



## **THE MYSTERIES OF GOD**

I'm going to make some statements through here that we could unpack for weeks, and you should. But for our purposes here, we are going to fly onto the next statement.

Deuteronomy 29:29 talks about the secret things of God. Tozer said,

Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him. We want a God we can in some measure control. We need the feeling of security that comes from knowing what God is like, and what He is like is of course a composite of all the religious pictures we have seen, all the best people we have known or heard about, and all the sublime ideas we have entertained. If all this sounds strange to modern ears, it is only because we have for a full half-century taken God for granted. The glory of God has not been revealed to this generation of men.

J. Rodman Williams said, "Because all Christian doctrines relate to God who is ultimately beyond our comprehension, there will inevitably be some element of mystery, or transcendence, that cannot be reduced to human understanding. Nonetheless, within these limits the theological effort must be carried on."

John Calvin said, "Man with all his shrewdness is as stupid about understanding by himself the mysteries of God, as [a donkey] is incapable of understanding musical harmony."

1 Corinthians 4:1, *"...men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God."*

## **VOCABULARY**

### **Contradiction**

Now what do you mean when you say "Mystery"? Well, let's talk about some different key terms, or vocabulary. A contradiction is a condition in which at least two things are truly contrary to each other. To say something is "A," and not "A" at the same time, is considered a contradiction. Or to say that someone is in this room, but there be no one in this room, would be a contradiction. You can't say both of them; they would be contrary to each other.

### **Paradox**

A paradox is a correlation that appears to be a contradiction or even absurd, but when closely examined, it proves to be true. I mean things like "jumbo shrimp," or 2 Corinthians 12:10, which says, *"...When I am weak, then I am strong."* That's a paradox.

## **Antinomy**

An antinomy is a combination of two thoughts or principles, each of which is true in its own right but which we cannot harmonize. They're both true, but we can't harmonize them together. This is a term that J.I. Packer uses in a great book called, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. He uses light as an illustration. He essentially ask the question, is light is made up of waves or particles? And the answer is both. Now how do you bring those together? It's an antinomy.

## **Mystery**

We are calling a mystery an assumed truth, i.e., not a contradiction. It is an assumed truth which the human mind cannot comprehend, but which we accept by faith. This can include paradoxes and antinomies, but this is truth. When we think about doctrine, or theology, or scriptural truths, we can't just say, "It must be a mystery," and just kind of wash our hands of it, because we came upon something that's kind of hard to figure out. But there are some things that are mysteries that become apparent when you contemplate an infinite God, which we accept as true, not contradictory. We're not talking about contradictions, but truth that the human eye cannot comprehend.

## **Mysteries of God**

So we're going to look at these three mysteries: The Trinity, The sovereign Will of God, God and Evil. We are probably going to go faster through the doctrine of the Trinity, so that we have a little more time on the last two. In any case, though, we are going to go quickly through them all.

# **The Trinity**

Tozer said, "To meditate on the three Persons of the Godhead is to walk in thought through the garden eastward in Eden and to tread on holy ground. Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain forever futile, and only by deepest reverence can it be saved from actual presumption."

## **Three Foundational Truths**

We know that the word "Trinity" is never mentioned in the Bible, but the Bible teaches the Trinity from cover to cover. If you were to ask me to explain the Trinity, I would put in front of you three foundational truths. Three truths that put together the Trinity in an understandable form. Again, how they fit together is the mystery. But these are the three truths. And keep in mind, when we talk about mysteries, we are focusing on what we do know, not what we do not know.

We do know these things: Number one, God is three persons. Scripture refers to God with plural pronouns. Genesis 1:26 says, "Let *us* create men in our image," or Genesis 11:7, "Let *us* go down," Or Isaiah 6:8, "whom shall I send? And who will go for *us*?" You have plural pronouns all over the Bible referring to God.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are persons. This is key. When we think about God the Father, we should think of Him as a person. We have God—the Father, God—the Son, and God—the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit a person or a power? We think of the Spirit as some force, or energy, but the Spirit is a person.

You look in John 16, and you see that He is referred to with masculine pronouns, not neuter or neutral pronouns. The word "spirit" would normally not be masculine or feminine. But you see in John 16:13, *"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears."*

When you look through Scripture, you see the Spirit doing what a person does. The Spirit teaches. The Spirit testifies. The Spirit intercedes. The Spirit searches all things of God, which we talked about earlier. The Spirit knows. The Spirit gives gifts. The Spirit speaks—*"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'"* (Acts 8:29). The Spirit is grieved. So the Spirit is a person.

The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct. Now this is really important to see. You look in Matthew 3 at the baptism of Jesus. What you see is all three persons of the Trinity. You see Jesus being baptized, the Spirit of God descending on Him like a dove, and the "voice from heaven"—the Father—saying, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:18).

Or you have the Great Commission that commands us to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which shows the distinction between them. The same in Ephesians 4:4-7, and 1 Peter 1:1-2. The Son is distinguished from the Father. The Spirit is distinguished from the Son. The Father is distinguished from the Spirit. They're distinguished from each other.

So, truth number one, God is three persons. That's foundational. Truth number two, each person is fully God. Scripture teaches that God, the Father, is fully God. That's never really been debated throughout the history of Christianity. You have Genesis 1:1, Matthew 6:26, and Matthew 6:30 that affirm God, the Father, as fully God. Not part God. God is not part Father, part Son, part Holy Spirit. God, the Father, is fully God.

God, the Son, is fully God. I would encourage you, we need to know why we believe that the Son is fully God. If I were to ask you to write out every verse that you know, that affirms that the Son is fully God, how many verses would you be able to write? I ask you that, because I think there is a famine when it comes to understanding the deity of Christ, the person of Christ, in the Church today. We need to know the importance of Christ's deity. This is very key in our faith, as we're going to see.

Philippians 2:5-11 is really the Christ-hymn, and the great passage on the deity of Christ. There are four truths that are contained even here in this little passage.

*Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).*

He is God, He is man, He is Savior, He is Lord. He is all of those things Philippians 2:5-11.

There are other Scriptures that affirm the deity of Christ. In Hebrews 1:3, *"He is the exact representation of"* the being of God. He is *"our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"* (Titus

2:13). We already talked about the Gospel of John, and how it emphasizes Jesus' humanity, and how in John 20:28, Thomas bows at Jesus' feet and says, "*My Lord and my God.*"

God, the Father, is fully God. God, the Son, is fully God. God, the Spirit, is fully God. Acts 5:4— "*You have not lied to men but to God.*" This is when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. Scripture is equating God with the Spirit of God. We have already seen that the Spirit is omnipresent. The Spirit is omniscient. God, the Spirit is fully God.

God is three persons, number one. Number two, each person is fully God. Truth number three, there is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*" Isaiah 45:5, "*I am the Lord, and there is no other.*" God makes it very clear. There is no question that from cover-to-cover in Scripture, there is one God. We're not talking about many gods.

So, you take those three truths, and the mystery lies in putting them together. But the three truths are—God is three persons, each person is fully God, there is one God.

### **Three Additional Notes**

Now I want to add in three additional notes here that we need to keep in mind. The Trinity is not a contradiction. This is why we did that little vocabulary study in the beginning of this section. When we are talking about God being three persons, and there being only one God, we need to realize that God's "threeness" and His "oneness" are different. God is three in a way that is different from Him being one. We're not saying, "God is one, and not one." That would be a contradiction. Instead, we're saying, "God is one in three." That's what makes this a mystery, not a contradiction. We're not saying that His oneness, and threeness are the same.

The picture that Scripture gives us is that, second, the Trinity is eternal. What I mean by that is that no one person of the Trinity came into being at some random time. The Father has always been and always will be God. The Son has always been and always will be God. The Spirit has always been and always will be God.

Third, the persons of the Trinity have different functions. Now here is what is key. They function in different ways at different times, but that does not mean that in their essence they are different. What I mean by that is that at times the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father, not essentially! When we see Jesus obeying the Father in the Gospels, we see that He is functionally subordinate to the Father, but that doesn't mean He is less than God at that moment.

In the same way, at times the Son is functionally, not essentially, dependent on the Spirit. Jesus "*is led by the Spirit,*" Luke 4:1. So the picture is that He is functionally dependent on the Spirit, but that doesn't mean He is less than God at that point.

You consider creation. They're functioning in different ways. God, the Father, is speaking. God, the Son, is implementing, Colossians 1 tells us. And God, the Spirit, is hovering over the waters.

Consider salvation. God, the Father, plans; God, the Son, obeys; God, the Spirit, applies salvation to our lives. The Father didn't come, and die on the cross. The Spirit didn't die on the cross. The Son died on the cross.

Consider the difference. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal in their attributes, and equal in their essence. There's not one person of the Trinity that is inferior in

essence to another. Second, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are different in their relationships. They relate to each other differently in time, just like we saw the Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Son dependent on the Spirit.

### **Three Dangerous Heresies**

Because of the nature of this doctrine, this truth in Scripture has been debated throughout 2,000 years of Christian history. Heresies usually arise from denying one of those foundational truths.

Modalism is denial of the first foundational truth. Basically, modalism says that instead of three distinct persons, God has three distinct modes. And the idea is that God wears three different masks. Something like, sometimes God puts His "Father" mask on, sometimes He puts His "Son" mask on, and sometimes He puts His "Spirit" mask on. A modalist would say that He's not three different persons, but He has three different modes that He operates in. So it's a denial of the fact that God is three persons, and the assertion that He has different modes or "masks," that He wears.

The problems with that are that it denies the relationships within the Trinity—the way they relate to each other. It ignores the separation of persons in Scriptures like Matthew 3 at the baptism of Jesus. You have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit doing different things. How does that work at the same time if it is just a matter of modes at different times?

This is where some of you are thinking, "Why does this matter?" It matters because this thought undercuts the doctrine of the atonement. Jesus must be fully God to be able to bear the weight of sin, and fully man to be able to pay the price for sin through identifying with us as man. If He is not fully man and fully God, then it undercuts the very foundation of our salvation. That's why this is important. That's why you don't want to be a modalist.

Second, Arianism denies the second foundational truth. Arianism denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Arianism claims that the Son is inferior in essence to the Father. I won't go into the history, for the sake of time, but praise God for a man named Athanasius who stood up at a very young age, and defended the deity of Christ, at great risk to his life for years. He showed the picture of the deity of Christ, and the supremacy of Christ.

Contemporary Arianism here. That really is not the best wording, but I just want to point out the significance of the truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man. This is a core distinction between Christianity and Islam. This is a core distinction between Christianity and cults like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. It's blasphemous to go into the Middle East and say that Jesus is God in the flesh. To Muslims practicing Islam, God would not become a man. He would not debase Himself to become like us. So this is a bedrock truth in Christianity that we need to have our hearts and minds around.

Third, Polytheism is denial of the third foundational truth. Polytheism, which is basically the worship of more than one god. We worship one God in three persons.

### **Three Practical Conclusions**

What does this matter? Number one, our God is worthy, and it is appropriate for us to worship the Father; it is appropriate for us to worship the Son; it is appropriate for us to worship the Spirit, because they are each fully God.

Second, our mind is finite. We need to realize that the Trinity is divinely revealed, not humanly constructed. I love what Tertullian, an early Church father, said, "This is definitely not humanly constructed, because nobody would be so crazy as to construct this kind of

doctrine.” He said this is “divinely revealed.” This is what Scripture shows us from cover to cover about these truths.

The Trinity is incomprehensible. It’s one of those things that we do not understand fully, and as a result, any analogy is insufficient. People try to give all kinds of analogies. Someone might say, “Well it’s kind of like the egg. You have a yolk, a white, and a shell.” Or maybe, “It’s like water. Sometimes it’s liquid. Sometimes it’s steam. Sometimes it’s ice.”

You don’t need to come up with an analogy to try to describe God. He’s not water, and He’s not an egg. Every single analogy that you can come up with to try to explain the Trinity to yourself, to your children, or to anybody else, is going to be insufficient in the end. Every single analogy is going to break down. The reality is that Scripture doesn’t give us an analogy to describe the Trinity. Therefore, we don’t need to come up with one. The Trinity is incomprehensible and any analogy is ultimately going to break down.

Can we know the doctrine with the Trinity exhaustively? No. That’s where we started tonight. We cannot know the doctrine of the Trinity exhaustively, but can we know the doctrine of the Trinity truly? Absolutely. We can’t know it fully, but we can know it truly. Tozer said, “Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel in reverence outside.”

Third conclusion, our salvation is secure. Ladies and gentlemen, we are not saved by a creature; we are saved by the Creator. We are not saved by a mere man; we are saved by a man who is fully man, and fully God. The One who saves us completely is completely God.

## **The Trinity**

An anonymous person said in the past, “Try to explain it and you’ll lose your mind; but try to deny it, and you’ll lose your soul.”

## **The Sovereign Will of God**

### **The Providence of God**

Now we’re going to think about God, and His sovereignty. And I want you to think about providence here.

What does it mean when we are talking about the providence of God. God is continually acting to sustain all things and guide all things according to His plan. He’s presently doing something. He’s always doing something.

There are two facets involved in God’s providence. He’s sustaining and guiding. Two facets involved. The first is preservation—God is sustaining all things. There is nothing that is, that He didn’t bring into existence. There is nothing that is, that He doesn’t keep in existence. He is sustaining all things. The only way we have breath right now is because God is sustaining our breath. The only way our heart is beating is because of sustenance from God.

Second, sovereignty—God is guiding all things according to His plan. God has a plan, and He is guiding everything according to it. That’s what we mean when we talk about sovereignty.

Now you think about three contexts affected by God’s Providence. Cosmically—everything in all creation is included in this. This means that God has a plan for Pluto. He’s sustaining

Pluto, and He has a plan for Pluto. Corporately—His relationship with His people. God's sovereignty is intended to be an encouragement to the Church.

Lastly, and this is just an amazing truth, personally. Ladies and gentlemen, He is sustaining and guiding each of our lives according to His plan. He has a sovereign will in each of our lives.

Now, what we need to avoid is four dead ends regarding God's providence. Dead end number one is deism. This is the idea that God created everything, and then took His hands off to leave everything to happen however it will. Similar to one who winds up the watch, then lets it go, but doesn't interact with it. This is not what we believe, but the reality is, this is the way a lot of us live. A lot of us live like God is not involved in our lives, but He is.

Pantheism. Remember, God is distinct from His creation. He is guiding, but this doesn't mean He is in creation. Fatalism, we have to be careful not to associate the providence of God with fatalism. This is the idea that there are blind forces of fate that are controlling everything that is happening. The idea is that fate has determined all of these things. If you read your horoscope, or if you look at the stars to find out what your destiny is, you are a fatalist.

Then, the fourth dead end is process and open theism. These are actually two different theologies—process theology and open theology—but I put them together here because they do both say that God is not fully in charge of what's happening in the future. Or that God doesn't know what's happening in the future. Or God may even be in process of developing Himself. That's not where we are going.

### **Preservation: God is Sustaining All Things**

God sustains any properties in any things. God preserves water so that it acts like water. God preserves grass so that it acts like grass. It does what it does, because God is preserving it. Second, God sustains any predictability in anything. When you drop something, it falls. That's not just natural. It's natural, because God sustains it that way. Any predictability, when you put gas in your car, it causes it to run because God sustains the properties of gas that would cause that to happen. There's nothing accidental in this whole picture. It's God sustaining all predictability in anything, and it's a good thing, otherwise everything in the universe would be haphazard. Third, you see preservation in the Old Testament, and preservation in the New Testament. I've listed relevant Scriptures in your study guide.

### **Sovereignty: God is Guiding All Things According to His Plan**

What do we mean when we talk about sovereignty? Well number one, we mean God has a plan. "*In days of old I planned it,*" He said in Isaiah 37:26. Proverbs 16:9, "*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.*" Nothing happens apart from God's activity. Nothing. Nothing happens accidentally. It's all in His plan. That's what we're talking about when we say, "Sovereignty." Now I want us to think about the plan of God in a few different ways.

First, the plan of God is eternal. Psalm 139:16, "*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*" His plan is not chronological. In other words, He's not still deciding what's going to happen next. Just like we talked about earlier, all time is present in God. That's what we mean by not chronological. Obviously it plays out chronologically in time, but He is Lord over time.

His plan is not changeable. He's not changing along the way, saying, "Oh, no. Well then this happened now I have to do this a little differently."

Next, the plan of God is purposeful. We have talked about this. God's motivation is His glory. He plans things for His glory. Our salvation in His plan is for His glory. His plan is not random, but it is purposeful.

Next, the plan of God is universal. I just want to give you a little survey through Scripture of all the different things that are under the sovereignty of God. You can go back and look at the different verses listed in your study guide.

He is sovereign over all nature. You do not see in Scripture, "Well it rained one day." No, what you see is that God brought rain, God sent the rain, God stopped the rain. God is sovereign over plants and animals. He is sovereign over animate objects and inanimate objects. You look at Job 37:9-11, and you see that it's talking about how *"The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture."* It's all under His sovereignty.

He is sovereign over all nations and all rulers of nations. He is sovereign over all our days. Our times are in His hands, Psalm 31:14-15. He says in Job 14:5, *"Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed."* He's sovereign over every single one of our days.

He's sovereign over all of our actions. Jeremiah 10:23, *"I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps."* Today or tomorrow are dependent upon the will of God.

He is sovereign over all our successes and failures. He brings us down and lifts us up. That's the picture. He is sovereign over all our gifts and talents. He's the one who gives them. He's the one that enable us to use them.

Lastly, He is sovereign over all our suffering. 1 Peter 4:19 says, *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator."* Suffer according to what? According to God's will. He is sovereign over our suffering. Now how does that relate? We'll get to that in the God and evil.

The plan of God is effectual. In other words, it reaches its intended effect. God doesn't plan something, and then something unexpected occurs and it doesn't go through like He thought. That never happens with God. It is always effectual. Isaiah 14:24, *"Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand."*

Now, here is where it gets a little interesting. The plan of God is willful. Here's what I mean by that. God does what He wills, but God wills different things in different ways. This is where I want us to ask the question, are there two wills in God? In other words, is there more than one way of understanding the will of God?

I believe Scripture teaches there is. When you look at Isaiah 53:10, you see it talking about the prophesy of Jesus on the cross. *"It was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer."* Now I want you to think about that with me for a second. God wills that people would not sin, right? He says, "Do not sin." That's His will. At the same time, He willed that His Son would be murdered. That's going to involve sin.



So, obviously in some sense, you have God willing different things in different ways. Same picture in 2 Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" So in once sense God wills that all people—wants all people to—come to the knowledge of faith in Christ. At the same time, we know that's not actually what happens. So, how do you put this together? I want you to think about it in a couple different ways.

First of all, think about it in terms of God's necessary will and free will. This is almost a little more philosophical. We're not going to camp out here very long. But God's necessary will involves His nature. In other words, God wills to be. Part of His will is to be loving, and as well as all the other attributes that we have seen. That's necessary. It is the essence of who He is.

At the same time, God's free will involves His actions. Did God have to create a world like He created? No. But He did it. Did God have to redeem us like He has, through the cross? No. But this is what He did. And so there's necessary will and there's free will.

Here's where it gets really interesting though. The second way of thinking about the will of God is God's revealed will and secret will. This is where I want to encourage you, when you think about the will of God, to understand both of these. God's revealed will and secret will. Deuteronomy 29:29 talks about how the secret things belong to God and the things revealed belong to us and our children forever.

Genesis 50 is the quintessential example, I think, in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. You know Joseph's story. Joseph starts wearing his nice bright colored jacket, and his brothers are not very happy with him. So his brothers take him, threaten to kill him, and end up selling him into slavery. Now what you find out is after he's sold into slavery, he's taken to Egypt. In Egypt, he is elevated in Potiphar's house. After several other events, he ends up being the means by which God's people are saved in the famine. When you get to Genesis 50:20, it says Joseph said to his brothers, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*"

So, obviously in this picture in Genesis 50, you see the will of God in a couple of different ways. God did not will for Joseph's brothers to almost murder him, and sell him into slavery. That is not what He would want Joseph's brothers to do. At the same time, this is exactly what was going to happen in the will of God, that Joseph would be sold into slavery. That Joseph would end up being in the place where he is in order to provide for his people. God was not thinking, "Oh, no. What's happening to Joseph? How can I make this better?" God is in control of this thing from the very beginning.

And so what you have is, God's revealed will is what he declares. These words, even in some sense are insufficient. But what I believe the Bible is giving us a picture of here, is that God declares things in His will. His Word is His will—His commands, His precepts. It is God's will for you to be holy. It is God's will for you to be sanctified. It is God's will for you to be pure. It is God's will for you to avoid sin. That's what He declares. That's what He reveals to us, "Here's my will."

So, ask the question. When we sin, are we out of God's will? Well in once sense, yes. We are out of His revealed will, yes. But it doesn't mean that God never knew this was going to happen. If that were so, then we would have the power to mess up the whole will of God. Instead, what you have over here is God's revealed will—what He declares, and God's secret will is what he decrees—what actually happens; what we see happen.

You put them together, and you see them in Scripture. What He decrees—Psalm 139:16, *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* This is the picture.

A perfect example of this is in Acts 4, when the church is recounting what had happened in the crucifixion of Christ. They said, *"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."* Now did God declare, "Be murders of my Son"? No. He said, "Do not murder." That's what He declares; it's His revealed will. At the same time, He willed that His Son would be murdered by being crucified on the cross.

So the picture is, nothing is outside of the will of God in accordance with what He decrees. At the same time, God's will, as He declares it, is being disobeyed at a variety of different points. But you have both wills of God in the picture. So how do we bring them together? That leads us to the next thing.

The plan of God is compatible. Here are these two truths, and this is where the crux of the mystery lies when it comes to the sovereign will of God. God is sovereign and man is responsible. These are the two truths, that when you bring them together, are really tough to figure out. This is the antimony that J.I. Packer talks about in the *Evangelism and Sovereignty of God*.

God is in charge. He is in control of what's going on. God is never looking down thinking, "Oh, no, oh no. What's going on? This is out of control." God is always in charge" God is always in control in everything.

Romans 9 is one of those passages that Paul writes that doesn't get a lot of hearty "amens." Talking about Jacob and Esau, Paul says,

*Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden (Rom. 9:11-18).*

The very next verse talks about how we are the clay, and He is the potter. So that which is formed say to him who formed it, what are you doing? No. The picture we have in Scripture is of God in charge, ultimately in charge. You even see it when Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:16, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."*

So, this is where we have to avoid the dead end of fatalism. Believing this does not make us say, "Well we're all just robots." That is not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that God is sovereign, and that He is in charge.

Second, we are making choices. Each of us is making choices. You chose to come here. We have to avoid thinking that Scripture is teaching that our choices are robotic, because it is not. We are not robots being controlled. Our choices are certain, not necessary.

This is really philosophical. Necessary choices must happen. That would be to say that we cannot act in a way contrary to God's plan. That would lean towards fatalism. Certain choices will happen. In other words, we will not act in a way contrary to God's plan. At the same time, we're making choices in the context of God's plan. That means our choices are completely real, but not completely free.

I have to define "free" because this concept could be defined in all kinds of different ways, by all kinds of different people. By not completely "free", I mean that we don't make choices apart from God's sovereignty. All of our choices are under the umbrella of God's sovereignty. They're completely real. We have responsibility for them, which we're going to talk about in just a second.

Now the question is, and people have asked, "Well how do you reconcile the fact that God is sovereign, and man is responsible for making choices?" I want to share with you two of my favorite quotes on this. The first comes in response to the question, "How do you reconcile the fact that God is sovereign and man is responsible?" And one person responded, "Well, we don't need to, because you don't need to reconcile two friends." In Scripture we see in both truths.

And then you have John MacArthur, a pastor out in California who when he was asked "How do you reconcile the problem of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?" said, "It's not my problem; it's God's problem, and He will reconcile it in His own way."

Acts 2:23 is the quintessential picture in the New Testament of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. This passage is talking about Jesus' crucifixion, and it says, *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* So it was God's purpose that this would happen. If that was out of the purview of God's sovereignty, then God would have been biting His nails up there, waiting to see if He was really going to be crucified. No, He knew this was going to happen, but at the same time, he says "You put him to death! Wicked men put him to death!"

Our choices have real consequences with real responsibilities.

- We are naturally responsible to God. We are creatures; He is the Creator. We are clay; He is the potter.
- We are morally responsible to God. He is the standard of that which is right, true, and holy. We're responsible to Him for lack of holiness or holiness.
- We are intellectually responsible to God, because He has revealed Himself to all of us, Romans 1:18-20 tells us.
- We are ultimately responsible to God.

You see both God's sovereignty, and man's responsibility here in Acts 13:48, *"When the Gentiles heard this"—this is talking about Gentiles coming to faith in Christ—"they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."* So they believed, they honored the word of the Lord—they are acting here. They

are making choices. They are believing. At the same time, all who were appointed for eternal life believed. It was under the umbrella of God's sovereignty.

Same picture in Acts 18, when Paul is wondering whether or not to leave Corinth, because things are not going very well. And God comes to Paul and He says, "Stay in Corinth. *I have many people in this city*" (Acts 18:9-11). What is God saying there? He's saying, "There are people who are going to come to Christ here, so stay here, and preach the gospel." It doesn't mean that they are just going to come to Christ automatically. It is as if God is saying, "You choose to preach the gospel, they will come to faith in Christ. It will all be under my sovereignty."

This is why when Scripture tells us that one day, there will be a multitude that no one can count from every nation, people, tribe, and language, that will bow around the throne and sing His praises. This is why we go with confidence to every single people group represented in these scrolls. We go with confidence to every single one of those people groups, because we know that when you go and preach the gospel to the nations, there will be people who will respond. There will be people who will come to faith in Christ. We know this, and so we go with great confidence.

As soon as the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is undercutting evangelism, we have missed the point of God's sovereignty. We have missed the point altogether. It does not undercut evangelism, or mission. It motivates evangelism, and mission.

I love what Charles Simeon said, as we conclude the compatibility of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Charles Simeon, a great pastor a long time ago. He basically said, "The truth is not in the middle, not in one extreme, but in both extremes." In other words, if you take God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, the goal is not trying to find the best middle ground. The goal is to go to this extreme and that extreme. God is completely sovereign; man is completely responsible. Go in both extremes.

All of that leads to—the plan of God is beneficial. In other words, the plan of God is good. And we're going to talk more about that, so just hold onto it for when we talk about God and evil.

### **Practical Implications of God's Sovereign Will**

How shall we live in light of the revealed will of God? We have to realize that God ordains in His sovereignty both the end, and the means—everything together. That means, when it comes to the revealed will of God—what God says to us in His Word, declares for us to do. We need to pray for the accomplishment of His revealed will. We need to pray for His Word to be accomplished. "Thy will be done." What does that mean? Does that mean to say, "Well do whatever you were planning on doing"? No. It is saying, "God, we see this in your Word—your glory is going to be known in the nations—show your glory to the nations!"

Another one of the dangers is thinking, "Well, whatever is going to happen is just going to happen. I don't need to pray. God's going to do it." No! That's not what Scripture is ever teaching! Scripture says, "You pray! Because it is the means by which God is working in the world!" So pray, and you will be involved in what God's doing in nations all over the world. You pray and be involved in what the God of the universe is doing. You are the means by which He is going to be opening blind eyes to see. He will do this because you're praying and interceding for them. So pray.

Second, proclaim the gospel according to His revealed will. They will hear, they will believe when we preach to them and how can they hear and believe unless they hear some from

us? If all we do is sit here where we feel comfortable, then they will not hear the gospel. God help us to see this.

William Carey, the father of modern missions, one time as he was preparing to go to India, had someone stand up by him who had taken God's sovereignty, and abused it. When he stood up, he basically said to him, "Sit down young man. You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen in India, He will do it without consulting you or me." In other words, God is sovereign. He will do that whenever He wants to. He will do it as we go. And He will do it in His sovereignty, and in your responsibility to go. We are responsible for the great commission.

How shall we live in light of the secret will of God? In light of the revealed will of God, how do we live in light of the secret will of God? Number one, face the past redemptively. This is the picture I hope you take away from Genesis 50, especially if you are going through a difficult time at this moment. It may not always be easy, and it may not always be soon, but God is working with an eternal perspective in mind. There may be things that happened in the past, that we wonder, "Why did that happen to me?" But know that God is a God who takes the past, and that which is evil, and redeems it for good. He redeems it for good.

It's a picture of Ruth and Naomi. Naomi, who is bitter in the Book of Ruth, with calamity striking her and her family. She has no idea that by the end of that book, Ruth and her line is going to lead to the king of Israel, king David. Not only that though, but eventually to the King of the nations, Jesus. She has no idea that what she's been through in the past, God is going to use to redeem the future in a way that she never could have imagined.

Face the present confidently. The sovereignty of God gives peace in all that we face. You can lie down and sleep tonight, because He is sovereign. The sovereignty of God gives joy. Joyful always because He is working in all circumstances. The sovereignty of God gives hope. There's nothing happening by luck or by chance. There's no impersonal fate at work here. Nothing is just happening. God is working in the present, so be confident in that.

Finally, face the future hopefully. Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*" Face the future hopefully.

## God and Evil

### The Problem of Evil

I want us to think about the problem of evil, which is summed up here by Epicurus, who was a fourth century philosopher. Follow along with me, and then I'll explain it. "Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how come evil is in the world?"

Basically, what you have in the problem of evil is a problem involving three concepts: the greatness of God, the goodness of God, and the presence of evil.

How do those three go together? How can God be great and good, but there be evil in the world? That's what we are seeking to understand.

First you have the greatness of God—if God is great, then He is able to prevent evil. So if God is truly great, then He would stop evil from happening. Then, the goodness of God—if God is truly good, then He will not permit evil to occur. He's able to do it, so why doesn't He do it? We are tempted to think, "He would do it if He was good."

Finally you have the presence of evil. We understand evil in two different ways. You have the fact that natural evil exists. By that I mean, natural disasters, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, disease, sickness, AIDS, cancer, these sorts of things.

Then you have the fact that moral evil exists. In a sense, all evil is traced back to the entrance of sin into the world, but we are talking about moral choices and actions of people, sometimes caused by us. We bring evil, or suffering on ourselves many times out of choices we make. Or sometimes, moral choices and actions are caused by others—things that are done to us that are wrong, which bring evil and suffering to us.

This is the danger here. I don't want anyone to think that I'm glossing over the depth of this issue. 6 million Jews exterminated in a holocaust. 40 million people infected with HIV. Literally, tens of millions of people who have lost their lives in Communist regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Almost a million Hutus and Tutsis slaughtered in Rwanda. Hundreds of thousands of people will die this year of starvation, millions suffering from malnutrition. But there is a question that we need to ask in the midst of all of this, "Where is God?"

I don't want to, in any way, appear to treat the weight of this issue lightly. We need to wrestle with this. If we don't wrestle with this, we have not wrestled with the reality of who God is, or what this world is like.

### **Insufficient Answers**

But we start by thinking about some insufficient answers. This is where I'll go back to atheism. Atheism is an insufficient answer, because in the end, it has no basis for good and evil. Evil does not exist when you take atheism to its philosophical end. This is where I want you to think about it with me. The existence of evil points to the existence of God. People say, "Well how can there be all this evil in the world, and there be a God? Obviously, if there's so much evil, then God doesn't exist." Actually, the existence of evil points us to the existence of God, because if there is evil in the world, then that means there's good in the world. If there's good and evil in the world, that means there is a measure by which we judge that good or evil. As we talked about earlier, the measure we use to judge good and evil can only come from a moral lawgiver. Morality, the difference between good and evil, points to the one who would show us that difference—moral law giver. And so the existence of evil actually points us to the existence of God.

On the other hand, if you subscribe to atheism, you must consider that if God does not exist, then good and evil do not exist. If God does not exist, then you do not have this morality; you don't have this objective basis for moral values. What basis would you have if you were an atheist? I want you to listen to this quote, very closely from Richard Dawkins, an avowed atheist. He says, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."

Can you imagine? Can you imagine telling the victims, the families who lost moms, and dads, and children in concentration camps like Auschwitz, "Well those tormentors were just

dancing to the music of their DNA”? When tragedy hits, or murder strikes a family when a child is killed. Can you imagine saying to that family, “Well that murderer was just dancing to his DNA”? The atheist answer for the problem of evil is nothing short of repugnant. It’s not sufficient. It’s a dead end answer.

And yes, it is not easy to reconcile God’s greatness, goodness, and evil in Christianity, but to go the route that says, “Well then God doesn’t exist” is far worse. There’s much more to answer with the atheistic response, than there is within a Christian worldview.

Christian Science says evil is illusory. Diseases for example, according to the Christian Science view, are just an illusion. New Age says that evil is the result of ignorance. According to this view, the more knowledge we have, the more answers we have to the problems of this world. That’s the answer. Dualism, posits the God of good and evil are two forces equal in power and opposite in purpose. Dualism is the idea that God/Good and Evil are two forces, equal in power and opposite in purpose. The idea is similar to the *Star Wars* story line. There is no guarantee that good is going to reign in the end.

Fatalism says that a blind fate determines the depth of evil in our lives. Process and Open Theism would say, God hates evil but has no power to do anything about it. You see this idea expressed in the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, by Rabbi Harold Kushner. This is a man whose son died, and his grief drove him to begin to question his faith. He basically came to adopt the belief that God couldn’t have done anything about it, because He would have if He could. In a book that sold more than a half a million copies, he writes, “I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die.” You can see the weight of the issue here. He basically cast out the omnipotence of God at this point, and says, “Well God couldn’t do anything about it. If he could have, then he would have done something.”

## **The Biblical Answer**

So what is the Biblical answer then? I want you to think about it in three ways, the Greatness of God, the Goodness of God and the presence of evil. First of all, the greatness of God: God over evil, the goodness of God: God behind evil, and the presence of evil: God amidst evil. And I want you to think about it on all three levels.

### **God Over Evil**

Let’s start with God over evil. I just want to remind you He’s sovereign over all of these things. God is sovereign over evil nations and rulers. God is sovereign over demons and evil spirits. Mark 5, the demons come running to Jesus, this demon possessed man, and had bowed at His feet. He’s sovereign over them.

Listen to this. Martin Luther—you remember this hymn? “And though this world with devil’s filth should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed His Truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure for lo his doom is short. One little word will fail him.” God is sovereign over demons and evil spirits.

God is sovereign over temptations we face. God is sovereign over suffering and persecution. That’s good news for our brothers and sisters in the world. Satan does not have the last say in their persecution; God does. God is sovereign over natural disasters. Satan is not the ruler of the wind and the waves; God is the ruler of the wind and the waves. God is sovereign over sickness and disease. Satan is not sovereign over diseases. God is. God is sovereign over death. If the Lord wills, we live. Satan does not determine whether we live or die. God does. He is sovereign over the whole picture.

## God Behind Evil

Now we are getting to His goodness. Is God good? Is God powerful? Yes. The Scripture teaches yes, He is omnipotent. He is great. He is over evil.

Is He good, God behind evil? God relates to sin variably, meaning He relates to sin in different ways at different times. Watch how Scripture lets this unfold, it shows us this.

Sometimes God prevents sin. This is the picture you have in Genesis 20. He's preventing sin from happening. "*Keeping your servant from willful sins*" (Ps. 19:13). Sometimes He permits sin. He lets it happen. Romans 1 says He gives us over to ourselves, which leads to sinfulness. Third, sometimes He directs sin. This is the picture we saw in Genesis 50 and Acts 2. Picture is of God directing sin for good. Sometimes He limits sin. This is the picture in Job 1:12, when Satan comes to God wanting to confront Job, and God says to Satan, "You can do this but you can't do this." He limits sin. "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man*" (1 Cor. 10:13).

All of these things, God does at different times. But in Scripture—when we're looking at what Scripture teaches—in Scripture He never directly causes sin. This is key. These are the truths that we hang our hats on. The mystery is how they go together, but these are the truths that we hang our hats on.

He never sins in Scripture, and He is never blamed for sin in Scripture. We're going to get to that in a moment, but God is never the one who is tempting us to do evil; that's what James 1 teaches us. He's never the one who's sinning. He is completely holy, completely good. All the attributes we have talked about with His goodness, He is all those things, and He is never blamed for sin in Scripture.

So, how, then, does God relate to good and evil? And what we need to see in Scripture is that God relates to good and evil asymmetrically, meaning, He relates to good and evil in different ways, in different ways. He relates to good in a different way than He relates to evil, according to Scripture. Let's think about good.

God is behind good in this way: All that is good is under His sovereignty. We have talked about that. You have Scriptures that are listed in your study guide. And this is important to remember. Ezekiel 33, there, He doesn't take delight in the death of the wicked.

And then, second, all that is good is morally chargeable to Him. When Scripture talks about that which is good, it all goes back to God. "*Every good and perfect gift is from above,*" from God (Jas. 1:17). Romans 3, you look at verses 9 through 20. It talks about us, and us as evil. "*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one*" (Rom. 3:10-12). It says, "There is nothing that is good in us." All the good is from God. Anything good in us comes from who? God. He is the one who is infinitely good. So, all that is good is morally chargeable to God. In other words, it comes directly from God, primarily from God. Any good we do... Can we do good things? Yes, but only through God in us. We're secondary. He's primary.

Alright and that's God behind good. Now, God behind evil. This is a different, asymmetrical different way. Same thing here. All that is evil is under His sovereignty. And I wish we had time to go back, and if you go back and look at these Scriptures that are listed here, you will find some very startling words. And my goal was in no way to attempt to shy away from some of what Scripture teaches. When you look at this picture in Lamentations 3, the very



end of this one, *"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?"* (Lam. 3:38). Joshua 11:20, *"...the Lord himself hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses."*

This is the picture all throughout. We know in Job, God is behind what's going on here. He's sovereign over what's going on here. Listen to what He says in Isaiah 45:7, *"I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things."* God saying, "I do all these things." And it entails that from God's sovereignty, if His sovereignty is universal, then this is true. He is sovereign over all that is evil.

Second truth, though, is that all that is evil—this is where it's different from that which is good—all that is evil is not morally chargeable to God. Simply put, what we're saying here is that Scripture never charges God with evil. In the same way that God is morally chargeable for all that is good, and we are secondary in the process, the picture is reversed when it comes to evil.

And yes, it's all under the sovereignty of God, under the umbrella of His sovereignty as sovereign over all, but Scripture never says the blame for evil is on God. It always puts the blame on those who are sinning, those who are doing wrong in those circumstances those who are responsible for that. Look at Romans 9,

*"One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' " Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"* (Rom. 9:19-21).

So you picture there, you have it both. You have the sovereignty of God, but you have man who sins. This is where we come back to remember the compatible plan of God. God is in control. At the same time, we make choices. Acts 2:20-24, the example we keep coming back to. It is the picture of Jesus on the cross, and what happened there. *"This man was handed over to you..."*—in the middle there, verse 23—*"...by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* This is the ultimate act of evil in all of history, and God says, "It was all a part of my purpose and foreknowledge to happen. He was sovereign behind it. He was behind the whole thing.

At the same time, "You put him to death," He says. And they were responsible for putting Him to death. It goes back to the compatible plan of God in Scripture we talked about earlier with the sovereign will of God. There was responsibility there. We make choices. God's in control. God's in charge. They're both in Scripture.

So Scripture affirms that God is completely powerful and He is completely good. That still leaves us with, obviously, a very big challenge in our minds and our hearts, but it all come home here in this last picture.

### **God Amidst Evil**

God over evil, God behind evil in a secondary way here, and it all comes down here to God amidst evil. This is where I want you to think of that picture of Job, the Book of Job. This was God's opportunity, if He wanted to, to give us a philosophical treatise on the problem of evil. This was the opportunity for God to say, "Job, I know you've wondered why bad things happen to good people, and here's the answer." And He could have engaged in a dialogue

with Job. Job would have asked Him questions. But the reality is, this, I believe, is unquestionably a mystery of God, and the reason He did not do that is because Job would have kept asking questions, and he would have never gotten to the point where "Oh, yes. I understand this now." Instead of giving a philosophical answer to the question of the problem of evil, God says two things to Job.

Number one, he says, "See thy goodness. I am with you." For 37 chapters, Job wrestles with all that's happened in his life and his family's lives, and then, God comes to him face to face, and He asks him question after question that reminded him of the fact that God is with him. And what we see in the Book of Job is when it comes to the problem of evil, what we need is not an answer; we need an answerer. What we need is not a philosophical argument; we need a person.

If I could illustrate, just very simply, I know enough in my marriage to know that, when my wife, Heather, is going through difficult times and she's struggling, what she needs from me is not answers. She needs presence. And this is what God does in Job's life. He says through question after question, "Job, I am right here with you. And not only am I with you. See my greatness. I am in control." And that is the thrust behind all the questions God asks Job. He's showing His power and His authority over all things. It's the same truth that we see in the New Testament, *"...all things God works together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose"* (Rom. 8:28). God is saying, "Job, I'm with you and I'm in control. I'm in control. I'm in control." He says that over and over again to Job in all those questions he asks.

And you go to suffering brothers and sisters around the world, and you will see this. If anybody has right to wrestle with God and evil, it's people in underdeveloped countries, especially our brothers and sisters who are facing persecution, because they're following a good and powerful God. And you go to places like Sudan. You go to Sudan, and you spend time in war torn villages with guides who have grown up and lived in civil war; militant Muslims from the north coming down and attacking them, and raiding their villages, and raping and killing, and taking away people into camps. You look at them, and look at what they live in, and you say, "I'm sorry this is happened." And they will look back at you with a smile on their face, and every time their favorite phrase in Sudan is they will say, "God is greater. God is greater. God is greater. God is greater." They know this.

They know this, and you see this. The Church is advancing in Sudan. What's really interesting, it's in the New Testament, and in Church history, the gospel advances not in comfortability, but in suffering. You look around the world at where the gospel is advancing the fastest, most rapidly, has been in the middle of suffering. You look at the comfortable west, this is where Christianity has plateaued and declined. The picture is God shows in the middle of suffering, "I am with you and I am in control."

This is why in Acts 4 they talk about what God had done, and His will and foreknowledge in Jesus going to the cross. They're saying, "God we know our persecutors." They're being persecuted in Acts 4. They're having threats against their life, and they say, "God, we know that you're in control of all these things." In other words, "We know that these persecutors are on a leash. Satan is on a leash. You are in control, and we can trust in you. You are with us and you are in control." This is the picture you have in Job.

It's a picture we see. C.S. Lewis writes "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." "It's often the case", J.I. Packer says, "as all the saints know, the fellowship of the Father and the Son

is most vivid and sweet, and Christian joy is greatest, when the cross is heaviest." And Malcolm Muggeridge puts it this way—I love this:

"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained...This, of course, is what the cross signifies. And it is the cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ."

And this is where I lead you to the main truth. This is what it looks like in Job. It's the picture of the cross. At the cross, Jesus says these two things. Number one, He says, "See my goodness. I am with you." This is the astounding answer that Scripture gives when it comes to God and evil.

It's Jesus on a cross. It's God taking all the effects of sin upon Himself. It's not a God distant, unconcerned about the struggles we have with evil. It's God bearing our evil. Jesus saying, "I am with you." Are you broken, brothers and sisters? He was broken. Do you feel rejected? He was rejected. We do not have a Savior who is unable to sympathize with our weakness. He was made like us. He knows how we feel in the middle of evil and suffering. He has borne it upon Himself.

On the cross He said, "See my goodness. I am with you," and, "See my greatness. I am in control." What do you mean by that? Well He takes evil and suffering upon Himself; the wrath of God and sin upon Himself. And three days later, He is alive and He says, ladies and gentlemen, "Evil is temporary." Evil is temporary, and God is ultimate.

Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? "*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15:55-56). Satan, the great lover of evil and suffering, is not sovereign. God is sovereign. He is ultimate. And that's why Romans 8:39 can state, "*neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Nothing can, because He's sovereign over it.

That's why Corrie Ten Boom could write from the depth of a Nazi death camp, "No matter how deep our darkness, He is deeper still."

Annie Johnston Flynt wrote this hymn. Let me remind you before I read this hymn. This was not written by a successful Hollywood film actress. This was written by a woman who was orphaned very early in life, a woman who was crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, who spent most of her life in bed, who had eight pillows cushioning her body from head to toe, because her body was covered with sores for all those years. She had lost control of her internal organs and cancer, was sapping away her life. She writes this:

"He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase  
To added affliction, He addeth His mercy  
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace  
When we have exhausted our store of endurance

When our strength has failed and the day's half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources  
Our Father's own giving has only begun  
His love has no limit  
His grace has no measure  
His power has no boundaries known unto men  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus  
He giveth and giveth and giveth again."

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater. This is God amidst evil.

The picture of eternity is this; bring it all to bear. We will forever worship God in His greatness. He is great, and we need not minimize His greatness to try to figure out how this whole evil thing works. We will forever worship God in His greatness.

Second, we will forever enjoy God in His goodness. He is Good. He is eternally good for us, His people. We will forever enjoy God in His goodness. When it comes to the presence of evil, what the Christian world-view says is this: "We will never experience evil again." Revelation 21—there will be no more sorrow, sickness or pain. It will all be gone. Old will be gone and new will come, and we will dwell with Him forever. This is the picture.

I remind you, this is the whole purpose tonight. We were thinking about our persecuted brothers and sisters, literally 200 million of them around the world in 60 different countries who are persecuted, who face suffering on a continual basis. And to consider that death of Job. Remember what Job said? He just found out that his sons and daughters were dead, all of them. It says in Job 1:20-21, "*Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'*"

God is great, and He is good, and He has taken evil upon Himself and He has conquered it and shown His supremacy over it. And I want us tonight, in light of all that we have seen, and in light of our brothers and sisters who right now, some of them are in chains. Some of them are in prison, some of their wives at home, alone, kids at home alone because parents are in jail. There are brothers and sisters who are facing impending death, threatened death. Remember, even when He takes away, He is good, and He is great.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)