

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this meditation and memorisation series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will meditate on the meaning of a Bible verse about one characteristic of the God of the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

In this eleventh series, the Bible teaches five truths about God's greatness. The topic of today's meditation and memorisation is: GOD IS SOVEREIGN. We will meditate a new Bible passage, memorise a new Bible verse and then review the previously memorised verses together.

(S) **POINT 1. MEDITATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE**

The new Bible verse that we will meditate and memorise is Ephesians 1:11-12.

The memorisation verse is: God is sovereign: Ephesians 1:11-12. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-12.

(T) **First. God's sovereignty is an important Christian doctrine.**

The sovereignty of God is very strongly emphasised in the Bible. The following Bible passages teach God's sovereignty.

One. God is sovereign in creation. Revelation 4:11 says, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and *by your will* they were created and have their being". God is the Creator of the whole universe and thus *his sovereign will* is the cause of all things. He also upholds all things that he created with his almighty power.

Two. God is sovereign in possessing. Because God created everything, everything also belongs to him. God possesses everything and gives out of his possessions to anyone he wants. In Jeremiah 27:5 God says, "With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please".

Three. God is sovereign in authority. Because everything belongs to God he has absolute authority over the hosts of heaven and all creatures on earth. 2 Chronicles 20:6 says of God, "You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you". God has absolute authority over everything and everyone and no one can withstand him. God sovereignly determines the ends which they are destined to serve here on earth. Thus, the God of the Bible rules as King in the most absolute sense of the word. All things are *dependent on* him. And all things are *subservient to* him. The God of the Bible has *absolute authority over all governments on earth*.

(S) **Second. A very important aspect of God's sovereignty is his sovereign will.**

Ephesians 1:9-12 says, "And he made known to us the mystery of his will (thelema) according to his good pleasure, which he purposed (prothesis) in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan (prothesis) of him, *who works out everything in conformity with the purpose (boule) of his will (thelema)*, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." In this passage, we must distinguish between three words.

One. God's will (thelema) is his sovereign exercise of his will, his sovereign will power.

Two. God's plan (boule) springs forth from God's will. It shows that God never acts arbitrary, but always acts with deliberation and with a definite plan.

Three. God's purpose (prothesis) indicates the purpose or design of his plan. It shows what his plan aims to accomplish. Ephesians 1:9-12 teach two important truths: God's eternal plan will be sovereignly accomplished. Verse 11 says that God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. Nothing and nobody can stop God from accomplishing his eternal plan. He executes his eternal will or plan (thelema) deliberately (boule) and with a clear aim (prothesis). God's eternal plan has one purpose and that is to glorify God. Verse 12 says that God works out his eternal plan so that Christians may be for the praise of his glory. The final goal of everything God does is that God will be glorified!

(T) Third. Examples of God's sovereign will.

The following Bible passages teach God's sovereign will with respect to people's lives.

In Job 14:5 the Bible teaches, that God sovereignly determines the number of days and months that each person lives and that God sovereignly sets limits for each person that he cannot exceed.

In Acts 17:26 the Bible teaches that God sovereignly determines the specific time in history each person lives on earth and the exact place where he lives.

Ephesians 2:10 and Proverbs 16:4 teach that God sovereignly controls both the good and wicked deeds people do.

Genesis 50:20 teaches that God sovereignly controls every event in history in such a way that it fulfils his purpose.

And 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 teaches that God sovereignly determines the goal (end) of each person's life as well as the means to reach that goal. These verses express God's goal. From the beginning God chose you to be saved, so that you may share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. They also express the means God uses. He saves you through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth, to which he called you through the gospel.

(S) Fourth. God's secret and God's revealed will.

Can human beings know God's will?

God's will may be distinguished in two parts. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, so that we may follow all the words of this law."

God's will may have a *secret or unrevealed* part and a *revealed part*. Both are his *sovereign* will. We cannot know God's secret will, but we can know God's revealed will.

One. God's secret will

includes his sovereign plan and sovereign action in every area of existence. It is mentioned in the following Bible passages. Psalm 115:3 says, "God does whatever *pleases* him". Daniel 4:25 says, "The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he *wishes*". Romans 9:18-19 says, "God has mercy on whom he *wants* to have mercy and he hardens whom he *wants* to harden". People may ask, "Who resists his *will*?" The answer is that nobody resists or can resist his sovereign will. Romans 11:33-34 says, "Oh, the depths of the riches, of the *wisdom*, and of the *knowledge* of God! How unsearchable his *judgements*, and his *paths* beyond tracing out! Who has known the *mind* of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?"

Two. God's revealed will

includes his general revelation and his specific revelation. *God's general revelation takes place* through his creation, his providential care, his judgements and his laws written on the heart and conscience of man. *God's specific revelation took place* through the words and acts of the prophets and Jesus Christ, which are recorded in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. God's revealed will is mentioned in the following Bible passages. Matthew 7:21 says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does *the will* of my Father who is in heaven". John 4:34 says, "My food", said Jesus, "is to do *the will* of him who sent me and to finish his work". John 7:17 says, "If anyone chooses to do *God's will*, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own". Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what *God's will* is - his good, pleasing and perfect will". These verses all refer to God's revealed will.

(T) Fifth. God's will is absolutely independent from man.

Is God's will absolutely independent from man or is it dependent on man's choices and actions? God's will is free and sovereign and absolutely independent from man. The God of the Bible freely, voluntarily and sovereignly determines what and whom he creates and the times, the places and the circumstances of their lives. He marks out the path of all his rational creatures, determines their destiny and uses them for his purposes. And although God endows them with limited personal freedom, yet his sovereign will controls their actions.

The Bible speaks of the freedom and sovereignty of God's will in absolute terms. In Isaiah 10:15 God says, "Does the axe raise itself above him who swings it? Or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood?" And in Isaiah 29:16 he says, "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'? Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing'?" In Isaiah 45:9 he says, "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making'? Does your work say, 'He has no hands'?"

(S) Sixth. God's will always has a good reason.

Is God's will rational or is it pure indifference? The sovereign freedom of God is never pure indifference, but always rational self-determination. God has reasons for willing as he does. God has reasons that induce him to choose one end rather than another, and one set of means to accomplish an end in preference to another set of means. In each case, God has a prevailing motive, which makes the end chosen and the means selected the most pleasing to him. God always has good reasons for his decisions and actions, even though we may not be able to determine what his motive is. Ephesians 1:11 teaches that God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. He executes his eternal will or plan (thelema) deliberately (boule) and with a clear aim (prothesis).

Is God's will righteous or sometimes unrighteous? God's will is always righteous! Everything God determines for man is completely righteous. Because all people have sinned, all people deserve to go to hell. Even if God did not save one single person in the world, he would still be absolutely righteous. God does not owe anything to anybody! In general we may say that God cannot "will" anything that is contrary to his nature. God cannot "will" anything that is contrary to his wisdom or love, and contrary to his righteousness or holiness.

(T) Seventh. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

Does man have a free will? Some people say, that man has an *absolute free will* and that man has *absolute power of self-determination*. But Romans 8:6-8 teaches clearly that the mind of the non-Christian is hostile against God and cannot please God. He *does not* obey God's will and *cannot* obey God's will. Therefore, the non-Christian or natural man does not have an absolute free will and he does not have absolute power of self-determination.

Does God's sovereignty then exclude man's responsibility?

One. The responsibility of man.

Some people say that God's sovereignty is inconsistent with the moral freedom of man. Although with our human mind we cannot reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, we should not assume a contradiction between these two truths. The Bible teaches that God has given his rational creatures a will, but this will is *limited to certain areas* and *this will is sinful* after the fall of man into sin. God gives man freedom in certain areas to choose and to decide. God also holds man responsible for all his actions. Man therefore has responsibility and is accountable to God!

Two. The sovereignty of God.

Although man has limited freedom to choose and to act, nevertheless, God has determined that the free acts of man will take place! For example, in Acts 2:23 we read, "Jesus 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." And Acts 4:28 says, "They did what *your power and will had decided beforehand should happen*". Thus, because God *beforehand determined* what would certainly happen in the future, he *beforehand knows* what will happen in the future. That is, God's *foreknowledge* is always dependent on his *foreordination*. God's foreknowledge of man's actions can only *be certain* when it is based on God's foreordination, by which he determined that these actions of man would certainly happen in the future.

How should I understand God's sovereignty with regard to sin and salvation? God has determined what he will do, or what shall come to pass. For example, he has determined that sin would enter into the world. Nevertheless, he is never himself the Author or Inducer of sin and he never takes pleasure in sin. God has revealed to people what they are duty bound to. God has determined that he would save many people, but he has not determined the salvation of every individual who ever lived on earth with a positive volition (Rom 9:16-18).

(S) POINT 2. MEMORISATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE

Write the Bible verse on a card or in a notebook. The topic today is "God is sovereign" and the reference is Ephesians 1:11-12. Let us memorise the Bible verse together. Then let us take turns to say that part of the verse alone without looking at the Bible or notebook.

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(S) **POINT 3. REVIEW OF THE LAST BIBLE VERSES YOU HAVE MEMORISED**

Let us review the last 5 Bible verses that we have memorised without looking at our notebooks.

Series “The Christian church”, verses 3-5 and series “God’s greatness”, verses 1-2.

(T) The ministries of the church. Ephesians 4:12-13. To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13.

(S) The tasks of church leaders. Acts 20:28. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:28.

(T) The glory in the church. Ephesians 3:20-21. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21.

(S) God is incomparable. Isaiah 40:25-26. “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Isaiah 40:25-26.

(T) God is all-glorious. 1 Chronicles 29:11. “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom: you are exalted as head over all”. 1 Chronicles 29:11.

(S) **POINT 4. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Daily review the last five memorised Bible verses once every day for 5 weeks.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.