

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

2080 West Grand Boulevard
Detroit, Michigan 48208
Pastor Nathan Johnson, D.D., Senior Pastor

Pastor's Bible Study

If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series
Based on the book
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

Part XVII

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God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **God's sovereignty gives him ownership and authority over the universe.**

- God's sovereignty is the biblical teaching that all things remain under God's rule and nothing happens without either his direction or permission.
- God doesn't commit moral evil, but he can use any evil for good purposes.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- ²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

- ²⁸ For royal power belongs to the LORD. He rules all the nations. *Psalms 22:28 (NLT)*

- Because he has absolute power, no one, including demons and humans who choose to violate his moral will, can thwart his ultimate purpose.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- Christ ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," *Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)*
- The Greek word translated "upholds" is *phero*, "to carry," the same word used in Luke 5:18 of the friends of the paralyzed man who carried him on his bed to Jesus for healing.
- God carries the entire universe as men may carry a bed.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan. *Ephesians 1:11 (NLT)*
- “Everything” is comprehensive, allowing for no exceptions.
- God works even in those things done against his moral will, to bring them into conformity with his purpose and according to his plan.
- God can and will redeem the worst thing that ever happens to his child.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **When Jesus said certain things “must” happen, he assumes an inevitability related to God’s predetermined purpose.**
 - Jesus often declared that certain events “must” happen in line with Scripture and God’s sovereign will.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- Among them:
 - ²¹ From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He **must** go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. *Matthew 16:21 (HCSB)*
 - ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, don’t be alarmed; these things **must** take place, but the end is not yet. *Mark 13:7 (HCSB)*
 - ¹⁰ And the good news **must** first be proclaimed to all nations. *Mark 13:10 (HCSB)*
 - ²⁵ But first He **must** suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. *Luke 17:25 (HCSB)*
 - ²⁶ Didn’t the Messiah **have to** suffer these things and enter into His glory?” *Luke 24:26 (HCSB)*
- Similar wording describes various prophecies that *must* be fulfilled.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **Though evil had no part in God’s original creation, it was part of his original plan.**
 - ⁸ All those who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered. *Revelation 13:8 (HCSB)*
 - ⁴ For He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will, *Ephesians 1:4-5 (HCSB)*
 - **God’s Sovereignty and Its Reach**
 - This means God didn’t devise his redemptive plan on the fly. Evil didn’t take him by surprise.

- God isn't the author of evil, but he is the author of a story that includes evil.
- He intended from the beginning to permit evil, then to turn evil on its head, to take what evil angels and evil people intended for evil and use it for good.
- In the face of the lowest evil, God intended to show his highest good.

◎ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **Christ's crucifixion was God's set purpose, known from eternity past.**

- Peter speaking to a Jerusalem crowd, said of Christ, *Acts 2:23 (NLT)* ²³ But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.
- If God planned Christ's death, do others die according to his plan? Does the God who had purpose in the death of his Son also have purpose, even though a different one, in the deaths of his other children? Does the same God who intended evil for good in the life of Joseph intend evil for good in the life of other believers?
- Romans 8:28 suggests the answer is yes.

◎ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **Countless passages affirm God's control over human lives and circumstances.**

- Our Creator is ¹⁵ "... the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords." *1 Timothy 6:15 (NLT)*
- The Bible says of him: *1 Chronicles 29:12 (ESV)* ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.
- *Job 23:13 (ESV)* ¹³ But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does.
- *Daniel 4:17 (ESV)* ¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.'
- **God's Sovereignty and Its Reach**
- Even what appears random is not:
- *Proverbs 16:33 (NLT)* ³³ We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall.
- *Matthew 10:29-30 (NLT)* ²⁹ What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. ³⁰ And the very hairs on your head are all numbered.
- If we believe these things, our reactions to many of the difficulties we face will change. Problems will seem smaller; though we can't control them, we know God can.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- **God clearly and repeatedly affirms and assumes his sovereignty over all.**
 - Many verses make it clear that though God's creatures can oppose him, they cannot ultimately prevail. For example:
 - *Isaiah 46:10 (HCSB)* ¹⁰ I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will.
 - *Daniel 4:35 (HCSB)* ³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does what He wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can hold back His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- The following passages emphasize God's sovereignty in this broken world.
- *God gives and withholds children.* Many couples struggle with infertility, but the Bible consistently ascribes this problem to God.
 - *1 Samuel 1:5 (NLT)* ⁵ And though he loved Hannah, he would give her only one choice portion because the LORD had given her no children.
 - *Genesis 29:31 (NLT)* ³¹ When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive.
 - *Genesis 16:2 (NLT)* ² So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has prevented me from having children. ..."

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- *God sends poverty and wealth.*
 - *1 Samuel 2:7-8 (NLT)* ⁷ The LORD makes some poor and others rich; he brings some down and lifts others up. ⁸ He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honor. For all the earth is the LORD's, and he has set the world in order.

☉ God's Sovereignty and Its Reach

- *God grants limited and conditional power to people, but he, the power dispenser, still maintains control.*
 - *John 19:10-11 (NLT)* ¹⁰ "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" ¹¹ Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above."
- *God determines the times and places people will live.*
 - *Acts 17:25-26 (HCSB)* ²⁵ Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one man He has made every nationality to live over the

whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live.

☉ God is Sovereign over Disabilities and Diseases

- **Scripture sometimes regards physical afflictions as consequences of the Fall, sometimes as the work of demons, but ultimate sees them from God.**

- *Exodus 4:11 (ESV)* ¹¹ Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”
- Remarkably, God takes full credit for giving disabilities. God does not say the Fall makes people deaf or Satan makes them blind, but *he* does.
- The fact that we don’t like the idea that deformities, diseases, and suffering come from God’s own hand does not alter Scripture. Our discomfort will not change God’s mind.

☉ God is Sovereign over Disabilities and Diseases

- Right-thinking believers find great comfort in knowing that such life-altering abnormalities don’t happen randomly or because of bad luck, but are granted to us with divine purpose.
- God doesn’t helplessly watch us suffer because of bad genes or accident that Satan or people caused. He offers us help dealing with any disability he has given us.

☉ God is Sovereign over Disabilities and Diseases

- If we see God’s involvement in people’s deformity or disease, we will view them differently than if we think they suffer because of Satan or sin.
- A large percentage of children diagnosed with diseases before birth are aborted. If we believe Satan alone deforms the child or gives the adult a disease, then we might view taking their lives as battling evil instead of committing it.
- If we believe God has made these individuals as they are, then we can love them as he intends.

☉ God is Sovereign over Disabilities and Diseases

- **God knows what good may arise from a disease or disability and what evil could come if that disease or disability were withheld or healed.**

- Vicki Anderson was born with hypertelorism, a facial abnormality. Vicki says, "I don’t really like the phrase 'birth defect' – it contradicts my theology. A 'defect' implies a mistake and I believe that God is sovereign. If he had the power to create the entire universe according to his exact specifications, then my face was certainly no challenge for him! If God is loving, why did he deform my face? I don’t know – maybe because with a normal face I would have been robbed of the thousands and thousands of blessings that I have received because of my deformities. It seems odd, but usually our greatest trial is what most molds and shapes us. It gives us

character, backbone, courage, wisdom, discernment, and friendships that are not shallow."

- **God is Sovereign over Disabilities and Diseases**
- Vicki's mother dealt with this condition from the time of her daughter's birth. She writes, "I believe that God chose this sorrow for our family, and surprisingly, what I at first felt was a sorrow, I see now as a joy. In all sincerity, if given such a chance, I would not change the journey our family has traveled. We have all learned, we have all grown, and we love the Lord and His sovereign direction in our lives."

☉ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

- **Your state of mind determines whether the doctrine of God's sovereignty comforts you or threatens you.**

- In his nineteenth-century poem, *Invictus*, William Ernest Henly captures the proud human spirit. He speaks of his "unconquerable soul" and brags, "My head is bloody, but unbowed." Charging forward, he claims, "The menace of the years finds, and shall find, me unafraid." He finishes, declaring,
"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."

☉ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

- ☉ Spurgeon wrote, "There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the doctrine of divine sovereignty. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings."
- ☉ Why? Because the proud human heart doesn't want to submit to almighty God. We want to make our own plans, do our own thing, and have it our way. We don't want anyone, including God, to impose his way on us. James identifies the arrogance and evil boasting underlying our presumption that we can do whatever we wish without submitting to God's plan:
- ☉ *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. (4:13-16)*
- ☉ We delude ourselves when we think we have ultimate control over our lives. We imagine that God should let us have our way. And when He doesn't, we resent Him.

⊙ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

⊙ **When we consider the best and the worst things that have happened to us, we often see a startling overlap.**

- ⊙ Make a list of the best things and worst things that have happened to you, place the worst things on the top half of the page and the best things on the bottom half.
- ⊙ You will find that the things you labeled the worst thing have over time become the best things that ever happened to you. There is a divine overlap.

⊙ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

- ⊙ How is this possible? Because God is both loving and sovereign.
- ⊙ Our lists provide persuasive proof that while evil and suffering are not good, God can use them to accomplish immeasurable good.
- ⊙ Knowing this should give us great confidence that even when we don't see any redemptive meaning in our suffering, *God* can see it—and one day we will too.
- ⊙ Therefore, we need not run from suffering or lose hope if God doesn't remove it. We can trust that God has a purpose for whatever he permits.

⊙ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

- ⊙ Perhaps the greatest test of whether we believe Romans 8:28 is to identify the very worst things that have happened to us, and then ask if we believe that, in the end, God will somehow use them for our good.
- ⊙ Reflecting on his long life, Malcom Muggeridge wrote,
 - ⊙ *Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained."*

☉ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

I Won't Complain

I've had some good days
I've had some hills to climb
I've had some weary days
I've had some weary nights
But when I look around
And think things over
All of my good days
They outweigh my bad days

So I won't complain

☉ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

Sometimes my clouds hang low
I ask the Lord to see them go
And then I ask the question
Lord why so much pain
But God knows what's best for me
Although my weary, weary eyes can't see

So I'll say thank you Lord
I won't complain

☉ **God Is Sovereign In Our Suffering**

God's been so good to me
The Lord has been so good to me
More than this world could ever be
The Lord has been so good to me
And he dried my tears away
And he turn all my midnights he turned them all into day

So I'll say thank you Lord
I just say thank you Lord
I'll just say thank you Lord
I won't complain