

**DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE
THE DOCTRINE OF GOD
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

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Introduction

Any discussion of God's sovereignty encompasses the foreknowledge of God, the counsel of God, the will of God, and the providence Of God.

I. THE FACT OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

It is without dispute that our God is ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN!

This is affirmed by both logic and Scripture:

A. God's Sovereignty Is Logical.

"To declare God sovereign is to declare Him God."

(A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty Of God*: Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1930: Pg. 19)

If God were not sovereign, He would be finite—someone else could be His master.

B. God's Sovereignty Is Scriptural.

The Bible declares God to be supreme (*1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 47:2*) and therefore sovereign (*Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 14:24*)

C. God's Sovereignty Is Harmonious.

The Sovereignty of God does *not* transcend or overrule His attributes— it is in agreement with them. God *never* ignores His attributes just because He is sovereign and can do anything He wants to. He is never arbitrary in what He does or decrees.

II. THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

One of the most vexing questions in theological circles deals with the reconciling of God's foreknowledge and His sovereignty.

A. God's Foreknowledge Is Logical.

If God didn't know about something before it happened, He would not be God. The fact is, nothing ever *occurs* to God— nothing surprises Him!

B. God's Foreknowledge Is Scriptural.

God is omniscient—therefore He knows "*the end from the beginning.*" *Isaiah 46:10.* (Cf. *Isaiah 42:9*)

The Bible gives specific examples of God's foreknowledge:

1. **He Foreknew The Need To Send His Son To The Cross.**
(*Acts 2:23*)
2. **He Foreknew All Who Would Receive His Son As Saviour.** (*Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2*)

3. **He Foreknew The History Of His Chosen People, Israel.**
(*Romans 11:2*)

C. God's Foreknowledge Is Harmonious.

The fact that God has known everything that has, is, and will take place in time from eternity past does not condition His sovereignty.

Calvinist philosophy, which argues that since God knew a certain event would take place in time He must of necessity have ordained it to be, or else He could not be sovereign, is erroneous.

D. God's Foreknowledge And His Eternal Purpose.

The Bible speaks of God's "*eternal purpose.*" A study of the relevant Scriptures shows this relates to God's plan of redemption through His Son.

By His foreknowledge God knew in eternity past what man would do with his free will, and so determined the great Plan of Salvation.

His eternal purpose is centered in His Son (*Ephesians 3:11*) and involves the following:

1. **The Provision Of Redemption By Christ.**
(*1 Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 13:8*)
2. **The Promise Of Eternal Life Through Christ.**
(*Titus 1:2*)
3. **The Predestination Of Those In Christ.**
(*Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14*)
4. **The Purchase Of The Church By Christ.**
(*Ephesians 3:3-11*)
5. **The Prospect Of The Consummation By Christ.**
(*Isaiah 14:24-27*)

Like the sovereignty of God, His foreknowledge is always consistent with His other attributes—including His counsel.

III. THE COUNSEL OF GOD.

We may define it as the *expression* of God's infinite wisdom.

The counsel of God figures into the discussion on the sovereignty of God because in Calvinistic thinking it is synonymous with His sovereign decree.

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- A. The Counsel Of God – Viewed Philosophically.**
Based upon Scripture references such as Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:28, Calvinists see the counsel of God as a foreordaining decree, predetermined in eternity past by a sovereign God.
- The Westminster Shorter Catechism states: *“The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will whereby, for His own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”*
- B. The Counsel Of God – Viewed Scripturally.**
As always, we must let Scripture define and interpret Scripture. On this subject, the Word of God reveals some interesting facts. (Not speculations!)
- 1. The Counsel Of God Is The Word of God.**
The following Scriptures show that we have the counsel of God in our hands. (Psalms 33:11; 73:24; 107:11; Jeremiah 23:18; Micah 4:12; Acts 20:27)
 - a. We Have The “Mind Of Christ.”**
(1 Corinthians 2:16)
 - b. We Have ALL Of God’s Counsel.**
(Acts 20:27)
 - c. We May Not Understand It Fully.**
(Romans 11:33-34; Isaiah 55:8-9)
Truly God’s wisdom is infinite.
 - d. We Can Reject It.**
(Luke 7:30; Proverbs 1:24-25, 30)
 - 2. The Decrees Of God Are Stated In The Word Of God. Specifically:**
 - a. God’s Decree To Provide Rain.** *(Job 28:26)*
 - b. God’s Decree Concerning The Lord Jesus Christ.**
(Psalm 2:7)
The decree to send His Son into the world to die for the sins of mankind is the **only** stated **predetermined** act of God.

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(See Acts 2:23; 4:28; 1 Peter 1:20; Luke 22:22a)

- c. God’s Decree To Establish The Heavens.**
(Psalm 148:6)
- d. God’s Decree To Contain The Sea.**
(Proverbs 8:29; Jeremiah 5:22)
- e. God’s Decree To Deliver Israel.** *(Isaiah 10:22)*
- f. God’s Decree Concerning King Nebuchadnezzar.**
(Daniel 4:24)

There are **no** other decrees of God recorded.

- 3. Other Things Are Determined By God.**
The Bible does speak of the Lord determining certain events. For example:
 - a. God Has Determined Certain Prophetic Events.**
(Daniel 9:24, 26-27; 11:36)
 - b. God Has Determined The Days Of A Man.**
(Job 14:5)
 - c. God Has Determined The Boundaries Of The Nations.** *(Acts 17:26; Deuteronomy 32:8)*

IV. THE WILL OF GOD.

The expressed will of God is the same thing as the counsel of God. God has sovereignly determined to reveal Himself to man and His will is fully expressed through His Word. *(Deuteronomy 29:29)*

A. The Will Of God Is Revealed To Man.

How do we know this?

- 1. Because It Can Be Known.**
(Ephesians 5:17; Colossians 1:9; 4:12)
- 2. Because It Can Be Done.**
The following Scriptures establish that God’s will can be done:

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(Psalm 40:8; 143:10; Matthew 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; Mark 3:35; John 7:17; Hebrews 10:36; 1 Peter 4:2; 1 John 2:17)

3. **Because It Can Be Proved.** *(Romans 12:2)*

4. **Because It Is Explicitly Stated.**
(1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; 1 Peter 2:15)

B. Is There A “Secret” Will Of God?

If there is, then no man can be expected to do it. However, there is no secret will of God whereby He sovereignly determines who will be saved and who will not be saved. This would be impossible because His revealed will clearly is:

1. **That All Should Be Saved.**

(2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4)

2. **That All Who Believe On Christ WILL Be Saved.**

(John 3:18; Cp. Isaiah 45:19)

God **never** wills sin! *(Jeremiah 19:5)*

C. Is There A “Permissive” Will Of God?

Though this term is not found in Scripture, the concept of a permissive will (at least from a human perspective) is. This term is applied to situations where the express will of God (the “perfect” will of God—*Romans 12:2*) is not followed, and yet where the Lord apparently permits certain things to proceed anyway. This so-called permissive will of God really falls into the category of the Providence of God, because God invariably uses it to accomplish His perfect will anyway.

For example:

1. **Abraham Was Permitted To Go Down To Egypt.**

(Genesis 12:10)

We note that God used the adverse situation in Egypt to bring Abram back into the center of His perfect will.

(Genesis 12:20; 13:1, 3)

2. **Israel Was Permitted To Have A King.**

(1 Samuel 8:4-22)

Clearly, God’s perfect will for His chosen people was a Theocracy. *(Judges 2:16)*

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However, God permitted them to have a king – something they later regretted.

(1 Samuel 8:11-18; 1 Samuel 14:52; 1 Kings 12:1-4, 11)

We understand through the prophetic Word that God will use the throne of David to re-establish Israel under a true Theocracy. *(Isaiah 9:6-7; 43:15; Jeremiah 23:5-6)*

3. **John Mark Was Permitted To Return Home.**

(Acts 13:5, 13)

God’s perfect will was for the Gospel to be preached to “every creature.” John Mark accompanied Saul and Barnabas on a church-planting venture into Asia-Minor.

For some reason he quit the team and went home. Evidently the apostle Paul believed he had stepped out of God’s will and had weakened the effectiveness of their mission. The issue later became a divisive matter of contention between he and Barnabas. *(Acts 15:36-40)*

No one should use the permissive will of God as an excuse for disobedience to the revealed will of God. No matter how acceptable the permissive will of God may be, it will never be as acceptable to God as His perfect will.

From man’s perspective. *(See Psalm 106:15)*

From God’s perspective. *(See Numbers 14:18)*

D. Is There A Purpose To God’s Will?

Everything God does is designed ultimately to His glory.

(1 Chronicles 16:24, 28-29; Psalm 115:1; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14c; Philippians 2:11; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Peter 4:11; Jude 25;

See also: *Acts 12:23; Romans 1:21; 3:23)*

1. Creation Glorifies God. *(Psalm 19:1)*

2. Israel Glorifies God. *(Isaiah 48:11; 49:3; 60:21)*

3. Salvation Glorifies God.
(Romans 9:23; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14c.)

4. Believers Glorify God.
(1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Romans 15:6)

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- a. By their works. (*Matthew 5:16*)
- b. By their fruit. (*John 15:8*)
- c. By their words.
(*Psalm 50:23; 2 Corinthians 4:15*)
- d. By their sufferings.
(*2 Thessalonians 1:10, 12; 1 Peter 4:14, 16*)
- e. By their death. (*John 21:19*)
5. Churches Glorify God. (*Ephesians 3:21*)
6. The Millennium Will Glorify God. (*Psalm 86:9*)
7. Heaven Glorifies God.
 - a. Its Occupants. (*Revelation 4:9, 11; 5:12-13*)
 - b. Its City. (*Revelation 21:11*)

VII. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

A. The Providence Of God Defined.

It is the provision and care God exerts to accomplish His divine purpose. It is God's bidding, control, direction, overruling, and permission in the affairs of His creation.

B. The Basis Of God's Providence.

The providence of God extends from, and is in consonance with the attributes of God.

1. God Is Wise.

Therefore, we may expect Him to act rationally.

2. God Is Good.

Therefore, He will have the interests of His creatures at heart.

3. God Is Omnipotent.

Therefore we can be confident He has the ability to accomplish His purposes.

C. The Scriptural Proof Of God's Providence.

That God's sovereignty extends over all His creation is made abundantly clear in the Bible.

1. Providence In The Physical Realm.

(*Psalm 103:19; Psalm 147:16-18; 1 Samuel 7:10; Job 9:5-7; Job 37:10; Job 38:12-35; Acts 14:17*)

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2. **Providence In The Animal Kingdom.**
(*Job 12:10; Psalm 104:21, 28-29; Psalm 147:9; Matthew 6:26; Matthew 10:29*)
3. **Providence In The Affairs Of The Nations.**
(*Job 12:23; Psalm 22:28; Psalm 66:7; Psalm 75:6-7 Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 10:5-7; Daniel 4:25b; Acts 17:26; Romans 13:1*)
4. **Providence In The Preservation Of His Word.**
(*Psalm 12:6-7; Matthew 24:35*)
5. **Providence Over All Individuals.**
 - a. **In Birth and Life.**
(*1 Samuel 16:1; Esther 4:14; Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 45:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15-16*)
 - b. **In The Course Of Man's Life.**
(*Matthew 10:30; Luke 1:52; Proverbs 16:1, 33; 1 Samuel 2:6-8; Exodus 12:36*)
 - c. **In Needs.**
(*Psalm 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:19; Isaiah 64:4*)
 - d. **In Eternal Destiny.**
(*Psalm 73:24; 37:23-24; 11:6*)
6. **Providence Over The Actions Of Men.**
 - a. **In General.**
(*Exodus 12:36; 1 Samuel 24:18; Proverbs 19:21; 21:1; Jeremiah 10:23; Philippians 2:13*)
 - b. **Sometimes, God Permits Sin.**
(*2 Samuel 16:10; 24:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 2 Chronicles 32:31; Psalm 81:12-13; Hosea 4:17; Acts 4:16; Romans 1:24, 26, 28*)
This is only after opportunities for righteousness have been rejected.
 - c. **Sometimes, God Prevents Sin.**
(*Genesis 20:6; Psalm 19:13; Hosea 2:6*)

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d. Always, God Limits Sin.

*(Job 1:12; Psalm 124:2-3; 1 Cor. 10:13;
Rev. 20:2-3)*

D. The Purpose Of The Providence Of God.

According to Romans 8:28, all things work together for GOOD.
(See also Psalm 84:11)

Even with the unsaved, God's providence is for good.
(Acts 14:17)

Providential goodness to the lost has for its end their salvation.
(Romans 2:4)

The ultimate end of Providence is the glory of God.
(Isaiah 48:11)

E. Difficulties Associated With The Providence Of God.

1. Does Providence Deny Human Freedom?

The providential workings do not limit God. Sometimes He allows man to do as he pleases. Other times He restrains, or prevents man from doing what he desires; always God overrules in ways to accomplish His glory.

2. Does Providence Mean I Don't Have To Pray?

To say this would deny the many Scriptural exhortations to pray. Evidently, there are some things God does only in answer to prayer.

Matthew 7:7-11