



PROVIDENCE

Euston Church Weekend Away

March 2024

Name:

Euston
CHURCH

Session 1 | Providence and Sovereignty

What is Providence?

The Belgic Confession (1561)

Article 13. The Doctrine of God's Providence

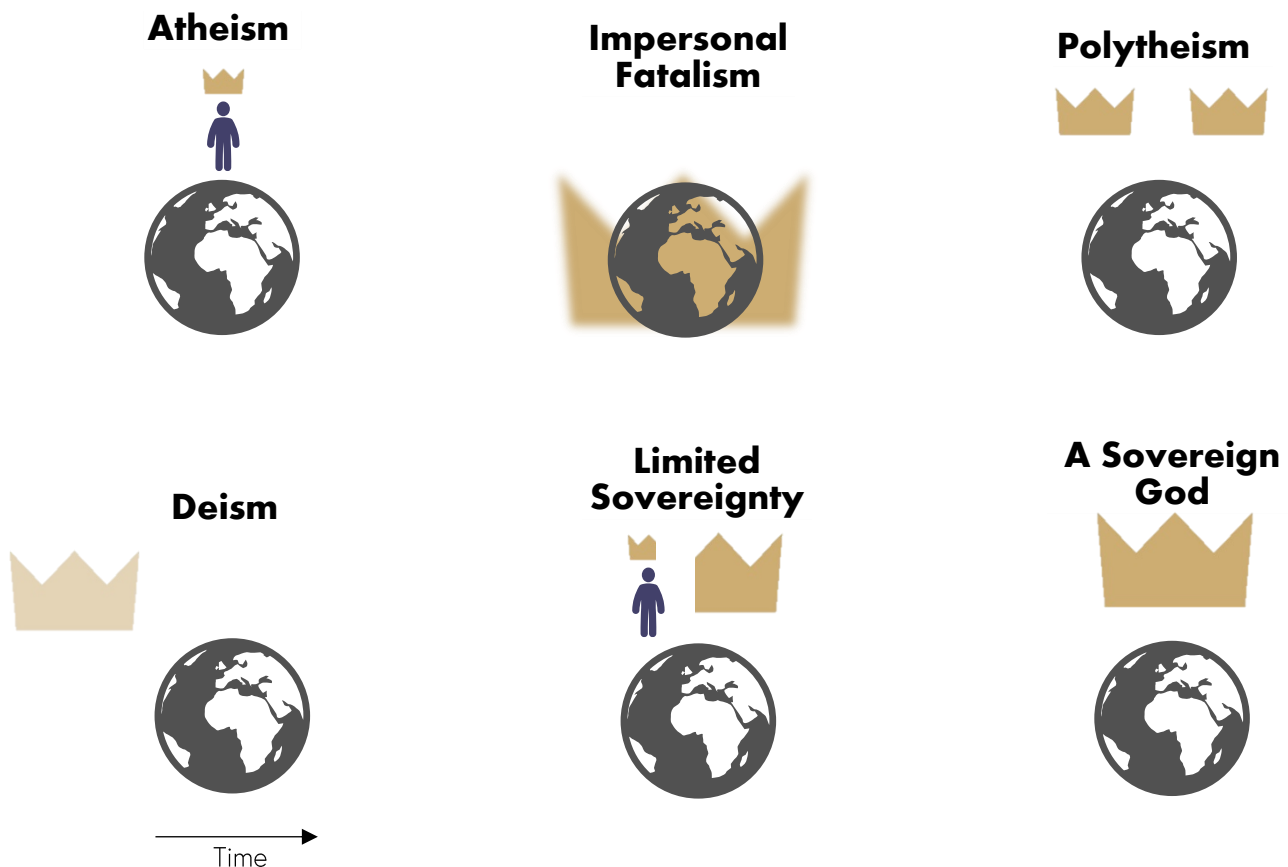
We believe that this good God, after creating all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without God's orderly arrangement.

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Question 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

Answer. The almighty, everywhere-present power of God, whereby, as it were by his hand, He still upholds heaven and earth with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.

What kind of world do we live in?



Creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...

Genesis 1:1

----> We are finite!

Sin

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:21

----> We are fallen!

...Therefore beware philosophical assumptions.

What is the extent of God's Sovereignty?

Authority

- God made everything, so he owns everything

Ex. 19:5; Deut. 10:14; Job 41:11; 1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 24:1-2; 50:12; 89:11; Is. 29:16; 45:9-11; 64:8; Jer. 18:1-10; Rev. 4:11

Control

1. Natural Processes

Job 37:1-13; Psalm 104:10-14, 24-31; 137:5-7; 139:13; 147:8-9, 16-17

...including:

2. _____

1 Sam. 2:6-7; Psalm 139:16; Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:31; Dan. 4:34-35; James 4:13-16

3. _____

Ezra 6:22; Ps. 33:13-15; Prov. 16:1; 21:1; Dan. 1:9; John 19:24

...Including _____

Gen. 45:4-8; Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28; 13:27

4. _____

Ps. 105:16; Is. 45:7; Lam. 3:37-38; Amos 3:6

5. _____

Prov. 16:33

...across the entire universe!

Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes—that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens—that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence—the fall of . . . leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

Charles Spurgeon

Implications

Worship

Rev. 4:11; Ps. 92:1-6

Reassurance: God's in charge!

- He accomplishes all his purpose

Deut. 18:21-22; Josh 21:44-45; Job 42:1-2; Ps 33:10-11; Prov. 21:30; Is 14:24-27; 46:9-10; 55:11; Jer. 23:20; Dan 4:35

- Nothing that happens to you is outside his control

Matt 6:26; 10:28-31

Session 2 | Providence and Purpose

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

3x "...to the praise of his glory"

You can't miss God's purpose, but just in case...

See Is. 43:7; 60:21; 61:3; 1 Cor 10:31; Phil 1:11; 1 Peter 4:11

Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

Chapter 5. Of Providence

5.1. 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.

Is God selfish...?!

What does it mean for God to seek his own glory?

What *is* the 'glory' of God?

- Weightiness
Heb. "kavod" (כָּבוֹד) = heavy/full
- Communication

"The beauty of the full panorama of his perfections." (John Piper)

How should God assess his glory?

Among created beings one single person is inconsiderable in comparison of the generality; and so his interest is of little importance compared with the interest of the whole system. Therefore in them, a disposition to prefer self, as if it were more than all, is exceeding vicious.

But if God be indeed so great, and so excellent, that all other beings are as nothing to him, and all other excellency be as nothing, and less than nothing and vanity, in comparison of his; and God be omniscient and infallible, and perfectly knows that he is infinitely the most valuable being; then it is fit that his heart should be agreeable to this.

Jonathan Edwards, *The End for which God created the world*

Why does God seek his glory?

- An important principle: Aseity

Psalm 50:8-12; Isaiah 66:1-2; Acts 17:24-25; Rom. 11:34-36

WCF

2.2 God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.

- So why did God create the world?

1. For you, out of love!

Psalm 136; Mark 2:27-28

2. To be the theatre of his glory

Psalm 19:1-14; Rom. 1:20

IMPORTANT: The world is the theatre of God's glory, not its factory.

BUT...1 & 2 are actually the same purpose!!!

In created beings, a regard to self-interest may properly be set in opposition to the public welfare...But this cannot be with respect to the Supreme Being, the author and head of the whole system; on whom all absolutely depend; who is the fountain of being and good to the whole. It is more absurd to suppose that his interest should be opposite to the interest of the universal system, than that the welfare of the head, heart, and vitals of the natural body, should be opposite to the welfare of the body.

God in seeking his glory, seeks the good of his creatures; because the emanation of his glory (which he seeks and delights in, as he delights in himself and his own eternal glory) implies the communicated excellency and happiness of his creatures...God is their good... in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused and expressed...he seeks their glory and happiness.

Edwards, *The End for which God created the world*

-----> God's self-focus and our best interests are not opposed.

Since he is the most glorious being there is, to point us to something or someone else instead would be the most selfish thing he could do...If God did not draw attention to himself as the supreme being, then we would not experience the greatest joy there is in life. So, as it turns out, God's commanding that he receive all glory is the most caring, loving thing he could ever do for us, because only then will we find ourselves truly satisfied in life.

Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*, p.243

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q.1 *What is the chief end of man?*

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Or perhaps more accurately: "Man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying him forever."

What if God's continual acting for his own glory proved to be less like an insecure, self-enhancing, needy bully and more like the star professional basketball player who drives his Porsche into the neighborhood because he genuinely loves inner-city kids and wants to give them the unimaginable pleasure of playing with their hero?

What if God's calling attention to his glory turned out to be less like a quack doctor who hangs out a sign that he's the best and more like a real doctor hanging out a sign because he is, in fact, the best, and he alone can do the procedure that will save the community from the spreading disease?

What if God's making known his superiority is less like an anxious college art teacher touting the greatness of his classes to shore up his reputation by attracting more students and more like the best artist in the world going to the poorest college and announcing that he is going to give an absolutely free course so that he can show the lowliest student the secrets of his superior skill?

What if God's public promotion of his power is less like a narcissistic, fame-hungry, military general who seeks victory by sacrificing thousands of soldiers from his safe position behind the lines and more like the truly greatest general who wins both victory and fame by willingly dying at the front line for the troops he loves?

In other words, what if, in the end, we discovered that the beauty of God turns out to be the kind that comes to climax in being shared? And what if the attitude we thought was mere self-promotion was instead the pursuit of sharing the greatest pleasure possible for all who would have it?

John Piper, *Providence*, p.41

Back to Ephesians 1...

Note the emphasis on *GRACE*.

Conclusion: *That God seeks his glory means that he seeks our greatest pleasure in the enjoyment of all that he is.*

Implications

- We can't know God's goal in every act...but we can know his big purpose

Every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian, every particle of air or every ray of the sun; so that he in the other world, when he comes to see it, shall sit and enjoy all this vast inheritance with surprising, amazing joy.

Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*

- Satan does not want you to believe this!!!

Gen. 3:1-5

-----> Believing Satan's lie that God does not want our best is the root of every sin.

- You were made to enjoy God

Group Discussion 1

What did you find most helpful from this morning? What questions did it leave you with?

Read Job 38-39

How should what God says in Job affect our attitude to God as we explore what the Bible says about this topic?

To what extent do you live each day conscious of God's active involvement in every tiny detail of what happens to you? What are you most prone to take for granted?

What could we do/How could we help one another to live more consciously of (and thankful for) this?

Which of the two aspects of providence we've seen this morning (sovereignty or good purpose) do you find harder to believe?

Why is it important to believe both?

"You were made to enjoy God's glory." If we believe that the goal of everything and the highest state of joy is to be found in enjoying God, how will that shape our pursuit of joy?

Session 3 | Providence and the Christian Life (1)

Decisions

- How liberating to know that you can't mess up God's plans!
- God hasn't told us the details of his plan for our lives
- But he has told us how he wants us to live
- So relax...and get on with it!

Is it a moral issue?

Is there Biblical wisdom on what to do?

Prayer

- Note: It doesn't make sense for us to pray unless God is sovereign!
- Prayer is God's ordained means of bringing blessing
Matt. 7:7-11
- Relationship with God is what we were made for!
Matt. 6:9 - "Our Father..."
- So pray to your Father...in line with his will!
e.g. 2 Sam 7 - David prays what God has promised!

Session 4 | Providence and Salvation

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

The doctrine of justification by faith was important to [the Reformers] because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this principle; and that not its deepest aspect. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration...Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort.

J. I. Packer, "Historical and Theological Introduction," in *Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, p.58–59.

A difficult doctrine

Remember: we are finite and fallen. God is always good.

The Depths of Sin: "You were dead..."

How the Bible describes us in our natural condition:

- _____ (2 Cor. 4:3-4)
- _____ (1 Cor. 2:14)
- _____ (John 12:37-41)
- _____ (John 3:19-21)
- _____ (Rom. 6:17; Titus 3:3)
- _____ (Rom. 8:7-8)

- Dead

Eph. 2:1-3

Left to ourselves and our own nature, our spiritual DNA is disobedience, and our destiny is God's wrath.

Piper, *Providence*, p.518

The Power of Grace: "But God...made us alive"

How the Bible describes our regeneration:

- Restored sight

See Mark 8:14-30 (cf. Is. 32:1-4; 35:5.; 42:6-7)

- New creation

God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'.

2 Cor 4:4-6 (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)

- New birth

John 1:12-13; 3:1-8

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

John 6:63

- Made alive

Eph 2:4-5

Implication: God has chosen those who are saved

- Predestined (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:29-30)

- _____ (Acts 13:48)

- _____ (1 Thess. 1:4-5)

- _____ (2 Tim. 2:10, 1 Peter 1:1)

- _____ (Rev. 13:7-8)

Election in John's Gospel

John 6 – see Appendix A

*"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."
John 8:47*

*"...but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock."
John 10:26*

*"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."
John 17:6*

What about free will??! How can God hold us responsible?

The Bible says both that God is totally sovereign AND we are responsible:

- Look at John 6 again...
- See also John 12:44-48 - a passionate appeal!
- Isaiah 10:5-6, 12

Although theologians take great interest in the "problem" of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, it is not one of the main concerns of the Biblical writers, although they are aware of it. Just as it is plain to them that God controls everything, so it is plain to them that he is the supreme authority. Therefore, to the Biblical writers, we are answerable to God for our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. Everything we think and do - indeed, everything we are - brings God's commendation or condemnation. Even action life eating and drinking, which we might consider to be ethically neutral must be done to God's glory (1 Cor 10:31). Whatever we do should be done thankfully, in Jesus' name (Col 3:17), with all our heart (v23). Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom 14:23). Practically every page of Scripture displays God's sovereign evaluation of human attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds...On the whole, the Biblical writers see no problem in affirming both total divine sovereignty and complete human responsibility.

John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p.120-1

We cannot distort the Bible's teaching in order to make it more palatable to people today. Even if there were no more to be said...we could not accept a non-Biblical view as the price of answering those objections. It would be better to leave the question unanswered. For the time being, at least, these questions would define a realm of mystery. But there would be nothing wrong with that. Our God is so great, and his thoughts are so far above our thoughts; how could there not be unresolved mysteries in our understanding of him?

Frame, *Doctrine of God*, p.146

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Deut. 29:29

A false assumption about responsibility: LIBERTARIANISM

Libertarianism: We are only freely responsible for an action if we could have done otherwise.



God does not monopolize the power.... God willingly surrenders power and makes possible a partnership with the creature.... The all-powerful God delegates power to the creature, making himself vulnerable.... God allows the world to be affected by the power of the creature and takes risks accompanying any genuine relatedness.

Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, p.115

Some reasons why it isn't Biblical:

1. No indication that God has limited His sovereignty
2. Our choices are governed by God
3. Inconsistent with God's knowledge of future events

'Libertarianism is inconsistent, not only with God's foreordination of all things, but also with his knowledge of future events. If God knew in 1930 that I would wear a green shirt on July 21, 1998, then I am not free to avoid wearing such a shirt on that date. Now libertarians make the point that God can know future events without causing them. But if God in 1930 knew the events of 1998, on what basis did he know them? The Calvinist answer is that he knows them because he knew his own plan for the future. But how, on an Arminian basis, could God have known my free act sixty-eight years in advance? Are my decisions governed by a deterministic chain of finite causes and effects? Is there some force or person other than God that renders future events certain - a being whom God passively observes? (That is a scary possibility, hardly consistent with monotheism.) None of these answers, nor any other that I can think of is consistent with libertarianism.'

Frame, p.143

Hence Open Theists deny foreknowledge. But...

Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study*

4017 predictive prophecies (inc. 1893 of what God will do through human beings)

2323 relate in one way or another to free human decisions

God could not make specific promises if he had no control over human decisions.

E.g. Isaiah 44:28 - Cyrus' decree!

4. In the New Creation we won't be free to sin!

The Bible's criterion for responsibility: COMPATIBILISM

Compatibilism: We are freely responsible for an action if it was what we wanted to do.

"Freedom of spontaneity" – we're free to do what we want to do, according to our (real) will.

The Bible says our actions flow from our hearts:

'The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.'

Luke 6:45

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Mark 7:20-23

John Frame's thought experiment (Wallace and Gromit version...)

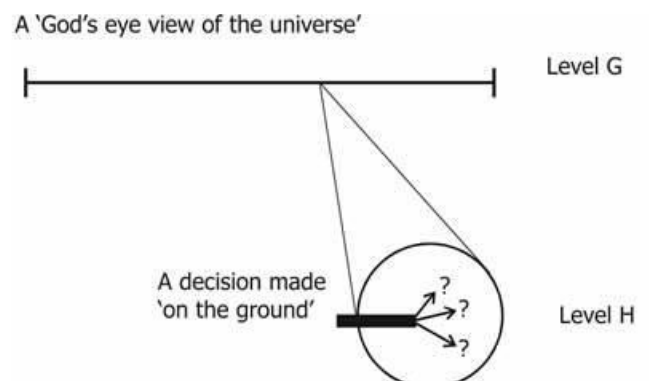
Coercion vs. evil will

See Isaiah 10:7-11

Concurrence - two causes concurring in one act.

Not a competition of wills.

Two perspectives.



But our natural wills are enslaved to sin!

Remember Ephesians 2:3

[It is not] that we are held in chains and prevented from doing what we would desperately love to do—trust and love Jesus. No, just the opposite: the chains are not external, preventing us from having our dearest wants; they are internal. They are our dearest wants. We do not stay in darkness because the door into light is locked. No. We stay in the darkness because we "[love] the darkness" and "[hate] the light" (John 3:19–20). The 'cannot' is the impossibility of loving what you don't love and hating what you don't hate. We were slaves of sin, not of situations. That is, we were slaves of our strongest preferences, and we preferred sin to Christ...

...Our good will is not imprisoned from outside; our rebellious will is the prison from inside.

Piper, Providence, p.523, 526

Why doesn't God choose to save everyone?

Cf. Romans 9...coming soon in midweek!

- It's fair of God to save some not others.

Everybody gets *justice*. Some people get *mercy*.

- He has the right to decide.
- This makes known his glory to his people.

Why this is great news

- God is even more gracious than you might have realized

Eph. 2:8-10

Session 5 | Providence and the Christian Life (2)

Does it matter what I do?

If you ever need a sense of significance in your life, think about this: every single thing you think, say or do - even the tiniest most trivial detail, even the things you get wrong - is contributing to God's will being worked out in the world.

Orlando Saer, *Big God*, p.55

Perseverance

- God wants us to be assured, but not complacent.
- We can be 100% confident that every Christian will be kept by God all the way to heaven.

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Phil. 1:6

*This does not mean that there isn't such a thing as false assurance

*This does not mean that true Christians cannot backslide for a time, but it does mean that they will always return to Christ before the end.

- Those who fall away had never truly believed.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

1 John 2:19

- Warnings are the way God keeps us.

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:10-11

Evangelism

- Don't use this in a way the Bible doesn't.

"Hyper-Calvinism"

Remember Matt. 9:36-38

Instead...

- Be encouraged!

'And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.'"

Acts 18:9-10

- Be fearless!

²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Matt. 10:28-31

Suffering and Evil

Caution: the Bible doesn't give us all the answers.

- A popular but wrong answer: free will.
- All evil and suffering operate under God's control...
See Job 1:12, Prov. 16:4, Isaiah 45:7 etc.
- ...but God always remains good, and there is no evil in him.
Psalm 5:4, 1 John 1:5, James 1:13

*"The Rock, his work is perfect,
for all his ways are justice.
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
just and upright is he."*

Deut. 32:4

What the Bible doesn't tell us:

- How both are true!
 - o Proximate causation?

While God dispenses the good from his hand directly...He ordains evil and sees to it that it occurs indirectly, mediated through someone else from whom that evil originates.

Matthew Barrett, None Greater, p 200

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Job 1:20-22

- The origin of evil

The Belgic Confession (1561)

Article 13. The Doctrine of God's Providence

We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what he does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ's disciples, so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word, without going beyond those limits...

What the Bible assures us:

- God ordains evil for good

'Now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.'

Gen. 45:5-8

'As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.'

Gen. 50:20

- There will be an end to our groaning!

Rom. 8:14-25

Therefore... "No hypotheticals"

Preservation

ROMANS 8:26-30

Intro: How much do you trust yourself to get yourself to glory?

1. The Spirit groans in prayer for us... (v26)

2. ...and he knows what to pray! (v27)

cf. Jer. 17:9-10

3. His prayers and God's will are for our good... (v28)

4. ...that we would reach his goal for us: our glorious Sonship! (v29-30)

"...we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame..."

Romans 5:2-5

Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, God would have put you there. You are put by him in the most suitable place, and if you had had the picking of your lot half-an-hour afterwards, you would have come back and said, "Lord, choose for me, for I have not chosen the best after all."... [So] be content; you cannot better your lot. Take up your cross; you could not have a better trial than you have got; it is the best for you; it sifts you the most; it will do you the most good...

Charles Spurgeon

'...if all things are in [God's] hand, if the very hairs of our heads are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of His providence and purpose; and if He has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which everything that happens is subordinate and subservient; - then we have nothing to do, but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy issue...How happy are they who can resign all to Him, see His hand in every dispensation, and believe that He chooses better for them than they possibly could for themselves!'

John Newton

The Belgic Confession

Article 13. The Doctrine of God's Providence (continued)

...This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under His power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us. And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.

Group Discussion 2

What did you find most helpful from this morning? What questions did it leave you with?

What would you say to a Christian who said they couldn't like a God who doesn't allow us free will?

Do you find it comforting to think that God is in control of suffering? How does this compare to the alternative?

How has this weekend:

Challenged your view of God?

Made you more thankful?

Appendix A | John 6:35-69

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; **whoever comes to me** shall not hunger, and **whoever believes in me** shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ **All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.** ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, **that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,** but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that **everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him** should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, **whoever believes has eternal life.** ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. **If anyone eats of this bread,** he will live for ever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ **Whoever feeds on my flesh** and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ **Whoever feeds on my flesh** and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offence at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, **"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."**

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Appendix B | Whate'er my God ordains is right

Whate'er my God ordains is right
His holy will abideth
I will be still whate'er He does
And follow where He guideth
He is my God, though dark my road
He holds me that I shall not fall
And so to Him I leave it all
And so to Him I leave it all

Whate'er my God ordains is right
He never will deceive me
He leads me by the proper path
I know He will not leave me
I take, content, what He has sent
His hand can turn my griefs away
And patiently I wait His day
And patiently I wait His day

Whate'er my God ordains is right
Though now this cup in drinking
May bitter seem to my faint heart
I take it all, unshrinking
My God is true, each morn anew
Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart
And pain and sorrow shall depart
And pain and sorrow shall depart

Whate'er my God ordains is right
Here shall my stand be taken
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine
Yet I am not forsaken
My Father's care is round me there
He holds me that I shall not fall
And so to Him I leave it all
And so to Him I leave it all

Words: Samuel Rodigast (1675), tr. Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878). Music: Matt Merker & Keith Getty

Appendix C | Frequently asked questions

Why do some people talk about "prevenient grace"?

Arminians believe that while we are all by nature fallen and therefore, as Arminius himself said, "incapable of responding to God without God first empowering them to have faith", yet God gives this 'prevenient' grace to people. So far this sounds like something a Calvinist would agree with. However, Arminians say that this is not a grace which saves us, but which simply puts us into a sort of neutral position where we can exercise our free will to choose to either accept or reject the gospel (additionally, many Arminians think that God has given this prevenient grace universally to all people).

This idea is appealing to those who argue that a libertarian understanding of free will is necessary for responsibility, but it's hard to see how it can be justified Biblically.

First, consider Romans 8:30, where Paul gives us what's been described as a wonderful "golden-chain" of assurance:

'those whom [God] predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.'

Notice, Paul doesn't say "some of those whom God predestined and called he justified...but others rejected the call!" - that wouldn't be very assuring! No, according to Paul, *all* those whom God called, he justified.

Second, consider Jesus' statement in John 6:37 - "All that the Father gives me *will* come to me". That doesn't leave room for there to be some people who Father elects to save but who don't come to Jesus because they resist his call. In this sense, God's call is always effective and his grace is irresistible.

Third, the Bible never describes people as being in a partially-regenerate state. Humanity is only ever spoken of in binary terms. Look how Paul describes the non-Christian world in Ephesians 4, for example:

'Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.'

Paul *doesn't* say of the non-Christian world that '*some of them* are darkened in their understanding and hard of heart...although others of them are enlightened by God but have chosen not to repent.' That third category of people just doesn't exist in Paul's thinking.

When Romans 8 says "those whom he foreknew he also predestined", doesn't this imply that God predestines us on the basis of the choices that he foresees that we will make?

We've seen that left to ourselves we are unable to choose God, so there's no way this could mean that God foresaw our decision to trust him that was made of our accord without his prior work of regeneration. God's choice in election must therefore have nothing to do with anything positive in us that he foresaw. Paul confirms this explicitly in Romans 9:11-13.

We often think about knowledge in two different ways - abstract knowledge and personal knowledge. It's one thing to say "I know *about* Prince William". It's another thing to say "I know Prince William"!

The Bible frequently uses the verb "to know" in this second, personal and intimate sense (e.g. "Adam *knew* Eve his wife and she conceived" means: 'they had sex!'). Amazingly, it's this intimate sense that is meant by 'foreknew' in Romans 8. 'Those whom he foreknew' is a shorthand for 'those whom he decided in advance that he would have a relationship with'. It think we can all agree that Paul's way of putting it is snappier...!

Note how this fits with Gen. 18:18-19, where the Hebrew verb 'to know' is (correctly, given the context) translated 'chosen':

Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in [him.] For I have chosen [literally: 'known'] him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord.

This is why the Council of Dort (convened because of the rise of Arminianism in Holland) made the following clarification:

Canons of Dort (1619)

Article 9: election not based on foreseen faith

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of every saving good. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, "He chose us" (not because we were, but) "so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love" (Ephesians. 1:4).

The Bible says God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). But doesn't that mean his will *doesn't* always happen, since not all are saved?

We need to recognise here that even within human beings, we're capable of having desires that we choose not to act on even if we have the ability to. For example, if you offered me a doughnut, on one level my will would be to eat it (I really like doughnuts!); however, that doesn't mean I would eat it. I might also be conscious of my waistline. So in that case, I'd also at the same time have a will not to eat it, and that might be what I decide.

Similarly, God's will is complex. Theologians point out that it's helpful to think of God's will in two different senses.

On the one hand we can talk about God's **sovereign will** - that's what we're thinking about in sessions 1 and 2 - his big plan to bring glory to his name through Jesus, and everything big and small he ordains along the way. His sovereign is what actually happens - it *always* happens.

But on the other hand we can talk about God's **moral will** - that includes how he tells us to live. For example, "love your neighbour". And clearly that doesn't always happen. We often don't obey his commands. But even when it doesn't, God's sovereign will still does.

God's desire for all people to be saved falls into this second category. John Piper explains it like this:

God's desire (θέλει) for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) is real, but it does not rise to the level of decisive action for all people. God can desire things at one level and choose not to act on those desires at another level. He desires all to be saved at one level, and he grants some to repent and be saved at another level.

Piper, *Providence*, p.548

If you want to see an example of the complex tension that exists in God's will, look up Ezekiel 18:32 & 33:11 and compare with Deut. 28:63! This is not a contradiction - God is capable of willing and not willing these things in different ways at the same time.

Sometimes people argue that God really wants all people to be saved, and it's only because he won't interfere with a free will that not all people are saved. But if this is an attempt to absolve God of responsibility, it doesn't actually work. After all, God could clearly do more to persuade people of his existence and their need to repent - why not appear in a vision to every person on earth, for example? This problem is not solved by a libertarian concept of free will. But it makes perfect sense if it is not God's *sovereign* will to save every person.

For a more extended answer, see John Piper's comprehensive essay "Are there two wills in God?" - available at desiringgod.org

Doesn't God change his mind in the Bible because of human decisions?

Sort of. But ultimately, no...

People often appeal to Exodus 32-33, where God says he's going to destroy Israel, but Moses then intercedes on their behalf, reminding God of his promises, and so God then says he won't. This is certainly an encouragement to pray! Moses' prayer does make a difference...But it's not as though Moses' prayer took God by surprise and won him over with its argument. Rather, God's announcement to Moses about his intentions would have been unnecessary had it not been intended to prompt Moses into interceding. It's as if God's saying "Moses, I'm going to destroy these people...unless you have something to say about it Moses...do you

Moses...???" In doing so, Moses (who's intercession was itself ordained by God) fulfils God's purpose of foreshadowing our need for a great mediator to come - Jesus!

Another verse people point to is 1 Sam 15:11 in which God says "I regret that I have made Saul King, for he has turned back from following me..." This appears as though God has changed his mind about Saul in light of his actions. However, 1 Samuel 15 also contains one of the clearest statements in the Bible against this understanding, as in v28-29 Samuel says to Saul "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbour of yours who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."

It may seem confusing that God is both described as having regret and not ever having regret in the same chapter! But just as in English our words can often convey a range of meanings (what's called a 'semantic range'), so in Hebrew the word translated 'regret' can just convey sadness. This must be what it means in 15:11, with the very helpful clarification in 15:29 that it *doesn't* mean God changes his mind or wishes he'd acted differently.

Appendix D | C.S. Lewis on praise

The most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that all enjoyment [note well!] spontaneously overflows into praise. . . .The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars.

My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely valuable, what we delight [!] to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.

C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p.93–95.

Timetable

Friday

9pm Introduction (Griggs Meeting Room)

Saturday

8.30-9am Leaders' prayer meeting (Ash Meeting Room)

8.45-9.30am Breakfast

9.45-11.00am Providence and Sovereignty (Griggs Meeting Room)

11.00-11.30am Coffee break

11.30-12.30pm Providence and Purpose (Griggs Meeting Room)

12.30-1.10pm Group Time

1.15-2.15pm Lunch

2.30-4.15pm Free time

4.15-5.00pm Afternoon tea (Griggs Meeting Room)

5.00-5.50pm Providence and the Christian Life 1 (Griggs Meeting Room)

6.15-7.15pm Dinner

8.00pm Evening fun (Griggs Meeting Room)

Sunday

8.45-9.30am Breakfast + vacate bedrooms

9.45-11.00am Providence and Salvation (Griggs Meeting Room)

11.00-11.30am Coffee

11.30-12.30pm Providence and the Christian Life 2 (Griggs Meeting Room)

12.30-1.10pm Group Time

1.15-2.00pm Lunch

2.00-3.00pm Depart. 2.30 coach departs.

5.00pm Service at Christ the King