

God's Decrees and Providence

Let us turn to our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11, chapter 1, verse 11. Here in the midst of this grand doxology of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the marvelous works they have done for us and continue to do for us and will do because they love us with an everlasting love. Verse 11, let's listen attentively to the Word of God.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. Let us pray. And in these words, Lord God, we read of a summary of all of what it means to be God Almighty and sovereign and omnipotent, that you have a purpose and you work all things in creation according to the counsel of your will and not ours.

Praise be to your name, for if we had such power and we were brought into your counsels, God, God forbid such blasphemous thoughts, we would bring terrible advice to be sure. And thus, God, may we be humbled by this teaching and doctrine of God's decrees and your providence over all things, yes, Lord, even our own lives. By the blood of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.

Life, I know it sounds maybe even trivial at times when we say this, life has a lot of mysteries. And I mean this in the most sincere and profound way. Many unresolved questions that we actually overlook and forget about.

We don't think about them, these mysteries. Let's consider that bastion of certainty and rationality, science. Let us further consider a fact of life everywhere that humans find themselves or they try to find themselves.

It is part of our life and your life that we cannot live long without and as it encourages this fact, encourages life to grow all around us and sustains the plants and humans as well. And that is light, light of the sun, even electrical light that we try to imitate the sun with. Consider this light in science.

Maybe you took some science in high school, you probably did and had the little prism and you divide it up, you see a little rainbow and all that stuff. What is light? We examine light under a high-powered observational microscope, for example. We observe its speed, we know the speed of light, we use it in our math.

But what about its shape and its qualities and how it works? A high school science teacher probably did not explain much to you. They're not going to sit there and tell you, you know, scientists can't actually agree and explain how light works, why it acts two different contrary ways it seems to us. You're just going to hear one thing or another.

Well, the scientists have a question. Is it a discrete particle? A packet of energy? What they call a photon? Or is it an interconnected array of energy that we label a wave? Which is it? We see both functions and activities by light when we examine it. In some instances, the math expresses light motion and interaction as a wave, as though it permeates through the room like waves upon an ocean.

And maybe you remember some of those light analyses in science class, it goes through a slit between items and still comes out like a wave. But other math equations rightly express its form and interaction with the world around it as though it were individual photons, like little packets of energy, bunches of them driving down through our window right now, for example. But depending on the question that we're trying to answer in science, both models work.

So which is it? We don't know how the two relate or why we enjoy a sunlit room anyways, but we do, and we don't ask the questions anymore. Then there are the rules for the very small versus the very large objects in our life, in our universe. The classical model of physics uses different principles and math to explain the movement and the mass of a ball, a car, people, and planets.

I remember getting up after finishing closing up shop at Wendy's, like on a Thursday night during school. It closed shop at midnight. And getting up at 6.30 or so to get to science class, physics class, at 7.20 in the morning on Arvada West.

To this day, because I'm just dragging my feet into this class. And in that class, you had that class probably, you had all these little equations about mass and energy and movement and distance of solid objects. That's the classical model of physics, Newtonian physics it's called.

Yet when you zoom down to the level of what? Atoms. That car we use to roll down an incline in physics class is made up of a bunch of particles we call atoms. And atoms have what in them? Electrons, protons, neutrons.

And even electrons, protons, neutrons are made up of something, leptons and quarks and things like that. You zoom down to that very, very small levels, quantum physics it's called. It's one of the hardest college classes to take compared to everyday physics.

And it's different. The rules are different. The mathematical equations are different.

How can that be? We don't know. We just live and do and work with these mysteries. It's a mystery.

The science isn't going to tell you that because they have no humility. Similarly, how do you sit on a chair to go one step further? We all know about the tiny atoms that make up matter. I just talked about them.

That in turn, those matters make up the chair you sit on. But the atoms are mostly what? Non-solid made of air or made of nothing. We don't know.

We call it nothing. Just energy and space, we say. In fact, if we removed all the space between the electrons and protons, quote, sort of my physics journal, you could fit the entire human race in the volume of a sugar cube.

If you just take all the atoms, arrange them and move all the space between them. How does it? How? What? It's a mystery. We're not saying it's contradiction.

We're not saying it's a saying. It's saying it's beyond our understanding. That's what mystery means here.

I'm not using the word to mean contradiction. We don't believe that Trinity is a contradiction of logic because God made logic. It is rational, but it's beyond our rationality because we are finite, but he is infinite.

We don't think of these mysteries often, but we certainly are comfortable sitting on an empty chair in more ways than one. and it's empty, full of nothing. We're used to them, we're used to the light and how it works, and working with it differently if you end up having to do any kind of science class.

And so we're comfortable with them. As one science writer wrote, quote, as I've said, one caveat of science paradoxes is that if you think about them long enough, they eventually make, he uses air quotes, sense, and eventually become part of our working scientific intuition. And that's exactly right.

I say we get comfortable with them. We don't think twice about them. In other words, we have our mysteries, they are there, and we use them, and we don't think twice about them.

I point this out because our topic in this sermon is not fully understood by our finite minds any more than these physics and everyday things I mentioned. And these aren't all the mysteries. Some who disagree with God's sovereignty and decrees over all things through providence can't wrap their head around it, and so they say it must be false.

We can't accept that mystery. Yet all we're doing is facing the facts and logic of God's own words, just as much as they do with creation. They just don't typically think of it that way.

For fellow believers who do not like this teaching, and you're gonna meet some of them, I'm sure, you may have been one yourself, it is good to remind them that they also believe in other mysteries of the Bible, for instance. So I talked about nature, there are mysteries in nature, and there are certainly mysteries in the Bible. Even by those who don't claim to be Reformed or Calvinists, they're gonna admit these things, I hope.

When we read Genesis 1.1, for example, so often in our Christian life, we lose the wonder and the breathtaking mystery of it. In the beginning, God, he's already existing, and he always had existed. Can you imagine never having a beginning? I can kind of think of having no end, it just keeps going on, I just keep living, but having no beginning, that just, what? And it continues, he created the heavens and the earth.

God created, he who has no beginning began something else outside of him. And so the question is, how does eternity interact with time and concreteness and the things we have, I don't know. And not just when, how, how can something come from nothing? Because we were nothing, and now we're something, and God sustains and provides for us, and in him we live and move and have our being, it's right there in the Bible.

I don't know how, it just is. Creation is not a part of God, we don't believe that God is in everything like some of the heathens do, right, pantheism. But he is there sustaining and holding all things.

Or consider the Trinity, of course, how can there be one God, yet three persons, each fully divine, but not three gods? I can explain it, that's not a contradiction, I'm not saying A is the same as not A, Sean is not Sean, but rather a relationship that's beyond our understanding of how it works. We can just say it, and that's about as far as we go. It's a mystery, some would call it irrational.

It's against all common sense, we may hear, but it's not. It's here in the Bible, and again, in natural life, we have a lot of mysteries as well. It's a stumbling stone to many unbelievers in the early church, in fact, thus the rise of heresies on the deity of Jesus, for example, and the Holy Spirit, yet it's a mystery we're comfortable with.

And I'm glad we should take comfort in that. I can speak, of course, of Jesus' incarnation, and we'll certainly speak of the mysteries of God guiding all things here, and our full responsibility, nevertheless, for our own simple decisions. We believe all this because we find it in the Bible.

We come with humility, or should, and accept what we read therein. And as we read in the Old Testament, Isaiah 55, eight, we must keep this in mind. God tells us, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. That is how we should come to this and all other doctrines. God's decree of all things, the first point here.

God's Decrees of All Things

So we have here, from the text of Ephesians 1:11, and other verses as we saw last week with respect to divine predestination and election unto heaven. Here it's a broader concept of decree of all things and the guidance of all creation, both seen and unseen by God's providence. Chapter three of the Confession, Westminster Confession of Faith, which gives us a nice, simple explanation of these things.

It combines all these Bible verses. I'm gonna go through these Bible verses. What's helpful about the Confession and the catechisms, it puts together a lot of Bible verses and simple to read understanding, although sometimes a little more complicated.

They were very smart back then. But it's helpful, that's the point of it. If we go to the text they are using especially, we need to always go to the Bible.

God, we read here, 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 the creatures, nor is the liberty

or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. All that to say is God's in charge of all things from small to large.

It's all part of his plan and moves according to his will and he's involved in it in providence, we call it. We'll get to that soon. Here, this is going back into the unfathomable eternity past.

No beginning, there's no creation, there's no earth. God had made these plans or had always made these plans. It's eternal.

And they will come to pass, unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass. Pass in what? History and time and what we understand is our reality, of course. And yet so that neither is God the author of sin, we will see a little bit about that, nor is violence offered to your will.

Calvinists doesn't believe God comes along and punches people spiritually, as it were, and just drags them by the neck and forces them to do things. They do things most freely. Never taught that.

People are confused and I can understand why. Let's see and see what we can find in the word of God. The counsel of his own will, by the counsel of his own will, that is he does not come to us and ask our opinion.

He ordained all things. And guess which text they use? Ephesians 1.11. Lots of Ephesians 1 going on here in the confession. Being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

And again, Romans 11.33. Oh, the depth and the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Oh, who has become his counselor? Or who has first given to him and it should be repaid to him? God's not indebted to anyone.

God didn't ask anybody. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has become his counselor? When you argue, when some Christians argue, God looks down the corners of time and says, Sean made these decisions and so I'm gonna back up those decisions. That's him coming to me for counsel, as it were.

What am I gonna do? So he's gonna what? React to me. That's not what the Bible teaches. Who has become his counselor? Nobody.

He doesn't seek advice from anybody. That's what it's saying. Least of all, mere mortal clay who walk around and make some decisions supposedly outside his will.

Hebrews 6, 17, we read, thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath. It's sufficient that God said to Abraham, I'm gonna do it. But he went one step further because we are weak, helpless little children, and he gave him an oath.

God doesn't need to take an oath. God said it, that's it. But he did an oath, that is the covenant to Abraham because of our weakness, not because of his weakness.

But note what Hebrews writes here. The immutability of his counsel, it does not change. If his counsel is immutable, that means it's what he decided then and before then and before that point before then and what? Eternity past.

That's what immutability means. Does not change. We understand the concept, we just don't ever see it around.

Everything changes around. We change our minds. God's counsel, his own decisions and will never changes.

And if it never changes and cannot change, what's another way of describing something that cannot be touched and stands on its own? Independent. What they call the incommunicable attributes of God, that which are unique to him, his qualities, one of them is he's immutable. All are interdependent and explain to one another.

He's immutable, he's what? Independent as well. He doesn't need you, doesn't need your power. So part of independence means he's omnipotent.

It's all of the pieces I'm gonna argue. I'm not gonna go beyond that, but if he's immutable, then he's independent. If he's independent, he's also omnipotent.

Yet so as, the confession continues on here. Yet so as neither is God the author of sin. God is not the author of sin.

That's a slander against Calvinists in the Bible. James 1.13 we read as well as verse 17. These go together.

Let no one say that when he is tempted, I am tempted by God. You can't blame God. And it goes on after that verse, it says, you sin and are tempted by your own desires within you that capture you and ensnare you and drag you away.

Verse 17, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. God is not morally culpable for your sinful decisions is what that's saying. 1 John 1.5, this is the message which we have heard from him and declare to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

God is light and in him is no darkness. Darkness comes from sinners, comes from the devil, comes from us. God is not morally accountable for our sins.

So we're establishing some facts here more broadly with respect to God and all things. Before we dig in here, creation here, the third part of the confession established by the decrees of God. And that is, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency, that is the cause and effects and how things depend upon one of the second causes be taken away, but rather established.

So we have established some facts here and some explanations. I'm gonna have more detailed explanations, but I wanna highlight this a little bit that no violence is given to the will of the creatures, but the liberty and the contingency of second causes, they will come about as they should. You kick that ball with your foot, it's contingent.

How hard you kick it is how far it will go. That's the idea of contingency, right? Depends upon, but rather established. Matthew 17, 12.

Matthew 17, 12. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.

The point of that text that the confession quotes is that there is a cause and effect that these things are gonna happen, that God made sure everything comes to pass, doesn't mean he made sure things come to pass independent of cause and effect. In other words, creates cause and effect, establishes the cause and effect, A to B to C. And here, Elijah being turned down, of course, the Son being about to suffer at the hands of others. That's part of the plan.

There's a cause and effect. If the Son comes down, he knows it's gonna happen. It's part of, in fact, the prophecy of the Old Testament.

Prophecy is another proof text for the sovereignty of God. How did it come to pass? Because God's making a wild guess. He makes it come to pass.

Acts 4.27 is more explicit. Acts 4.27, one of the classic texts they use. For truly, Peter argues, 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.

Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, the people of Israel, were gathered together against holy Jesus to do whatever your hand, he's speaking of God, and your purpose determined before to be done. Jesus Christ, fulfilled because the Father had a plan, and of course, in conjunction with the Son of God, the second member, and the Holy Spirit, that whatever your hand and your purpose determined to do before to be done was done. And it's quite astounding when you realize the Son of God, specifically, of course, him as a man, is part of God's predestined plans to do whatever he had determined beforehand is gonna be done, his own suffering.

If Jesus is part of God's predestined plan, why do you think you're outside of it? And yet people do. They think, I'm not part of God's decrees. Jesus was.

He isn't gonna suffer for us. Evil men will kill him. It's part of God's eternal plan to do whatever he purposed before to be done.

Proverbs 16, you heard this proverb before, that chapter, one, nine, and 33. That's why I like to use it. Proverbs 16, one, nine, 33.

Why try to memorize so many different verses? Our brains get tired. Here's a chapter that has a bunch of them for you. Proverbs 16.

The preparations of the heart belong to man. You have determinations. You made preparations.

You have plans. You had plans this morning. Maybe you ran late because your plans fail.

The Bible continues, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. I'm sure you've said things you never thought you were gonna say before, and you did. You had preparations in your heart, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

A man's heart, verse nine, plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps. You can plan all you want until you get hit by a car. And then verse 33, the lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision that's from the Lord.

These factual texts, Matthew 17, 22, Acts 4, 27, and following, Proverbs 16, one, nine, and 33, these factual texts, when we're talking to other Christians, you should look at this and say, is it or is it not in the word of God? Thus saith the Lord. That's the first question. Is it here? It's clearly here.

So the question is, what do you do with it? They demonstrate that the things of this world, and indeed the people of this world, cannot exist nor function without God's eternal power. He's behind it all. As the Confession marvelously summarizes, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures.

You make determinations, you make plans. Nor is liberty or contingency of second causes, because God is the first or primary cause, and all things flow from his decision to create all things. We're called secondary causes, inferior causes.

But rather established, that's key. Our own forefathers recognized from the Bible, your free will, secondary events and causes of kicking the ball and things like that, cause and effect that we see in everyday life, even moral cause and effect, are actually established by God's sovereignty, not by the free will of man. That you will or will not, eat or eat not, sleep or sleep not, is only possible because God decreed all things.

And as we'll see in Providence, sustains thereby all things according to his decree. Because we're talking here now, his plans from eternity past, not how they're executed yet. Just as we could not will or will not, do or do not, decide or decide not without a brain, without oxygen, and so without God, you don't even have oxygen or a brain, let alone your own decisions.

We talk and think so much about how independent we are, I just speak in general, especially as Americans. And we forget how dependent upon we are of all things around us, even our own soul. Those who insist that free will of man must trump God's sovereignty and his decrees of eternity past, will create a false dichotomy.

We argue, rather without God, nothing can be done. And this leads us here to the second point.

God's Providence Over All Things

Those are the decrees of God, here we have the providence of God in which he executes his decrees from eternity past in time.

Chapter five of the Confession of Providence. God, the great creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of his glory and wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy. I'm not gonna go through all of that, obviously.

I do wanna point out that this is not uncommon in our confession that it slides off into praise. Describes providence, he directs, disposes, and governs all things, the greatest of the least, all to the praise of his glory and wisdom, and power, justice, and the like. Now, the prior point, again, was about God's decrees, and here we see the execution of his decrees in history.

In history, providence, broadly, I'm gonna cover a little bit here. Creation, providence, and redemption, those are the three major categories for us. Creation brought everything into existence, providence sustains creation, that is God's providence, and then in that providence, some are saved and some are not, that's redemption.

So, three major categories. Specifically here, again, providence, that he upholds history, and our lives, and the lives around us, sustaining all things from the greatest of the least. He upholds all things, Hebrews 12, excuse me, Hebrews one, two through three, Hebrews one, two through three, that God has, in these last days, spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, that is Jesus, heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds, the Son made the worlds, who being the brightness of his glory, the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, the Father's person, and upholding all things by the power of his word, the Son, the Son is involved and sustains, upholds all things, of course, the Father does as well as the Holy Spirit.

Your heir, your bones, the food you eat, the earth you stand upon, keep you alive, sustain you, but what holds the air together, and your bones intact, and the food sustains it, and what keeps the earth around? Because we know there's a thing called entropy, everything falls apart, for example. Leave it alone, it falls apart. Leave a sink alone, a toilet alone, the gas can fall apart if you never use it.

When you use it, it'll still eventually fall apart too, just how everything is. We could say rocks and momentum hold the earth together as it flies through space, that's what the atheists argue, that's as far as they go, but then what is a rock? We know the rock, by virtue of the atom of formation, such as iron, in a certain arrangement, creates the rock of iron, but what holds the iron together? What holds the atoms together, the weak and strong force? Well, what holds the weak and strong force together? There is an old, old pagan way of describing

the universe of one turtle on top of another, holding up the earth, maybe you've seen that picture. They at least recognize there's something more going on than what we see with our own eyes.

The atheists can't go beyond the eyesight of an animal. They can, they just, of course we know, they just completely ignore God and hate him, but practically, that's what they're doing, they're acting even less smart in many ways. Somehow it just works, strong force, weak force, that's part of physics, gravity, electromagnetic force, they just somehow, they're just there, they work, it's amazing.

If we dig up or dig down, if we look up or look out, we're gonna find more and more questions of what holds and sustains all things, and the answer is God. He directs all things, Psalm 135, verse six. Psalm 135, verse six, whatever the Lord pleases, he does in heaven and the earth and the seas and all the deep places.

Simple as that. Acts 17, 25. Nor is he worshipped with men's hands, Paul argues, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life and breath and all things.

Paul is arguing not to Christians, he's arguing to pagans, unbelievers who don't have access to the Old Testament Bible, nor to the prophets, the first time they've heard of the resurrection. And Paul's arguing to them, this God who creates all things, he doesn't need anything, he gives life to all and breath and all things, and he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell in the face of the earth, and has determined the pre-appointed times and the boundaries of the dwellings. He makes the nations, so that they should seek the Lord and hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us, for in him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own prophets have said, quote, for we are also his offspring.

They recognize, and you dig into the ancient writings, that there is a God, not just gods. There are gods, they would argue, but they believe there was a God behind the gods. The more I've read, I've seen the original sources, the source quotes, it was really amazing, I didn't know this, I was never taught this.

Paul recognized it, that's why he quoted their own prophets, poets. Just as we cannot breathe without air, we cannot exist or even decide or act without God, who sustains all things. Ruth one, Ruth chapter one, verses one and five.

Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdoms, then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites and all, on all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem. Both the people themselves, the Jewish Old Testament church, and the pagan king Cyrus were moved by God explicitly, the text tells us, to fulfill prophecy. And a great passage in Proverbs 21, one, put this down in your Proverbs collection, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of the water, he turns it wherever he wishes, they are nothing compared to him.

Put president's heart, Congress heart. Although the confession continues here in chapter five, although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, right? We are secondary causes, he's the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, it's gonna happen, yet by the same providence, he orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently, don't worry about that, just secondary causes come about because God makes sure they come about. You cannot decide or live or will without God making sure cause and effects works.

If you literally had a world of blind chance and your will was not bound by the nature of who you are, good or bad, sinners sin, and the righteous do good things, determined by your nature, they teach an absolute freedom of will, a lot of these atheists, then there's no reason why you do anything, there's a reason, something that moves you to do something, but you can't move, you have free will, my will just is willy nilly, I just do things randomly, and the earth is made by random chance, as everything's random, it just falls apart, there's no cause and effect, they don't believe that, they want unity and orderliness, that's why science works, because God made the universe, orderly, he's an orderly God, not a God of chaos, but they want to throw in random chance because they don't want to submit to him, it's not just the atheists, unfortunately Christians fall for this lie at times. And I want to end lastly here with a little bit of the details, we've gone kind of broad into the past and some particulars here, even the cause and effect, the secondary causes are established by God. Genesis 8.22, while the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.

God tells us, the Noahic covenant of general creation, times and seasons and foods and animals are gonna maintain their cycle, he's maintaining it. Isaiah 10, six through seven, in which God disciplines the Old Testament church through a chain of events. Sometimes perhaps we think, well it's God sometimes puts his hand into history and time and pokes and makes things move along, no, he's involved in everything.

He's involved in everything. I will send him against an ungodly nation and against the people of my wrath, I will give him charge to seize the spoil, to take the prey, to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so, but it is his heart to destroy and to cut off not a few nations.

God's gonna bring judgment and the judgment's gonna come through occasions of the king making decisions and decisions go to war and the war includes spoil and taking the prey, all these things are part of God's, God's behind and through it. Psalm 127 highlights, I think, very well that cause and effect in this universe depends upon God. Psalm 127, one, unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.

Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. The beauty of that psalm is it tells us two things. We gotta do something.

You wanna protect that city? You better be awake as a guard. But you can be awake as all you want if God's plan is not you fall asleep, you're gonna fall asleep. God's in control, but we still have responsibility.

It's all in one psalm, Psalm 127, one. So we're already there partway to explain or at least get a better grasp of the mystery of God's decrees and providence and yet we still have responsibility and freedom. And so how is this mystery to be sure? How much can we explain? The way I think it's helpful to explain it is that there are two active agents at least two active agents in any moral action because you can have the devil and demon possession.

God and man. In every moral act, there's God and man. Or you can say, I guess I say moral act.

The same event or thing, perhaps is a better way of saying it, in which God works at the same time you do. You're still two moral agents. God is gonna do what he does and he does it for his own glory and for our good.

And we do things good or bad for our own purposes. So this is what I mean here. 1 Chronicles 21, 1. 1 Chronicles 21, 1. Now Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.

2 Samuel 24, we read the same event. 2 Samuel 24, 1. Again, the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and he moved David against them to say, go number Israel and Judah. David does it, Satan does it, God does it.

Three moral agents going on and acting through the same series of events. See that? But we know God is not a sinner. God does not tempt us.

It is always man's fault and his intent is for evil. Man uses what God gave him and he uses it for wickedness. God is never at fault and everything he does and every event he does is for his glory and our good.

He has a pure intention in all said acts. The last example and the greatest example, I think is Acts 2.23. Proverbs 16 is a great one. Psalm 127, one is a good one.

And Acts 2.23 is another great one. These three can say much to your fellow believers who don't believe this. Men of Israel, hear these words.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know. Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death. It was God's plan that his son, he determined beforehand that he would suffer by what? Lawless hands.

Multiple moral agents in one event. And the difference is the moral agent's intent, isn't it? You and I could do all kinds of things, even by accident. And we recognize, especially if it's someone we know and trust, oh, you did it by accident.

Your intent wasn't evil. You spilled coffee on me, you hurt me. The intent is really what it really boils down to for all moral events.

At the very least, is the intent pure or not? Is it right or wrong? God's is always pure. And he can use sin in a way that we can never grasp. And for his good, for our good, and for ultimately his glory.

Different moral agents, men and God. Different purposes and intents. Yet what? The same outcome in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

God eternally planned the outcome and accomplished it through their moral decisions. And it's beautifully summed up here in Genesis 50, verse 20. So this, I suppose, could be your fourth verse to put down.

Proverbs 16, Psalm 127, Acts 2, and Genesis 50. 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. He tells his brothers, Joseph tells his brothers, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

What the same series of events in this case, not a singular thing, a whole chain of events. Even for decades in his life, when he was thrown into a pit and carried off by slavers into Egypt. All that was part of God's plan, not in the abstract, but through the actions of providence, because God's behind and through in all things, just like air is through us and around us in all things.

This is for our good, this is for our health, this is for our comfort, brothers and sisters. Warfield was asked about the sovereignty of God one day, and he gave this apparently famous Dutch story at the time. Professor Warfield.

There was a Dutch child who liked to play out by the windmills. His father told him not to play by the windmills, but he did it anyways. Big old arms, I guess they got really close to the ground.

Having fun, as little boys do, he was suddenly lifted up high into the air, swiftly and surely his body was flailing upward, higher and higher, his terror rose into a scream, until he looked up and saw his father had grabbed him away from the windmill in order to spank him. See the difference between a mechanical universe run by a blind chance and one run by a father who loves you? That's the difference, brothers and sisters. That's the hope and comfort that God eternally decrees and establishes cause and effect so that when you believe and trust in him, his promises will come to pass.

Any other doctrine is a doctrine of terror and heartache. This world is merely man's willy-nilly decisions, or Satan's, we should be like that terrified child. Praise be to God, it's not.

It's controlled by a loving father, and we ought to therefore rest in the comfort that he knows what is best and is indeed working for our best, for our souls especially, to be preserved by him. Let us pray. Our God and Savior, our Lord God, Master and Ruler and King, we bow down and submit to you.

Help us, therefore, we pray through this sermon and through our hearts and our lives, the difficulties and the blessings alike, to focus again upon you and how much you care for us

and guide all things for our good and ultimately for your glory. By the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.