1:16-17** - 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- **all things have been created by Him and for Him.** 17 And He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together.** NAS

Because of this truth it also follows that any power that is in the creation is granted by God. If God made everything out of nothing, than nothing has power unless it has been delegated by God. In fact the **Scripture plainly declares** that God's power is far above all earthly powers.

**Ephesians 1:19-21** - 19 and 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 20 which 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. NASB

Consider, if someone were more powerful than God, than they would have authority over Him, but this is in fact impossible. Therefore, because God is Omnipotent, He is also **SOVEREIGN**.

## Knowledge

God knows everything. Because God is the source of all things, making everything from nothing, He is therefore the source of all knowledge and wisdom. Let us examine a definition of Omniscience to try and understand how complete God's Knowledge is...AW Tozer writes....

*"God knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn."*

We could add to this that God knows all of the data of every possible cause and effect, feeling and desire, creature, event, and every other thing that can be named. His knowledge is complete and eternal. The **Scripture plainly declares** that God knows everything....

**1 John 3:20** - 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for **God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.** NASB

**Isaiah 40:28** - 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. **His understanding is inscrutable.** NASB

**Psalm 147:5** - 5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; **His understanding is infinite.** NASB  
Rarely would someone argue that God does not know the past, but what about the future. Does God know the future? The **Scripture plainly declares** that God knows the record of the future, in fact the future is the outworking of God's decrees made from before He created the world. ***He knew in eternity past the entire record of history for all eternity.*** Predictive prophecy proves this again and again. God speaks about future events before they come to pass. Consider how many prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled!

**Isaiah 46:9-10** - 9 "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, 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'; NAS

**Isaiah 44:7-8** - Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come-- yes, let him foretell what will come. 8 Do not tremble, do not be afraid. **Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?** You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one." NASB

In Psalm 139 the Scripture speaks of God knowing our thoughts and words ***"before there is a word on our tongue."***

**Psalms 139:2-4** - 2 Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; **Thou dost understand my thought from afar.** 3 Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, And art intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 **Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all.** NAS

There is nothing that escapes His notice, and nothing can be hidden from Him. He is aware of the events of the past, present, and future as if they were all laid out before Him. As His being is perfect, so is His knowledge. Being perfect in knowledge, He is therefore all-knowing and never confused, misled or surprised.

**Hebrews 4:13** - 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but **all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him** with whom we have to do. NASB

Nothing escapes the attention of God. He see all things even the inner thoughts of man. Jesus said that "all of the hairs of our head where numbered," (Luke 12:7) and that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His attention (Matt 10:29). Our very thoughts and intentions of our hearts are ***"open and laid bare before the Lord."*** He knows our thoughts (Eze 11:5) before we even express them. Indeed there is no place where we can hide from God, He sees every hidden thing in full view, and ***He even understands the intentions of our hearts better than we do. He is God!***

**1 Kings 8:39**- 39 then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest, **for Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men.** NASB

**1 Chronicles 28:9** - 9 "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; **for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.** If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever. NA

**Proverbs 5:21** - 21 For the **ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD,** And He watches all his paths. NASB

AW Pink writes of God's knowledge of our sins;

*"Neither the darkness of night, the closest curtains, nor the deepest dungeon can hide any sinner from the eyes of Omniscience. The trees of the garden were not able to conceal our first parents. No human eye beheld Cain murder his brother, but his maker witnessed his crime! Sarah might laugh derisively in the seclusion of her tent, yet was it heard by Jehovah. Achan stole a wedge of gold and carefully hid it in the earth, but God brought it to light. David was at much pains to cover up his wickedness, but ere long the all-seeing God sent one of His servants to say to him, "You are the man!" And to writer and reader is also said, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23)*

Proverbs 15:3 - The **eyes of the LORD are in every place**, Watching the evil and the good. NAS  
Job 34:21-22 - 21 "For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, And He sees all his steps. 22 "**There is no darkness or deep shadow Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.** NASB  
Psalms 90:8 - 8 Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, **Our secret sins in the light of Thy presence.** NASB

S Lewis Johnson summarizes God's knowledge like this.....

- **Intuitive** - God knows everything by default, His knowledge exists within Himself
- **Simultaneous** – God knows everything in one simple act, instantaneously, not gradually
- **Independent** – God knows everything apart from any learning, He cannot learn, because He knows all things from eternity, His knowledge comes from Himself
- **Distinct** – God knows everything clearly, without ambiguity, specifically not generally, absolute
- **Infallible** – God's knowledge is unfailing, certain, accurate in every detail
- **Immutable** – God's knowledge never changes because He learned a new fact, it is not subject to anything outside of Himself
- **Complete** – God's knowledge is infinite, the scope or extent of it is exhaustive, He knows all things actual and possible, all events, all creatures of the past, present and future

Consider how God's knowledge is related to His Sovereignty. If God be All-Knowing, than nothing can escape His attention or somehow surprise Him. He is intimately aware of everything at all times, knowing it all from before He ever created the world. God knows everything FREELY because He has willed them to be and has providentially brought them about.

**Ephesians 1:11** - 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.** NASB

### **Distinctions in God's Will - Is everything that happens God's will?**

As we have seen, God's will is seen as the final authority and the ultimate reason for everything that happens. God's "**permitting**" or "**preventing**" in Providence is the determining factor. But is everything that happens God's will? This can be a very puzzling question unless you make a distinction which is clearly seen in Scripture. The distinction is between God's Sovereign will and God's Moral will. Many times in Scripture we see that God's desire for our moral conduct is violated by the free choices of mankind, yet God does not prevent but rather permits this to occur. So then it is not His "**moral will**" that evil should take place, but in His "**Sovereign will**" He has permitted it to happen. We find out God's "**moral will**" by simply reading His "**precepts**" and "**commanded will**" about what we should do or how we should behave. We find out God's "**Sovereign will**" when events actually happen and the "**secret**" counsel of God is "**revealed**", the things He has planned and "**decreed**" from all eternity. So when we ask questions like, "Is it God's will for me to do this or that," we simply look to God's revelation in Scripture about what He desires for us to do. But when events actually occur, we see what the secret counsel of God's Sovereign will, what he has ordained and approved (what He has permitted or prevented to occur) as it is revealed in time and space. Therefore it is important when discussing these matters to make a clear distinction in the "**will of God**" for the sake of properly understanding one another when we make statements about God's will. See the table below on the "**Two Wills of God.**"

# The Two Wills of God

Deuteronomy 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. NASB

SOVEREIGN WILL	MORAL WILL
<b>Also called.....</b> <b>SECRET WILL</b> <b>WILL OF DECREE</b>	<b>Also called.....</b> <b>REVEALED WILL</b> <b>COMMANDED WILL</b> <b>WILL OF PRECEPT</b>
<i>God's <b>Sovereign will</b> includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs everything that happens. We find out God's <b>Sovereign will</b> when events actually happen.</i>	<i>God's <b>moral will</b> expresses God's general desire concerning things and usually contains God's commands about our moral conduct.</i>
Ephesians 1:11 James 4:15 Genesis 50:20 Matthew 11:25-26 1 Corinthians 4:19 Acts 2:23, 4:28,21:14 Romans 1:10, 9:18, 15:32 1 Peter 3:17, 4:19	Exodus 20:1-17 Ephesians 5:17 Romans 2:18 1 John 5:14 Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 18:14 1 Timothy 2:4 2 Peter 3:9 Ezekiel 33:11

Examples of distinctions in God's will are clearly seen in Scripture or in the world around us. Many times it is NOT God's will(His moral will, His general desire) for evil to take place, but his **permitting and NOT preventing** obviously makes it His Sovereign will(His will of Decree or Secret will), that which He determined should happen from all Eternity. Consider the following.....

- **Genesis 50:20 – Joseph and his brothers**  
**Genesis 50:20** - 20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good in order** to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. NASB
- **Acts 2:23 – The murder of Jesus**  
**Acts 2:23** - 23 this 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. NASB
- **Genocide in War**
- **911- The Twin Towers**

In light of this knowledge, consider afresh the statement we looked at by Jonathan Edwards...  
*"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."*

Know then that the **Scripture plainly declares** a distinction in the will of God between His Sovereign(Secret or Decreed) and Moral(Commanded or Revealed) will.