

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 1
The Nature of Salvation
Week 3 – Calvinism, Arminianism and God’s Sovereignty

Editors’ note:

- Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.
- Italic (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

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Introduction

In this last lecture on soteriology, we want to consider whether an individual chooses to be saved or if instead God chooses to save them.

At issue is the interplay between God's SOVEREIGNTY and HUMAN CHOICE with regard to SALVATION. Do humans have free will to believe or reject the gospel? How should we understand the New Testament's statements about Christians being “elected,” “chosen,” and “predestined?”

Instructors: Remind students of the definition of sovereignty we provided in their homework assignment: God owns, rules, and sustains the creation. Nothing can thwart him from ultimately accomplishing his purposes.

Doctrinal Overview

Calvinism:

This term is actually a misnomer. Calvin did not emphasize predestination in his *Institutes* (only 4 chapters). Calvin warned against delving too deeply into this subject (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 21, section 1). However, it became the controlling principle in Reformed Theology, expressed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619.

Starting point for Calvinist/Reformed theology: *God's decrees*. God is sovereign and decrees certain things.

(Isa. 46:10,11) ...My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (11)... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

- **Total Depravity:** *As a result of Adam's sin, people are born in a "depraved" state.*

This means that although people may do things that are good, they are constitutionally unable to submit themselves to the gospel.

(Rom. 3:11,12) . . . there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless . . .

(John 6:44, 65) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day..... (65)And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."

- **Unconditional Election:** *Salvation is completely dependent on God's choice to bestow it.*

Because of total depravity, humans are unable to choose God on their own. Instead, for his own good reasons, God sovereignly chooses which individuals he will save. "Unconditional" in this context means that there are no conditions that humans must meet, including faith. Faith is a gift of God (ROM 12:3; Eph. 2:8). If human-generated faith plays a part in salvation, salvation is not entirely by grace.

(Eph. 1:4,5) He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (5) In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus

Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . .

(1 Pet. 2:8) . . . they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

(Romans 9:16,18,22-24) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy . . . (18) So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires . . . (22) What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? (23) And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (24) even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Double predestination: (also called reprobation) means that *God predestines the ELECT to heaven, and that he predestines the NON-ELECT to hell* (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4; ROM 9:22,23).

(John Calvin) "... (God) does not create everyone in the same condition, but ordains eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others." (Cited in Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 396)

Not all Calvinists believe in double predestination. Instead, they follow Augustine's teaching that God is active only in the salvation of the elect, while he is passive with regard to the non-elect.

- **Limited Atonement:** *Christ died for the purpose of saving only the elect.*

Calvinists infer this from the passages that say that Christ died "for his people" (Matt 1:21; John 10:11,15,26-27; John 15:13; Acts 20:28). Since God sovereignly elected some to salvation, he sent Christ to die only for them. Not all Calvinists hold to limited atonement.

- **Irresistible Grace:** *God's grace in salvation includes imparting saving faith to the elect.*

This grace is irresistible since it does not depend on human will (ROM 9:16; Jn. 6:37,44,65; 15:16). God causes the elect to believe the gospel (Acts 13:48), even though they may not be aware of this fact.

(Jn. 6:37) All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

(Acts 13:48) When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

- **Perseverance of the Saints:** Because election depends on God, *those who are elected cannot lose their salvation* (i.e., eternal security).

However, the elect will show evidence of their election by continuing to believe in Christ and manifesting good works consistent with salvation (2 Pet. 1:10; Heb. 3:6,14; Col. 1:23). This is the origin of "Lordship Theology" discussed last week.

(2 Pet. 1:10) Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

(Heb. 3:6,14) Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end . . . For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

Implications for Evangelism

Positive	Negative
<p>"Since Christ has elected people to salvation, I can persevere in witnessing with the confidence that I will be fruitful." Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, and many effective missionaries have been motivated in this way.</p>	<p>"If God has already decided who will be saved and irresistibly calls them, does it really matter whether I witness or not?" This was the logic of those who told William Carey, "Sit down, young man! If God wants to save the people in India, he can well do so without your help."</p>

Arminianism:

Arminianism is named for Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who strongly objected to the Reformed system described above—especially limited atonement. His position was published posthumously in the *Remonstrance* of 1610.

Starting point for Arminian theology: *God wants all people to be saved.*

(2 Pet. 3:9*) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

(1 Tim. 2:4) (God) desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- **Total Depravity: People cannot respond to the gospel without God's help. But God has enabled all people to respond to his convicting influence.**

Arminians agree that left to themselves, people are unable to respond to the gospel. However, God in his (prevenient or common) grace has enabled all people to respond to his convicting influence (John 12:32; 16:8)—he has given the gift of faith to everyone.

(John 12:32) "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

(John 16:8) "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment . . . "

(Henry C. Thiessen) "Since mankind is hopelessly dead in trespasses and sins and can do nothing to obtain salvation, God graciously restores to all men sufficient ability to make a choice in the matter of submission to him. This is the salvation-bringing grace of God that has appeared to all men."¹

- **Conditional Election:** *God's election of people to salvation is conditioned upon their faith response to the gospel.*

See Ephesians 1:13 and Romans 3:28. Arminians reject the claim that faith is a work, since faith merely receives the gift that God offers (ROM 4:4,5; Gal. 2:16).

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 344-345.

(Romans 4:4,5) Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. (5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness . . .

Illustration: Having been handed a million dollar check, the Arminians would not state that it was work for you to go to the bank, endorse it, and to have it deposited into your account.

Predestination and election are based on God's foreknowledge (presumably) of our decision to trust Christ.

(1 Peter 1:1,2*) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

(Romans 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

- **Unlimited Atonement:** *Christ died for the whole human race.*

Arminians believe that Christ's atonement is *sufficient* for all people, but *effective* only for those who believe (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2*; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9).

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

(2 Corinthians 5:19) God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

(1 Tim. 4:10) For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

Illustration (continued): The above check is sufficient to cover your debt, but you must deposit it to your account.

- **Resistible Grace:** *It is God's will that all people be saved, but some may say no.*

God desires that all people be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9*; Ezek. 18:23). Therefore, God in his grace draws all people to himself (Jn. 12:32; 16:8). But scripture clearly teaches that humans are capable of resisting God's will (Mt. 23:37; Heb. 4:2; Lk. 7:29,30).

(Matt. 23:37) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

(Luke 7:29,30) And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. (30) But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

- **Present Assurance of Salvation:** *We can have present assurance of salvation, but can also lose our salvation for various reasons.*

Most Arminians do not believe in eternal security. Like John Wesley, they believe that we can have present experiential assurance of our salvation—but that we could lose our salvation for various reasons.

However, it is neither logically nor biblically necessary for Arminians to reject eternal security. In Xenos, we hold a moderately Arminian position while also believing in eternal security.

Implications for Evangelism

Positive	Negative
<p>"I am motivated to share my faith because I know that more will be saved if I am faithful as Christ's ambassador." The logic of Arminianism makes it easy for Christians to believe that evangelism is both a privilege and a responsibility.</p>	<p>"Evangelism is a heavy burden since my friend's salvation depends on my witness." Arminians need to be careful to fully emphasize God's will and non-Christians' responsibility as they evangelize. Unless we remember this, we can become unhealthily anxious, taking on more responsibility for people's salvation</p>

than is rightfully ours.

Passages Arminians must harmonize

The following passages are interpreted differently by Calvinists and Arminians.² We believe that the passages teaching the Arminian position are clearer, and that it is easier to harmonize the following passages with this position than it is to harmonize passages supporting Arminianism with the Calvinistic perspective.

(John 6:37) "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

² This list of passages is by no means exhaustive. Here are a few more:

(John 15:16) "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you."

Some Calvinists view this passage as a proof text for unconditional election, emphasizing the irrelevance of human choice.

Arminians point out that the statement is made to the disciples with reference to their apostleship, not to their salvation. This interpretation accords well with the next phrase "that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. . ." See also Jn. 6:70 referring to the same choice. Clearly, Judas was chosen, but not saved.

(Galatians 1:15,16) But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood...

Calvinists interpret this passage to mean that God irresistibly called Paul because he was elected to salvation. They further argue that Paul's salvation is typical of all Christians in this regard.

Arminians would point out that Paul's election and calling were based on God's foreknowledge of Paul's decision to believe. Some Arminians acknowledge that Paul may have been unconditionally elected and irresistibly called by God, but point out that this does not prove that God deals with all people in this way. There is no reason to think that God cannot deal with some people differently than others. Arminians would argue that the burden is on the Calvinist to demonstrate not just that God elected someone unconditionally, but that he elects all Christians in this way.

(2 Thessalonians 2:13) 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.

Calvinists interpret this passage to teach unconditional election.

Arminians point out that "from the beginning" could refer to the beginning of their Christian lives (i.e., conversion). Paul uses this same phrase in Phil. 4:15 to refer to people's conversion. If the term "salvation" refers to glorification (see vs. 14) or spiritual maturity (1 Thess. 5:23), Paul is simply reminding them of God's purpose for their lives.

Calvinists argue that this passage teaches irresistible grace. The individual cannot refuse God's choice. Therefore, all those given to Christ will respond.

Arminians reply that "those given to me" in vs. 37 are the same as those who "believe in him" in vs. 40. In other words, when God foresees that some will believe, he gives them to Christ. See that in vs. 45, those who have "heard and learned from the Father" are the ones who "come to me."

(John 6:44,65) "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" . . .(65) And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."

Calvinists usually hold that these passages teach total depravity and unconditional election, and also imply limited atonement and double-predestination. This is because:

"No one can come to me..." because they are totally depraved.

"...unless it has been granted him from the Father," and "...the Father draws him," imply unconditional election - unconditional because the cause is the Father, not the individual.

Limited atonement and double-predestination are usually inferred from the fact that it is impossible to come to Christ without election. Therefore, those whom the Father has not drawn are naturally destined for judgment and are therefore those for whom Christ did not die.

Arminians agree that these passages teach total depravity. However, they argue the Father draws all men to Christ (Jn. 12:32; 16:8). They further hold that to assign the cause exclusively to the Father ignores vs. 29,35,40,47. To attribute the cause exclusively to the Father regardless of the response of the person also flies in the face of the stated will of the Father in vs. 40 that "every one who beholds the Son and believes in him" be saved.

Finally, with regard to limited atonement and double-predestination, these are positions which depend on the earlier conclusion (unconditional election), and therefore beg the question.

(Acts 13:48) And 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.

Calvinists hold that this teaches unconditional election.

Arminians point out that the participle translated "had been appointed to" (tetagmenoi) is the middle-passive voice form of tasso. In Greek, the same form is used to designate both the middle voice *and* the passive voice. The NASB translates it in the passive voice (the subject receives the action). However, if it is translated in the *middle* voice (the subject initiates the action), the passage would read ". . .as many as set themselves to eternal life believed." This translation resolves the difficulty.

The context (see vs 46) indicates that Luke intended the middle voice in verse 48. In vs. 46, Paul says of the Jews, "...you repudiate it (the gospel), and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life." Luke is purposefully contrasting the Jews' response to that of the Gentiles, who "began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had set themselves to eternal life believed."

Because of this grammatical ambiguity, neither view should base its position on this passage.

(Romans 9:1-24)

Calvinists normally hold that Romans 9 teaches unconditional election and double-predestination.

V. 16: "*...It [God's choice] does not depend on the man who wills. . .*"

V. 18: refers to double-predestination.

Vs. 22-23: refer to "*vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*" and "*vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for glory.*"

V. 24: The election involved is not a national election because vs. 24 states that the vessels of mercy are "*us, whom he called not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles*" (i.e., believing Christians).

Arminians argue that the first part of ROM 9 **deals with God's choice of nations and their roles in his plans.**

Vs. 1-5: the context is that of *national* choice.

Vs. 6,7: This is confirmed in vss. 6,7 because all Israelites were not saved, and all Ishmaelites were not damned.

V. 13: Paul cites Mal. 1:2, in which God says that he favors *the nation* of Israel over *the nation* of Edom. Furthermore, the phrase "I hate/I love" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "I do not favor/I favor" (see Luke 14:26-hate father and mother).

V. 16: refers to God's choice of how to lead the *nation* of Israel through the wilderness, which was independent of Moses' will in the matter. Personal salvation is not in view in the original passage (Ex. 33:19).

V. 18: is in the context of vs. 16 (see above) and vs. 17, which refers to God's *temporal* destruction of the Egyptians when they wanted to destroy Israel. The verse teaches that God caused his choice of Israel to stand regardless of Moses' attempts to help or Pharaoh's attempts to hinder. *Neither Moses' nor Pharaoh's personal salvation was in view in these passages.*

Vs. 21-23: refer to *nations* which have either a glorious or judgmental role in history. Two interpretations are possible: God allows evil nations to exist and often uses them to bless the chosen nation Israel. Today, believers are able to participate in the covenant blessings of Israel because they have been "grafted into the rich root" of God's purpose in history.

Another explanation is that the "lump of clay" in vs. 21 refers to national Israel. God has the right to divide Israel into two vessels: unbelieving Israel, which has become a "*vessel of wrath prepared* ("fit" or "suited") *for destruction,*" and believing Israel which, along with Gentile believers, has become a "*vessel of mercy.*"

Note: Any interpretation of Rom. 9 must account for the transition that Paul makes from national choice in vs. 1-24 and individual salvation in vs. 24-33. Therefore, neither view can claim that the other is completely out of context. The question becomes one of which transition is more believable, and makes the most sense of the Old Testament quotations.

(Ephesians 1:4,5) . . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . .

Calvinists cite this passage as teaching unconditional election. God "*chose us. . .before the foundation of the world.*" He "*has predestined us to adoption as sons. . .according to the kind intention of His will.*" These phrases are taken to mean that God has sovereignly decided in advance who will be saved, completely irrespective of human choice.

Arminians agree that vs. 4 is teaching God's election of the believer to salvation. However, they call attention to the significance of the phrase "*in Him.*" This phrase, it is argued, means that Christ was the chosen One (Is. 42:1) and that believers corporately participate in his chosenness because they are baptized into him when they believe (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13).

With regard to vs. 5, Arminians hold that this passage is referring not to God's choice of who will be saved, but of God's choice that those who believe will be ultimately glorified. They interpret "*adoption as sons*" as a reference to the glorification of believers (cf. Rom. 8:23 for Paul's use of "adoption" in this way).

Arminians also insist that **God's election and predestination are based on his foreknowledge of our choice to believe in Christ** (1 Pet. 1:1,2*; Rom. 8:29).

(1 Peter 2:8) . . . and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Some Calvinists find support for double-predestination in this passage. God appointed certain people to "doom" and therefore they rejected Christ.

Arminians point out that the specific cause for their stumbling is not God, but that "*they are disobedient to the word.*" Peter is not saying that God made them disobey, or that they cannot repent. He is simply saying that God has ordained judgment for those who reject the gospel.

(Jude 1:4) For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Calvinists hold that this passage teaches double-predestination. The false teachers were "*long ago marked out [by God] for. . .condemnation.*"

Arminians point out that the participle "previously marked out" (progegrammenoi) can also be translated "previously written about." For an example of this usage, see Rom. 15:4. Since Jude goes on to cite several recorded examples of the destruction of ungodly persons (vs. 5-18), this translation is seen as preferable.

Summary:

An Arminian approach that affirms eternal security is preferable to the Calvinist position outlined above. It makes better sense of all of the passages that we've looked at and it leaves room for human agency in God's redemptive plan. But remember...

- *This is not an essential doctrinal issue.*

Christians should not break fellowship with one another over whether they are Arminian or Calvinist. We use many excellent theological texts that are written by Calvinists (e.g., Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*). It is instructive that Francis Schaeffer makes no mention of this issue in any of his many books. Commitment to the work of evangelism and missions is more important than one's position on this issue.

Practical implications of God's sovereignty

Recall from our lecture on God's attributes...

God' sovereignty: God owns, rules, and sustains the creation. No one and nothing can thwart him from ultimately *accomplishing his purposes.*

Arminians correctly affirm that humans have free will and freely choose their salvation. But the passages that we've read clearly indicate that in many areas of life, the ultimate outcome is controlled by the sovereign will of God and not the free choices of human beings. This truth has profound implications for the broad sweep of history and for our day-to-day lives...

God's sovereign work in history:

- **God chooses *nations* for specific roles (Ezekiel 38:4; Psalm 33:10,11; Psalm 2:1-6).**

- **God selects *individuals* for specific roles in his national strategy (2 Samuel 7:8; Isaiah 45:1; Daniel 4:32,34-35).**

- **God can use the *evil choices* of human beings to advance his purposes (e.g. the death of Christ in Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27,28).**

- **God intervenes at the end of history to *establish his kingdom* (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15; 19:15-20:15).** We will cover this in more detail in the weeks ahead.

Discussion: Ask students to draw from their homework and share evidence of God's sovereignty over history from the book of Daniel.

(Daniel 1:1-2) In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

(Daniel 2:20-21) Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings. After interpreting the dream of the statue symbolizing four empires that would dominate Israel, Daniel adds,

(Daniel 2:44) And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

(Daniel 4:31-35) The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes... At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

(Daniel 5:21-28) He [Nebuchadnezzar] was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. 22 But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. 23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven, but you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. 24 Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. 25 This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN 26 This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. 27 Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. 28 Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

God's sovereign work in our day-to-day lives:

•**God decides what *spiritual gifts* we get (1 Cor. 12:11) and calls individuals to *specific ministry roles* (Acts 13:1,2; Galatians 1:15,16; 1 Cor. 12:18).**

•**God promises *to protect and provide* for his people.**

God used the treachery of Joseph's brothers to preserve Jacob and his family from famine (Genesis 45:4-8; 50:20); he used their stay in Egypt to grow them into a great nation (Exodus 1:6,7); when the Jews were trapped with no way of escape, he parted the Red Sea (Psalm 77); he preserved them through the harsh environment of the Sinai desert with water and manna (Psalm 78); once in the land, he gave his people victory in battle against great odds (Psalm 78; 2 Chronicles 20). Jesus reassured his disciples that God would look after their basic needs (Matthew 6:19-34); while they may face danger, suffering and even death, he promised to preserve his disciples through it (Matthew 10:28-31); he said they would never perish and that no one would snatch them out of his hand (John 10:27-30); "If God is for us," Paul asked, "who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31); nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38,39); God can even use negative circumstances that befall us for good (Romans 8:28).

Application:

God's sovereignty gives us the assurance that God is with us and active in our lives. Knowing we are in his care enables us to face every area of our Christian life with confidence! Instructors: pick some of the areas below and cover as time allows.

Circumstances: If we understand God's sovereignty, we realize that all persons and all situations in my life can be used by God as part of His wise design to develop me spiritually. Everything we go through can benefit us if we choose to cooperate with God. No person or situation can thwart God's plan to make Himself known to & through you.

e.g.

We tend to think: If it was not for _____, I would be an effective employee, student, teacher, leader, etc.

But in fact: If it was not for _____, I would lose an opportunity to be stretched spiritually. _____ is God's gift to me.

Fear: The biblical antidote to fear is directly tied to an awareness that God will ultimately protect us (Psalm 27) and that his purposes will not be thwarted (Revelation 1:17;2:10).

Our "need" for control: When I trust God's sovereignty, I don't have to get my way and manipulate people into doing what I want. I can trust that God may choose to work through different means and/or at a different time than I had in mind. When I try to control, I am acting as if I believe people can take away what God has promised me.

Fellowship: The composition of our home group is not an accident. If I trust in God's sovereignty, I will view the people in my life as people God has brought to me so I can receive and give to them (1 Corinthians 12:21). A sense of "compatibility" will not be my main concern. People that are different from me and difficult for me are God's tools to shape my character. I will also realize that God sends people to me to teach me and correct me. I can lower my defensiveness when I realize God may be speaking to me through them.

Conflict: Conflict is seen as much vertically (between your self and God) as it is horizontally (between yourself and others). Seen apart from God's sovereignty, conflict is simply me vs. you, me proving I'm right, me winning, etc. If I trust in God's sovereignty, I don't always have to win and defend - God can teach me through conflict even if the other person is wrong and misunderstands me.

Suffering: If I trust in God's sovereignty, I will have the hope that God will bring good out my suffering - even if I don't see it at the time. Suffering cannot take away what God wants to give me. Because of God's sovereignty, we are never helpless victims. For more on this topic, see Christian Growth.

Parenting: Without a perspective on God's sovereignty, we will increase our attempts to control as we feel threatened - or withdraw in defeat.

Our Service to God (Ministry): Our service to God is not something we make happen or force (Mt. 28:18, 20). Do we think about and rely on Matt. 16:18? There Jesus declares, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not withstand it."

Evangelism: If I trust in God's sovereignty, I know that God wants to reach people and is able to orchestrate events so that I will cross paths with someone who wants to truly know him. We should prayerfully anticipate this as we interact with people in our community each day.

Discipleship: Hope and vision (rather than fatalism and discouragement) is based on the belief that God is committed to active involvement in the life of the person you are discipling. This gives the discipler the patience to invest over the long haul.

Failure: Failure is part of our training and spiritual history. Without God's sovereignty, failure is simply wasted effort and an area of shame. Failure is avoided, and when encountered, is often denied. We also look to blame others. Oswald Sanders has a different perspective on failure based on God's sovereignty:

(Oswald Sanders) “The God of Jacob is preeminently the God of the second chance to Christians who have failed and failed persistently. The second chance does not avert the consequences of past failure, but even failure can be a steppingstone to new victories. To the child of God failure can have an important educative value. God does not waste even failure. The outstanding lesson of Jacob’s life is that no failure need be final. There is hope with the God of Jacob for any disposition or temperament. No past defeat puts future victory out of reach. When God has saved and apprehended a person, He pursues him with undiscourageable perseverance that He might bless him. God will turn the tables on the Devil by creating a wider ministry out of our very defeats.”³

Memory Verses

1 Peter 1:1b-2* – Election is based on God's foreknowledge (evidently of who chooses to believe in Christ).

1 John 2:2* – Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, not just of believers.

2 Peter 3:9* – God's will is for all people to be saved.

Assignment

- **If you are continuing on to Module 3 of Christian Ministry 1, complete the Messianic Kingdom Assignment. Otherwise, study for the exam.**

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³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Maturity* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1994 edition) p. 33.

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