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The Sovereignty of God in Scripture (Part 1)



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

In this discussion, Steve Gregg tackles the concept of God's sovereignty and its role in Scripture, particularly its relation to Calvinism. He explains the classical view of Augustinian Calvinism, which suggests that everything that happens is foreordained by God, while also acknowledging the mystery of God's ways. Gregg argues against the idea that God is a micromanager, noting that God allows free will while still guiding the direction of events. He also highlights the tension between God's desire for all to be saved and his active intervention in the lives of the elect, which some interpretations of Calvinism teach.

Transcript

Okay, we're looking at lecture number two, The Sovereignty of God in Scripture. Now, eventually we're going to be looking at the five points of Calvinism, not in this lecture, but in this series. And we're going to actually go over the defense for each of the five points of Calvinism.

And I'm going to spend at least one lecture in this series defending Calvinism from the Scripture the way they do it. And then in the latter part of the series we'll be re-examining all those five points and trying to give a more responsible treatment from Scripture. But before we do that, what we really have to deal with is the subject of the Sovereignty of God.

And that's partly because no matter what else they lean upon, Calvinists believe and have a fierce loyalty to their doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. In fact, what they believe sovereignty means, as I've told you before, is meticulous providence. They believe that God controls and ordains everything that happens, including sin.

And they believe that if anything less than this is affirmed, that we have a smaller, weaker God. That the highest view of God is the highest view of sovereignty of God, they say. Now, of course, non-Calvinists say, well, we believe that God is sovereign.

But if God is sovereign in the way that the Calvinist says, then God is seemingly responsible for sin in the fall. And really people go to hell, go there without having had

any choice in the matter. And it doesn't really seem like God is very just or merciful.

And the truth is, I believe, having looked at this subject for many decades now, the difference in the mentality between the Calvinist and the Arminian is generally this. The Calvinist thinks that God is most glorified by affirming his prerogatives and his sovereign will. That he gets his way because he's just that powerful.

And he's that big. And no one can resist God because he's the biggest guy in the universe. And he's strong.

And if you diminish that at any level from where they're at, you're demeaning God. And you're failing to glorify God. And you're giving credit to man.

You're beginning to glorify human free will, they say. They believe that anything less than Calvinism is humanism. And that only Calvinism really gives God the honor that's due his name because they emphasize his prerogatives as the ruler of the universe.

Those who are not Calvinists generally say, well, I think God's glorified more by glorifying his character, his goodness, his compassion, his justice, his mercifulness, the kind of person he is. The non-Calvinist usually thinks that God is more glorified when we represent his character correctly rather than his privileges. You see, his sovereignty is about God's privileges.

He's got the right to do whatever he wants to do. That's what sovereignty means. And it's true.

God does have the right to do whatever he wants to do. But his character controls what it is he wants to do. And this is something that many times in conversations with people who hold to Calvinism, they haven't thought this through.

They believe that to say that God ordains all that is, that he meticulously controls all things, this is the most uncompromising, loftiest view of God that a person can hold because they're not taking away from his sovereignty. And they'll usually say that they, unlike Arminians, Calvinists, believe in the absolute sovereignty of God. Well, actually, Arminians believe in the absolute sovereignty of God too.

But the definition is different. Because the word sovereignty doesn't have to mean meticulous providence. And there's no good reason that it necessarily should be equated with that.

The word sovereignty is a perfectly good word in the English language even when it's not applied to God. For example, many people are arguing that the United States should be sovereign instead of being part of the United Nations. What does sovereign mean? Self-governing.

Sovereign means not answerable to anybody else. Sovereign means you've got the authority to make your own decisions in your realm and no one has any right to say you can't do that. In a sense, a father is sovereign in his home, although, of course, he's subject to laws and things like that if he's abusive or neglectful.

But insofar as he's not breaking any laws, the father is the sovereign over his home. A king is a sovereign over his nation. These are the normal uses of the word sovereign when we're not talking about the sovereignty of God.

And by the way, the word sovereign isn't found in the Bible. It's a theological word, but it's a good word. What sovereignty means is that God is the ruler.

A sovereign is a king or a lord or a father. These are the images that the Bible uses from which we derive our understanding of God being sovereign. The word sovereign is an ordinary word that speaks of somebody having the absolute right to do whatever he wants to do within his own realm and that nobody can really justly answer against what he does because he's sovereign.

That's the definition of sovereign. But notice that doesn't tell us anything about how he exercises his dominion. A father may be sovereign in his home, and because of that he has the right to schedule his children's day every moment.

This time of day you're doing this, this time of day you're doing that. And he can do that if he wants to. He's sovereign, but he doesn't have to do that.

He doesn't have to micromanage his home in order to be properly sovereign. He can choose for there to be a lot of liberty in his home. He can give his children lots of free time if he feels that's good for them or good for his home.

He can give them choices about things. That doesn't make him less sovereign. They're still answerable to him.

Even a king over his domain doesn't have to be a tyrant micromanaging everything in the lives of his subjects. Sovereignty, when applied to kings, has never meant micromanagement. Some kings might like to micromanage, but of course they can't.

And I've often pointed this out to Calvinist. You know, well, a king doesn't necessarily micromanage everything his subjects do. And they say, yeah, but he can't because he's a human being, but God can because he's all-powerful.

Well, that doesn't tell me everything I need to know about God. What he can do is not as interesting to me as what he wants to do. Does he want to micromanage everything, or was it his will to create a realm where some of his creation has a bit of freedom? He can still work with that.

You see, some people who take a Calvinist view of providence and sovereignty, they say, well, if God leaves free choices to people, then how do we know that God's will is going to work out in the end? I don't think God has any problem with that. He's bigger than all the people combined by a magnitude of infinity. Sometimes the illustration is given of a chess master who's playing ten games against ten novices at the same time.

He beats them all. He doesn't have to determine what they're going to move. He'll beat them anyway.

It doesn't matter what they do. They make their choices quite freely, but he can checkmate them nonetheless because he's better than they are at it. And God can still fulfill his purposes in the world even if he doesn't micromanage everything people do.

Some people compare it to a cruise ship. You know, the captain is steering the ship. It's going from New York to London.

The passengers are playing shuffleboard or they're sitting by the pool or they're gambling or they're eating or they're jogging. They're doing whatever they want to do. The passengers do whatever they want to, but the ship still goes where the captain wants it to go.

Now, the passengers could jump ship and they don't have to go where the ship's going. They can just throw themselves overboard if they choose, but they can't change where the ship's going. The ship is guided by the captain and it's going where he wants it to go.

In the context of that ship, people can make all kinds of free choices and it doesn't interfere at all with where the ship's going. In other words, a non-Calvinist says God has a plan and he's working his plan, but that doesn't necessitate that he controls every individual thing anyone ever does. And in fact, some say it's a higher view of God's sovereignty to say that he doesn't have to micromanage everything.

He can still win. If God has to have everything controlled like a machine that he pushes all the buttons and nothing can be out of his control, no detail can, or else he's going to lose his position, then he's a weaker God than one who can actually allow some of his creatures to have freedom and he can still bring about whatever he wants to happen ultimately in the macro. So the question is, does God exercise his prerogatives, his sovereignty, in a macro or micromanaging manner? So this is really where the difference is going to lie.

The first two pages of these notes on Lecture 2 are quotations and most of them are from Calvinist sources. The Westminster Confession of Faith, R.C. Sproul, John Calvin, Lorraine Bentner, Arthur W. Pink, R.C. Sproul again, James White. These are all Calvinist authorities.

And when we start by defining sovereignty, the classical approach is what the

Augustinian Calvinist approach of the Westminster Confession suggests that everything that happens is foreordained by God, which means that God decided and rendered inevitable that everything that happens would happen. Nothing could really go different than it really goes because he ordained it all. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.

Yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin nor is violence offered to the will of his creatures. Neither is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. Now, if you were paying attention, you might say, was there a contradiction in there somewhere? This particular statement is a statement of what Calvinists call compatibilist sovereignty and compatibilist free will.

Calvin didn't hold it, but the Westminster Confession of Faith represents more of what modern Calvinists usually hold. And we'll talk more about compatibilism in a little bit in these notes. But compatibilism means that to believe that God ordained everything inevitably to happen and that man is still free to do what he wants can be considered compatible notions.

Now, logically, they don't seem to be. That's one of the mysteries of Calvinism, is that they are mysteriously compatible, that you can be making free choices and yet everything you choose is what God foreordained before you were born that you would choose and do. And the fact that both these things can be true is called compatibilism and it's really the view of most modern Calvinists, not of Calvin.

Calvin was not a compatibilist, as we shall see, but R.C. Sproul is. And R.C. Sproul said, when we speak of divine sovereignty, we're speaking about God's authority and about God's power, that God, in some sense, foreordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty. To say that God foreordains all that comes to pass is simply to say that God is sovereign over his entire creation.

If God refused to permit something to happen, and it happened anyway, then whatever caused it to happen would have to have more authority and power than God himself. If there is any part of God's creation outside of God's sovereignty, then God is simply not sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then God is not God.

R.C. Sproul is a theology professor, and he once said in one of his lectures that I was listening to, he said he sometimes asks his class, how many of you are convinced atheists and no hands go up? And then he says, how many of you believe that God ordains everything that happens and not very many hands go up? And he says, now every one of you who does not believe that God ordains everything that happens should have raised your hand when I said how many of you are an atheist? Because he says, if God doesn't ordain all things, then he's not sovereign. And if he's not sovereign, he's not God. That's a very common Calvinist thing to say.

Sproul says it all the time. And notice where the premise of that little reasoning begins. If God doesn't ordain all that happens, then God is not sovereign.

Wait a minute. Who gave you the right to define sovereignty that way? I can be sovereign in my home without ordaining everything that happens in my home. As long as nothing's really challenging my authority, I can allow all kinds of things to happen that I don't directly cause or don't directly ordain.

And I can even let other people in the home make the decisions about things. And I'm still no less or more sovereign by doing so. To say if God doesn't ordain all that happens, he's not sovereign, is to create a definition of sovereignty that only Calvinists accept.

And you can win a debate by creating your own definitions. But it's not a valid way to win a debate. If you say, okay, I'm going to make this assertion, and this word means what I want it to mean, not what it usually means in the dictionary, not what it means to other people.

I want sovereignty to mean God ordains all things. And certainly if God's not sovereign, he's not God. So you have to believe in Calvinism to believe in God.

That's what Sproul says. That's what many Calvinists say. I have a note of my own there.

It says, in saying, I'm talking about Sproul's comment there. In saying, when we speak of divine sovereignty, we are speaking about God's authority and about God's power. Sproul omits the principle distinctive of the Calvinist system, as opposed to the non-Calvinist theology, namely meticulous providence.

There is no dispute between Calvinists and non-Calvinists over the issues of God's authority and God's power. All Christians accept both concepts. By leaving out this key issue, Sproul insinuates that Arminians, in rejecting the Calvinist view of sovereignty, are in fact denying what no Christian has ever dreamed of denying.

No Christian has any problem believing that God is sovereign. 100% sovereign. He has the right to do whatever he wants.

He made everything. It's his. He can do whatever he wants.

That's not what's being disputed. We don't deny that God has all power. God's omnipotent.

No one disputes that. Sproul makes it sound like if you believe that God has all authority and all power, you have to be a Calvinist. No, you have to add something else to that.

You have to assume that the God who has all power and all authority chooses to exercise his authority in a certain management style, which means he lets nothing happen that he doesn't directly control. That's a management style. That has nothing to do with

whether he has authority or power.

He actually has the authority, if he wishes, to do things differently than the Calvinists say he does. One of the leading Calvinist voices right now who's writing books, whom I debated on my radio show five times, is a man named James White. He's a Reformed Baptist.

Reformed means Calvinist. He wrote a book called *The Potter's Freedom*. He was answering Norman Geisler's book called *Chosen but Free*.

Norman Geisler wrote a book that's more or less Arminian, although he called it a moderate Calvinist view. James White, a Calvinist, came very strongly against him and wrote a whole book against him and called it *The Potter's Freedom*. Of course, the potter is God.

To James White, the Calvinist, to be an Arminian means you're denying that the potter has freedom to make what he wants from the clay. In fact, that's casting the argument wrongly. It's not a question of whether God has the freedom to make what he wants.

Does he have the freedom to do something the Calvinists don't want him to do? That's the question. What if God wants to make a world where there's free agents that he doesn't control? Is he free to do that as far as the Calvinists are concerned? No. By definition, he can't do that.

A guy who's much lesser known than James White wrote a book against it called *The Potter's Freedom to Love the World*. An Arminian wrote that saying that God, yeah, the potter has freedom. He has freedom to love everybody if he wants to.

The Calvinists won't allow that. He's got the freedom to give people free choice if he wants to. Calvinists don't allow that.

They rule it out by definition, but there's nothing in the actual definition of sovereignty that requires that to be ruled out. Because a sovereign is simply the person who holds the office of highest authority where the buck stops. He can do whatever he wants to.

The question is what kind of a person is he? And that'll dictate what he really wants to do with all that power he's got. And the character of God is going to be much more definitive of who God is and how things are run than the issue of his sovereignty. Because no Christian doubts that God is sovereign, that he's the supreme authority.

No Christian doubts he's all powerful. But many Christians doubt that he chooses to use that authority and power to control every atom and every decision of every person. And that's what's really at dispute.

The second point of the Calvinist paradigm is everything man does, including sin, is

ordained or instigated by God. Now we notice from the Westminster Confession of Faith, the first quote said that God has unchangeably and freely ordained whatever comes to pass. That's going to include sin.

A lot of sin comes to pass. Yet so he's not the author of sin, it says. Now this is something that Calvinists are very adamant about.

God is not the author of sin, they say. But they also say that God foreordained sin. In fact, look at these arguments here.

John Calvin himself, in Institutes of the Christian Religion, said, God has decreed that all events take place by his sovereign appointment. Everything done in the world is, according to his decree, so ordained by his decree. Lorraine Bentner, in his Reformed Doctrine of Predestination book, said, God creates the very thoughts and intents of the soul.

Arthur W. Pink, in the Doctrine of Election and Justification, wrote, God foreknows what will be because he has decreed what shall be. And Arthur Pink also said, God foreordains all things. R.C. Sproul, in his book Almighty Over All, wrote, God wills all things that come to pass.

Now think of how many things come to pass. A lot of sin, a lot of rebellion, the fall, everything bad. That's among the things that come to pass.

And yet the argument is God foreordains and wills everything that comes to pass. James White, whom I just mentioned a moment ago, in his book The Potter's Freedom, says God has wisely and perfectly, excuse me, wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe. John Calvin, in Institutes, wrote, The counsels and wills of men move exactly in the course which God has destined.

Augustine, Calvin says, Augustine everywhere teaches that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to hold that anything is done without God's ordination. No cause must be sought for it, but the will of God. All events are produced by the will of God, unquote.

Calvinist writer named Christopher Ness wrote a book called An Antidote Against Arminianism. And in that book he said, That it could not be but that Adam would sin is equally true, considering Adam was subordinate to the decrees of God, determining what Adam would do out of his freedom of his own will. There's that free will being compatible with God's decree and everything too.

By the way, you'll notice there's a lot of reference to this word decree. A lot of these quotes refer to God's sovereign decrees. Calvinists believe that if you got saved, it's because God sovereignly decreed that you'd be saved.

And his decree is irresistible. If somebody goes to hell, it's because God decreed that

they would go to hell. And his decree is irresistible.

If anything happens in the universe because God decreed it, they use this word decree as if it's found in the Bible. Just for your information, for future notice, there is no reference in the Bible to such decrees of God. The word decree is never used in the scripture.

And the concept is simply a theological concept introduced by Augustine to explain God determining or dictating that everything will happen. And we're going to find that in the Calvinist writings extensively. It's one of the favorite words of the Calvinists, God's decrees.

This idea of God's decrees is strictly a theological convenience, really. It's not anything that the Bible actually uses that term or speaks about, that I can tell, not in the way they speak about it. In Calvin's Institutes, he said, the first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet, that he should.

R.C. Sproul said, God desired for man to fall into sin. God created sin. Now notice, if you talk to Sproul, he'll read his books, he'll say God's not the author of sin, but he decreed that man would sin.

Man is the author of sin, but God decreed infallibly and inevitably that man would sin. And here he says God created sin, but he's not the author of sin. Now if that sounds like double talk to anybody, join the crowd.

I don't think that doesn't sound like double talk to anybody except to Calvinists. Somehow, that's a mystery. God decreed that man would sin, it was inevitable, God's not the author of sin.

How come? It's a mystery. It's the many mysteries in Calvinism, which other people call contradictions. Now a contradiction isn't always a mystery, and a mystery's not always a contradiction.

For example, the Trinity is a mystery, but it involves no contradiction. Some people say, well it sounds contradictory to say that God is three and he's one. Well, that would only be a contradiction if you said he's three in a certain sense, and he's one in the same sense.

That'd be a contradiction. But to say in one sense God is one, and in another sense he's three, well that's not contradictory, that's just new information. My wife and I are, in one sense we're two people, and in another sense we're one.

If I say we're one, I don't mean in the same sense that I'd say we're two. If I did, that's contradictory. But to say that God is in substance one, but in persons three, which is the traditional Trinitarian view, which I accept, that's not a mystery.

Well, it may be a mystery, but it's not a contradiction. We may not understand exactly what it means to be three persons in one substance, because we don't have many analogies from nature for that. I don't think people try to find them.

But there are certain mysterious things in the sense that we don't fully grasp them. But Calvinists often say, well you accept the mystery of the Trinity, why don't you accept these mysteries? Because, first of all, they're nonsense, if I might be polite about it. They contradict one another.

And you can't take two contradictory things and say they're both true, it's just a mystery how it's so. The truth is, there's only the mystery because one of the two members of that contradiction is created by the Calvinist theology without scriptural support. The scripture does not involve the contradiction that their theology involves.

But because they say it does, they have to appeal to mystery all the time. And this is one of the ways. God's not the author of sin, but he created it.

Oh, then who's the author of it? You know, sometimes Calvinists say, you know, your life is like a book. God's the author of the book. All history is like a book and God's the author.

But not of the parts about sin, apparently. He must have had a co-author. Someone else had to write the parts about sin because God's not the author of sin.

Well, that co-author is man. But Calvinists don't allow any co-authorship with God. Everything's from God unilaterally.

And therefore, you really can't have God anything but the creator of sin. He wrote the whole book of human history. But they're squeamish, to say the least, about calling God the author of sin.

How do they avoid it? They simply avoid the word author. They can say God willed sin, God created sin, God ordained sin. Was the author of sin? No, we don't use that word.

He's not the author of sin. But isn't the person who creates something and ordains something and makes it happen, isn't he the author of that action? Not in the Calvinist manner of speaking. You're not allowed to say that.

Kenneth Talbot and Gary Crampton wrote a book called Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism, Arminianism. They are Calvinists. And they said, The Reformed Christian may even biblically say that God has foreordained sin.

For if sin was outside the plan of God, then we would have to maintain that God does not control all things, and that some things come into being apart from his sovereign will. He is not to be considered the author of sin, they say. God was the divine first cause, they

mean, of sin, whereas godless men were the second cause.

Oh, that clears it up. Godless men are the proximate cause, and God is the distant cause. God is the first cause, and men are the second cause.

Therefore, men are the authors of sin, and God is only the first cause of sin. So he's not the author of sin. If that doesn't sound like double speak to you, then you're a Calvinist.

Because I don't know anyone who's not a Calvinist who would not see that as a fairly contradictory way of talking about the subject. And he says, Nothing is outside his sovereign purpose, including sin. But the decree with reference to sin is permissive, rather than an efficient decree.

Now, God decreed that men would sin, but he did so in a permissive way. He didn't do it in an efficient way. Now, by the way, these words permissive, efficient, and decree, all of them are non-biblical words.

They're just words that Calvinists use to try to make statements like this. That is, it is a decree that renders sin absolute certainty, but it is not brought about by a direct divine act. So that's how God's not the author of sin.

God decreed in such a way that it was an absolute certainty. Inevitable. Nothing else could have happened.

Only Adam and Eve could... One thing they could do is sin and nothing else. But God didn't do it directly himself. They did it.

So they're the authors of sin. Edwin H. Palmer, in his book, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, said, God ordains sin, and man is to blame. Sin is foreordained by God.

God ordained every evil thought, word, and deed in all of history. So God ordained every evil thought, word, and deed that anyone ever did, but man's to blame for that. How so? Their answer? Who are you, a man, to answer against God? I'm not answering against God.

I'm answering against Calvinism. I've got no problem with God. I've got problems with statements about God that don't make any sense and don't have any biblical basis.

Where does it say in the Bible that God ordained every thought and evil action of men in history? Where does it say that God ordained that Adam and Eve would fall, which is what Calvinists say, or that this person would reject Christ and this other person would not reject Christ? Where does it say that anywhere? It says that in Augustine's philosophical system, which is bought by the Calvinists. It doesn't say it in the Bible, and if it did, we'd have to wonder whether the biblical writers were schizophrenic because they say opposite things. And I don't think the Bible writers did contradict each other or

themselves.

I think that it's the Calvinists that are, sadly, contradicting what the Bible actually does say. God didn't ordain sin, and the Bible doesn't say that he did. John Calvin, in his Institutes, made this statement.

If God did not will it, we could not do it. Men do nothing save at the secret instigation of God. Now, here's the word not just ordains, and he instigated it.

God instigated man to sin. That kind of sounds like tempting man. Now, James said God is not tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man.

But God instigated, and this is Calvin's own words. Men do nothing save at the secret instigation of God. What he has previously decreed and brings to pass by his secret direction, whatever we conceive in our minds is directed in its end by the secret inspiration of God.

So every sin is directed by the secret inspiration of God. I had the impression reading the Bible that God didn't like sin. But he's the one who instigates it, inspires it, and ordains it.

But he's not the author of it, fortunately. I hate to involve him that closely in it. John Calvin also said men do only what God brings to pass.

Martin Luther, who was Augustinian also, said natural reason itself is forced to admit that the living and true God must be one who by his freedom imposes necessity upon us, since obviously he would be a ridiculous God if he could not and did not do everything, or if anything took place without him. He'd be a ridiculous God if he wasn't the Augustinian God. But the first four centuries of Christians didn't think he was very ridiculous, and they didn't hold the Augustinian view.

They must have just been illogical people themselves. Now interestingly, Calvin's stronger on this than Sproul is. Sproul does what many modern Calvinists do, but what they do, Calvin called, basically he basically said they're being mealy-mouthed.

Sproul is fairly typical of modern Calvinists when he says this. This is from his book, Chosen by God. He says, we know that God is sovereign because we know that God is God.

Therefore, we must conclude that God foreordained sin. What else can we conclude? We must conclude that God's decision to allow sin to enter the world was a good decision. This is not to say that our sin is really a good thing, but merely that God's allowing us to do sin, which is evil, is a good thing.

God's allowing evil is good, but the evil that he allows is still evil. The fact that God decided to allow us to sin does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin. Now I

italicize the word allow and allowing every time it's in here for a good reason, because we're going to see what Calvin said about this kind of talk.

Calvin felt that people who talk about God allowing something are watering down God's sovereignty. God didn't allow anything, he made it happen. Now what Sproul actually says diffuses much of the objectionable-ness of the Calvinist doctrine.

Frankly, what Sproul says in this paragraph is not unreasonable. God, in fact, if he didn't stop a sin from happening, has allowed it to happen, because God indeed is all-powerful. He could stop it.

He could have, for example, before Hitler killed six million Jews, he could have killed Hitler. God had no trouble doing that. He could have killed Stalin.

He could have killed Mao Tse-Tung. He could kill anyone he wants to. In the book of Acts, Herod displeased him, and an angel of the Lord struck Herod, and worms ate him, and he died.

God can do that any time he wants to. He struck us dead for touching the ark. God could strike anyone dead he wants to.

God could stop sin from happening, and if sin happens, God at least has chosen not to stop it. That doesn't mean he chose to make it happen. It doesn't mean that he inspired it in the mind of the sinner.

It means that he sees a sinner about to do something, and God has to decide, am I going to let this happen, or am I going to step in and not let it happen? Indeed, God lets sinful things happen. He let Joseph's brothers sell him into captivity. That was an evil act, but he let it happen for a good purpose.

He let Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and Pilate crucify Jesus. That's a bad thing. God let it happen.

God can allow bad things to happen without himself being bad. Sometimes bad things are the first step toward a good thing happening. There's no question about that.

We know that's true. Therefore, every sin that does occur, it occurs because God did not choose to stop it when he could have. We can't say he allowed it.

But that's not what Calvinism teaches. Calvinism teaches that God instigated it, inspired it. In other words, it's not just that God saw that Joseph's brothers wanted to sell him into slavery and didn't stop it, because he could use this to get Joseph to Egypt.

To the Calvinists, God put it in the minds of the brothers to hate Joseph. And to plot against him and so forth. In other words, God's the instigator of that sin, not just one who exploited it.

I think God's wisdom is such that he can exploit the bad decisions that he does prevent people from making. But to say that he gave them those thoughts is a very different kind of thing. To say that he ordained that they would have those thoughts and made it inevitable that they would, that's a different kind of a claim.

Now, Sproul seems to be talking in terms here, although his book, *Chosen by God*, is a book about Calvinistic sovereignty. He seems to be saying what really non-Calvinists wouldn't have a serious problem accepting, in many cases. I don't have a serious problem accepting anything in that paragraph.

But Calvin would have had trouble with it. And I have a quote from Calvin from his book, *The Eternal Predestination of God*. And he said, Now, you just know what he just said.

He said that if you want to say that the evils came not because God willed it, but he only permitted it or allowed it. In other words, if you say what R.C. Sproul just said. He said, To say that God odiously permits them.

When scripture shows him not only willing, but the author of them. Calvin says that God is the author of them. Calvinists don't say that.

Who does not tremble at these judgments with which God works in the hearts of even the wicked, whatever he will, rewarding them nonetheless according to desert? Again, it is quite clear from the evidence of scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as he will, whether to good, for his mercy's sake, or to evil according to their merits. Now, it's obvious that Sproul and Calvin are not the same kind of Calvinists. Calvin is an unflinching Calvinist.

He says God is sovereign. Whatever happens is what he ordains. Whatever happens is what he decreed.

If people are sinners because God decreed they should sin. Not because he allowed it. Not because he permitted it.

Not because they really had free will and he just didn't interfere. But because God ordained them. That's true Calvinism.

And yet, modern Calvinists, like R.C. Sproul and many others, try to pretend that that's not what Calvinism is. And they try to water it down so that people who would ordinarily react with revulsion to what Calvin said will be still kind of open to what Calvinism is supposedly teaching. But to do that, they kind of have to be a little a little weaselly words.

You know, I mean, they kind of have to and I mean, that's just really, they have to soften things in a way that Calvin would never approve. He said, that's a frail and foolish defense. It's a frivolous refuge.

Anyway, so pure Calvinism teaches that God ordained all that comes to pass, including sin, including every thought, word, and deed of evil men. God ordained them so it inevitably happened. Modern Calvinists sometimes back away from that a little bit.

But at other times, they don't. They just go, they say that. Now, of course, this raises the question, do men have free will or don't they? And Calvinists don't know quite how to answer that.

So they answer differently from each other. For example, Martin Luther, who is not technically a Calvinist, but an Augustinian like Calvin was, says free will is an utter fallacy. He said that in *The Bondage of the Will*.

Calvin, in his institute, said, those who seek for free will in man labor under manifold delusion. Charles Spurgeon, strong Calvinist, said, free will is nonsense. Now, these statements are, again, uncompromising Calvinist statements based on their view of God's meticulous providence.

If God has determined that you will do a certain thing and you can't do anything else, then to talk about free will is just nonsense. And in Calvinism, it is. However, James White, debating with David Hunt, they wrote a book together called *Debating Calvinism*.

And White said, Calvinists believe fully that man has a will. And Dave Hunt responds, Calvinists contradict themselves and then say that we don't understand them. This is really true.

They contradict themselves and when you represent to them the foolishness or the contradiction that they present, they say, you're misrepresenting us. We don't believe it that way. Well, then why don't you say it that way? Why don't you say it the way you mean it? The truth is that you can represent the Calvinist statements ever so faithfully, using their own words.

And if you make it sound like that's ridiculous, they'll say, you don't understand it. You don't understand the mystery. You know, and this is true.

They complain that those who argue against Calvinism just don't understand them. But then, like Dave Hunt says, well, what are we supposed to do? They contradict themselves. How are we supposed to understand that? Well, it's a mystery.

But notice that White said, Calvinists do believe that man has a will. Now, why is that? Well, that brings us to our next point, compatibilism. Remember, I mentioned that already before, compatibilism.

I'm going to talk about the five points. Compatibilism is not what Calvin believed, but it's what Calvinists today generally favor. There's two ideas about free will that are often talked about.

One is called libertarian free will, and one is called compatibilist free will. Libertarian free will is what Arminians believe in. Libertarian means a man is at liberty to choose yea or nay, good or evil, receive Christ or reject Christ, sin or resist sin.

This is libertarian free will, that man's choices are not predetermined, and therefore he is at liberty, libertarian, at liberty to choose one way or the other. Now, compatibilist free will is an interesting innovation of the Calvinists. I suppose it may first arise in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I'm not sure it didn't arise earlier, but we saw it in the first quotation from the Westminster Confession at the beginning of this lecture. It said that God did freely and inevitably for it and all that would be but without doing violence to man's free will. Well, how do you do that? Well, what they mean is this.

Because man is totally depraved, man cannot even want to make good decisions. His will is bent and enslaved towards sin, so that although man can make any free choice he wants to, it is always going to be to sin. And, therefore, he can't choose good.

Therefore, man has free will within the range of possible choices he can make. An example of a choice that I can't make, I cannot make the choice to flap my arms and fly across the room. It's just not one of the choices open to me.

It's not in my nature. A bird could do it, a butterfly could do it, I can't do it. It's not in human nature to be able to fly through the air like that.

And, therefore, although I am given free choice about many things I could do, they all have to be limited by what human nature allows, not what is impossible for humans. And they say that an unregenerate person, for them it's impossible to choose good. We're going to look at that claim and look at the scriptures they use shortly, of course.

But that's their starting point. Man is fallen and depraved in such a way he can't choose good. Therefore, he's free to make choices if he wants to, but they're all going to be bad ones.

He can't choose God. He can't choose to be saved. He can't accept Christ.

He can't believe. He can't repent. He doesn't have that much free choice because that's outside the range of fallen human nature's abilities.

So, there's a range of choices a man can make, but none of them are the kind that could ever bring him back to God. And that preserves God's sovereign choice to save who he wants to save and no others can be. Now, this is really how compatible his free will goes.

Now, in a sense, it's not really the same thing as God ordaining all things that come to pass. See, it sounds like they're saying man can make a lot of different choices. They're

still free as long as they're within a certain category.

They can't go beyond. There's a certain ceiling they can't go above, but they can do a lot of things below that ceiling. And yet, if that's true, if man really is free to choose to have ham in his sandwich instead of cheese, then it must not be ordained by God that he'll have ham or cheese.

He's making his own choice about that. You see, you can't have him making the choice freely and also making the choice because God made the choice that he'd make that choice. God can certainly do that if he wants to.

Believe me, the Arminian is not saying that God has no right to overwhelm a man's will and make him do a certain thing. But what God can't do is do that and still call the man's choice a free choice because that's illogical. God can intervene to take away free choice, like he hardened Pharaoh's heart.

No question. He moved on Cyrus to release the captives from Babylon. There's a place in Revelation that says that God put it in the hearts of ten kings to give their authority to the beast.

God can do that. But when he does that, that's not free will. That's coerced will.

That's God making the choice instead of man making the choice or God forcing the man to make a choice. But whatever choice is made under God's force and pressure is not free. God, by the way, is not required to give man free will.

That's not our argument. We're not arguing that God doesn't have the right to manipulate everything like checkers on a checkerboard. He has the right to do that if he wants to.

The question is, is that what he does? Is that what the Bible says he does? Or does the Bible actually teach that God has given man free will? If that can be shown, that man has the ability to make choices that God did not make for him and can make them freely, well, that can't be true at the same time as God ordaining infallibly that this choice to be made is true. The question at stake here is, is it free? God doesn't have to give freedom, but if he does, you can't have something free and coerced at the same time. That's illogical.

It's like making 2 plus 2 equal 5. God can't make 2 plus 2 equal 5 because God can't do anything that's not true. God is truth, and 2 plus 2 equals 5 is not the truth. And that freedom and coercion are the same thing are not true.

That's what a contradiction is. It's saying both statements can't be true. And God can't make a contradiction be true not because God's power is limited, but because he's committed to truth.

And contradictions are, by definition, a violation of truth. Just like God can't deny himself, and God can't sin, and God can't be tempted with evil, and God can't lie. The Bible says all those things.

He can't be untrue either. And therefore, he can't be involved in a contradiction because by definition, a contradiction exists when two things are both affirmed that cannot both be true. So, anyway, here's some statements.

The Westminster Confession of Faith said this. And we saw this already. I'm just giving it to you again.

God, from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own free will, freely and unchangeably, ordain whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes, meaning man, taken away, but rather established. Jerry Walls, who is not a Calvinist, makes this comment.

He says, in addition to affirming universal causality, soft determinists, which is compatibilism, also believe that we are responsible for our actions and they agree that we must be free in some sense if this is the case. In other words, soft determinists want to affirm both complete determinism and freedom. This position is also called compatibilism because it holds that freedom and determinism, contrary to what hard determinists or libertarians claim, can be compatible.

So, this is Jerry Walls, not a Calvinist. He's not actually making a criticism here of Calvinism, so much as just explaining what it is that Calvinists believe. Douglas Wilson is a Calvinist.

I've debated him. In his book, *Back to Basics, Rediscovering the Richness of the Reformed Faith*, he said, as a creature, the slave to sin is naturally free to do what he wants, which is to continue in sin. But he is not morally free to desire righteousness because his sinful heart does not love what is right.

Like all men, he is not free to choose what is repulsive to him and true godliness is repulsive to him. Now, I think we would be entitled to ask the question, how do we know this? How do we know that every unregenerate person finds righteousness repulsive? Haven't there been Greek philosophers and humanist philosophers that have thought that justice and righteousness were attractive things? Why would he say that every unregenerate person finds righteousness repulsive? Because this is the only way he can say that they can make free choices and they're always going to be bad because they can't choose or want what's good. But does the Bible actually teach that non-Christians can't want what is good? Aren't there a lot of non-Christians who respect the work that Mother Teresa did? That's good.

Aren't there a lot of men who love and respect their saintly mothers, although they themselves, as sons, have not embraced Christ? They still see the virtue of their father or their mother as something admirable. Lots of people can enjoy righteousness from a distance. Many people can wish that they were more righteous and yet not have the power to perform it.

That seems very different to me than what Calvin said. That a person who is not regenerate hates righteousness, hates goodness, and always chooses evil because that's in their nature. Well, sin is in our nature, but is that kind of sin really demonstrated or declared in Scripture in all unbelievers? I think we shall find that it is not, but we haven't time right now.

We will later look at those things. Doug Wilson and other Calvinists like to give these verses as proof for compatibilism. One is Genesis 50, 20, where Joseph later in his life said to his brothers, But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring about, as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Now, we're talking, of course, about the brothers' sin, the sin that they committed in selling Joseph into slavery. He went to Egypt. It ended up being good because he saved his family and the whole world from starvation because of it.

Joseph saw God's hand in it. He said to his brothers, You intended evil, but God meant it for good. Now, this is said to be a proof of compatibilism because the men had their choice to do evil, but God's choice was in it for something good to come from it.

But you see, for compatibilism to be true, you'd have to have something more. You'd have to have Joseph or the Bible affirming that God put it in the brothers' hearts to do the evil deed, and yet they freely chose it. Well, freely would have meant that they could have chosen something else, but if God put it in their heart to do it, sovereignly and irresistibly put it in their heart, then they wouldn't be free to do something else.

I mean, philosophically, it's just not a possibility. And Joseph doesn't say that that's the case. Joseph didn't say, God put it in your heart to do this because he meant for me to come here and save people.

He says, you intended evil against me. God trumped you. God exploited the evil thing that you did and brought something good out of it, just like we believe all things can work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, according to Romans 8, 28.

And yet many things that work together for our good are things that were bad that people did. We don't have to assume that God ordained those bad things, but he worked them. He worked with them, he exploited them.

So I can use that. These brothers hate Joseph. They've been trying to kill him for years.

I can use that. I'll just put him at their mercy and see what they do. And I'll bring these Midianite slave traders along just at that time.

And the brothers will do what they naturally would do. God didn't have to put anything in the heart of his brothers to do that. He didn't have to instigate their sin.

They did that as freely as if they were Arminians. The difference is that God exploited their decision and worked through it to bring Joseph. And the same thing is true of the people who killed Jesus.

And Calvinists really like Acts 4, 27, 28. So do I, by the way. But they quote this one a lot.

This is about compatibilism. Peter said in his sermon to the Sanhedrin, he says, for truly against... I'm sorry, this is in their prayer after they've been released by the Sanhedrin. Peter prayed, for truly against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done.

Now notice what the Sanhedrin did. That was sinful. And Caiaphas and Pilate.

All these people were sinning. And yet Peter says that what came through this was exactly what God had foreordained to happen. Namely, the crucifixion of Jesus.

Which of course had to happen in history for us to be redeemed. It was promised through the prophets. Of course Jesus had to die.

So it sounds like it's saying that God ordained the sinful behavior of these men. Well, he didn't stop it. But we don't read that he instigated it.

He didn't have to. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry these men were trying to find a way to kill Jesus. What God did is he stopped protecting Jesus from them.

Many times earlier they took up stones to stone him but it wasn't his hour. So he walked through the crowd unhurt. We read many times in the earlier ministry they wanted to kill him but it wasn't his time.

And so he walked away unscathed. But at the end it was his time. And God didn't protect him.

He didn't have to put sinful thoughts in the hearts of these people. They had them. They were already determined to kill Jesus.

All that God had to do was not protect Jesus. Not send those 12 legions of angels to defend him that Jesus could have called on. Just let the people do what they've been wanting to do without stopping them.

This is not making them sin. This is simply not stopping them from doing what they've been planning to do for years. Notice it says these people through their choices simply accomplished what God had foreordained should happen to Jesus.

Namely that he'd die for our sins. God could have possibly used other circumstances. Other enemies.

God did determine that Jesus would die for our sins. He didn't necessarily say in any of the prophets that it would be through Caiaphas or the Sanhedrin or Pilate. They just happened to be the ones who happened to be willing to do the job.

And God said okay I'm going to deliver Jesus over to these people. In fact if you look at a similar statement that Calvinists also quote in Acts in chapter 2 this one is even clearer from a non-Calvinist point of view it seems to me. In Acts chapter 2 Peter is preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost.

And in verses 22 and 23 Peter says Now notice he says that Jesus was crucified and put to death by what? By the purpose, determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. True. But what did God do to make that happen? He delivered Jesus to them.

He didn't tell them what to do or ordain what they do. He knew what they wanted to do. He just delivered Jesus over to them.

Which he had not done on all the earlier occasions when they wanted to kill him. God had protected Jesus from it. But at this point it was time for Jesus to go.

And so God delivered Jesus to them. That's not the same thing as ordaining the specific things that they chose to do. And therefore it is true of course that God uses the sins of sinful men.

That God can in most cases anyway could prevent them from doing them if he chose to do so. But the fact that he doesn't prevent it strikes me as one of the best evidences that God doesn't micromanage. God does leave a lot of choices to people.

He lets people sin although he doesn't like it. And he'll judge them for it ultimately because they did it. But he doesn't make them do it.

A lot of things are determined not by God but by man. Of course there's a more distant way that God could be said to be making it happen in that he doesn't interfere when he could. And maybe some Calvinists would like to say that's how it is.

That's what R.C. Sproul said. God allowed sin. Calvin didn't talk that way.

Not that God allowed sin. He ordained it. He made it happen.

He instigated it. So not all Calvinists talk the same way as Calvin did because his words

are frankly not as acceptable in the modern world as they were in his own world. And for some generations and actually centuries after his time.

These three points that are in your notes are my own points. In instances where God's will is accomplished through man's sinful actions, one, there is no indicator that their sinful decisions were inspired by God rather than simply being the outworking of the sinful patterns of their lives. In other words, God didn't make them sinners.

They chose that themselves. He didn't ordain that. Two, if God did indeed create the sinful decisions, for example, when God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he didn't let the people go.

That's a case where God did guarantee that Pharaoh would make a bad decision. But he was already making those bad decisions before. God just stopped giving him the choice to make other ones.

But that's a special case. God doesn't harden everybody's heart. That's a special case.

That's a special case when God was releasing his people from captivity and birthing the Israeli nation. God intervened a great deal in those circumstances. And where God did indeed create the sinful decisions, these may not have been universal statements about all sinners' behavior, but special cases mentioned because they are exceptions to the norm.

For example, Calvinists say that God has hardened the hearts of all sinners. Well, then why does the Bible tell us of certain cases where God hardens this person's heart or that person's heart? If God's hardened everyone's heart, isn't that a bit redundant? It's mentioned because it's not a universal thing. It's mentioned because it is unusual for God to harden someone's heart.

Even if God put it in the heart of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin pilot, we don't read that he did. But if he put it in their hearts to kill Jesus, that doesn't mean he puts every sinner's sinful out into their hearts. Killing Jesus was a major issue, a major outworking of God's purpose.

If God had to do that to get Jesus crucified, that wouldn't tell us anything about God's general working in the life of Joshua, and whether he's going to be faithful to his wife or not. But, of course, the Bible doesn't tell us that God caused those decisions. And number three, God can justly harden the hearts of specific sinners to accomplish his will, like Pharaoh.

This is only done when they have previously freely set themselves in a pattern of sinning. Yes, sometimes people think God was unfair to Pharaoh because he hardened his heart. Pharaoh was a wicked man before God ever touched him.

God didn't harden Pharaoh's heart until Moses came and confronted him. But Pharaoh had a career of afflicting slaves and killing babies and doing, you know, worshipping the sun, and the man was ripe for judgment. For God to say, okay, here's how I'm going to judge you.

You've had your whole life free to choose and you've chosen wrong. From now on, you're not going to have any freedom to choose anymore. This is your judgment.

You know, if God struck him dead, that'd be the end of his choices, too. But instead of striking him dead, he keeps him alive and says, you're going to make some real bad decisions here. It's going to go badly for you because that's my judgment on you and your gods.

Now, in other words, God doesn't take an innocent or neutral person and harden them to make them evil. A man who's evil already, God has the prerogative to judge him any way he wants. And if judging him means hardening his heart to accomplish some purpose, then that's fine.

That still is not telling us anything about the general universal working of God in the life of every sinner every time they sin. Just because he hardened this man's heart in this situation. So, often Calvinists will take specific statements about specific cases.

None of them are insignificant cases. All of them are like major history-changing events where God is said to intervene in some sense. And they'll say, see, God ordains everything that happens because he hardened Pharaoh's heart, every sinner's heart is hardened.

That's not a responsible way to understand those statements. Those statements are not often making universal declarations about how God governs history. They're talking about what he did in this special case.

And he might do it in other cases, too. But to say it's universal is going far beyond what the scripture would allow. Now, there's one other section I want to give you and then we're going to have our break.

And this is still following the Calvinistic view of sovereignty. And then after that, our next lecture will be about what I believe the Bible teaches about sovereignty of God. The fourth one is the decrees of God are instrumental in his electing people to be saved.

That if you are saved, it's because God decreed before you were born that you would be saved. If you are lost, it's because God decreed before you were born that you'd be lost. And you really couldn't have changed anything because what God has decreed is sovereign and unchangeable.

John Calvin said in his Institutes, by predestination, we mean the eternal decree of God

by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. And accordingly, as each has been created for one or the other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or death.

Same author, John Calvin, in his book *The Eternal Predestination of God* said, If what I teach is true, that those who perish are destined to death by the eternal good pleasure of God, though the reason does not appear, then they are not found but made worthy of destruction. The eternal predestination of God, by which before the fall of Adam he decreed what should take place concerning the whole human race and every individual, was fixed and determined. God chose out of the condemned race of Adam those whom he was pleased, and he reprobated those whom he willed.

Now, notice he is not allowing any of this mealy-mouthed stuff about God permitted people to sin or God allowed sin. He says that God, by his eternal good pleasure, destined some people to perish. And they were not found by him worthy of destruction, but they were made worthy of destruction by him.

Calvin has no qualms about saying God made these people to be the sinners they are because he had no better use for them than for them to burn in hell. And he predestined before they were born, before the world was created, that they would do this. It really raises questions about how loving God is and how fair God is.

I mean, certainly God doesn't owe salvation to anyone, but it doesn't sound, if this is true, that he owes torment and hell to anyone either. If no one chose freely, if I was born to sin and destined by God before I was born to be a sinner and to reject God, I mean, the worst for me, and frankly, the worst for God. But how can it be thought that I deserve to be severely punished for doing exactly what God ordained for me to do, unchangeably and inevitably? This is something non-Calvinists find difficult about Calvinism.

I, for one, do. In Calvin's *Institutes*, he says, We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God, by his eternal and immutable counsel, determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. Do you get the impression that Calvin had sort of a delight he took in the idea of sinners being destroyed? He thought God even has a delight in that.

It was his pleasure to doom these people to destruction. Why? Because they did bad things? Yeah, the bad things he ordained for them to do. They didn't do anything except what he had mapped out for them.

He choreographed their whole life before they were born, and they just danced the steps he gave them because they had no choice, but it was sure delightful to him to send them to hell. Really? Is this the kind of God Calvin worshipped? It's not the kind of God I

worshipped. Thankfully, it's not the kind that Jesus worshipped either, or that Jesus was.

The God in the Bible says, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his evil way and live. Turn, turn at my reproof, for why will you die? God asked, as if he doesn't know that he's ordained them to die. Why ask? If he ordained them to die and to be sinners, why do you say, well, why will you do this? Well, duh.

God, don't you know about Calvinism? Don't you know about your eternal decrees? Apparently he didn't. In Isaiah, he talked about Israel being like a vineyard that he planted, hoping to get good fruit, and he got bad fruit, and he says, what more could I have done for my vineyard that I've not done? Why did it not give me the fruit I was looking for? Come on, God, stop playing games. Don't you know? You ordained that they would do that.

And he talks like he's disappointed. That's the strangest thing about Calvinism, is that throughout the entire Bible, Old and New Testament, God's continually complaining about those who rebel against him, those who aren't obeying him. He weeps for them in Jeremiah.

He gets angry at them in Ezekiel. And yet, God's the puppet master who made it all happen. These people are just doing the very thing God in his all-wise sovereignty ordained.

These people are sinning because it was God's pleasure to make them worthy of destruction and doom them. This is what Calvin said. If he didn't say it, if he didn't say it differently, then why are we supposed to understand it differently? If Calvinists say, no, you're misunderstanding.

Really? Then why didn't he say it in words we could understand? Sounds like he's pretty much saying the same thing again and again in a lot of different ways. And it sounds like he's saying God really gets pleasure out of making people who are doomed to go to hell and then destroying them in hell. This is, in my opinion, not the God of the Bible.

It's the God of Augustine and the God of Calvin and Luther and of many, but I don't think it's the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith on the next page says, Well, that part sounds good. Moving people to be saved all to the praise of his glorious grace, but that he didn't do it for all people means that he moved a whole bunch of them to go to hell and that also is apparently for his glorious grace.

In Chosen by God, R.C. Sproul said, To understand the Reformed view of the matter, we must pay close attention to the crucial distinction between positive and negative decrees of God. Notice we're still talking about decrees, decrees, decrees, decrees. Where do you find any of these decrees in the Bible? I'd like to find one.

Get a concordance. Find one of these decrees in the Bible. Well, so you don't get confused and draw wrong confusions about Reformed theology.

You have to make a distinction between the positive and the negative decrees. We don't just have decrees, but there's positive and negative ones. Positive has to do with God's active intervention in the hearts of the elect.

Negative has to do with God's passing over the non-elect. Remember, this is Sproul disagreeing with Calvin. It's not a matter of God passing over.

It's not a matter of God just allowing people to go their own way. God decreed that they would go that way. But R.C. Sproul says, no, that was a negative decree.

Negative not meaning that the results are bad, but that it involved God doing nothing. Whereas to intervene to bring the elect to faith is God's positive, we'd say proactive decree. Whereas the negative decree is that he simply decreed that he wouldn't do anything and he'll just let them go.

That's what Sproul says, but it doesn't sound very much like Calvin. The Reformed view, he says, teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to ensure their salvation. The rest of mankind, God leaves to themselves.

And this means that if we would take the story of the Good Samaritan for an example, every sinner who has been beaten up by the devil, born enslaved to sin, needing a physician, as Jesus said, it's not those who are righteous, not those who are well need a physician, but the sick do. I've not come to the righteous, but to sinners to save them, to call them to repentance. Here's every sinner laying by the side of the road and God is like the priest and the Levite who walk by on the other side of the road, just leaves them in their condition.

Now, my impression is that Jesus was like the Good Samaritan, but the Calvinist God is like the Levite and the priest who see the man in squalor and sickness and dying and infection, and they say, I don't want to touch that. That's dirty. I'm going over on the other side of the road.

I'm going to just pass by those ones. Now, of course, there could conceivably be a God like that. But is that the God that God declares himself to be in scripture and in the incarnation? We have no clearer picture of God than we have in Jesus.

Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And yet, how many Christians believe that the Father is sort of the mean God and Jesus is the nice God? The reason Jesus came is because God didn't like us very much. In fact, his default attitude towards us was wrath and anger and hatred, and that God hates sinners.

But fortunately, there's someone in the Godhead up there who liked us. Fortunately,

Jesus was a little younger, softer-hearted, more liberal, and so he came and said, oh, Father, please don't hurt them. I'll save them.

Please let me go and save them. Give them a chance. And so God said, okay, but this better work, because if you don't save them, I'm going to smoke them.

Now, I mean, really, a lot of people think of it that way. A lot of people, when they pray, they feel comfortable praying to Jesus, but not to God the Father, because they think, God, he's the mean one, isn't he? The Father, he's the mean one. Jesus is the one who loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

But God the Father sounds pretty scary to me. Why? No doubt because Augustinianism has dominated Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, for centuries. And the image of God there is a God who takes delight in dooming certain people.

Did you ever read *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by Jonathan Edwards? He starts a sermon to his congregation, he says, God hates you. He loathes you. To him, you are worse than the most venomous spider is to us.

He takes delight to destroy you. This is the sermon. It's a classic sermon from Jonathan Edwards, called *Sinners in the Hands of the Angry God*.

It's a horrible sermon. And it's a horrible God that he preaches. It's not the God Jesus talked about.

Jesus said, God is good even to the unthankful and the unholy. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

He's a friend of sinners. You see, this is what Calvinism doesn't know. That God is the friend of sinful man.

That's why he sent Jesus to exhibit this. Jesus was a friend of the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the sinners. He wasn't very friendly with the religious people.

Jesus said some scathing things about the self-righteous and the religious, but we never find Jesus denouncing the tax collectors. He's reaching out to them. He's having dinner with them.

They don't feel uncomfortable around him. He must not have been like the Westboro Baptists. He must have been more like God.

You see, it's not that God was the angry God and Jesus was the good God who came to our rescue. The Bible says God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son. Jesus came because God sent him, not because Jesus wanted to thwart God's default anger.

Sure, God has wrath towards sin, but he also has love toward his creation. He has love toward his children. The prodigal son was loved by his father even in a far country.

The prodigal son's father didn't make it hard for him to come back and say, I'm not sure you're one of the ones I want back. You've been behaving pretty badly. He said, my son was lost and he's found.

Kill the fatted calf. This kind of picture of God is not the Pharisees' picture of God, and it's not the Calvinists' picture of God, in my opinion. Now, the Calvinists say they believe God is very loving and kind, but they mean to them, to the elect.

In Calvinism, God is only loving toward the elect. Toward everyone else, he's going to smoke them forever, and he made them for that. He never gave them a chance to do anything else other than that.

They are predestined for that. That doesn't sound like a very loving God. Now, we might marvel at his grace toward us as believers and say, well, what a loving, gracious God he is, but if the majority of people he made, he has no mercy toward, no love toward, why call him a loving God? He's bipolar.

He loves some, but he hates others equally. I mean, sure, he's been loving to me, but is he by nature loving, or is he really only loving to a small minority of the people he made, and to the rest, he's very angry and implacable. This is really the question that Christians have to wrestle with when they're dealing with Calvinism, frankly, because God doesn't love everybody in Calvinism, and does that mean, how could we then say God is love? We'd have to say he's love some of the time to some of the people.

The rest of the time, he's anything but that, and I'm afraid that, although Calvinism does talk about God being a God of love, I don't think they have many grounds for it, with the foundation of their theology being what it is. Let's just read these last two quotes here. John Calvin said, Those, therefore, whom God passes by, he reprobates, He doesn't reprobate them because they're worse than the elect.

They're not. Calvinists admit this. The elect are just as big sinners as the reprobate.

The sinners who go to hell don't go there because they deserve it more than we do. They just go there because God delighted in not saving them. He's a respecter of persons.

He treats people differently who are equal sinners. Kenneth Talbot and Gary Crampton, in their book, Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Arminianism, said, That's stated that way. I'd have to agree with them.

Any God who's sovereign and has foreordained all things from all eternity and who has made unchangeable decrees, I suppose couldn't have those changed by the wiles of man. But that's not the way God is represented in Scripture. God does not represent God

as one who makes everything happen, ordained all things before all time to happen exactly as they do by his sovereign decrees.

These are Calvinist buzzwords. They are not biblical words. But they have become so standard orthodoxy because Augustine, who invented these concepts and introduced them to the church, became the most influential theologian in church history.

He's called the father of Roman Catholicism, but he's also the father of the Reformation, ironically. The Reformers were all Augustinians. And it wasn't until people like Arminius and John Wesley and some others went back to the doctrines of the church before the time of Augustine that there now began to be controversy.

But for centuries, the church had just gone with Augustine's views pretty much unchallenged. And it is what's considered orthodox by many. But fortunately, it's not the only possibility.

And the Calvinist idea of God is not the only possible God that we can believe in. We can actually believe in the one that's in the Bible. And so what we want to do in our next lecture is look at what the Bible says about the sovereignty of God.

All these affirmations of Calvinism insert and assume things that the Bible does not say about God. And we'll actually look at what it does and does not say.