



God's Sovereignty

Part 3 – God's Sovereignty over Sin & Suffering

Sunday 30 November 2025

Definition

“God’s providence is his constant care for and his absolute rule over all his creation for his own glory and the good of his people.”

Jerry Bridges, Trusting God even when life hurts, 23.

Overview

Sunday 9 November – God's Sovereignty is Supreme

Sunday 16 November – God's Sovereignty over Salvation

Sunday 30 November – God's Sovereignty over Sin and Suffering

Recap Part 1: God's Sovereignty is Supreme

God doesn't rule over a little

God doesn't rule over a lot

GOD RULES OVER THE LOT!

Recap Part 2: God's Sovereignty over Salvation

Blind, deaf, dumb, enslaved,
on our own we can't be saved!

Although we are all lost in sin,
God's gospel call does break in!

Introduction

What do you make of this quote? “I suppose we have to admit that this is one of those occasions when the Almighty has made a mistake.” (From a clergyman following the Aberfan disaster in 1966 which killed 114.)

Today we are going to see how God’s Sovereignty includes his rule over **SIN** and **SUFFERING**. And we are going to see that God rules even over both these things.

Sometimes people try and suggest that God has no dealings with matters that affect people’s choices nor with things that are tinged with sadness. However, if God’s Sovereignty didn’t include any human choices or anything tinged with sadness, he would have a very small kingdom indeed!

1. God is Sovereign over Sin

We saw back in the first week, that God rules over human decisions.

(a) God rules over Human Decisions

The heart is the very centre of human life (see Luke 6:43-45). But the heart is under God’s control.

*In the Lord’s hand the king’s heart is a stream of water that he channels towards all who please him. **Proverbs 21:1**
(cf. Psalm 33:15; Proverbs 16:1, 9; 19:21)*

And God doesn’t simply rule over **GOOD** decisions. He rules over **BAD** decisions too.

- **Decision for good:** Babylonian official overseeing Daniel (Daniel 1:9).
- **Decision for ill:** Joseph’s brothers (Genesis 45:5).

(b) God rules over Sin

People freely choose to do evil (Jeremiah 17:9), but for that they are no less under God's control. In the Bible we find that sin doesn't lie outside of God's control.

Three very important things to remember:

1. In the Bible we never find God directly doing anything evil – instead he brings about evil through willing actions of moral creatures.
2. Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God taking pleasure in evil.
3. Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do, they remain responsible.

Bible ref. (page no.)	In what ways does God ordain evil?
Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 (60)	God hardens Pharaoh's heart so he doesn't do what the LORD commands him to do. (Pharaoh also hardens his own heart (see 8:15, 32; 9:34), but not until <i>after</i> the LORD has hardened his heart first.)
Deuteronomy 2:30 (180)	The LORD made King Sihon's heart stubborn so he refused to let God's people pass through his land.
1 Samuel 16:14 (287)	The LORD sent an evil spirit on Saul to torment him.
1 Kings 22:20-23 (365)	The LORD sends a deceiving spirit to mislead the prophets and King Ahab.
Isaiah 6:9-10 (692)	The LORD made the hearts of God's people hard and unresponsive to him through the ministry of Isaiah the prophet.
Isaiah 10:5-11 (695)	The LORD sends Assyria to punish God's people and to plunder and trample upon God's people.
Judges 14:4 (257)	The LORD prompted Samson to demand a Philistine wife – something expressly forbidden for God's people and especially for Samson who was raised as a Nazarite.

Bible ref. (page no.)	In what ways does God ordain evil?
2 Samuel 17:14 (322)	The LORD caused Absalom to reject the wise counsel of Ahithophel. (See also 1 Kings 12:15 where Rehoboam does the same because of God's sovereign ordaining.)
Matthew 13:14-15 (979)	The parables are God's means of both enlighten the disciples and yet also harden the wicked.
John 13:18 (1081)	Judas' betrayal was in fulfilment of God's word in the Scriptures.
1 Corinthians 2:15-16; 1 Peter 2:6-8	The ministry of the apostles who bring God's word both brings light and salvation, but in some cases it brings hardening.

(c) Case study: Joseph

Joseph's brothers did much evil against him:

*“When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they **hated** him and could not speak a kind word to him.⁵ Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they **hated** him all the more. ...And they **hated** him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. ...‘Here comes that dreamer!’ they said to each other.²⁰ ‘Come now, **let’s kill him** and **throw him** into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’ ...So when Joseph came to his brothers, they **stripped him** of his robe – the ornate robe he was wearing –²⁴ and they **took him and threw him** into the cistern. ...So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers **pulled Joseph up** out of the cistern and **sold** him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.”*

Genesis 37:4-5, 8, 19b-20, 23b-24, 28

Joseph attributes these actions *both* to God *and* his brothers.

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ *For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping.* ⁷ *But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.* ⁸ *So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.* He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

Genesis 45:5-8

You intended to harm me, but **God intended** it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50:20

(d) Case study: Jesus

The heinous action of crucifying the Son of God upon the cross was simultaneously ordained by God and carried out by sinful people.

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 2:23

Indeed **Herod and Pontius Pilate** met together with **the Gentiles and the people of Israel** in this city **to conspire against** your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what **your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**

Acts 4:27-28

This plan was ordained by God and recorded in the Scriptures...

The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in ***condemning*** him ***they fulfilled the words of the prophets*** that are read every Sabbath. ***Acts 13:27***

***'The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed.
But woe to that man who betrays him!' Luke 22:22***

In both Joseph's and Jesus' situations there is a **PRIMARY** and a **SECONDARY** cause to what happens.

PRIMARY: _____

SECONDARY: _____

(e) God's sovereignty and human responsibility

And yet, the people who had crucified the Lord Jesus (not to mention Joseph's brothers) didn't think they were innocent. Far from it!

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Acts 2:37

(see also Shimei cursing David 2 Samuel 16:5-11; 19:18-20)

"When God's providence brings about hate or cursing towards his people, it does not make the sinning person into a robot with no moral accountability." John Piper, Providence, 459.

In what ways are we free? Before someone becomes a Christian...

1. Are they free to do right and wrong, or **TO MAKE MORAL CHOICES?**

2. Are they free to do **WHAT THEY WANT TO DO?**

3. Are they free to do literally **ANYTHING?**

If God rules over sin and evil, it is good news because...

- Sin and evil are in the control of the God who has proved he is good.
- Sin and evil are limited.
- Sin and evil can and will be ended.

2. God is Sovereign over suffering

(a) Suffering in the Bible



Creation¹: God created everything perfect from the very beginning. There was **no** sin and, therefore, **no** suffering.



Fall: Because of Adam and Eve sin entered our world as they disobeyed God's word and rebelled against God himself. The consequence is that the very good creation is under the curse and suffering is a reality.



Redemption: the Lord Jesus has secured redemption from our sins, meaning we can be forgiven and folded back into God's family. And yet many of the consequences of sin remain, including suffering.



New Creation: At the end of time the Lord Jesus will return, he will judge the world and remake the heavens and the earth where there will be no more sin or suffering.

Our world is one where suffering is a reality. Ultimately because creation is under God's curse. But the curse is time-limited.

*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice,
but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope*

*²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay
and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

Romans 8:20-21

General Suffering for all people because we live in a fallen world.

Specific Suffering for God's people because we follow a persecuted Saviour
(John 15:20; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12)

¹ Images from HMCC.TV's Gospel Paradigm.

(b) Case study: Job

Read Job 1:6-2:10 (page 509)

Why does Job suffer?

How does God show he's in control?

(c) Case study: Paul

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10 (page 1166)

Why does Paul suffer?

How does God show he's in control?

(d) God works through our suffering

God is able to work all things for good, that's a precious promise.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

Bible ref. (page no.)	What kind of things are included in “all things”?
Romans 8:18	
Romans 8:22-23	
Romans 8:35	

God ordains hard things, including suffering, so he can bring good about through them. And what's the good he brings? To make you and I more like the Lord Jesus (see Romans 8:29).

Bible ref. (page no.)	Why does God ordain suffering?
Psalm 119:67 (619)	
Psalm 119:71 (619)	
James 1:2ff (1213)	
Romans 5:3f (1132)	
Luke 13:1-5 (1046)	
John 9:1-3 (1075)	
1 Peter 1:6-7 (1217)	
1 Peter 2:21 (1218)	
Psalm 34:19 (561)	
Hebrews 2:10 (1202)	
Isaiah 43:2 (729)	
2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (1159)	
2 Corinthians 4:16ff (1161)	
Philippians 3:10-11 (1180)	

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Romans 8:28

*He is not at work in some things, most things or almost all things. His control extends to everything. This includes prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, joys and sorrows, blessings and trials. God never has to wring his hands in frustration because somehow something got under his radar. He is never outmanoeuvred or taken by surprise. And this God works all things for our good. He is incapable of doing anything that is not good. **Paul Mallard, Heaven, 154.***

[After explaining that we are unable to thank God for expressions of suffering in and of themselves, he goes onto say...] What I can thank God for what is good is God's purpose in the trials. The trial may be vile, but the purpose is magnificent. Through our trials God is making us like Jesus and getting us ready for heaven.

Paul Mallard, Heaven, 155.

In the Bible God gives us three resources as we face suffering:

1. **PURPOSE** – God will use our suffering for his glory and our good.
2. **A SONG BOOK FOR THE HEARTBREAK** – God has given us songs to sing in the mist of suffering called **laments**. These help us express our pain and through prayer in our suffering to deepen our faith.
3. **HOPE FOR THE FUTURE** – suffering reminds us that this world is not our home, but God is getting us ready for home **now** and will take us home **in the future**.

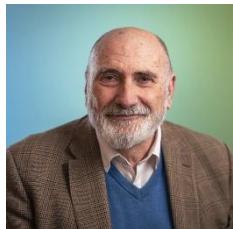
Note: Mystery remains and not all our questions are answered!

(e) Testimonies from God's people



*Setting aside for a moment the consideration that the Bible actually teaches this that is, the comprehensive sovereignty of God-consider the question: **Would we really want it any other way?***

Paul D. Wolfe, My God is True, 26.



But one thing I have never doubted is that, in the darkest circumstances, we were only ever in the hands of God. That has been the ultimate source of comfort and hope.

Paul Mallard, Invest your suffering, 34.

And you'll find many more testimonies from God's people here at Beccles Baptist Church.

Recommended Reading

Invest your suffering by Paul Mallard

Trusting God even when life hurts by Jerry Bridges

My God is True! by Paul D. Wolfe

