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The Sovereignty of God in Scripture (Part 2)



God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the concept of the sovereignty of God as presented in scripture. He argues that while God is sovereign over all things, including individual's destinies, this does not mean that he micromanages every aspect of human life, nor necessarily determines every outcome. Rather, God has given people free will and expects them to make choices, though he sometimes intervenes in human affairs. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding these nuances when interpreting biblical passages about God's sovereignty.

Transcript

Alright, let's look at what is about the middle of the notes on Lecture 2. We're doing the second part of Lecture 2. It's actually our third session, but we're still in the second lecture. And in our first two sessions, we haven't really done any biblical studies yet at all. We've talked about a summary of what the issues are, what the doctrines are we're talking about.

And in our last session, we simply read quotes from Calvinists, defining the distinctives of their view on the subject we're talking about. Our subject is God's sovereignty and man's salvation, and the distinctive of the Calvinist view, of course, is that God is sovereign, meaning God ordains all things that come to pass. And if anyone thinks that's hyperbole with them, it is not.

They believe that everything, including sin, is ordained by God. Everything that comes to pass is from God. Now, a lot of people who call themselves Calvinists, when they hear me say that, they say, no, you're misrepresenting it.

Well, we read the Westminster Confession of Faith, we read Calvin, we read Sproul, we read other Calvinist writers, they all say the same thing. And if I'm misunderstanding them, as they often say I am, I wish they could make themselves understood better, because it seems like I'm understanding their words and their plainest meanings, and if they have some hidden meaning that they're not talking about, and they hope not to be critiqued, they ought to say what they mean. But I think they are saying what they

mean.

And I think they're a little confused about what they mean, because half of the time they're saying there is no free will in man, other times they're saying, well, there is free will, but it's not really so free that they could ever turn to God. And they're saying, well, God, you know, ordained and created and instigated every sin that man commits, but he's not the author of sin. And to my mind, that just sounds like confused talk.

And so, I honestly will tell you that I can't imagine how I could be misunderstanding them if they mean the words they use. And sometimes I wonder if they do, because often, whenever they critique, Calvinists will say, well, you're just misunderstanding what we're saying. It seems like everybody says it the same way, and I don't see what I'm misunderstanding.

So I'm going to go with what they say, and if they say we misunderstand, then let them clarify if they would, because I'd like to have that happen. Now, having looked at the strong statements made by Calvinists that God ordains everything that happens, this raises questions that have often been raised. These are classic questions that are raised against the classical approach, the classical being the Augustinian Calvinist approach.

I'm not going to answer these questions here and now. In our course of study, we will address some of them, maybe all of them. But obviously, if the Calvinist view of God's sovereignty is correct, then if there's only one will in the universe, how can man be held responsible? The obvious question that comes to any thinking person's mind when they first hear this.

How can God hold a man responsible for doing only what God sovereignly ordained that that man must inevitably do and has no power to do otherwise? How does he become responsible for his actions? Another question is, is God's will always done? If so, why does he so frequently complain? God complains a lot in the Bible. Why is he complaining if his will is all that's being done? A third question, if God sovereignly instigates sin, how is he not its author, and why does he object to it? If God is the one who decided that there would be sin and made sure that it happened, what objection does he raise to it? It's his plan. Fourth, does prayer really affect anything? And of course, a corollary of this is, does doing anything affect anything? Can man do anything that changes anything? Why do we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven if that's a given without our praying about it? God's will cannot help but be done because that's all that can happen when there's a sovereign God on the throne.

His will must always occur. Why should we pray for anything? Is it going to change anything? By the way, sometimes I've heard Calvinists say, well, prayer doesn't really change anything. It just changes you.

Have you ever heard that? Nothing's going to change because you prayed except you.

Prayer is a discipline that brings your heart more into harmony. It reminds you that God is on the throne.

It brings peace to you. It's time to unload your burdens on the Lord and so forth. Well, isn't that changing something? Am I not something? If it changes me, didn't it change something? First of all, I disagree with that explanation because the Bible indicates that prayer is supposed to change other things besides the person praying.

James said, you have not because you ask not. Meaning, if you had asked, you would have. Well, you don't have.

But you didn't ask, so you don't have. Obviously, the Bible teaches that prayer changes things. Jesus said, whatsoever you ask in my name, I will do it.

That sounds like he's going to do something, like something's going to change. But even if we allow this common explanation, well, it doesn't change anything externally. It just changes you.

Well, I'm something. If I was nervous before and now I'm calm because I prayed, prayer changed something. Was it preordained that I'd be nervous at one moment and calm at another moment? Did anything change because I prayed or did it just happen because it was preordained? These questions are not mockery.

These questions are serious questions that people have who are trying to live the Christian life and trying to move with these kinds of propositions that Calvinists make. What are the real life implications for us? The fifth question, why are evangelism and especially persuasion necessary? If you ask a Calvinist, if those who are elected are inevitably going to be saved no matter what because God has sovereignly decided, why do we evangelize? They have an answer. They say because God has ordained not only the ends but also the means.

In other words, he's ordained that the elect will be saved, but he's ordained also the events that lead to them being saved. So if you got saved because somebody witnessed to you and shared the gospel with you, God preordained that you'd be saved, but he also preordained that that person would witness to you. And that's why we witness.

R.C. Sproul said that when he was in seminary class with John Gerstner, his professor and mentor, Gerstner asked the class, if God has ordained everything, why should we witness? And R.C. Sproul says the whole class sort of sat there in kind of embarrassed silence not knowing a good answer. And R.C. Sproul himself who was not a very old Christian at the time, a fairly new convert himself, he sheepishly raised his hand and said, well, maybe because God commands us to. And that was the answer John Gerstner was looking for.

He said, that's right. That's the answer. We may not know why God wants us to witness

since he's going to sovereignly save everyone he's going to save, but if he commands us to, we should do it.

Now, see, this is another kind of answer that doesn't have to make sense. Just go with it. Just obey and don't try to make sense of it.

Now, I agree, we should just obey, even if we can't make sense of it. But it's fair enough to ask the question, why did God give these orders that we go out, maybe even die as missionaries, go out and confront people when he is sovereignly in control of every decision everyone makes? Why doesn't he just turn the hearts of the elect without Christians spending money and time and losing their lives to go out and reach them? God can do whatever he wants. At least we have the right to inquire.

Is this the only way God could do things? I mean, why does he want us to witness? And you know, if it's simply the truth that God has ordained the ends as well as the means, we can say, well, then that means if I sit home and watch TV instead of witnessing, God ordained that I was going to do that. And if somebody would have gotten saved and gone out, but he doesn't get saved because God didn't ordain for that person to be saved. It really doesn't matter what I do, because whatever I end up doing is what God ordained I would do anyway, and I couldn't really have done otherwise.

I might have imagined that I could have done otherwise. I could have perhaps pictured myself going out and witnessing and doing something for God or going on the mission field, but if in the end I decided not to do it, that's really the only thing I could have done anyway, because whatever God ordained is what's going to happen. And so it's kind of a fatalism.

Now Calvinists don't like to be identified as fatalists, because fatalism is a pagan philosophy. Notice when we read the Church Fathers quotes in an earlier lecture, they talked about if everything was by fate, if the fates do this and the fates do that. That's because in paganism, they actually had these god-like beings that were called the fates, and fate would determine everything.

In Greek philosophy, everything was predetermined by fate. With Augustine, who was a Greek philosopher who became a Christian and introduced Calvinistic ideas for the first time, interestingly enough, it sounds like the same doctrine, but God is just there in the place of the fates. The pagans say the fates have fated everything.

Augustine seemed to say that God has fated everything, but it's still the same thing. Fatalism, it would seem. And although frankly, I mean, just in all fairness, I say that Calvinists object to this characterization.

Well, they can object if they want to, but can they disprove it? Can they find any real difference in the outworking, in the practical everyday living of the Christian who

believes strongly in the Calvinist doctrine, differently than if they were simply fatalists? Now, by the way, I'm not saying that Calvinists don't evangelize. Many of the great missionaries that have gone out on a mission have been Calvinists. Many of the great preachers have been Calvinists.

Many people have laid down their lives for the heathen and were strong Calvinists. David Brainerd, certainly Jonathan Edwards, a great preacher of the Second Great Awakening in America, as Calvinistic as men can be. Spurgeon.

Well, let's face it, some great, great men and great, great preachers have held Calvinistic theology. I'm not saying Calvinism doesn't lead people to evangelize. It's just hard to understand why they do.

How they're doing so is somehow consistent with what they believe. Now, of course, what they say is, well, because Christ told us to preach the gospel, and if we preach to someone, they get saved. God ordained not only their salvation, but our preaching to it.

And I guess I'll accept that, but the upshot of it truly is that if I decide not to preach, it doesn't make any difference, because then God ordained that I wouldn't. If somebody doesn't get saved because I didn't preach to them, that's only because they weren't elect. If they'd been elect, they certainly would have gotten saved, whether I preached to them or not.

So this is taking these statements to their reasonable conclusion, it seems. And it's not just evangelism, but persuasion. Paul talked about persuading the Athenians when he was reasoning with them and stuff.

If someone is the elect, won't God change their heart? Isn't that what he's supposed to do? Why should you have to persuade them of something? I mean, it's one thing to say that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, so to say, well, we need to preach the gospel because God intends to save them through the gospel. But what if they're not convinced of the gospel, and you have to reason with them? Maybe it's a friend of yours, you reason with them over a period of months, and they eventually get saved. What was that about? I mean, if they were inevitably going to get saved anyway, why did it have to be through this reasoning and argumentation and persuasion? These are just questions people ask, and I don't think they're unreasonable questions to ask.

Sixth, why do actual events not always conform to God's stated will? For example, it says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication. So God's stated will is that people abstain from fornication. Do they? Not everybody does.

Well, how come the reality then doesn't conform to God's stated will? Now, the Calvinists do have a standard answer for this. They say God has two wills, and they give different

names to them, and they don't all give the same labels. But it's common, for example, to refer to one as God's prescriptive will, and the other is God's decretal will, or secret will.

The decretal will is what God decrees and what inevitably does happen. His prescriptive will is expressed in his commands. He commands that people, that the Israelites not worship idols, but in fact they worship a golden calf.

Now his prescriptive will was thou shalt not make a graven image. His decree, his secret decree was that they would in fact make a golden calf, which they did because he decreed it should happen and aforeordained it. Now he didn't tell them that he decreed for that to happen, he only told them the opposite.

But secretly we know he decreed for it because it happened. And by definition, if it happened, God decreed it would happen. So God has two wills, the one that he reveals in his commands, which is his prescriptive will, and the one that really happens.

Whatever happens is his decretal will or his secret will. So if you ask, well why did Paul say that it's the will of God that you have to save from fornication, and some people commit fornication, the answer to Calvinist gifts is God's prescriptive will is that you don't commit fornication, but his decree is that those Christians who actually do commit fornication, he decreed that they would do it. It was inevitable.

It's his ordained secret plan that they would do it. Well then why did he tell them not to? And why is it that if they are indeed among the elect, that even they can't do what he tells them to do because he's decreed that they would sin? Because Christians do unfortunately sometimes sin too. And if they do it's because God ordained it.

You might be able to say, well I can understand the reprobate, the people who are inevitably going to hell that God would ordain that they do any number of sins because they're going to do nothing but sin anyway. But once a person is saved, one of the elect, and God's will is for us to be holy and blameless in his sight, why does he decree that we must sin as often as Christians are known to do? These questions are difficult questions for an honest Christian to ask and to find answers to, but the Calvinist premises make it hard to reach sensible conclusions on these matters. Seventh, does this meticulous providence model of God's sovereignty have any biblical basis? Now that's the big question.

All the first six questions are assuming, okay this meticulous providence, if this is true, then what about this, what about this? The seventh question is, is it true? Is there any biblical basis for it? And that's what we want to look at now. We found that the Calvinists are unanimous in saying that God's sovereignty by definition means meticulous providence. He ordains everything that happens.

Is that true? Does the Bible teach that view of sovereignty? Remember I said last session

that the word sovereignty itself in the English language doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean the person who controls every event. That's what many people assume.

In fact, many non-Calvinists use the term sovereignty that way because they've been taught by Calvinists to do so. God sovereignly did this or sovereignly did that simply means he intervened in a situation. But that's not what sovereignty is.

That would be his omnipotence. He powerfully intervened. Sovereign means the person who has the right to do whatever he wants to do.

The person who's authorized. The person who has the authority to act and not be challenged. A king is sovereign in his realm.

A lord over his household. God over the heavens and the earth. But like I said, the word sovereignty isn't used in the Bible to describe God.

But images of sovereignty certainly are. So we know that the Bible teaches that God is sovereign. But what images does he use? He's a king.

He's a father. He's a lord. He's a shepherd.

These are all sovereign roles over some category. Father is sovereign over his family. A lord over his household including his servants.

A king over his nation. A shepherd over his flock. They have to go where he wants them to go.

If they don't, he can go bring them back. And in other words, he has the authority to tell the sheep where to go. The king has the authority to make the laws and enforce them.

This is what, these are the models of sovereignty we know outside the Bible. And the Bible imports them to describe God's relationship with us. He's the king.

He's the father. He's the shepherd. He's the lord.

And from that we can deduce he's sovereign. Because all of those images are images of sovereign persons in some realm. And we know that he's the king over all things.

He's the king of the kings and the lord of the lords. So he's universally sovereign. But that doesn't tell us what he does.

It only tells us what he has the right to do. You know, I might have the right to withhold all, you know, pleasure from my kids. I'd never let them have anything they like to eat.

Never let them watch anything that entertains them. Never let them do anything. But I'd have to be a certain kind of a man to make those kinds of decrees.

I'd have to be a certain kind of person and have a certain kind of attitude toward my children, which I don't have, in order to sovereignly govern my household that way. As a sovereign I could do that, and no one could say I don't have the right to. But why would I? That's the question.

What kind of a person am I? Now I mentioned in our earlier lecture that when I said, well, kings don't necessarily micromanage everything their subjects do. There have been many kings in history. In fact, there have been more kings than there have been democracies.

And kings usually did not determine who each of their subjects would marry, what time they'd get up in the morning, what they'd have for breakfast, what jobs they would do. They might do that for their royal servants, but they don't do that for everyone in their domain. There's a lot of freedom given in most cases in terms of day-by-day activities, even under a sovereign king.

He could impose himself into every area of his subjects' lives, and no one could say he can't because he's the king. But most kings don't. And when I pointed that out to Calvinists, they said, yeah, but earthly kings can't do that.

They have human limitations. They can't control everything their subjects do. But see, that statement is simply assuming that every king would if he could.

God can, so he does. God has the power to control everything, so of course he will. To my mind, that tells me more about the Calvinist who's telling me that than it tells me about any reality about God.

It means they're saying, if I was a king, if I was God, I would control everything everyone does. Then they assume that God must be like them because he must do that too. See, I believe that there are many kings who have lived on the earth who aren't tyrants, and who, even if they could, they don't want to meticulously get involved in every aspect of everybody's life.

Why would a king have an interest in doing that unless he's like a control freak? And most people, although there have been certainly tyrants who'd love to have done that, couldn't, there's a lot of kings who've been good kings, who actually like the idea of their subjects having some freedom and some happiness and so forth. I mean, having the power to control everything doesn't mean that someone's motivator desires to control everything. God has the power to do it, no question, and the right if he wishes to.

But does the Bible teach that that's what he does? That's what we want to find out. What does the Bible teach about this idea of meticulous promise? Or more probably, what does it teach about God's sovereign rule over his universe? I've got this broken down in a pretty logical fashion, starting with the most basic and moving to the more specific.

What does the Bible declare about God's authority, ability, and intervention, his sovereign rule? First of all, very basic stuff.

God has the right to rule, partly because he's the creator, and that would be enough. If someone creates something, they own it. That's even recognized in secular law, although the Bible would say it even if it wasn't.

You write a song, you get a copyright on it, and that means no one can use it without your permission. It's yours. You write a poem, a book, you paint a picture, you copyright it.

It's yours, because you created it. It's understood. It's your creation, it's your invention.

You can get a patent on your invention or a copyright on your piece of art, because you made it. It's a given. No one else owns it but you.

And God made everything, so no one else owns it but him. I've often tried to understand how it is that many non-Christians, and frankly some Christians too, seem to feel that they own themselves. They didn't make themselves, how could they own themselves? It's my life, I need to seek my happiness.

Who told you it's your life? Where'd you get that idea? Did you make it? Did you buy it? How did you become the possessor of it? It's God's. God made it. It says in Psalm 100, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

It's he that has made us and not we ourselves. God owns everything because he made everything. And I'm not going to read all the scriptures about it here, but Revelation 4.11 is the worship in heaven.

It says, you are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, honor, and power, because by your will all things are created, and for your pleasure. And certainly God made it, and the creation really owes its existence to him and is owned by him. Romans 9.21, Paul says, has not the potter the power over the clay? To make of one lump, one vessel unto honor, one vessel unto dishonor? The potter owns the clay, he can do what he wants with it.

That's his prerogative. That's what sovereignty means. He has the right to do whatever he wants to do with what he made.

Matthew 10, excuse me, 20.15 is the parable Jesus told about the man who owned a vineyard, and he hired some people in the morning to go work there, and some more later in the day, and some more later in the day, and finally about an hour before closing time he hired some more. All these guys worked different lengths of time, and at the end of the day they all got paid the same thing. And the ones who worked the longest complained, although they got paid what they were promised.

They didn't know that those who worked only an hour were going to get the same pay. And they grumbled about it. And the master said to them, why are you grumbling? I'm not treating you wrongly.

I paid you what I offered you. Are you jealous because I'm generous with these other people? He says, is it not mine to do with what are my things? In other words, don't I have the right to do what I want to with my money? And certainly the king is like God. It's his stuff.

He can do what he wants with it. Christians, Calvinists or otherwise, should never have any question about God's absolute sovereignty over everything. He owns it.

He has, therefore, the right to do with it what he wants to. He is the king over the kings and the lord over the lords, because they are also made by him. In Revelation 19.16, Jesus is seen with a banner across and says, king of kings and lord of lords.

And we find in other passages, including Exodus and Daniel and many others, references to God's authority over the rulers of the earth. They are answerable to him. They don't always do what he wants, and we'll see that the Bible says that too.

But they should. You see, a person's authority doesn't mean that they always get what they want. It means that they always should get what they want.

The authority is the right to have things done the way you want them done, the way you decree them to be. A king makes a decree, people should obey him. His decreeing it doesn't mean they will.

It just means if he's a lawful king and the rightful ruler, it means they should obey. If they don't, they're criminals. If whoever has the right to rule, which is what authority means, it is wrong to rebel against him because he has the right to rule.

The only right thing you can do is to obey his rule. So the kings of the earth are under his dominion, but that doesn't mean that everything they do is what they should do. They will be judged for the times they don't.

All people will be. You see that a man is sovereign doesn't mean everyone does what he wants, but it means that he has the right to do to them whatever he wants when they don't do what he wants. The sovereign king doesn't guarantee there will be no criminals, but he punishes them according to his choices.

To say that men can make free will choices against God doesn't mean men are getting away with something. God is the sovereign. Ultimately there's a judgment.

He has the right to judge as he wishes. Fortunately he's a just and merciful judge, but not all kings are and no one can really stop them because they're the king. There have

been some pretty cruel kings in history and they mostly got away with it because that was their position.

Who could challenge their authority? But God is the king over the kings. This means of course that if a politician, a ruler, or a president, or anyone who's got political authority commands you to do something that's contrary to what God commands you to do, it's wrong to obey that authority instead of God. That's why Peter said we must obey God rather than men when the Supreme Court of Israel told him to stop preaching the gospel.

Well, we're answering to a higher power than you. When Peter said we're going to obey God rather than men, he wasn't making a statement of rebellion against authority. He was saying there's a higher authority than you and we have to obey the highest authority.

If you don't agree with the highest authority, the worst for you, but we're going to obey God because he's the ultimate authority over the rulers of the earth. In addition to being the creator and ruler, he is the redeemer and redeemer means the one who purchased it. Jesus' death is the purchase price to recover for God what was lost by man's rebellion.

God lost something, but Jesus came to seek and to rescue and to recover that which was lost by God, and he recovered it. His death repurchased it. That's why Jesus is, in fact, as he said after his resurrection, he has all authority in heaven and earth.

He is the king of kings and lord of lords. He has the right to be obeyed. Not everyone obeys him, and to say that he is the king is not a prediction that they would.

It's only a statement that they must, they should. If they don't, they're criminals and they'll have to eventually pay for that. There's a judgment, there's an accounting.

But the point is that God owns the world twice, by creation and by purchase. After losing it, he rebought it. I remember a preacher I used to sit under when I was young.

He used to like to use the story of the gingerbread man, who this little girl made the gingerbread man and he ran away. She chased him down. He said, run as fast as you can.

You can't catch me. I'm the gingerbread man. Remember that story from childhood? And then he got caught by a baker, and he was put on display in the bakery window for sale.

And little girls walking down the street, she sees her gingerbread man there, and she says, that's my gingerbread man. And the baker says, no, that's my gingerbread man. If you want it, you have to pay 25 cents.

So she went home and broke her piggy bank, got her 25 cents, came out and bought the gingerbread man. And she said after, now you're doubly mine, because I made you and

then I bought you. And that's indeed how God doubly owns us.

He made us first. He owns us completely for that reason. But then he even paid the price to recover us.

And Christians are the people who recognize that and therefore affirm God's right to do whatever he wants. Paul said, you are not your own. You've been bought with a price.

1st Corinthians 6 verses, I think it's 19 and 20. He says, do you not know that you, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and you're not your own? You've been bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So God has the right to rule because he owns, he owns us. He even owns the unbelievers. They just don't know it.

That's our message. In fact, that's the gospel is that Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the sovereign.

Everyone ought to obey him. And those who don't should repent and start doing so. That's the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Christ is the king. God has put him on the throne and he's the sovereign. Now this much Christians should not find controversial.

Calvinists, Armenians, no problem there. We're starting from scratch. God is sovereign because of creation and because of redemption.

Now, in addition, therefore, to having the authority to be the king, he also has the power to pull off just about whatever he wants to pull off. He's omnipotent, as the theologians say, which means all-powerful. And what that really means is nothing is too difficult for him.

When God told Abraham and Sarah that she was gonna have a baby when she was nine years old, she laughed. And God rebuked her and said, why do you laugh? Is anything too difficult for Yahweh? And she said, I didn't laugh. He said, yes, you did.

That ended that conversation. But he said, is anything too difficult for Yahweh? The question carries its own answer. Of course nothing is too difficult for him.

Jeremiah said the same thing. Actually, Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 32 of 17, he said, ah Lord God, you've made the heavens and the earth by your great power. Nothing is too difficult for you.

And then 10 verses later, in God had to tell Jeremiah, nothing's too difficult for me. I guess he forgot. But the point is, nothing is too difficult for God.

Whatever he decides to do, he can pull it off. He's got no limits to his power. He's omnipotent.

Now, not all kings are omnipotent. In fact, none are, except for God. All kings have authority in their domain, but not all of them have the power to do all that they would like.

God does. And it's this fact that makes Calvinists think that he in fact does do everything he wants to do. Everything he'd like to see done is in fact done because he's got the power to do it.

But his power to do it does not predict necessarily if he's going to do everything. He has the power to end sin right now. Every time someone's tempted to sin, he could strike them dead before they do it.

The population of the earth would be very small very quickly. But the point is, if God didn't want to permit it, he wouldn't have to permit it. He could kill everybody off and there wouldn't be another sin committed, not on this planet.

But God doesn't apparently choose to do that. God allows people some freedom, even some freedom to do things that he wishes they wouldn't do. But he can do anything he wants to.

If he sets out to do it, he can do it. No one can stop him. He cannot act contrary to his own nature, however, and character.

Now, this is really important because when we say that God is omnipotent, that doesn't mean he can do everything. You know the old question, can God make a rock that he can't move? What's the answer? It's a philosophical conundrum. If you say, yes, he could make a rock that he can't move, then they say, well, if he can't move it, is he all-powerful? I say, oh, no, I guess he can't make a rock that he can't move.

But if he can't make it, he must not be all-powerful. And so it's kind of a lose-lose kind of a proposition. But the truth is, frankly, if God wanted to make a rock that he can't move, he could do it.

He could choose to never have that rock move again. If he wanted that rock in that place forever and ever and ever and ever and was sure he never wanted it moved, he could make it. But the interesting thing is that he can't do some things.

He can't lie. For example, Titus 1-2 says, God who cannot lie. In 2 Timothy 2-13, it says, God cannot deny himself.

Not will not, but cannot. In James 1-13, it says, God cannot be tempted with evil. In Genesis 19-22, when the angel of the Lord is talking to Lot in Sodom, he said, quickly, go

to that city because I can do nothing until you're there.

Well, why not? Not because God doesn't have the power, but because he doesn't have the ability to do that which is contrary to his wishes in such matters. You could ask, do I have the power to strangle my children in their sleep? Well, technically, I could probably do it if I set my mind to it, but I couldn't set my mind to it. It's too contrary to who I am.

Physically, I have the power. I could strangle any adult in their sleep, as long as they're in deep sleep. You can kill anyone in their sleep.

You've got the power, but are you the type to do that kind of thing? Most of us are not, hopefully. Hopefully, none of us are. There are things you could do, but you can't do because it's too much unlike who you are.

There are things that God could do if he wanted, but he can't do them because he never could do it because it's too much not who he is. He can't lie. He can't sin.

He can't even be tempted to sin, and therefore, to say that God is omnipotent just means he has all the power he needs to do anything he wants to do. It doesn't mean that he could conceivably do everything, like evil things, because that's against his nature to do that. It's against his character.

And it doesn't mean he can do things that are contrary to truth. I mentioned this in the previous lecture. He can't make $2 + 2 = 5$. He can't create a square or circle, because by definition, those things are mutually exclusive.

He can make a circle, and he can reshape it into a square, and even people can do that. But you can't have it be a circle and a square at the same time, because by definition, a circle is something different than a square, and they can't be the same thing. God cannot make contradictions be true, because by definition, a contradiction involves one statement that is not true against a statement that is in fact true.

And God cannot make, for example, a free act be a coerced act. If God coerces a certain action, he can't make that also be a free action on the part of the agent. He can coerce if he wants to, but he can't change a coerced act into a free act, unless he can change the meaning of words.

He can't make a contradiction be true. Being omnipotent does not require that. Omnipotence means he has all the power, unlimited power, and whatever he, whatever is consistent with his nature to do, whatever is according to truth, whatever he wants to do, he can do it.

It doesn't mean that you can make up ridiculous things and say God could do that too. And by ridiculous, I don't mean things that are humanly impossible. I mean things that are logically impossible, that simply are contrary to reality, to truth.

God is always truthful. That's why it says he cannot lie in Titus 1-2. He can't, because you can't lie and be truthful at the same time.

And there are other contradictions that could not apply to him. So, to speak of his omnipotence means that he can pull off his will whenever he determines to do it, but it doesn't mean that he can do things that are absurdly, irrationally contradictory, or contrary to his nature. Okay, so we've talked about God's authority and God's power.

Remember, R.C. Sproul said, when we say God is sovereign, we're just talking about God's authority and his power. Well, we've just talked about God's authority and his power. We haven't come up with a Calvinistic view of sovereignty by necessity.

These things don't translate instantly into a Calvinistic idea of meticulous providence. Now we come to the part that is the game changer, God's intervention. Not just what he has the right to do and what he has the power to do, but what does he actually do? That's where the Calvinists and the non-Calvinists part company in this matter of defining sovereignty.

The Bible says that God limits his intervention according to his own policies and purposes, and does not always get precisely what he wants in men's lives. Now, here's the thing. We're going to argue, I'm going to argue, that God had it in his purpose to make a creature that was not like the animals, when he already had all the animals.

He said, let us make man in our image, and let's give him dominion over all of this. Now, one thing about people that's different from animals is people can rule. If you are a small business person, you've established a business, let's say you spend 30, 40 years building it up, and you say, I'd like to leave this to somebody who's related to me.

Hopefully you have some kids. Hopefully you've got some kids that are worth leaving it to. So you can leave it to your kids.

Now, if you never had kids, you can't do that, and you're not likely to leave it to your golden lab. Even though your golden lab will never disappoint you because he has no free will, he'll always be a loving friend. Your kids? No guarantees about that.

But still, most people prefer to have kids than dogs. Of course, a lot of people have both, but most people value their dogs more than they value their kids. They value their kids more than they value their dogs, even though their kids disappoint them more.

Your dog will never disappoint you, never betray you. Your kids often may. But why do people have kids anyway? The same reason God made people.

He already had a full menagerie of every kind of animal pet you could have, and they always obey him. God even said so in Isaiah. The ox knows his owner.

The donkey knows its master's crib. My people, Israel, don't know. Me.

How come the donkey and the ox instinctively do what their master wants, but my people don't? That's why. Animals do it instinctively. Man is not an instinctive creature.

He's a free creature. That's why he sometimes disappoints. In Jeremiah chapter 8, God said, the stork knows its appointed time and the swallow in its coming.

There's talk about the migration of the birds. He says, but my people, they don't know where to go. They don't know what they're doing.

They rebel against me. Well, again, the animals, when God made the animals, they never disappointed. They always do exactly what's built in to their brains for them to do, and they do amazing things when it comes to migration.

I think God built these migration instincts into animals, and even the social instincts into bees and ants and things like that. Things that have brains smaller than we could see, to show that they can be smarter than us, because they always do what God wants them to do. But they don't get any commendation for it, because they can't do otherwise.

They're sort of like what Calvinists think people are. Animals are what Calvinists believe people are. Creatures that just do what God ordained for them to do, and can do nothing else.

But when God had all these animals, and beautiful pets, and wonderful, impressive things, I'm sure God was delighted with all the animals. But he said, you know, you were missing something here. We can't give dominion over this to the horses, or even to the higher animals, to the dolphins, the chimpanzees.

We can't leave this family business to our pets. We need someone who's more like us. Someone rational.

Somebody that doesn't just, you know, you wind up the thing, and it just marches the way you mechanically made it do. Let's have someone who's more like us. Somebody that's morally responsible.

Someone who's rational. Someone who's not an animal. Someone who's more God-like in terms of personality and so forth than the animals are.

In our image, he says. And so he made man, and he said, rule over all of this. And it's very much, I believe, analogous to a family that's always had pets, but they don't want to leave their family business to the pets.

Some people do. Some people actually leave their inheritance to their pets. These people are silly people, in my opinion.

Of course, they say, you don't know my pets. It's true, I don't. A lot of people love their pets.

But rational behavior would say, if I'm going to leave this to somebody, I'd like to leave it to at least a human being. And all the better if it's a human being that's come from me, that I've raised, that I'm affectionate, or that I feel something, I'm invested in. I'd like to pass this on to somebody a lot like me, at least of the same species.

And so God made man different than the animals. And therefore, he doesn't program man to do whatever. There's always the possibility that man can disappoint him.

And God often speaks of that disappointment that he feels with men. He says, I called and you did not answer. How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks and you wouldn't come.

I had these plans for you and you didn't do them. Instead, you offered your children to Moloch, something I never would have commanded, never entered my head, he said. In Isaiah, where he's talking about Israel being like his vineyard, not producing the fruit he wanted.

He says, what more could I have done to my vineyard that I didn't receive the fruit I wanted? Well, what's the problem here? Why is it I did all this and I didn't get good fruit? Because it's not really a vineyard, it's really people. And people don't always do what God wants them to do. By making people, he knew he was making himself vulnerable to this kind of disappointment.

By having a child, a parent must know. We're making ourselves vulnerable in a way that we wouldn't if we just had a cat and a dog. Emotionally.

If I'd only had cats and dogs, I'd have had a happier life. Although my kids gave me more delight than anything in the whole world when they're young. When they go the wrong way, there's nothing that can ruin your life and your happiness more.

They say that a parent's happiness is no greater than that of his unhappiest child. God made himself vulnerable to great grief and disappointment when he decided, let's make someone that's like us. Someone who's not like these animals, but who can actually make some choices.

Now you might say, why would God even do that? Well, because if you make a creature that can make a choice between you and another option, and they choose you, it's so much more meaningful. Than if they were just programmed like an animal to lick your hand like a dog. To have someone who loves you because they appreciate you, and could have done otherwise, but they've decided to be loyal to you, and to be loving toward you.

That's in a different world than having your goldfish glad that you put food in their bowl every day. And yet, that same person can bring more grief than you can imagine. But you can't have the one without the risk of the other.

And therefore, it's clear that God chose to take that risk. Now when I say risk, I don't mean to say he didn't know how it would turn out. He knew there'd be disappointment.

He knew there'd be sin. He knew, however, there'd also be people who'd bring delight to him. People who'd love him.

People who'd be a bride to him. People who would love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and live for his glory, and be everything that he wanted them to be. So he said, okay, if I make people in my image, they can go either way.

And they will go both ways. But the ones who are going my way, their freely chosen loyalty to me is worth infinitely more than that of an animal that can't make a choice. And if I have to be brokenhearted over these other ones, it's just the price I have to pay.

And I don't know that God's thinking exactly like that, but as near as I can tell from reading the Bible, it seems like he was. But the main thing to point out is that when he made man, he did make that risk. He did make something different than the animals.

And he doesn't always intervene to make sure people make the right choices. It's like if I was trying to teach my kids how to be financially responsible, I said, okay, I'm going to give each of you \$10, and you can do whatever you want with it. But let me tell you what I think you should do.

I think you should take part of that money and save it, and part of that money and invest it this way, and part of it and give it. But I'm going to let you make your own decision, because you're going to learn from your own mistakes and from your own wise choices. This is how you grow up.

And so I see one of these children making a really bad mistake with their money, and I could intervene and say, no, you can't do that. I think, right now, I want them to learn. I want them to be responsible.

I want them to take their chances and learn their lessons. Now, do I want them to waste the money? No, I don't. But I'm more willing to let them waste the money than waste the opportunity for them to learn something and be wiser next time.

In other words, sometimes you can't have everything you'd like. You'd like your kids always to make the right choice. Nothing can make you happier.

But sometimes to learn lessons and so forth, you have to watch as they go the wrong way and hold back and not intervene, not help. And if we do that with our children,

there's no reason to believe that that doesn't make sense to God, too. He created people to rule with Him, to reign with Him, to have dominion over all things.

But He doesn't want people doing that who make stupid choices and have bad loyalties. And so He lets people go the wrong way if that's where they're going to go. They disqualify themselves for the ultimate.

If we endure, we will reign with Him. But those who defect from Him, well, they show that they weren't the right stuff to reign in the universe with Christ. So He lets people make their mistakes.

He lets people do things He wishes they wouldn't do. I mean, this is, to my mind, obvious. This is not like we need proof texts for.

This is what we see happening in all the stories of the Bible when people go wrong. He doesn't want them to do that. But He'd rather let them do that than interfere and spoil the test entirely.

And spoil the lesson entirely. There are some things that matter more than intervening and micromanaging in your kids' activities. And I believe that's how God views it.

And so He does allow things to happen without Him intervening. With reference to specific circumstances, God's intervention is often conditioned on man's exercise of faith and prayer. In other words, there are things God would do if He's asked that He'll stand by and not do anything if He's not asked.

Because He made man to govern and said, okay, you're in charge here. But feel free to invite me to help you out anytime you want help. It's again like you're turning over the family business to your son before you die and you're saying, okay, you're in charge here.

I'm not going to tell you what you have to do. I'm not going to make you do the right thing. Not to make you do it the way I do it, but I'll be glad to give you advice.

I'll even be glad to step in there and fix things if you ask. But I'm not going to just hand it to you and pretend like I'm giving it to you and then jump in and interfere all the time. You have to ask me.

Otherwise, I'll let you make your own mistakes. And I believe that's the arrangement God has with man. I've given you the earth.

Feel free to call me in anytime you need me. But if you don't, I'll stand by and watch you ruin the whole thing if you want to. Because I really gave it to you.

This is not a sham. This is really yours. And I'm really available.

And feel free to ask. I hope you will before you ruin everything. But this is the arrangement.

It says in Matthew 13, 58 that Jesus couldn't do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the lack of their faith there. And I already mentioned James 4, 2. You do not have because you do not ask. A very clear statement.

God would have given you this. God would have intervened in the way you want Him to if you had asked Him. You didn't.

So He just kept His hands up. He just let you go your way and make your own mistakes. And live without His intervention if you want to.

And so God sometimes does not intervene simply because although He'd like to if He was invited, He just doesn't because He's not invited. He lets us make our own mistakes. With reference to man's obedience, God generally does not overrule man's will to rebel.

He does sometimes. And He has the right to step in whenever that's absolutely necessary to keep from sinking the ship. Remember I said that on a cruise ship, the ship goes where the captain wants it to go, not where the passengers necessarily determine it'll go.

They do what they want on the ship within limits. If they try to pull off a mutiny, well, the captain's got to put that down. There's times when the captain's got to say, I'm sorry, I'm not going to give you that much freedom.

You're not going to redirect the ship to another time zone than where we're supposed to be going, another part of the ocean. The ship's going this way, and anything you may want to do to make that happen otherwise, I'm not going to let you do that. And God has every right to intervene and stop some course of action that some human being has pursued if that's going to foul up something that God intends to go right.

But when that's not the case, He'll let them play shuffleboard and let them, you know, swim in the pool and let them do whatever they want on the ship without intervention most of the time. He lets people rebel if they will. In Isaiah chapter 1, in verse 2, God says, I have brought up and reared children, and they have rebelled against me.

He actually sounds, you know, disappointed. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner, the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not consider. It's like God is thinking, what's up with that? I raised these kids right. I gave them all the advantages like my vineyard, I did everything right to get good fruit.

How come I'm getting bad fruit? How come my kids are rebelling? Well, the answer is not stated, but one thing is very clear, is that God didn't prevent them from rebelling. He let them make their bad choices. Of course, they're going to pay a price for it, but he didn't stop them.

He didn't intervene to prevent them from rebelling. He does let people make their own choices most of the time, unless it's going to really foul things up in a way that he's not willing to let things get fouled up. Also, God's ability to intervene guarantees that ultimately God's macro purposes will be fulfilled in history.

Not the micro purposes all the time, because his will is that everyone would be saved, and maybe they won't. But the big picture, planet Earth and its history are going in the direction that God is going to make it go. And he can do that, like the master chess player, even regardless of what moves the novices make.

They're not going to stop his purpose from being fulfilled. The verse I want to give you here is a very typical Calvinistic proof text for sovereignty. It's Psalm 115, verse 3. It says, But our God is in heaven, he does whatever he pleases.

Now, there's quite a few verses in the Bible, in the Psalms and elsewhere, that make essentially the same statement. God does whatever he wants, no one can stay his hand. If he's purposed it, who will annul it? You can't make God's will not come to pass if he's determined to do a thing.

Daniel chapter 4 is another one of those verses. There's actually quite a long list we could give, but they all say kind of the same thing, that these verses say. In Daniel chapter 4, in verse 35, it says, There's a ton of verses in the Bible that say God does whatever he wants to do, and no one can stop him.

Now, to the Calvinists, this means meticulous providence. But they don't realize that it doesn't say meticulous providence. It doesn't say that God wants to tinker in everything that anyone's involved in.

He does what he wants to do. But that leaves open the question, what does he want to do? Does he want to micromanage everything or not? Well, these verses don't answer that question. All they say is that when he wants to do it, he does it.

And an Arminian has no trouble with that. We believe that too. We believe that God determines to do it, he'll do it.

He wants all people to say, but he hasn't determined that he's going to twist everyone's arm to the breaking point to get them to repent against their will. That's not something he's determined to do. He will use various means to persuade, but there are limits to what he will do.

He's not going to just reach right in and turn them around against their will. Unilaterally, I don't believe he is. Some people think, of course Calvinists think he does that.

And by the way, I should say, many Calvinists would object to my saying that. They would object to my saying that Calvinists think that God changes somebody against their will. The Calvinists say, wait, no, wait, that's misrepresenting what we're saying.

God doesn't change anyone against their will, he makes them willing. Well, what were they before he made them willing? They were unwilling. Did they want him to change them? No.

Then he changed them against their will. I mean, this is a very awful illustration, but if a young man is trying to seduce a young woman and she says no, let's not make it seduction, let's make it marriage, okay? He proposes to a young woman and says, will you marry me? She says no. So he slips her a roofie in her drink.

And now she's, you know, doesn't know what she's doing. And he says, now will you marry me? She says, sure. Let's go down to Las Vegas to the chapel and get married.

He's changed her will against her will. He slipped her a date rape drug. Now, of course you couldn't say God does that, but I have a hard time seeing in principle how that's different than what the Calvinists suggest, that God finds someone who's unwilling, because all people are unwilling.

According to them, they're all, no one is willing. No one can want God, no one can seek God, no one can love God, no one can even want God. They're enemies of God until God comes in unilaterally and changes their will against their wishes.

Sure, they now want it, but they didn't want to want it before. According to Calvinist teaching, they hated God. They were repulsed by God, is what many of the Calvinists say.

They found righteousness repulsive. Suddenly he says, well, I'll change that. Turns around, oh, now I love God.

Now, I do believe that God changes people's hearts, but I believe not against their will. The only way that Calvinism can be true is if God does it against their will, because before he does it, they're not willing for that to happen, by definition. Although the Calvinists object to saying that God saves people against their will, that sounds too brutal.

It sounds too much like forcing yourself on somebody who doesn't want you. Well, that's exactly what it is, because before he changes their hearts, they don't want him, and they would never want him unless he did the manipulation thing that he does, the irresistible grace thing, the tractor beam, where he draws them to himself, kicking and screaming.

Now, they say, no, it's never kicking and screaming because he changed their wishes.

They want to come to him, but how did they come to want that when they didn't want it before? He made them want it against their previous wishes. There's really no other way to look at that, it seems to me. I'd love to hear some reasonable explanation of how that isn't the scenario.

But nonetheless, God does what he wants to in heaven and earth, and no one can stay his hand. But does he want to force people to love him against their wishes? I don't think so. In my understanding of the scripture, he wants everyone to love him, and if he could force them against their wishes, he'd have everyone doing it, everyone loving him.

Why is it that he gets some and not all? To the Calvinist, he only wants a few, he doesn't want the others. To the non-Calvinist, he says, no, he wants everybody, but not everyone will agree to it. Not everyone will willingly surrender and humble themselves and repent and choose to follow him.

So there's two different explanations of why he doesn't save everyone. The Calvinist says, well, he must not want to because he always gets what he wants. Well, that's not what the Bible necessarily says.

The Bible, he often expresses his disappointment with man. But his disappointment with man doesn't mean that he's going to lose in the final analysis. He's going to get his way, at least in his purposes in the earth are going to be fulfilled.

He's going to have his bride. He's going to have his remnant. He's going to have a new heavens, new earth wherein dwell righteousness.

And if there's people who don't agree to that, the worst for them, they'll have to go wherever else it is to go, which is hell. But no one's going to ultimately win out against God in this matter in a tug of war. But he's not always tugging.

He's not always, he gives a lot of people a lot of rope sometimes. And with that slack rope, they do a lot of things he wishes they wouldn't do, but he doesn't ordain it. Now, the next point is that God's general rule over history is described in scripture a certain way.

For one thing, the Bible says he can raise up and depose rulers. Now, history is usually run by the rulers for the most part. The big things in history, the rise and fall of kingdoms, it's usually the kings and the presidents and the armies and stuff that do that.

Well, God rules over them. And therefore he can make history go whatever way he wants. First of all, he can take a ruler out.

If that person's too obstinate, won't do what he wants, he can take him out, put someone

else in, who would? And Daniel tells us that very clearly. God raises up rulers and brings down rulers. The most high rules in the affairs of men and he gives the kingdoms of men to whoever he wills.

Daniel says that in Daniel 2.21 and Daniel 4.17 and a number of other times in Daniel, especially in Daniel 4 and 5. Now, that's one way to get your will done in the earth. If the rulers of the world are the ones making the decisions about the direction history is going and you can take out any ruler you want to and replace it with someone else you want in there, you're pretty much in the driver's seat for that way it turns out in history. And God is.

He is in the driver's seat. He can also direct their decisions when they're in power. Proverbs 21.1 is one of the favorite Calvinist texts and it's one of my favorites too.

Proverbs 21.1 The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. As the rivers of water, he turns it with or soever he will. The heart of the king.

That means the decisions the king makes. That's in God's hand. He can turn that just like he can turn the rivers.

He can turn the king's heart. Now, the reason Calvinists like this verse is because it seems to say that God micromanages the decisions even of the rulers. He just is always steering their heart wherever he wants it to go.

Of course, it doesn't quite say that that's the case. What it says is that God does turn king's hearts wherever he wants them to go. It doesn't say how often he wishes to do such a thing.

He can put it in the heart of a king or withhold something from the heart of a king because a king is not a normal guy. A king's decisions often affect God's people and God's overall purposes. God is sovereign.

He can go in there and say, you'd like to do this, I'm going to make you do that instead. The fact that he does that with a king whenever he wants to do it, and we don't know how often he does want to do that, but whenever he wants to, he can do that. That doesn't tell us much about his general ruling in the lives of every peon on the planet like you and me who aren't changing history by the decisions we make day by day.

The fact that God has the power and the right to change our king's heart when he wants to is guaranteed. How often he chooses to intervene in that way, we do not know. Certainly, the Calvinist is reading too much into it when he says this means that every decision a king makes is what God's making him make.

If that's true, we have to wonder why God was so upset with so many of the evil kings in Israel who did things that he didn't want them to do. And there's even the case of Ahab,

interesting, at the end of 1 Kings, in chapter 22, it's not in your notes, but Ahab was a wicked king. He married Jezebel and he persecuted the prophets and things like that.

And God wanted him dead. Now, God could have just struck him dead, but God had a plan, and that was he's going to make him go to war against the Syrians at a place called Ramoth Gilead, a place that used to belong to Israel, but the Syrians had taken it from him. And so Ahab wanted to recover Ramoth Gilead from the Syrians and go to war against them.

And Judah's king, which I believe was Jehoshaphat at that time, no, Hezekiah, it was Hezekiah, I believe, was visiting him. Well, I'm not really sure. Maybe it was Jehoshaphat.

I forget now. But he was visiting King Ahab, and Ahab said, will you go with me, your troops, and you go with me to fight against Syria and recover Ramoth Gilead. And Judah's king said, well, let's inquire of the prophets of God.

And Ahab had all these hireling prophets who didn't even know Yahweh. They were just professional prophets on the king's cabinet. And they all said, yeah, go and prosper at Ramoth Gilead.

But they didn't prophesy in the name of Yahweh. And Judah's king said, well, isn't there a prophet who prophesies in the name of Yahweh, so we can get Yahweh's opinion about this? And Ahab said, oh, there's one guy. His name is Micaiah, but I don't like him.

He always prophesies negative stuff. And the king of Judah said, nonsense. Call him in here.

So they went and called Micaiah. And the servant who went to fetch Micaiah told Micaiah, he says, now all the king's prophets have told him to go and prosper. You say the same thing, and it'll go well with you.

And Micaiah said, I'm just going to say whatever the Lord tells me to say. And so Micaiah comes in before these two kings, and Ahab says, well, how is it, Micaiah? Should I go and fight at Ramoth Gilead? And Micaiah says the same thing the other prophets said, but apparently with a sarcastic tone. He says, go and prosper.

And Ahab recognizes he may be sarcastic. He says, how many times have I told you not to say anything except what the Lord tells you to do? And Micaiah said, well, if that's what you want. He says, I saw all the people of Israel scattered on the hillsides because their shepherd was slain, the king.

And Ahab turned to Judah's king and said, see, I told you, he always says bad stuff. And Micaiah said, well, you called for me. You listened to me.

I'll tell you what I saw. I had a vision, and the Lord was sitting on his throne, and all the

angels were with him. And he said, who will go and persuade Ahab to fall at Ramoth Gilead? And he said, one angel said one thing, and one said another.

And he wasn't getting any opinions that appealed to him. Finally, one came up and said, I'll go, and I'll persuade him. And God said, how? And this spirit said, I'll be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets.

And God said, go and do so. And Micaiah said, therefore, Ahab, know that God has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets who are trying to get you out and die. And Ahab ordered Micaiah to be put in prison.

He says, put this man in prison until I come back safely. And Micaiah said, if you come back safely, the Lord has not spoken by me. And what's interesting about that is God wanted this man dead.

And God's got an infinite number of ways to get a man dead, including drop a meteorite on his head, strike him with lightning, cause an angel of the Lord to smite him so he's eaten with worms and dies. You know, God's got a lot of stuff available to him. But what God wanted to do is persuade him to go fight a certain battle where he would die in battle, which he did.

But God didn't just tweak his heart and say, hey, I think I'll go do this. He sent a lying spirit to his prophets to persuade him to do it. How does God change the hearts of kings? Maybe lots of different ways.

But it doesn't look like God just always unilaterally just reaches down there and directs the king's heart just through no means at all. Nor that he even always does so. But he can.

And it's nice to know that he can. In Exodus chapter 4, God told Moses, I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will not let the people go. In Revelation 17, verses 16 and 17, it says that the ten horns on the beasts are ten kings, and these give their power to the beast for a little while because God has put it in their hearts to give their power to the beast.

Interesting. These are wicked kings, and God directs their hearts to be in league with the beast. So God obviously can turn the hearts of kings when he wants to.

There's no suggestion that every time a king makes any kind of decision at all that God is behind that decision. But God does this kind of thing with kings. God does it whenever he wants to do it.

Though God can and often does direct rulers, he is not the author of every political development. Hosea 8.4, God says to Israel, You set up kings, but not from me. Interesting.

God raises up kings and brings down kings, but that's not always the case. He does it when he wants to. Apparently a lot of times he lets politics run their course without his own intervention.

You set up kings, but not from me. He says, I didn't give you those kings. I can set up kings and bring down kings.

I didn't do it in this case. I didn't raise these ones up. You did that.

You see, God actually disowns those kings. He actually disavows any responsibility for those kings. He'll boast of his ability to raise up kings and bring them down when he does it, but he doesn't always do it.

He does it whenever he wants to, but God's intervention isn't all the time in everything. It can be much more than it is if we pray more, because he would do more things in answer to our prayers than he's going to do if we don't pray. You have not because you have not.

God's intervention in the Christian life and in the world could be far more extensive and intensive probably than it is if Christians prayed better, more faithfully, more diligently. But it doesn't mean he's doing everything everywhere. He does everything he wants to do, and no one can stop him.

No one can stay his hand. His purposes will be fulfilled. But there are things that are not his doing.

He doesn't approve every decision of rulers, though he remains sovereign over the ultimate outcome events. Look at Isaiah 54, 15. Isaiah 54, 15.

Indeed, they shall surely assemble. He means armies against you. Christians will be attacked by the enemy, armies.

It says, if we read back far enough, it talks about this, and it says, Indeed, they shall surely assemble, but not because of me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. In other words, I'm going to protect you from these people who come against you.

Their coming against you wasn't my doing. They're coming on their own. I didn't make this happen.

Now, by contrast, Isaiah 10 talks about the Assyrians coming against Israel and defeating them, and the Assyrians are brought by God. He says they're like a tool in his hand. He said the Assyrians don't see it that way.

The Assyrians think they're just conquerors, but he says can the axe boast against him that hews with it, or the saw against him that shakes it? The idea here is that the

Assyrians coming against Israel on a certain occasion were God's doing. They were a tool in God's hand. That was God's sovereign intervention, but this isn't.

There are times people will come against you, and God's not doing it. They're not a tool in God's hands. He will overthrow them, but he didn't bring them.

You see, what a Calvinist does is they find verses where God changes a king's heart, or where God drags Assyria down to defeat somebody. We see God moving armies and moving nations and moving kings all over, and they extrapolate from that. He does that to everyone and to every king at all times, but the reason the Bible mentions when it does that this is God's doing is because it isn't always.

If it always was, it'd be superfluous. It'd be redundant to say God is bringing this on you. Well, duh, doesn't everything that happens come from God? No, not everything does.

Some will assemble against you, but not from me, he said. But when he does say, okay, the Lord is bringing this on you, that's because it's a special enough case to mention it. It's not what's always happening.

In Isaiah 37 and verse 36, we read, the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000, and when the people arose early the next morning, they were corpses, all dead. Now, this is referring to when the Assyrians, who had already conquered Israel as God's tool to punish Israel, they then came down against Judah, and God had no intentions of judging Judah, or maybe he would have, but Hezekiah prayed. Remember, God does things when you pray that he might not have.

When Hezekiah prayed, it was not God's will for the Assyrians to conquer Jerusalem, so God sent an angel and killed 185,000 soldiers in one night, and that kind of ended the siege. He could have done that any time to any other battle, too. He doesn't do that all the time.

God is in control. We don't ever have to worry that if we're praying and trusting him that somehow the circumstances of our lives are beyond his control. He's got the resources.

Jesus could have called 12 legions of angels to deliver him, and God would have answered that prayer, but Jesus didn't pray it because it wasn't the will of God. Apparently, it was the will of God for Hezekiah to pray for one angel, and if one angel can kill 185,000 soldiers, I wonder what 12 legions could do. The point is, however, that God is truly sovereign over the macro purposes that He wants to do and sovereign enough to respond to His people's prayers if it's His will to do so in a given case, but that doesn't mean that everything that happens is automatically what He wants.

He doesn't intervene in every little detail unless He's asked, and even when He's asked, He sometimes says it may not be His will to do so. Yes, He can bring the Assyrians against Samaria. He can defend Judah against the same people, and other rulers can

come against you and then not be from God at all.

He's got nothing to do with it. He disavows any involvement. So, God rules over the large matters of history and the way kings rule and so forth.

Now, He also governs particular circumstances like nature. We read of Jesus stilling the wind and the waves with the command in Mark 4, but we read of God doing the same thing in Psalm 107. God can control the weather and does when He wants to.

Does He always? I don't know. I think a lot of weather just follows the course of natural law. It's my guess.

The Bible doesn't say otherwise. In fact, again, once again, when the Bible says God brought the storm that sent Jonah's ship into turmoil, or God made the storm stop when Jesus commanded it, it almost sounds like on these occasions, God was doing something unique, something special. Not that every storm out in the middle of the sea where there's no people to experience it, God's making that one happen too, specifically because He likes to watch the wind swirl around.

I mean, God doesn't have to do that. Nature will do most of that. God can protect people from what nature would do, or He can manipulate nature and make it go where He wants to, or He can just stand back and let it do what it's going to do.

But He at least is the one who makes those decisions. He can intervene all the time if He wants, or some of the time if He wants, or none of the time. He's sovereign.

But the thing is, weather cannot get away with anything that He has determined that it won't get away with. There's not going to be a Katrina if God doesn't let it happen. Now, that doesn't mean that Katrina was God's judgment, as some people think.

I don't know if it was or not. It doesn't mean Katrina was even God's deliberate will to happen. He just didn't intervene.

Katrina may very well have just been the laws of nature doing what the laws of nature do. But God could have stopped it if He wanted to, but He doesn't always do that. He's not obligated to.

But He certainly has the power over it. Likewise, He has the power to thwart the plots of evil men. He doesn't create the plots of evil men that He thwarts.

That'd be a silly thing for Him to do. Calvinism thinks that evil plots are something God ordains, but sometimes men make those plots and God stops them. In Psalm 21, verse 11, it says about certain evil men, it says, They intended evil which they were not able to perform.

They made a plot, but they weren't able to do anything. They couldn't pull it off because

God didn't let them. Remember the men who swore that they wouldn't eat anything? Forty men swore they wouldn't eat anything until they killed Paul? They must have gotten very lean because he lived for years after that.

Because God saw to it that Paul's nephew overheard the plot, told Paul, told the centurion, and the centurion whisked Paul away to safety, and Paul spent another two years in prison in Caesarea and then went to Rome. Those guys must have gotten real hungry. But you see, they were determined to kill Paul and God was determined they weren't going to.

Men can make their plots and God can say, That's what you think. See, now God didn't put the plot in their mind. That was their doing.

They can be punished by God justly as much as if they pulled it off, even though they didn't, because their wicked plot was to kill Paul, and God can judge them as murderers. But he doesn't have to leave Paul in their hands if he doesn't want to. People can intend an evil work and not be able to perform it because God just says, It's not in my calendar today.

It's not going to happen here. And God is sovereign over that. He can stop the evil plots.

And that's good to know, too, because a lot of evil things are being done in our day, in this country as well as elsewhere, by people in high places and so forth. And you know, God could stop them if he wants to. And maybe he would if we were better about praying.

I don't know. Or maybe he wouldn't. Maybe the nation's under judgment.

Who can say? God knows and I'm not sure. But the point is, we can wring our hands and say, Oh, no, evil is ruling. Or we can recognize, Well, it's only ruling as much as God lets it.

And maybe he's only letting it as much as we're letting it because we won't pray and we don't ask him. We have not because we ask not. Or we ask with vapid apathy instead of with passion and determination and prayer and fasting and watchings and vigils and things that the early church did when they prayed.

We kind of just mouth a few prayers and we say we've prayed. I wonder if God sees some of that as prayers, including mine. I'm not anywhere near the passionate prayer that I think would be good to be.

That's just a confession. He also can turn evil acts into good. Remember, again, Joseph's brothers.

Joseph's brothers plotted to do an evil thing and they did it. God let him do it, but he

meant it for good. He turned it out to be a good thing after all.

It says that in Genesis chapter 15, verse 20. You intended evil against me, Joseph said, but God meant it for good. That's a great thing to know.

People can be planning to hurt you and God can either let them or not let them. And if he does let them, it's because he intends it for good. And good to have him on your side.

In Psalm 76, verse 10, it says, Surely the wrath of man shall praise you. With the remainder of wrath you shall gird yourself. The interesting thing about this verse is that James says the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

God does not approve of the wrath of man. That's not how he wants us to operate. When James says you should be slow to wrath because the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God, he's saying don't get angry because that's not how God wants his will to be done.

But he can make the wrath of man to work out his plan anyway if he wants to. He doesn't approve of it. It's not his desired way of things getting, but he can pull it off.

He can take the wrath of man and cause that even to glorify him because he is God and no one else is. Now, how does he particularly rule over the lives of believers? A, by giving commands, which believers want to obey because they're believers. Also, by inward direction.

Paul says it is God who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure in Philippians 2.13. Jeremiah 31.33 says, I will write my laws in their hearts and put my ways in their inward parts. God works inside of the believer to urge us to go the right way. He does so by providences.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16.9 that God had opened a door of opportunity to him and that's the way he's going to go. He sees God opening the door. He says that's where God wants me to go.

I'm going that direction. That's how God guides believers through his commands, through his inward working, through circumstances like opening doors, providences, also by chastening. If we're going the wrong way, he can pull out the switch.

In 1 Corinthians 11.32 it said, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we're chastened by the Lord so that we might not be condemned with the world. We're going the wrong way, we're going to be condemned with the world.

If we go that way very far, God chastens us to turn us around so we won't be condemned with the world. He directs the believers. Now, none of these things are by direct imposition of his will.

He convicts us in our hearts. He tells us in his word what to do. He shows us by providences what's the right way.

But we don't always obey. He doesn't force obedience even upon believers. But believers by definition are people who want to obey and therefore we do most of the time.

Now, how does God draw sinners? This is part of the providence of God that the Calvinists and Armenians disagree about. They believe God has an irresistible drawing of sinners. Armenians don't believe that.

He desires all to be saved. The Bible says that. Jesus died for all.

1 John 2.2 He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 Timothy 2.6 Who desires that all men should be saved. 1 Timothy 4.10 Jesus who is the savior of all men especially those who believe, Paul says.

He calls all to repent. In Acts 17.30 Paul told the Athenians God in times of ignorance winked but now he commands all men everywhere to repent. How does God draw sinners? By dying for them and appealing to them to repent and he desires that all repent.

2 Peter 3.9 God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Ezekiel 33.11 Turn you, turn you, for why will you die? I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that the wicked would turn from his evil way and live. God's intentions about this are not secret.

He wants all to be saved. So how does he draw them? By the display of his grace. Paul says it's the goodness of God that leads you to repentance.

Jesus said God causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and causes the rain to fall on the wicked and the righteous by being good. The prodigal son came home because he remembered how good his father was. Not because his father was out there with a whip threatening to hurt him but because he remembered, you know, my father is good to his servants.

He treats his servants better than my master here in the pig farm treats me. I'm going back to his house. That's better there.

My dad's a good guy. It's the goodness of God, the display of God's grace that leads people to repentance in many cases. Also by the manifestation of the truth.

God reveals the truth to unbelievers through the display in the heavens. Paul says in Romans 1 that, you know, he's made his infinite power and so forth known through the things he's made and also through the preaching of the gospel. Also by the conviction of sin.

In John 16, 8, Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes he will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And so he does. In Acts 2, 37, when Peter preached it says they were pricked in their hearts.

Also when Stephen preached the Zanhedrin they were pricked in their hearts, it says too in chapter 7. Different response though. They were pricked in their hearts when Peter preached and they repented. They pricked in their hearts when Stephen preached and they stoned him.

But they were convicted. No question about that. God convicted their hearts.

And also he appeals to man's self-interest. Although he doesn't desire that we live in self-interest he realizes that some people are just not unselfish enough to not think about what's in it for me. And so he'll persuade them, like Peter said in Acts 2, 40 to save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

Luke 13, 3 said if you don't repent you'll all likewise perish. In Acts 9, 5, when Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus he said it's hard for you to kick against the goats. In other words, this is not doing you much good, is it? How's this working out for you? Kicking against the goats, it's hurting you.

It's not good for you. It hurts you to kick against the pricks, he said. In other words, don't you see it's better for you to stop doing that? And God appeals to people's enlightened self-interest.

Also the pressure of circumstances. Jonah was disobedient and God put him in the belly of a whale. He did a lot of rethinking of his decisions there.

And when he was vomiting out he was ready to obey. God didn't manipulate his heart through some kind of sovereign activity except to just put him in a tank underwater for three days. Let's see if that's better.

Is this better? Is this better than Nineveh for you? I don't think so. The prodigal son repented partly because he was under pressure. He was poor.

He was in a famine. He was feeding pigs. He was brought to a low point.

So God uses persuasion and pressure of circumstances. He also encourages a godly sorrow. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7.10 that a godly sorrow leads to repentance.

And God grants repentance to people. Helping a willing but weak faith. This is another thing God does.

Remember the man said, Jesus, I believe, but help my unbelief. If a person has a little bit of faith but not enough, God can help them along. He can do things to encourage their faith.

These are ways that God draws sinners. But it's not yanking them totally against their will. These are ways in which he seeks to persuade them to be obedient and repentant.

But he doesn't force the issue. Now man's resistance to God's rule. This is the last point.

I know it's been long. There's a lot in the Bible. God draws animals irresistibly.

They always obey. Which is a major difference between men and beasts. And those verses there are the ones in Jeremiah 8 and Isaiah 1 that talk about how the animals are obedient but man isn't.

Those given to Christ by the Father came to Jesus. However, they were already those who were God's faithful people prior to Christ's coming. Jesus said so in John 17.6. We'll talk more about those verses in a later lecture.

And they were capable of falling away. People who are given to Christ can fall away. Judas was one of them.

Jesus said, of those that you've given me, Father, I've lost none except that one. The son of perdition. He was one that God gave to Jesus and he did fall away.

God's predestination did not determine man's choices. But the consequence of man's choices. We're not going to look at these verses now.

We will later in the course of the lectures. God didn't predestinate some to be saved and some to be lost. What he predestined, according to Paul, is that those who are saved will experience a certain end game.

There will be a certain destiny for those who are believers. And that is to be conformed to the image of his son. That's what's predestinated.

Nowhere does it say anyone is predestinated to become a Christian. What was predestinated is that Christians, those who are Christians, would have a certain destiny. To be conformed to the image of God's son.

It says in Romans 8.29. We'll look at these verses more closely under other headings. Inequality in God's dealing with man is the result of man's doing, not God's. This is a direct denial of Calvinism.

Calvinism says any difference in our fates is because God determined it. No, the Bible says it's because man determined it. There's lots of verses that say so.

I'm not going to look at all those now because we've run out of time. But frequently God says those who honor me, I will honor. Those who despise me will be lightly esteemed.

Or God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. God's dealing with people is

according to what they are. You're proud, he's going to resist you.

You're humble, he's going to give you grace. You honor him, he's going to honor you. You hate him, he's going to lightly esteem you.

God can be resisted, but it's always to man's hurt, of course. I want to just close with this summary from Jerry Walls, who's an Arminian, not a Calvinist. But he's, since we read a lot about what the Calvinists say about God's sovereign rule, I thought one Arminian could counterbalance that pretty well.

Jerry Walls said, In trying to read the Bible cautiously and on its own terms, we see a sovereign God who is freely chosen to create a world fully dependent on him, yet different from him. A world open to divine causation, but not comprehensively determined by its divine sustainer. A world inhabited by God, but not utterly overwhelmed by divine presence.

We are not seeking to establish human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty. Rather, we are seeking to affirm God's freedom to create whatever kind of world he desired. Even a world whose every movement is not to be traced back ultimately to a specific divine determination.

If God has in fact chosen to create this kind of a world, we neither glorify him nor magnify his sovereignty by insisting that he has created a world of a different sort. So, what he's saying is, the Calvinists think we don't glorify God if we don't make him the one who makes everything happen. It's just, you know, he's too small a God if he didn't ordain everything.

This Arminian is saying, no, it's not more glorifying to God to say he's that kind of a ruler if he's not. If he is, then of course we glorify him by recognizing what he is. But if he's not, we don't glorify him more by pretending that he is.

We glorify him best by recognizing what he has revealed about his intentions and about his activities. And so, this was kind of a crammed course on the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty and its different aspects. I realize it went longer than probably desirable, but I didn't want to make another lecture out of it because we want to get to the actual five points and examine those in our next lecture.

I didn't want to spill this over to another day. So, I just took advantage of your being a captive audience and kept it going.