

God's Sovereignty and Predestination

Let us turn to our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. Continue through the book of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 1 verses... Well, I won't be reading 3 and the rest like I have the last 3 sermons. This time I'm going into more of the particulars.

Verses 4, 5, and 11. I will read part of 3 to give a better context. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Verse 5. That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself. Verse 11.

And 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. Spirit of truth and light, be with us this morning as we go through this high and exalted doctrine of God's sovereignty and predestination.

May it humble us, may it at the same time draw us unto you all the more as we realize on the flip side the importance and the need of it as well, which is always looking behind this doctrine, that is, the importance of our own sins, how far we have fallen, God, and how much we need and depend upon you. And this teaching and doctrine unfolds that to a great depth, God, that is frankly very offensive to the flesh and to many, unfortunately. Our God and Savior, may we continue to be encouraged and drawn and enlightened thereby by this truth that we can carry on in our lives knowing that you are for us and no one can be against us.

Amen. We have seen thus far the great beauty and breadth of this doxology, this theology of praise, verses 3 to 14. Both in the great praise and adoration due unto our Creator as a Creator and Redeemer as well as the works and nature of that glorious Trinity.

We now explore the depth of some of the teachings here, the particulars that the Spirit has put in these dense verses. The first one that stands out in these three verses emphasizes the sovereign will and power of the Lord God in our redemption, in our salvation and our deliverance from the kingdom of Satan. Before going into these particular verses, we will review the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty. It goes hand in hand with the doctrine of predestination.

God's Sovereignty and Providence

God's sovereignty in Providence, first point. Our God and Savior, our Creator, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is above all, in control of all things.

The sovereignty, the sovereign might of God Almighty can be defined in various and sundry ways, but they all have these things in common. The divine infinite power and might, or as omnipotence is the word we use sometimes, all power, greater than we could ever

conceive. It is sovereignty in action, and we see this sovereign might as a king and a ruler over all, in creation and in Providence.

Even before we go to the text here to understand what it means that God is sovereign and that predestination is a real truth and action of God Almighty, if we understand that sovereignty also exercised in the rest of creation and the rest of the world at the beginning of creation and the continuation of it, which we call Providence, that it should all the more, I pray, put this thing to rest, this debate sometimes we have in our circles about predestination. Everything, in other words, comes to pass in accordance to God's plan. He decided to create all things of His own free will and to continue to sustain such things in Providence.

That's what it means. This is what we're talking about. The sovereignty of God, His omnipotence and power.

It's shouted there, of course, in Genesis 1. Without using the word, you don't need to. Just read the text. You're like, what am I reading here but almighty power that creates things out of nothing.

As humans, we have the power to fly to the moon. We recently had this. They went around the moon and landed to get the program back to the 60s power level again, apparently.

Or we have the awe-inspiring might of the atom bomb leveling entire cities. We see these things. I like to keep abreast of technology at times, these wonderful things that we can do and have done.

A lot of you have seen much of this in your lifetime. But it pales in comparison to our Lord and Savior. They are nothing to Him.

A moth to the sun. How God created all things in the beginning? God created the heavens and the earth that weren't there and now they are there. And how did He do it? He spoke and it was so.

Man speaks and it falls flat from his mouth. He spoke and creation moved and living things came across the earth. Man has to grab something to make it move independent of him.

God spoke and defined things like night and day and separated and distinguished them forever and ever. And man cannot but only describe what exists. He cannot define in this ultimate cosmic sense.

And the Lord God created all things. Visible and invisible, living and inanimate, non-living things, men, animals, rocks, and skies as we read in Genesis 1 and 2. Great and small, large and fathomingly large stars. You can see these things on YouTube or sometimes social media where they'll show you the breadth and width of the universe by scale.

Here you are and it keeps blowing up. Here's the sun and it keeps going larger and larger. Here's our galaxy and it just seems like it never ends.

You cannot fathom the depth of it. And how much more can you fathom the power and omnipotence of God Almighty who sustains and created all this? You cannot. And the fact that we can fly to the moon and around it and drop nuclear bombs can only exist because God sustains it.

Our power, in other words, is derived from His almighty power. And that shows all the more how wonderful and great and awe-inspiring He is and should be for us. The creator of all things, visible and invisible, has the power to sustain and dispense all things as He wills.

In fact, we read part of that here in verse 11, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, His desire, not yours. He is the king of the universe, the master of all. Furthermore, He didn't make this world as a spinning top to spin through space, but He upholds this planet and the universe and dispenses as He pleases.

He didn't leave it as the old deist taught. Well, here it is, and have fun without me. But He is actively involved.

This is what we understand by the doctrine of providence. Question 11 of the Shorter Catechism gives us a nice summary of this awe-inspiring doctrine. What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions.

We have a governor in Colorado. All the states have a governor. This is another name for president, but at the state level.

There's one guy who has a fair amount of power, but really not that much. God Almighty is the governor of the universe, but not the governor like a state governor who has limited ability. It can only do so much.

God can do it all and does and sustains and retains and holds up all things. This is the doctrine of providence, which, of course, expresses what? His omnipotence, His power and His might, His sovereignty, His sovereign will. He's a sovereign governor of the universe.

He preserves and governs all things, and the smallest quark and atom to the largest mass of suns are held together by the word of His power. Nehemiah 9, 6 we read, You alone are the Lord. You have made heaven and the heaven of heavens with all their hosts, the earth and everything in it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all.

The smallest bird, and we have lots of birds in our neighborhood, is fed and preserved by God Almighty. You can imagine that. I mean, we don't take time for birds.

I don't. Get out of here. You're making a mess of my house.

God feeds them every day as only He can through providence. When we say this, children, we're not saying God took the body of a man and comes down there and feeds them individually, but He works through cause and effect, and we're going to go over more of this next week. This doctrine is going to have a lot of questions.

Today I want to focus on the glory of it and how it is good for you to learn this. The cause and effect, as you know, the animal has to go out there and look for food. If you tried that, you'd be dead pretty soon, I'm sure, you kids.

The little birds catch on really quick. How? God has so designed it in His providence that they can find it. That's what we mean by God feeding them.

Proverbs 16, 33. I like Proverbs 16. You've heard this before.

That's a good thing to put in your Bible, those white sheets somewhere in the front or back, a list of key Bible verses on sovereignty and salvation. Proverbs 16 has four great verses on the sovereignty, the omnipotence of God. In verse 33, at the end of that chapter, we read, The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord.

The lot is like a die or playing with dice. You kids have played board games, I'm sure, at least once in your life. And you throw those dice on the table.

And every time you throw, it's a random chance, I'm not sure if I'm going to get a six, will I get a boxcar, two sixes, twelve, will I get a seven, will I get the number I want? God knows. Because He's behind and through that event itself. Nothing is by chance in His universe, because He's in charge.

For us, it's by chance, because we don't know. We're just completely clueless. We have to act as though these things are by chance.

But we're not the final definition of things, are we? We are but dust. God is in control, even to the throwing of the dice. It's every decision, it's every landing, is from the Lord God Omnipotence.

But not just things, and animals, and stars, and little bitty atoms, but people as well. Now this is when it becomes more offensive to the flesh, even amongst Christians. Lots of non-Presbyterian reform, non-Calvinists, I use the word very broadly here, are fine with saying, yeah, God created all things, and yes, God's even behind the animals and the whales, and how they're fed and sustained.

Although, unfortunately, some will deny some of these things and will say things like, the flooding of the Tibetians in northern, north of India, right, Tibet. You saw those videos? Absolutely astounding. In four minutes, I don't know, 40 feet? That was God.

And that's not his full power. I mean, that's just, he just blinked and there it was. And there are supposed Christian leaders who say, that's not the work of God.

That's astounding, it is indeed the work of God. And we're gonna see more of this here in the particulars of people. Genesis 12, 17.

I remember reading this as a young man when I was one of the Doctors of Grace in the late, early 90s. Absolutely astounding. I remember, you know, I've read at least through the Bible at least once, I think, by then.

And you miss a lot. That's why it's good to have pastors and family and friends and your parents to go, it's stuff that you miss. Genesis 12 is, but the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abraham's wife.

Remember, he's there, she's beautiful, and the king's like, Pharaoh's like, oh, I like that, I'll have another woman. And Abraham said, she's my half-wife to protect himself. Half-sister, excuse me.

Pharaoh took him in innocently. He didn't know any better. Called Abraham and said, what is it that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? And in that incident, Pharaoh recognizes that God was in control.

In chapter 20, it happens again. It happens again with another king in Genesis 20, verse five. Did he not say to me, she is my sister, the king says to God in a dream.

Pagan king, another king, not Pharaoh. Same incident elsewhere. Abraham didn't learn his lesson.

Takes Sarai, and he finds out bad things are happening in his household. And he has this dream, and he tells God, did he not, that is Abraham, say to me, she is my sister. And she, even she herself said, he is my brother.

In the integrity of my heart, and innocence of my hand, I have done this. I took her thinking she was a free woman. And God said to him in a dream, yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart.

For I also withheld you from sinning against me, therefore I did not let you touch her. I did not let you touch her, God says. What? Doesn't he have free will? Well, we'll talk about, again, next week.

Yes and no. Yes to lots of things in this world, but no with respect to God. Never and never against God.

You cannot say no to God. You think you're saying no, but you're not. As you will find out if you do not repent.

The Lord held back a king, a pagan king, from sinning. Acts 17, in Acts 17, Paul unpacks the great might of God almighty to the unbelieving audience there in Athens at Mars Hill. God who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life and breath and all things.

Your own breath comes from God almighty. You cannot exist without breathing. I know we like to think in America, I can do what I want and go wherever I want.

I can be my own man. You can't do anything if you can't breathe. And you can't breathe unless you have God.

That's the relationship of his sovereign might and power and providence in guiding and governing all things. He upholds you and gives you that oxygen and the ability to exist and think. Like oxygen, it's everywhere.

God is everywhere and sustaining all things. That's his might and power, things that we can never do. And he has made, Paul continues, from one blood every nation of men to dwell in the face of the earth and has determined or set apart, they're pre-appointed, pre-appointed, an eternity past because God is eternal.

All his decisions were already eternal. Think about it. And the boundaries of their dwellings, God set up the nations ahead of time.

They didn't have a choice. You're like, oh yeah, America, created by our grit and determination, backed by our pilgrim fathers in the 1600s. Yes, humanly speaking, that's true, and you can say those things, but behind and back of all that and in and through all that was God in pre-appointed time setting the boundaries of this new nation before you were even, before they were even born.

So there's lots and lots of verses about this. This leads us to our text about God's sovereign might, power, his omnipotence. For the triune God is not only sovereign Lord of creation and of providence and guiding and governing all his creatures, including mankind, he is sovereign Lord over our redemption, the saving of the soul, which is the point of this doxology in verses three through 14.

God's Sovereignty and Predestination

God's sovereignty and predestination. God's sovereign might, predestination. Again, brothers and sisters, there are those, probably many, who are fine with saying God's sovereign, sovereign in creation.

Maybe even fine saying God is sovereign in providence, but unfortunately too many are not fine with saying God is sovereign in our redemption and salvation. That somehow, at the end of the day, God waits for you to change your mind and come to him. Ephesians 1 we read a number of things here.

Before I get to the verses four, five, and 11, I want to point out that every verb directed toward us in these verses, right, you have active verbs, you have passive verbs. Things are being done to you. You're the passive recipient.

Things being done, the one who's doing it is the active actor in this matter. That's what we're reading here in verses three to 14. Even without going to those particular verses and those key words of predestination, you have evidence of God's triune might and power in all things.

He who has blessed us. We didn't bless ourselves. That's a sovereign act of God.

He who chose us. We didn't choose ourselves from eternity past. He made this decision.

He has made us accepted. We didn't make ourselves. He did it of his own accord in the beloved, in the riches of his grace which he made to abound.

They are abounding towards us and growing as we saw with the rain and the cool air and the moisture this week. This is the Lord's doing. It's his decision and he has thus done it for and upon us.

That he might, we read, gather together in one all things in Christ. God will gather. He's doing it and we are the recipients.

He's herding us like sheep towards the end of time. And at the end there, verse 13 to 14, you who were sealed. You didn't seal yourself.

You were acted upon by the Holy Spirit, the sovereign third member of the glorious Trinity and thus brought to a fruition of your salvation by the omnipotent power of God. He is the divine initiator of all and we are but the recipients of our salvation. And as we will see in chapter 2, even faith itself is a gift given, initiated by, the Holy Spirit for us.

But there's more. We have those clear texts. Verses 4, 5, and 11.

At verse 4, we read not just the verbs but particular words. Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world before the foundation of all things. Before creation is what he's saying.

It's a metaphorical way of speaking. It was his decision, not yours. You weren't even around for him to consult.

What do you think, Bob? What do you think, Tripp? No. A thousand times no. According to his own sovereign will.

Verse 11. This is the doctrine of predestination here. The word is not used just yet.

It's a bunch of other words that say the same thing. The Bible does that often. Just as he, God Almighty, chose us in him, Christ Jesus, before anything was created.

The word here, predestination, is often used to refer to all things coming to pass by God's will. But it's often used in systematic theology more precisely with respect to the saving of souls. Predestined unto heaven or predestined unto hell.

And those predestined unto heaven, they use the more technical word elect. You're elected to salvation. But you can say predestined.

That's fine. That God chose us before we chose him and then made all the difference in the world. Verse 5. Now we have the actual word.

Having predestined us, the Father, to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. So there you have it again. The Father and the Son are involved in a redemption according to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

God had chosen us. Verse 4. Here it's more specific. Predestined.

That's another way of saying it. Pre-done beforehand. Sometimes people speak of destiny.

You'll see this in TV shows and movies and whatnot. This is my destiny or I can change my destiny. A lot of that, right? They don't mean the same thing as this text.

They don't mean predestined. They just mean some good things are going to happen to me. Maybe it's out of my control.

Maybe it's in my control. This is all before you even think about control. It's eternity past.

It's simply what the word means. There's no way of getting around it. We are blessed and adopted and made holy as part of verse 4 highlights that he chose us that we should be holy and without blame.

He didn't just choose us in the abstract but to a specific and particular purpose to be sanctified, to be holy and like him and here adopted as well. You may think you chose adoption and you did. You did choose but your choosing only came after God chose you.

Otherwise you would never have chosen him. These are wonderful blessings that were decided for us before we were born. In verse 11 in him also we have obtained an inheritance, a godly good thing, a blessing, being predestined, explaining how this is done, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Predestined again. That verb is used six times in the New Testament. Two times here.

Clearly Paul is hammering this point. And of course the same idea is there in verse 4. The idea is there three times explicitly. This particular word is here twice in these texts.

It makes it clear that this eternal decree is not because of us. So he says it to the purpose of why God chose us, that we're adopted, that we may be blameless in his sight. And here he adds a little more to this doctrine.

You're predestined not because you wish it to be but the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. All things. And of all things then the things that are less than all, some things which are in particular your salvation, your deliverance is part of all things.

And that according to the counsel of his will, the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made these decisions within the Trinity what they call inter-Trinitarian. That's all it takes. They make the decision.

That's it. And they made it eternity past. God has no beginning and no end.

And because of that predestination necessarily follows. And what you'll read in the older literature that we've lost and we're now getting more of back is an arguing about natural theology that is what you can learn about God without the Bible. One of the things that comes out is providence because everything here is finite and had to have a beginning and that beginning must be infinite because finite cannot sustain the finite.

It just doesn't make itself. Something else had to make it. God, who's infinite, always there, ever present.

And if that's the case then predestination logically follows as well as providence. This is an eternal decree. If we were left to ourselves we would have fallen like Adam and we would continue to fall because we are weak and are nothing without him.

But our salvation is in secure hands. This is what this is teaching. Paul, the apostle, is praising God for predestinating our salvation.

He's not holding back and, oh, this doesn't sound fair. I don't like the sound of this. What happened to my free will? But he's actually all excited about this fact.

This is wonderful doctrine and truth because my deliverance and pathway to heaven is secure. It's not secure if it depends upon you at the end of the day. It's a profoundly humbling doctrine and it's established in these verses without going to other texts.

But you know what? I'm going to go to other texts. You may need some of it. Others around you who don't believe these things in your life will certainly need more of these verses.

But if one text says it that's sufficient, as we know. And so here in this doctrine of predestination that God chose us to save us from eternity past that even while we were dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2, we are dead in trespasses and unresponsive, in fact, more than unresponsive, downright rebellious against God Almighty. This doctrine saves us from ourselves.

So let's look more carefully at these other texts to help us understand all the more the only source of power that can save us is the omnipotence of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Daniel 4.35 Nebuchadnezzar, as you recall, was arrogant, publicly arrogant, as a magistrate under God. He was a pagan, yet he's still a magistrate or a leader under God, a king, and should have acknowledged that, but he did not.

So God took away his senses. He became like an animal. It wasn't for months.

His nails grew so long they curled. And then he finally came to his own senses. Who is this? This God is a mighty God.

And no one can say their hand to Him. The contrast, we forget again, the ancient Near East king were often called despots. That means a mighty ruler who does what he wants.

We talk about, oh, we got kings in America and we don't want kings or whatever, our president is too powerful. They got nothing on the ancient kings. They got nothing on them.

You sneeze wrong, off with your head. That's the kind of power they had. And he's like, I got no power compared to this God.

When you understand that great gulf, wow, that's a great admission. Psalm 33, amongst other psalms, of course, let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. I command, I speak and it falls flat on its face.

Judges speak and people ignore them. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. Verse 10, He makes the plan of the peoples to no effect.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever in the plans of His heart to all generations. And that's an encouragement there. His plans stand to all generations and thus we baptize our children for they are the next generation.

And we cry out to God to have mercy on them and He does often in many ways. It may sometimes take decades and they come back to the church but other times they stay their whole entire life. That's wonderful.

That's because God is sovereign and not us. And so we put our hope in His will and His power and not our own. Now Paul plumbs the depths of this mystery in Romans 9 as many of us know.

This should be the death knell of people who disagree with this doctrine but unfortunately it's not because people as I think the older you get the more you realize are more emotional than rational often. It's the first thing that they think of as I don't like that. It doesn't sound fair as opposed to.

Put that aside. Let's look at the text and be very careful here. Romans 9. Paul is trying to explain is explaining no trying is explaining by the spirit within him how not all Israel is Israel.

Not all Jews are actually saved. That the covenant of Abraham was actually given to the Jews of the Jews that is the invisible church the elect and the chosen from eternity past that we cannot know infallibly as humans. We only see the outward parts and we see a lot of Jews fell away.

The Old Testament church fell away. How is this possible? Is God's promises failing? And his answer is God forbid it's not failing. It's part of his plan.

He didn't elect every single Jew. He elected some Jews or maybe a lot of them. We don't really know.

We'll ask and find out in heaven. And he continues to unpack this teaching. And that is Paul writes verse 8 those who are children of the flesh biological Jews these are not the children of God but the children of the promise are counted as a seed for this is the word of promise at this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son and not only this.

But when Rebecca also had conceived by one man even by her father Isaac for the children not yet being born nor having done any good or evil that the purpose of God according to election might stand not of works but of him who calls it was said to her the older shall serve the younger the older shall serve the younger the children weren't even born yet Paul emphasizes they had no decision in the matter and yet what they did they did most willingly again we'll talk about that next week and most freely but it was all within God's plans from eternity past we continue on a few verses later what shall we say then is there unrighteousness with God.

Certainly not for he says to Moses I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion so then it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy it is not your baptism it is not your circumcision

It is not how good you are it is not how faithful and obedient you are it is of God's gracious goodness and everlasting love for his people I hope that's good news to you it is to me to read to realize how much you need God and how weak we are in thought word and deed as you examine your sins your attraction towards transgressions of God's holy will should humble you.

And Paul brings it up in chapter 2 thus this teaching here of predestination should be used to draw us closer to God and thankfulness and humility because without his sovereign might and protection you are lost if Satan has free will as some Christians believe if man has free will the way they define it which is more secular definition of it that they can just say no to God's eternal plans I don't want to be saved I want to have fun in hell with my buddies there are songs about that remember that? and Satan comes along how much more powerful is Satan compared to you?

Unfortunately they don't make that connection what? you're stronger than Satan? no you're not even the angel said in the name of the Lord get away I can't stop you I'm an angel I need God's power it's God who stops the devil and if God doesn't have power to stop the devil what hope do we have to save ourselves?

Put all the pieces together you got to have sovereignty or we have no salvation predestination and preservation therefore go hand in hand God's sovereign protection from us from the fall of Adam until today the world, the flesh and the devil are working hard and

It seems like they are succeeding as we read in Romans 9 it looks like the Jewish church fell apart and God lost Paul's like that's not the case at all you misunderstand and so down

through history as much as they try to destroy the people of God the Old Testament church the New Testament church the persecution of believers in Africa in the Middle East in China in North Korea they are failing they are bashing their head against a wall until they collapse and all empires have collapsed but what has to survive for 2,000 years and beyond?

The church every society that wished to take down the church has fallen the church still survives because God preserves and sustains us it is His might and His power and we rely upon that reading the Bible reading church history we see that God protects and preserves His people and is never themselves we are weak and frail and fall apart so easily God's sovereignty brothers and sisters His deliverance of your soul to bring you to heaven to justify you to adopt you to sanctify you is by His will and His love for you alone this teaching here it's a high and holy teaching as our confession says it should be handled carefully is not given for curiosity's sake it's for you the teaching is in God's words here in those other texts.

I hope you see teaching that God's power and might is all sufficient and all powerful and none can stay His hand teaching that you can do nothing to stop His plans sometimes we think have I sinned enough? have I lost my salvation? can I jump out of God's hands? a thousand times no.

So I encourage you that God's power that holds all things and guides all things and sustains all things is for your good and directs your life every part of your life that the hopelessness that you feel in your own situation is not greater than God's power and He will use it for your good and for His glory a power that keeps His promises that His yea and amen is an eternal yea and amen in Christ Jesus because He has the omnipotence to keep that promise when we fail in our promises therefore love the Lord God all the more for having pity upon your pitiful selves and keep praying for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us pray indeed our sovereign creator and Lord be with us continue to guide us may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven and may we become more sanctified and holy not only in our understanding and teaching of this doctrine but in our life to be encouraged to carry on to do good works that have been prepared for us before the foundation of the world prepared beforehand as we read in Ephesians 2.10 because by ourselves our good works will always fall flat we thank you and praise you God for working and sustaining us and preserving us against our own foolishness be with us and draw us unto you we pray by the power of the Holy Spirit Amen.