

Systematic Theology Series

Theology Proper: The Study of God the Father

Wednesday Night Teaching Schedule			
Date	Lesson	Teacher	Topics
10-7	1	Matt	Introduction to Theology Proper: Why Theology Matters and What is Needed in the Study of Theology Proper
10-14	2	Matt	The Existence of God and The Trinity: God is 3 in 1
10-21	3	Matt	The Essence, Attributes and Sovereignty of God
10-28	4	Tom	The Aseity, Immutability and Eternality of God
11-4	5	Matt	The Immensity, Omnipresence, and Omniscience of God
11-11	6	Ben	The Wrath, Jealousy and Patience of God
11-18	7	Rob	The Holiness, Faithfulness and Glory of God
12-2	8	Ben	The Love, Goodness and Wisdom of God
12-9	9	Matt	The Names, Grace, Mercy and Will of God

A.W. Tozer in his classical book on theology proper entitled *The Knowledge of the Holy* said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Sadly, our fallen world is plagued with a man centered view of God, and the modern church has become deeply infected by this so that what often comes into the mind of many so called believers is not what Scripture teaches regarding the person and work of God the Father. Therefore, we will spend this fall semester on Wednesday nights studying the person and attributes of God. Here at Belcroft Bible we unashamedly have and minister with a high view of God because that is what the Bible declares about God and that is what He demands of us. Thus, as we begin this semester in an ongoing study in systematic theology we will grow deeper in understanding of God that He alone has Ultimate Authority, that He works in Undeniable Sovereignty, that He lives in Unapproachable Holiness, that He is marked by Unquestionable Mercy, that He will bring Undisputable Wrath, that He offers Unfathomable Grace, that His character, plans and promises are all covered in Unending Faithfulness and that all the earth was created to give Him Unequivocal Worship. May the quote below further provoke your thoughts on why this study in Theology Proper matters in our day.

“The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds.” – A.W. Pink

Review:

1. **The Existence of God:** God's existence is assumed from the first verse of the Bible forward. Nowhere is God's existence defended or given a series of evidence to prove it. It is assumed that if God did not exist, nothing could be adequately explained. In other words, the Bible teaches that the existence of God is self-evident and transcendent. Theology Proper does not seek to prove the existence of God, but to show that Scripture asserts God's existence and to derive Scripture's description of God's nature and works. The Scriptures do not present any detailed rationalistic argumentation for the existence of God. The Scriptures simply assume and implicitly assert the existence of God. The only reliable proof of the existence of the true God consists of statements from and about him in his inspired Word. God must not be excluded from testifying about himself (*Bible Doctrine*, MacArthur & Mayhew).

2. **God is One in Three Persons:** Learning the attributes of God is crucial in a study of God, but it is not sufficient to comprehend God. The fact that God has always existed as three-in-one is also necessary to understand the Infinite One. The fullness of New Testament revelation manifests God to us as three persons in one God. To know God, He must be known as a Trinity or a Triunity. There is only one God, and he consists of one simple (uncompounded, indivisible) essence (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; John 17:3; James 2:19;¹ The Trinity is biblically declared as one God eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are co-eternal in being, co-identical in nature, co-equal in power and glory, and yet retain distinct ministries in relation to creation, salvation, and people. There is only one Divine essence – undivided, not distributed, but always simply one. Each Person of the Trinity is identical to each other in essence, not in Person. The distinctions in God are called "Persons." They are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. **Each Person of the Trinity is God:** All three persons of the one true God are all declared in Scripture to be God. The Father is declared to be God. The Son is declared to be God and the Spirit is declared to be God. Each distinct person of the one true God also displays the attributes of God, exercises the prerogatives of God and they all do the works that only God can do further displaying how each one of the members of the Trinity is God. The Trinity is a biblical mystery in the sense that it is a truth that was hidden until revealed. But it is also a mystery in that, in its essence, it is supra-rational, ultimately beyond human comprehension. It is only partly intelligible to man, because God has revealed it in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. But it has no analogy in human experience, and its essential elements are beyond man's reason. Consequently, the doctrine must be accepted by faith as God revealed it in Scripture. And it must be articulated in such a way that the essence of God is not divided, and the distinction and the co-equality of being between the three Persons are not compromised.

¹ MacArthur, J., & Mayhue, R., eds. (2017). [*Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*](#) (p. 190). Crossway.

I. Defining God²

A. Introductory Thoughts

1. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, “In Jewish and Christian theology, the supreme being, regarded as the creator and ruler of the universe.”
2. A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 6, “The child, the philosopher, and the religionist have all one question: What is God like? ... it cannot be answered except to say that God is not like anything; that is, He is not exactly like anything or anybody. ... When the Scripture states that man was made in the image of God, we dare not add to that statement an idea from our own head and make it mean ‘in the exact image.’ To do so is to make man a replica of God, and that is to lose the unicity of God and end with no God at all. It is to break down the wall, infinitely high, that separates That-which-is--God from that-which-is-not-God. To think of creature and Creator as alike in essential being is to rob God of most of His attributes and reduce Him to the status of a creature.”
3. Wayne Grudem, p. 149, “Because God is infinite and we are finite or limited, we can never fully understand God. In this sense God is said to be incomprehensible, where the term incomprehensible is used with an older and less common sense, ‘unable to be fully understood,’ This sense must be clearly distinguished from the more common meaning, ‘unable to be understood.’ It is not true to say that God is unable to be understood, but it is true to say that he cannot be understood fully or exhaustively.”

B. The Difficulty of a Definition

1. From the beginning of His self-revelation God does not seek to define Himself by any concise statement. That means He intends us to behold Him working and speaking in the flow of human history and piece together our understanding of Him. In other words, to get a definition of God we must take into consideration a vast array of His words and works.
2. Gregory Nazianzen 325 AD, “It is difficult to conceive God but to define Him in words is an impossibility ... to comprehend the whole of so great a subject as this is quite impossible and impractical, not merely to the utterly careless and ignorant, but even to those who are highly exalted, and who

²Grateful for Pastor Tom Leake and GAMA Bible Institute notes that I have used in different ways throughout this study. I used to teach the *Theology Proper* class at the GAMA institute and Tom’s notes were used in that class and used by permission in making these notes as well. Also, I am grateful for my seminary notes from Dr. Mook and his class on *Theology Proper* that have been used by permission in helping create these notes for this series. Also portions of The Shepherds Training Institute (TSI) notes on *Theology Proper* taught by Dr Paul Shirley will be used at times in this class.

love God.”

3. Psalm 145:3 “Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.”
4. Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 89, “Anyone who seeks an answer to the question, ‘What is the God of the NT like?’, will find no formal statements, but a mass of incidental indications, which nevertheless are invaluable in throwing light on many facets of the character of God.”
5. Berkhof, p. 41, “In order to give a logical definition of God, we would have to begin by going in search of some higher concept, under which God could be coordinated with other concepts; and would then have to point out the characteristics that would be applicable to God only. Such a genetic – synthetic definition cannot be given of God, since God is not one of several species of gods, which can be subsumed under a single genus. At most only an analytical – descriptive definition is possible. This merely names the characteristics of a person or thing, but leaves the essential being unexplained. And even such a definition cannot be complete but only partial, because it is impossible to give an exhaustive positive description of God.
6. We learn about God also in the OT by reading of God doing things – creating – calling things into being that do not exist. Then He shows care for his creation of man in the Garden. He gives rules He requires to be obeyed in order to keep life. He pronounces a just judgment on the man and his wife when they disobeyed His revealed word. Then He clothes them to cover up their shame while also promising them a deliverer. Yet He continues to receive worship that is appropriate, and He unwaveringly rejects false worship. Yet He warns Cain of the effects of his sin. He also expresses sorrow over making man on the earth when man falls into constant violence. He wipes man out in judgment under the waters, yet preserves a saved remnant in the Ark. From all these actions and expressions we learn about God.
7. Berkhof, p. 41, “The Bible never operates with an abstract concept of God, but always describes him as the living God, who enters into various relations with his creatures, relations which are indicative of several different attributes.”
8. So the Bible means for us to understand God through His actions, through his words, and through His names. We put these together, and we have a mural which reveals the true, complex, picture of God.
9. In a sense all of the Bible is meant to define or reveal God through His actions in history, through knowing His eternal decrees, through studying

His laws and commands, and through reading an explanation of His perfections (attributes).

C. Historical Definitions of God

1. The question “what is God?” was posed in 1647 by the authors of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question 4 says,

Q: What is God?

A: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

- **He is Spirit:** Simply put, this means that God doesn’t have a physical body like we do and that he is not made of a composite of parts like we are. There are time when the people speaks of God in anthropomorphic terminology, but these instances are condescending language used to help us better understand that nature of God.
- **He is infinite:** God is bound only by His nature, which means that his perfections are immeasurable. He transcends all human limitations, the only thing that limits God is the perfection of his own nature (i.e., he can’t sin, he can’t lie, etc.). “God is absolutely free in comparison with anyone or anything outside of Himself; however, His freedom is qualified by the totality of his own being.” Prof George Zemek
- **He is eternal:** God is infinite with regard to time. Time is a form of measurement and God is immeasurable. God has neither a beginning nor an end; He has always existed. He is not bound by time, but He has chosen to work in time for His glory.
- **He is unchangeable:** Also referred to as immutability, God’s unchangeable nature is rooted in the unassailable purity of his holiness and the total faithfulness of his character. He cannot and will not change or violate his promises. In man, unchangeableness is a detriment because he is by nature evil. However, in God immutability is a perfection because there is no room for improvement or possibility of decline in God.

2. This historic definition of God may be the most succinct definition of the Infinite that is possible apart from divine inspiration. If one has this definition of God in mind when using term “God” then they will not have to worry about breaking the third commandment.

3. This is a very concise and clear definition that would be hard to improve on but I believe it leaves some vital trues out like the tri-unity of God being 3 in 1.

4. The Westminster Confession of Faith gives us a longer definition for God as...“There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”
5. This is more complete in seeking to define God yet still incomplete and in some ways too long to remember. You can see the difficulty in trying to define the one true God who defies defining!

D. Possible Scriptural Definitions?

1. Within the 66 books of the Bible God has revealed himself to us. Any definition that man produces must reflect the truths about God recorded in the Bible.
2. Yet, rarely do we find in Scripture a long list or consolidation of His attributes much less an attempt at a full definition of God. Consider how the Scriptures declare God to be Spirit, light, love and a consuming fire.
3. John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
 - a) These kind of emphatic statements in John where God is declared to be something (light, love, spirit) are not meant to define God or be a total description of God’s attributes. Rather they are meant as something that is so true of God it is essential to His being.
 - b) The term “Spirit” is emphasized in this verse in the Greek construction. It reads, “Spirit God is.”
 - c) That does not mean God is one spirit among many, but that His nature is spirit. In other words, God is not a place. God is not a body. God is not an idea. God is not physical nature. Mother nature is not God.
 - d) God is a person who is spirit. He is invisible. He is incorporeal. It means that God has no material or physical being. He can materialize and be seen in some aspects of His person but this is not His essential, eternal being.
 - e) 1 Timothy 6:16 “God alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen!

- f) John 1:18 “No man has seen God at any time.”
- 4. 1 John 1:5 “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”
 - a) This is an emphatic statement in Greek.
 - b) God’s message to man through Christ can be summed up by the statement that God is light and no darkness of any kind exists in Him.
 - c) When John writes that God is light, he means that God is true, holy, loving, and good.
 - d) In God is not the least bit of darkness.
 - (1) He is true and cannot lie.
 - (2) He is holy and cannot look upon sin with favor.
 - (3) He is love to the core of His being.
 - e) There is no darkness - no sin, no lie, no selfish hatred - in Him at all.
- 5. 1 John 4:8 “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
 - a) God is not equal to love. He is so loving that He may be described as love.
 - b) This again is not a definition of God but a strong statement about how inseparable love is from the being of God.
- 6. Hebrews 12:29 “... God is a consuming fire.”
 - a) God is not equal to fire.
 - b) He acts like a holy consuming fire destroying all with which He is not pleased.

Group Exercise: Look up Ex 3:13-14 and Ex 34:6-7 and explain how you can see God define Himself by who He is, by what He says, and by what He does.

- 7. In our TSI Theology Proper class Paul Shirley helped drive the biblical or canonical definition of God in two concise categories
 - a) He is who He is (Ex 3:14)
 - (1) Faced with what seemed like an insurmountable task Moses asked a reasonable question, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Ex 3:13)

- (2) God's response is remarkable. He said to tell them "I am who I am." Literally, YHWH. This is the covenant name of God. Who is He? He is who He is. He is completely "other" and self-sufficient. Nothing that is external to Him makes him what He is. You can "take him or leave him" but it won't change him. Much more can, and will, be said about the divine name. But, here we are at least reminded that God is who He is.
- (3) Berkhof, p. 42, "On the basis of this passage the essence of God was found in being itself, abstract being. And this has been interpreted to mean self-existence or self-contained permanence or absolute independence."

b) He is who He says (Ex 34:6-7)

- (1) Another legitimate answer to the question "what is God?" is found later in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 34:5-7 we find what God's self description. God has already revealed His name to Moses and here we find him revealing the essence of His glory to Moses.
- (2) Here we see that God is who He says He is. He is YHWH, the Good and Righteous God. He forgives, displays mercy, show covenant love, and is slow to anger. He is a good God, much better than we deserve. And yet, at the same time, God is a righteous God. He refuses to ignore wickedness and he will not gloss over sins that are committed. He forgives and punishes. He loves and hates. He shows mercy and keeps justice. This is who God says He is.

E. A Humble Definition/Description

- 1. *There is only one true and living God who is an infinite, sovereign, self-existent, unchangeable, all powerful and all-knowing Spirit, perfect in all His attributes, one in essence but eternally existing in Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are co-eternal in being, co-identical in nature, co-equal in power and glory yet retain distinct ministries in relation to creation and people. God is to be worshipped above all, adored beyond all, and obeyed by all for He is the holy, just, good creator and judge of the world.*
- 2. This definition is admittedly far from perfect, but who can provide a perfect definition of God?

II. Attributes (Perfections) of God³

³ This section taken from The Shepherds Training Institute (TSI) notes on Theology Proper taught by Dr. Paul Shirley. TSI Theology 1 class notes for lessons 4-6.

- A. The attributes of God describe the essence of his nature that is uniquely manifested by his works through specific characteristics. The essence of God is one, since he is a simple being not made up of parts. However, 1 Peter 2:9 does provided warrant for identifying and proclaiming specific excellencies of God:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9, ESV)

- A. The word translated excellencies (ἀρετὰς) signifies an “uncommon character worthy of praise, excellence of character, exceptional civic virtue” (BDAG) and is also used in 2 Peter 1:3 to refer to “manifestation(s) of divine power” (BDAG). Thus, these attributes of excellence are not parts that collectively add up to the essence of God. Rather, they are individual manifestations of the virtue inherent in the divine nature. In other words, they are not parts of God that you could add or subtract from his nature, they are specific revelations of God’s perfect character.
- B. How does the distinction between essential and accidental attributes relate to God? Theologians and philosophers within the Judaeo-Christian tradition have maintained that all of God’s attributes are essential attributes. Unlike his creatures, God has no accidental predicates. Remove or change any of God’s attributes and there would be no God. [John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 234.]
- C. The attributes of God are also referred to as the perfections of God, which may be a more helpful term to employ since it communicates the completeness of God’s character. In other words, these perfections are manifestations of God’s essentially perfect being not individual attributes that have been added to his character. Thus, God is not good because he matches an external standard of goodness, instead, good is good because it reflects the internal nature of God.
- D. Definition of Perfections: *God’s perfections are the essential characteristics of his nature. Because these characteristics are necessary to his nature, all his attributes are absolutely perfect and thus rightly called perfections. Further, since these perfections are essential to God’s nature, if anyone of them were denied, God would no longer be God. (MacArthur and Mayhue, 161).*
- E. God’s perfections, or attributes, function as glimpses at the divine nature in a manner analogous to the glimpse of God’s glory that Moses received in the cleft of the rock. The revelation of God he received was accurate, but not exhaustive. In the same way, the list of perfections we find in Scripture are accurate manifestations of the excellency of God, but they do not individually represent the full picture his glory.
- F. This does not mean that God’s perfections are separate from his essence: *God’s essence is identical to his perfections. There is no distinction between God’s essence and his perfections, and there is essential difference between Gods perfections to one another.*

Each perfection characterizes God's complete essence simply and eternally That is to say, God is what he has. He does not merely possess love, justice, and goodness; he is love and justice, eternally, fully, and completely. God is eternally all-powerful, all-holy, and loving. [MacArthur & Mayhue, 164]

- G. However, because human beings are perspectively limited, we can only contemplate individual attributes one at a time, which is how they are revealed to us. Whenever we mediate on a specific manifestation of God's excellencies we must always keep in mind that this one perfection fits perfectly with everything else that can be accurately stated concerning God's nature.
- H. God's attributes are generally categorized as either communicable or incommunicable. Another way of putting this is that some of the perfections of God are unique to him, while other perfections are reflected in mankind. This organization of the perfections of God is helpful for the purpose of communication, and it serves as a good illustration of the transcendence and the immanence of God.

III. The Preferred Classification: Incommunicable (less communicable) and Communicable (more communicable).

- A. Definition. The incommunicable perfections are those having little analogy in creatures (e.g., self-existence, simplicity, immensity), whereas the communicable perfections have more analogy in man (e.g., power, goodness, righteousness, love).
- B. Problem: Since we cannot know God in His essence apart from His relations, it is impossible to know any characteristic of God apart from His relations. Also, even the incommunicable perfections have at least some analogy in man.
- C. Rationale for Using this Classification.
 - 1. A classification is a helpful tool in studying God's perfections.
 - 2. This classification has endured throughout the years among theologians.
 - 3. This classification stresses the transcendence and immanence of God, thus disallowing both pantheism and deism.
 - 4. This classification can be useful if one does not strictly divide the two groups of perfections, but sees the incommunicable attributes as qualifying the communicable attributes and vice versa. Bavinck says: "Hence, it is perfectly proper to speak of incommunicable attributes, if one remembers that these are really descriptions of the unique, absolute, divine manner in which the other attributes (viz., those of essence, life, and spirit, mind and will, love and righteousness, etc.,) exist in God" [my addition: and vice versa]. (Bavinck, p. 141)
- D. Cautions About All Classifications.
 - 1. All classifications of God's perfections have the same weakness. They seem to divide God in two, leaving no harmony between the attributes, no unity in God. This weakness must be overcome by seeing the first class of attributes as qualifying the

second class and vice versa, “so that it can be said that God is one, absolute, unchangeable and infinite in His knowledge and wisdom, His goodness and love, His grace and mercy, His righteousness and holiness” [my addition: and vice versa]. (Berkhof, p. 56)

2. The negative and positive classifications overlap. When we make a negative assertion about God, we have a positive concept in mind, even though we might not be able to articulate it. And when we make a positive assertion about God, we also imply a negative assertion – e.g., that God is love, but not in the same sense in which man is loving.

Bavinck notes:

“If they were completely incommunicable, they would also be absolutely unknowable. The very fact that we are able to name them proves that in one way or another they were revealed by God in creation. Hence, the negative attributes have a positive content: though we need the idea of time in order to obtain a conception of God's eternity, and that of space in order to form an idea of his omnipresence, and that of finite, changeable creatures in order to become aware of his infinitude and immutability; nevertheless, these negative attributes furnish us with a very important positive knowledge concerning God. Thus, even though we cannot comprehend eternity in any positive sense, nevertheless, to know that God is exalted above the limitations of time is very important.” (Bavinck, p. 139)

3. All the classifications seem to imply that we can know God in His essence, considered apart from His relations. But God cannot be known in this way. This weakness must be overcome by seeing even the first class of attributes as at least in some way having an analogy in man and being active in relation to creatures.

E. The Perfections of God Classified.

1. Less Communicable Perfections.

- a) Independence (including self-existence).
- b) Immutability.
- c) Infinity (Absolute Perfection).

1. Eternity.
2. Immensity.
3. Omnipresence.

d) Unity.

- a. Numerical Oneness.
- b. Simplicity.

e) Omniscience. (some theologians classify as communicable)

f) Omnipotence. (some theologians classify as communicable and with Sovereignty)

g) Perfection. (some theologians classify as communicable)

2. More Communicable Perfections.
 - a) Spirituality. (could be classified as incommunicable)
 - b) Invisibility. (could be classified as incommunicable)
 - c) Wisdom.
 - d) Truth and Faithfulness.
 - e) Goodness.
 - f) Love.
 - g) Grace.
 - h) Mercy.
 - i) Longsuffering.
 - j) Holiness.
 - k) Justice.
 - l) Jealousy.
 - m) Will. (includes Sovereignty)
 - n) Blessedness.
 - o) Glory.

IV. The Sovereignty of God (also Omnipotence)

A. Meaning

1. God's sovereignty speaks to both God's **authority and power** to rule over all He has made all the time. Thus, God's sovereignty very simply means that God is in control of everything, everyone, in every place, all the time. God works in all things to accomplish His perfect will (See Eph 1:11)!
2. God's sovereignty is His omnipotence (power) and will (decree) put into unstoppable action (Gen 50:20; Job 42:6.) Paul Shirly says, "Omnipotence is the divine source of God's sovereignty. This "all-powerfulness" is seen most clearly in God's ability to accomplish His 1) creative will; 2) providential will (history); 3) salvific will (salvation). In each of these examples God sovereignly accomplished what He set out to accomplish. He proved Himself to be omnipotent."
3. The Bible makes it clear that God is exhaustively and meticulously in control over all life including the good, bad, and the ugly (Gen 50:20; Ps 33:11; 115:3; 135:6-7; Prov 16:1-4, 33; 21:1; Eph 1:11; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:3). He controls the actions and the events of all people, the rise and fall of all nations, and the life and death of every individual from the royal ruler of a nation to the beggar without a home (Ex 3:19-22; 7:1-5; 9:15-16; Deut 32:39; 1Sam 2:6-8; Ecc 7:13-14; Isa 45:5-7; 46:8-10; Lam 3:37-38; Dan 2:20-22; 4:34-35; Mt 6:25-34; Lk 12:4-7, 22-31; Acts 2:23-24; 4:24-28; 17:24-31; Rom 8:28; 11:36; 2 Tim 1:9; Rev 6:10). Therefore, as the believer traverses this world filled with trials and tribulations, he finds great confidence and comfort from knowing that all the storms of life have first been sifted through the loving hands of a sovereign God (Rom 8:35-39)!

4. The means through which this control or better yet this sovereign rule takes place is called providence! **God's providence** can be defined as the continuous activity of God whereby He makes all the actions and events of this world, both great and small, to fulfill His ultimate plan and purpose. In many ways God's providence is a subset, or better yet the means through which God sovereignly rules over all of His creation.

5. EDOT "God's sovereignty is expressed in the comprehensive plan or decree for all of history; he "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). His sovereignty is exercised and displayed in history in the work of creation, providence, and redemption. The sovereign Lord has made the heavens and the earth and nothing is too hard for him (Jeremiah 32:17 – 23), indeed, all things are possible with God (Mark 10:27; 14:35; Luke 1:37). God also sovereignly upholds and governs the created world. In his providence he rules the destiny of men and nations (Acts 14:15 – 17; 17:24 – 28). Adam's fall occurred within the context of his arrangement (Genesis 2:16 – 17) as did Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:23; 4:27 – 28) and all other events. His providential rule is all – comprehensive.... Gracious work of redemption also manifests God's sovereignty. He promises, covenants, and works redemptive history...."

6. EDOT continued, "Theologians generally consider sovereignty one of God's incommunicable attributes; sovereignty expresses an inherent characteristic of God, and the distinction is sometimes made between sovereign will and sovereign power. God's sovereign will and power are not arbitrary, despotic, or deterministic; his sovereignty is characterized by his justice and holiness as well as by his other attributes. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are paradoxical and beyond human comprehension, but not contradictory. Divine sovereignty and human sovereignty are certainly contradictory, but divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not. God uses human means in history to accomplish his purposes, yet such means do not involve coercion. God commands us to live according to his sovereign law... yet God effectually works his will even through sinful, disobedient human actions (Genesis 45:5, 7-8; 50:19 – 20). The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, certainly the most heinous crime in history, occurred within the boundaries of "the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God," for the crucifixion did what God's "power and will have decided before hand should happen" (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

Group Exercise: Look up Gen 50:20 and explain how God's sovereignty is declared and displayed in Joseph's life from the pit to the palace. Also, explain practically and theologically what God was doing in sovereignly working out this plan in and through man.

B. Areas of Sovereignty and Providence

1. World Events

- a) Ex 9:16 “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” (See Josh 2:8-11; Rom 9:17)
- b) Proverbs 21:1 “The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.”
 - (1) Note: This necessarily involves the control of human decisions even at the highest levels.
- c) Isa 44:24-45:13 Cyrus raised up by God to free Israel and bring her back to Jerusalem that she might rebuild the temple. **How many years before this prophecy take place meaning before it actually is fulfilled?**
- d) John 19:11 “Jesus answered, ‘You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’”

2. Minor Details

- a) Matthew 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”
- b) Jonah 4:6-7 “So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. 7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.”
- c) Proverbs 16:33 “The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.”
- d) Acts 17:26 “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,” See Deut 32:8. God even is sovereign over the placement of nations and the extent to which they spread and live in the land!

3. **Providence Explained:** Providence is best understood according to these three sovereign works of God.⁴ The three points and subpoints below come from *Bible Doctrine* and the most helpful section on Providence. See foot note 4.

- (1) **Divine Preservation** of the universe without which nothing would exist. God is sovereignly upholding all things in Preservation! (Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29; Heb 1:3; Col 1:17; Acts 17:28; 2 Pet 3:7)
- (2) **Divine Concurrence** in all events. God's concurrence is his operation with created things, causing them (whether acting directly or ordaining them through secondary causes), through their properties, to act. God is sovereignly working in and working out all things through concurrence! (Gen 45:5-8; 50:19-20; Ex 4:11-12; Duet 8:18; Josh 11:6; Prov 21:1; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Phil 2:12-13)
 - (a) God's concurrence in all events does not implicate him in sin. Men sin according to God's predetermination in his decree but by secondary causes, so God does not directly and effectively cause the acts of sin
 - (b) This concurrence is not a cooperative synergism, which would involve partial participation by both God and man. Rather, both are entirely engaged in causing this action. God's will is ultimately behind the act, and he provides energy. But man as the second cause initiates the action in time, in response to God's direct causation or in response to man's own desires as stimulated by circumstances
 - (c) God's concurrence is also simultaneous. Man never works independently of God in anything. God always accompanies man with his (God's) effectual will, yet without coercing man to violate his nature in any act
 - (d) There is a simultaneous working, and the act is the product of both causes (God and man), though in different ways. As Berkhof describes it, "This divine activity accompanies the action of man at every point, but without robbing man in any way of

⁴ See MacArthur, J., & Mayhue, R., eds. (2017). [*Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*](#) (p. 220-221). Crossway.

his freedom. The action remains the free act of man, an act for which he is held responsible

- (3) **Divine Governance** involves God's continual active rule over all things so that, through them, he will accomplish his ultimate purpose of glorifying himself. God is over all things through governance! (Ps 22:28-29; 103:17-19; 115:1-3; Dan 2:21-22; 4:32, 34-35; Prov 16:33; Mt 10:29:31-31; 11:25; 17:24; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15; Rev 1:6; 19:6)

- God is sovereignly upholding all things in Preservation
- God is sovereignly working in and accomplishing all things through Concurrence
- God is sovereignly ruling and reigning over all things through Governance

- b) Akin, p. 280-281, “**Preservation** – the Bible often describes God's preservation and care for all his creation. The universe is sustained continually by the Lord who created it (Nehemiah 9:6; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). God cares for the good earth that he created... **Concurrence** - by concurrence we mean that both God and his creatures work together to accomplish God's sovereign purposes in his world. Already in the creation account in Genesis, one observes divine agency working together with creation to ??? or to work (1:11 – 12). This cooperation between God and creatures to accomplish his purposes occurs at various levels. Psalm 104 provides examples of the ways in which the natural processes of God's world, which is preserved and governed by him, are used to provide for the sustenance of plants, animals, and humans... Psalm 127 indicates that general activities in life are accomplished both by divine and human agency: ‘unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain....’ the basic activities of awakening, sleeping, eating, and working, along with the maintenance of the family, are works which involve divine and human operations.... The work of both evil spirits and evildoers is also viewed as concurrently a divine and creaturely activity. Certain texts indicate that God sends evil spirits to accomplish his purposes (1 Samuel 16:15, 23; 18:10). Second Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 taken together offer the insight that while Satan performs his evil activity to accomplish his purpose, God sovereignly asked demonic activity to accomplish divine purposes. Such concurrence is evident in the book of Job as well. In Genesis 50:20 – 21 Scriptures record that the evil actions of humans are

employed by God to accomplish divine purposes. In the same way the dispersion of the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:1) by evil persecutors (Acts 4-7) resulted in the accomplishment of God's kingdom purpose (Acts 1:8) for the gospel to be carried abroad (Acts 8:4). In this case the concurrent work of human evildoers and the God of Providence results in the accomplishment of God's gospel plan (Ephesians 1:10; 1 Timothy 1:4).... God's providential care for his churches is often cast in terms of concurrence. It is God, through the Holy Spirit, who gives spiritual gifts to believers and powers the saints to use them (1 Corinthians 12:11), yet it is also true that believers are to exercise the gifts given to them... the ministry prayer provides another example of such cooperative effort. In Acts 12 the church earnestly prayed for the release of Peter (Acts 12:5), and it was God who released him from prison (Acts 12:6-7, 17).... **Governance while God is so ordered his creation that he accomplishes his plan along with creaturely cooperation, we must not lose sight of the central Biblical theme of God's governance or rule over the universe.** This doctrine, the doctrine of sovereignty, is critical for understanding the doctrine of Providence and for answering various questions that arise in light of the Bible's teaching of God's providence. The Bible praises God as Lord, king, and ruler (Psalm 2; 29:10; 24; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Revelation 19:6). The terms Lord and King refer to God's sovereignty and signify that he always is master of the world he made.... While human kings and nations possess certain power, they themselves are under the dominion of the Lord who is king (Deuteronomy 32: a; Psalm 33:10 – 11; 47:2, 7, 9; 96:10; Proverbs 21:1).... Sinful actions did not occur apart from God's governance ... a perennial question in Christian theology revolves around the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. That the scriptures affirm both divine sovereignty and human freedom is obvious. ... First, one must determine the nature and extent of God's sovereignty. We have seen that God's sovereignty, his lordship, is absolute."

C. God's Sovereignty & The Problem of Evil

1. God does not have a problem with Evil. He has it under control. He uses it to accomplish His purposes.
 - a) 2 Kings 21:12 "Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.'"
 - b) Isaiah 45:7 "The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."

c) Also read Job 1:1; Kings 22:20-23.

2. However, only secondary causes are responsible for evil. The blame in Scripture is always on the moral creature not the Creator. I.e. Ecclesiastes 7:29.

a) God is not to be blamed for evil. James 1:13-14 “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”

3. The Isaiah passage does not mean God does evil, only that in his overall plan he created moral creatures with the capacity for evil. He then planned for evil as part of his purposes to reveal His glory and save man.

4. Only the secondary causes cause evil.

a) Grudem, “If we were to say that God himself does evil, we would have to conclude that he is not a good and righteous God, and therefore that he is not really God at all. On the other hand, if we maintain that God does not use evil to fulfill his purpose, then we would have to admit that there is evil in the universe that God did not intend, is not under his control, and might not fulfill his purposes. This would make it very difficult for us to affirm that ‘all things’ work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). If evil came into the world in spite of the fact that God did not intend it and did not want it to be there, then what guarantee do we have that there will not be more and more evil that he does not intend and that he does not want? And what guarantee do we have that he will be able to use it for his purpose, or even that he can triumph over it?”

D. God’s Sovereignty in Salvation

1. Romans 9:15 “For He says to Moses, ‘I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.’”

2. John 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;”

a) The inability of people to come to faith in Christ demands God sovereign draws whom He has chosen to save.

3. Revelation 13:8 “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

- a) Notice the timing when eternal life for people was determined - long before they believed.
- 4. 2 Timothy 2:10 “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.”
 - a) God uses evangelism to accomplish the salvation of the ones He has elected.
- 5. Acts 13:48 “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- 6. It is a plain fact that the Scriptures repeatedly mention the elect ones of God.
 - a) Romans 8:33 says, “Who will bring a charge (an accusation) against God's elect?”
 - b) 1 Peter 1:1 mentions these people who are elect.
 - c) Jesus said in Luke 18:7 “... shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?”
- 7. God specially cares for His elect.
 - a) In 1 Peter 2:9 Peter tells Christians, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession,”
 - b) He chose us to own us, and that’s not talking about everyone in the world.
- 8. In Colossians 3:12 Paul writes to believers and says, “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;”
- 9. Paul says we should know we are chosen and that should motivate us to Christian living.
- 10. Jesus said in Matthew 22:14 “For many are called (that is they hear the gospel preached to them and the call to repent and accept it), but few are chosen.”
- 11. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the

beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

a) God chose us for salvation! What could be clearer!

12. In 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul writes, “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.”

a) Salvation is for the chosen ones.

b) Paul labored in his evangelism so the chosen ones would gain eternal glory.

13. In Titus 1:1 Paul begins his letter, “Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God ...” The designation elect or chosen is equated with being a Christian.

14. Election gives us the greatest security as believers, for we were chosen by God in eternity past, and He will keep us to eternity future.

15. *I am persuaded that the doctrine of predestination is one of the “softest pillows” upon which the Christian can lay his head, and one of the “strongest staffs” upon which he may lean, in his pilgrimage along this rough road.* – Charles Haddon Spurgeon