

Name:

God's 
sovereignty

RML Romans

31 January–2 February 2020

God's sovereignty and his plan

Read Isaiah 6:1–7

1. The reality of God's sovereignty

God's sovereignty = God's complete control

(Psalm 33:10–11, 115:3, Proverbs 19:21; Daniel 4:35; Job 42:2; Isaiah 14:24–27, 46:9–11, 55:11 etc)

¹¹ [God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. (Ephesians 1:11)

- totally effectively...

(Isaiah 46:9–11; Job 42:2; Psalm 33:10–11; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 14:24–27; 55:11; Ephesians 1:4–5, 9, 11)

⁹ Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,

¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,

saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose',

¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country.

I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isaiah 46:9–11)

- totally extensively...

...all 'natural' events

(Isaiah 45:6–7; Psalm 135:6–7; Proverbs 16:33; Matthew 10:29–30; Psalm 104:10–30; Psalm 147:15–18)

⁶ Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (Psalm 135:6–7)

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. (Proverbs 16:33)

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:29–30)

...all human history

(Genesis 45:5–8, 50:20; Psalm 33:10–11; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 21:1; Exodus 14:4; Psalm 139:13–16; Proverbs 16:9; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; 17:26)

⁷And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:5–8)

²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

¹⁰The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the plans of his heart to all generations. (Psalm 33:10–11)

⁹The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

¹The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. (Proverbs 21:1)

The Belgic Confession

Article 13

Divine providence

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, nor give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment

Heidelberg Catechism

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Q What do you understand by the providence of God?

A The almighty and ever present power of God

by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures,

and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty

—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

- How? because he is God the Creator

⁹I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,

¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done (Isaiah 4:9–10)

R.C. Sproul

The great difference between us and God is that apart from God we don't exist but apart from us He does exist.

Eternal

All-powerful

All-knowing

Creator's knowledge	Creature's knowledge
eternal	gained by observation
independent of others	dependent on others

Mistakes...

i) Materialism

ii) Deism

¹⁷And [the Son] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17)

iii) Polytheism or dualism

iv) Pantheism or panentheism

v) Puppet master God

2. The goodness of God's sovereignty

God's perfect goodness

(Deuteronomy 32:4; Exodus 33:19; Psalm 92:15; Psalm 100:5; Matthew 10:18; Mark 10:18; 1 John 1:5)

“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice.

A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

3. The goal of God's sovereignty

ultimate good = rule and glory of the Son

⁹[God has made] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10)

Application: awe

Group discussion

How does the reality of God's total control over all things challenge our view of him?

How does the goodness of God impact how we view his sovereignty?

How does the of God's sovereign plan—ie the rule and glory of the Son—impact our view of God's sovereignty?

God's sovereignty and salvation

Read Ephesians 2:1–10

1. We were dead

Ephesians 2:1–3

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1–3)

- Inability: **corrupt** nature

Heidelberg Catechism

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Q But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?

A Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

²⁰“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹For from within, **out of the heart of man**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:20–23)

- Guilt: **real** will

2. But God made us alive

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ
—by grace you have been saved—

⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4–6)

- Why? his love and mercy

- How?

The gift of faith

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (Ephesians 2:8)

The gospel heard

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)

- When? before the beginning of time

⁴ [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Objections...

i) Puppet master God

No: divine sovereignty **and** human agency together

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:27–28)

ii) Foreknowledge (God knew the good we would do)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

No: there was nothing worthy about us

Canons of Dort

Article 9: election not based on foreseen faith

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of every saving good. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says,

“He chose us” (not because we were, but) “so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

iii) Unfair for God to choose only some

No: God's gift of life is a question of mercy not justice

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Romans 9:14–15)

Canons of Dort

Article 1: God's right to condemn all people

Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: “The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God” (Rom. 3:19), “All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

iv) Logically God predestined people to hell (double predestination)

No: the Bible says God leaves people in the condition they chose—the fault is ours

²² **What if** God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath **prepared for destruction**,

²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which **he has prepared** beforehand for glory? (Romans 9:22–23)

Article 15: reprobation

Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—

those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decree:

to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish those who have been left in their own ways and under God's just judgment, not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice.

And this is the decree of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

v) Evangelism is pointless

No: the gospel is God's chosen means of saving

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18–20)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

(John 3:16–18)

3. The purpose of God's sovereign salvation

New creations in Christ

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Willing co-rulers with Christ

¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies...

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:19–23, 29–30)

Application:

Humility

Assurance

⁹ if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15)

Group discussion

How does the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty and our salvation impact our:

- Assurance
- Humility/pride
- Evangelism

What would you say to a Christian who says “this isn't fair”?

God's sovereignty and evil

Read John 11:17–44

1. God hates evil

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. (John 11:33–35)

⁵ The Lord tests the righteous,
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. (Psalm 11:5)

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezekiel 18:23)

A W Tozer

God hates evil in his creation as a mother hates the polio that takes the life of her child.

Mistake 1: the presence of evil means there is no God

John Mackie (1912–1981)

1. God is all good
 2. God is all powerful
 3. There is evil in the world
- >>>The Christian faith is incoherent

2. God is in control of evil

⁷¹ I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create calamity;
I am the Lord, who does all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

...but cannot be charged with evil

"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice.
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)

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nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then when devils and wicked men act unjustly.

- How? God's control of good and evil = asymmetrical

While God dispenses the good from his hand directly...

He ordains evil and sees to it that it occurs indirectly, mediated through someone else from whom that evil originates.

(Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*, p 200)

Though evil is ever so much under God's control, it cannot in the same sense and in the same way be the object of his will as the good (Herman Bavinck)

Job

Assyria

⁵Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger;
the staff in their hands is my fury!

⁶Against a godless nation [ie Israel] I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

⁷But he [ie Assyria] does not so intend,
and his heart does not so think;
but it is in his heart to destroy,
and to cut off nations not a few; (Isaiah 10:5–7)

Joseph

²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

The crucifixion of Jesus

–Caiaphas the high priest

⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” (John 11:49–50)

–Pilate

¹¹Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

–Peter's sermon

²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:23)

Mistake 2: open theism

God's knowledge of future is 'open' to different outcomes ie not in complete control

No: if evil is out of control there is no comfort in suffering

3. God is wise beyond our understanding

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

²⁹ "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Two aspects of the one will of God

Revealed/preceptive will: –what God values
 –revealed in his moral commands

Hidden/decretive will: –what God decrees will happen (bringing ultimate good)
 –secret to him

Job's response: "I repent" not "I understand" (Job 42:6)

Article 13

Divine providence

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And as to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into it further than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word without transgressing these limits.

Mistake 3: speculate about God's hidden will instead of trusting his revealed will

including attributing suffering to a particular sin in a person's life—Job, Luke 13:1–5

⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. (Luke 13:1–5)

4. God is passionate for his glory

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” ⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. (John 11:40–46)

ultimate good = rule and glory of the Son

⁹[God has made] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10)

The Westminster shorter catechism

1

Q What is the chief end of man?

A Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

John Piper

Man's chief end is to glorify God **by** enjoying him forever.

Mistake 4: The highest good is the removal of all suffering and the pursuit of pleasure

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” (John 13:31)

5. God is victorious over evil

¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:13–15)

⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

Mistake 5: the armchair God

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16–17)

Conclusion:

But what do we say in the face of suffering?

- Weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15)
- Listen
- Cumulative pointers are better than a neatly zipped up answer
- Point to the cross

God's sovereignty and his provision

Read: Matthew 6:25–34

Group discussion

How would you answer a non-Christian who says that there can be no God, because there is so much evil in the world—in five minutes and in twenty seconds?

How would you help a Christian struggling with the presence of suffering in the world as an academic question?

Eric has 62 sheep. Six are killed by wolves, five are kidnapped by animal rights activists and he sends nine to the abattoir. How many sheep does Eric have left and who is to blame?

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,

²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Belgic Confession

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This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father,

who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under His power⁵ that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground without the will of our Father,⁶ in whom we do entirely trust;

being persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us.

Heidelberg catechism (1563)

1

Q What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A That I am not my own,

but belong—

body and soul,

in life and in death—

to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way

that not a hair can fall from my head

without the will of my Father in heaven;

in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

26

Q What do you believe when you say,

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”?

A That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them,

who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,
is my God and Father because of Christ the Son.
I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul, and will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world.
God is able to do this because he is almighty God
and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

1. A proper perspective: God is your Father (v22–32)

³...we were **by nature children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:3)

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:5–6)

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that **we might receive adoption as sons**. (Galatians 4:4–5)

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that **we should be called children of God**; and so we are. (1 John 3:1)

...therefore, not anxiety but trust

...even in suffering

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:28–29)

Suffering for the Christian...

1. **Not** God's punishment for your sin

2. **Not** God's punishment for your sin but could be his fatherly discipline

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (Hebrews 12:10)

3. A necessary trial to strengthen and purify your genuine trust in Jesus

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7)

But all for the ultimate purpose of your good and his glory

2. A proper priority (v33–34)

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:33–34)

John Stott

There are only two kinds of ambition. One can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative.

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7–11)

Group discussion

In what ways does Jesus' teaching here challenge our view of God?

What would it be like if we really believed that God is our Father?

How do these truths help us trust God in the face of suffering?

Consider learning and meditating on Matthew 6:31–33

God's sovereignty and our suffering

Read: Romans 8:18–30

1. The creation groans around us.

2. Christians groan within ourselves.

3. The Spirit groans for us.

So

a) Shore up the foundations...

b) Don't be resigned.

Appendix: confessions with scripture references

Belgic confession

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We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, nor give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will,¹ so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment;²

nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then when devils and wicked men act unjustly.

³And as to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into it further than our capacity will admit⁴ of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word without transgressing these limits.

This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under His power⁵ that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground without the will of our Father,⁶ in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us. And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.

1—John 5:17; Hebrews 1:3; Proverbs 16:4; Psalm 104:9, etc; Psalm 139:2, etc

2—James 4:15; Job 1:21; 1 Kings 22:20; Acts 4:28; 1 Samuel 2:25; Psalm 115:3; 45:7; Amos 3:6; Deuteronomy 19:5; Proverbs 21:1; Psalm 105:25; Isaiah 10:5–7; 2 Thessalonians 2:11; Ezekiel 14:9; Romans 1:28; Genesis 45:8; 1:20; 2 Samuel 16:10; Genesis 27:20; Psalm 75:7–8; Isaiah 45:7; Proverbs 16:4; Lamentations 3:37–38; 1 Kings 22:34, 38; Exodus 21:13

3—Matthew 8:31, 32; John 3:8

4—Romans 11:33–34

5—Matthew 8:31; Job 1:12; 2:6

6—Matthew 10:29–30

Heidelberg catechism

1

Q What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A That I am not my own,¹

but belong—

body and soul,

in life and in death—²

to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴ and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵

He also watches over me in such a way⁶

that not a hair can fall from my head

without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷

in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸

Because I belong to him,

Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life⁹
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.¹⁰

1—1 Corinthians 6:19–20

2—Romans 14:7–9

3—1 Corinthians 3:23; Titus 2:14

4—1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 John 1:7–9; 2:2

5—John 8:34–36; Hebrews 2:14–15; 1 John 3:1–11

6—John 6:39–40; 10:27–30; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:5

7—Matthew 10:29–31; Luke 21:16–18

8—Romans 8:28

9—Romans 8:15–16; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14

10—Romans 8:1–17

8

Q But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?

A Yes,¹ unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.²

1—Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isaiah 53:6

2—John 3:3–5

26

Q What do you believe when you say,

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”?

A That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them,¹
who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,²
is my God and Father because of Christ the Son.³
I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul,⁴ and will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world.⁵
God is able to do this because he is almighty God⁶ and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.⁷

1 - Gen. 1:2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15

2 - Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

3 - John 1:12–13; Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5

4 - Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25–26; Luke 12:22–31

5 - Rom. 8:28

6 - Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31–39

7 - Matt. 7:9–11

27

Q What do you understand by the providence of God?

A The almighty and ever present power of God¹
by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures,
² and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness,
prosperity and poverty—³ all things, in fact, come to us not by chance⁴ but by his fatherly hand.⁵

1 - Jer. 23:23–24; Acts 17:24–28

2 - Heb. 1:3

3 - Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15–17; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2

4 - Prov. 16:33

5 - Matt. 10:29

28

Q How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A We can be patient when things go against us,¹
thankful when things go well,²
and for the future we can have
good confidence in our faithful God and Father
that nothing in creation will separate us from his love.³
For all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.⁴

1 - Job 1:21–22; James 1:3

2 - Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18

3 - Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3–5; 8:38–39

4 - Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24–28

Historical background

The Belgic confession

The confession's chief author was Guido de Brès, a preacher of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, who died a martyr to the faith in the year 1567. During the sixteenth century the churches in this country were exposed to terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, de Brès prepared this confession in the year 1561.

The Heidelberg catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was composed in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Elector Frederick III, who ruled the province of the Palatinate from 1559 to 1576. The catechism was intended as a tool for teaching young people, a guide for preaching in the provincial churches, and a form of confessional unity among the several Protestant factions in the Palatinate. Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus were co-authors of the catechism.

Canons of Dort

The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands is popularly known as the Canons of Dort. It consists of statements of doctrine adopted by the great Synod of Dort, which met in the city of Dordrecht in 1618-19. The Synod of Dort was held in order to settle a serious controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of Arminianism.

