

The Plan and Providence of God

Lesson #3

Memory Verse: Ephesians 1:11

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will

God has a sovereign plan which He freely decreed in eternity past according to His own will and good pleasure. This sovereign plan is actualized in real time through the active and passive providence of God. A proper understanding of the sovereign plan and providence of God is critical for believers to live godly lives that are secure, worry-free, and built upon a rock. Only when these truths are properly understood can believers have genuine hope, which is well founded and sure. Without an appreciation for these powerful, life-changing truths, the believer will be unable to live life to the glory of God.

I. God's Sovereign Plan

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "*The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.*" Because the all-knowing, all-powerful and immutable God definitively determined His eternal plan before the foundation of the world, we can confidently rest our hope that He will bring it to pass.

A. The sovereign plan of God is in accordance with His freely-made and self-determined purpose.

1. Who has contributed to the sovereign plan of God (Isaiah 40:13-14)? _____

B. The sovereign plan of God is consistent with His good pleasure.

1. According to Psalms 115:3 and 135:6, what does God do? _____

2. To what is God's good pleasure (or kind intention) linked in Ephesians 1:9? _____

C. The sovereign plan of God is all-inclusive, comprehensive, and universal.

1. Read Ephesians 1:11. What does God work together according to His plan? _____

2. According to Romans 8:28, how many purposes does God have? _____
3. How many things were made for God's purpose (Psalm 119:89-91; Proverbs 16:4)?

4. Each of the following passages reveals something that is predetermined according to the sovereign plan of God. List these predetermined areas of life below.
 - a. Acts 17:26 _____
 - b. Romans 13:1 _____
 - c. Job 14:5 _____
 - d. John 21:17-19 _____
 - e. Ephesians 2:10 _____
 - f. Luke 22:22 and Acts 4:27-28 _____
 - g. Lamentations 2:17, Amos 3:6 and Revelation 17:17 _____
 - h. Ephesians 1:5 _____

D. The sovereign plan of God is eternal and immutable.

1. How is the purpose of God described in Ephesians 3:11? _____
2. According to the purpose of God, when was His grace granted to believers in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9)? _____
3. How is God's plan regarding the death of His Son described in Acts 2:23? _____

4. Does the plan of the Lord ever expire (Psalm 33:10-11)? _____
5. What is said about the purpose and good pleasure of God in Isaiah 46:9-11? _____

E. The sovereign plan of God is unconditional and certain.

1. According to Romans 9:10-16, how much control does man have over the sovereign plan of God? _____
2. How did Isaiah and Job express the fact that God's plan is unalterable (Job 42:2; Isaiah 14:24-27)? _____

- F. The sovereign plan of God preserves human responsibility.
1. Re-read Luke 22:22. How is human responsibility expressed in this passage? _____

 2. How is human responsibility expressed in Acts 2:23? _____

- G. The sovereign plan of God is directed toward His glory.
1. According to what does God act (Isaiah 42:8, 48:11)? _____

 2. What is the goal of God's plan and purpose (Isaiah 63:14)? _____

- H. The sovereign plan of God results in the good of believers.
1. Re-read Romans 8:28. How does God's purpose impact His people? _____

 2. How did Paul view his troubles in light of God's plan (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)? _____

- I. The sovereign plan of God is unknown in its entirety but can be known in part.¹
1. Read Deuteronomy 29:29 and answer the following questions.
 - a. Can man know everything there is to know about God's plan? _____

 - b. Can man know some things about God's plan? _____
 2. For each of the following passages, explain the unknown aspect of God's will.
 - a. Daniel 3:16-18 _____
 - b. Acts 1:6-7 _____
 - c. James 4:13-15 _____

Providence is God's power in bringing the movement of the universe to its predetermined goal and design. It is the effecting or the outworking of His decrees...God controls the free acts of men, both predestining them and providentially bringing them to pass.²

¹ For more examples of known areas of God's will, please see lesson #5.

² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume One*, (Allen Park, MI.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 342, 343.

II. God's Providence

God guarantees that His sovereign plan, which was decreed before time began, will come to pass, because He providentially works in time to bring it to pass. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "*God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence... God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.*" It is a great comfort to know and trust that God's providence will ensure the fulfillment of His will and purpose. It helps believers to look at life with an eternal perspective and a lasting hope.

A. God directs people through providence.

1. How do the following proverbs describe the directive providence of God?
 - a. Proverbs 16:1, 9, 33 _____
 - b. Proverbs 19:21, 20:24 _____
 - c. Proverbs 21:1 _____
2. How did God direct the hearts of the Egyptians to bring about His purposes (Exodus 12:36)? _____

B. God protects people through providence.

1. What reason is given in Matthew 6:26 and 10:29-31 for believers not to fear? _____

2. According to Psalm 91:11, what is one way in which God protects His own? _____

C. God prevents human actions through providence.

1. What action did God prevent in Genesis 20:6? _____

2. Read Acts 16:6-10 and answer the following questions.
 - a. Why did Paul and Timothy not speak in Asia or Bithynia (vv.6-7)? _____

 - b. Why did they go to Macedonia (vv.9-10)? _____

D. God allows human actions through providence.

1. What types of human actions are described as having been allowed by God in Psalm 81:12 and Romans 1:24-28? _____

2. According to Psalm 76:10, why does God allow evil? _____

3. How does Acts 3:17-18 illustrate the fact that God allows human actions in order to fulfill His plan? _____
4. What type of action will God allow in the day of His power (Psalm 110:3)? _____

E. God controls circumstances through providence.

1. How is God’s providential control over nature and weather described in Jonah 1:4 and Job 37:9-13? _____

2. According to Philippians 1:12, what happened as a result of God’s providential control over Paul’s circumstances? _____

F. God’s providence determines history.

1. According to Daniel 4:35, Isaiah 10:13-17 and Psalms 124:1-3 and 127:1-2, Who ultimately determines the result of any effort and what role to men play? _____

2. According to Job 14:5, _____ is determined by God?
3. What has God done so that man would seek and find Him (Acts 17:26-27)? _____

4. To what degree was the death of Christ predetermined (John 7:30, 13:1, 17:1; Luke 22:21-22; Acts 2:23-24)? _____

III. Personal Application

- A. Hope is defined as “*confident expectancy...not wishful thinking, but a firm assurance about things that are unseen and still in the future*”.³ With this in mind, how can a deep knowledge of and hope in the sovereign plan of God enable believers to look forward with an eternal perspective, always rejoice “*in hope of the glory of God*” (Romans 5:2), and exhibit an attitude of perseverance and eager expectation (Romans 8:25)?

- B. How can a deep knowledge and trust in God’s providence give believers confidence and strength to live a victorious Christian life (c.f. Matthew 6:33-34; Psalm 16:8; Proverbs 16:3-4)? _____

³ R.F. Youngblood, F.F. Bruce, R.K. Harrison, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).