

Ephesians 1-11
The God who rules over all!

1. Scripture reading

a. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

2. Prayer

a. Please join me in prayer...

3. Introduction -

a. We live in strange and difficult times.

- i. Unemployment is the highest it has been in decades.
- ii. The stock market is very unstable.
- iii. Our country is racking up trillions of dollars in debt.
- iv. Many of you have been forced, against your will, to home school your children.
- v. We can't go out and see our friends.
- vi. We can't gather on the Lord's Day for worship.
- vii. Some of you are deeply concerned about contracting Coronavirus.
- viii. Others are deeply concerned about loved ones contracting coronavirus.
- ix. We all wonder, will things ever get back to normal?

b. In times of uncertainty and angst, what will calm our worried souls? The doctrine of providence!!!

c. This brings us to Ephesians 1:11...

- i. Ephesians 1:11 tells us very clearly that "God is working all things according to the counsel of his will."
- ii. This is an amazing statement....
- iii. Ephesians 1:11 contains one of the strongest statements on divine providence in the whole Bible.
- iv. This morning we are going to focus our attention very specifically on the doctrine of providence from Eph. 1:11. But before we do that, let me remind you of the context of this verse.

d. Context...

- i. Broader trinitarian context of verses 3-14.
 1. 3-6 the role of the Father
 2. 7-11 the role of the Son

3. 12-14 the role of the Spirit
4. Verse 11 is highlighting the work of the son, but in doing so, Paul brings up the role of the father again.

ii. Before we home in on providence, let me provide a brief overview of verse 11.

1. Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11 In him (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance (discussed in verses 4-5), having been predestined (also discussed in verses 4-5) according to the purpose of him (God the Father) who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

- e. This morning we are going to look at four aspects of providence from Ephesians 1:11.
 - i. Providence defined
 - ii. Providence demonstrated
 - iii. Providence defended
 - iv. Providence applied

1. Providence defined.

- a. What does this wonderful word mean?
- b. In simple terms the word providence means that God controls all things good and bad in his universe. We see this at the end of Ephesians 1:11.

c. Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

- i. The counsel of God refers to the plans that God made before the foundation of the world for every detail of history. Theologians refer to this as the decrees of God.
- ii. Mention meticulous providence.
- d. Does the rest of the Bible teach that God really control ALL things? Yes. This brings us to our next point....
- e. *First, providence defined...*

2. Providence demonstrated.

- a. The biblical evidence that God controls all things is overwhelming. I can't read all the relevant texts but let me read a few arranged by category.
- b. First category- God controls all things in nature

i. **Psa 147:8-9** ESV He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. (9) He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry.

1. He determines when it will rain, and he determines where the grass will grow, and he provides for the animals. Several places in the psalms teach us this.
2. Secondary causes - God uses the laws and processes of nature to accomplish his purposes.

- ii. He determines when it will Thunder- ps. 29
- iii. He controls Plagues - Joel 2:25
- iv. He makes the sun rise and the rain fall on the good and the evil- Matt 5:45
- v. God feeds and cares for the animals- Ps 104:21,28
- vi. Animals and plants- Matthew 10:29; Jonah 1:17; 2:10; 4:6

c. Second category- God controls world leaders and world history

i. **Job 12:23–25 (ESV) — 23** He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away. **24** He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a trackless waste. **25** They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.

ii. **Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) — 1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

iii. God controls the details and outcomes of war- Is 46:8ff

d. Third category- Satan and Demons

i. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

1. Paul does not say that God works most things, he says that God works all things, which includes all of Satan's actions...

ii. **Satan had to ask God to ruin Job's life (Job1-2)**

iii. **Satan had to ask God to sift Peter! (Luke 22:31)**

e. Fourth category- God controls all the details of your life

- i. God controls the blessings and hardships of our lives.
 - 1. Job 1:21-22 ESV And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (22) In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.
 - ii. God planned and controls all the days of your life
 - 1. Psa 139:16 ESV Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
 - iii. God controls who will be saved.
 - 1. Eph 1:3-5 ESV Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
 - iv. God controls birth and death and everything in between
 - 1. 1Sa 2:6-7 ESV The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. (7) The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.
 - 2. When it says the lord kills it means God controls the details of our death.
 - v. God controls the seemingly random details of your life
 - 1. Pro 16:33 ESV The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.
 - 2. Acts 1:23-26 (Casting lots to replace Judas) and Joshua 7:14-15
 - vi. God controls your decisions
 - 1. Pro 19:21 ESV Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. (20:24)
 - 2. **Proverbs 16:9 (ESV) — 9** The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.
- f. Fifth category – God controls the evil actions of men

- i. **Exodus 4:21 (ESV) — 21** And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.
 - ii. Joshua 11:19-20 The lord hardens more hearts
 - iii. Genesis 45:7-8, 50:20, Acts 4:27-28 below.
- g. Sixth category- (summary verses) God controls all things in the universe
- i. Psa 103:19 ESV The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.
 - ii. Heb 1:3 ESV He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
 - iii. Col 1:17 ESV And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
 - iv. **Romans 8:28 (ESV) — 28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
 - v. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
- h. Summary- the Bible teaches that God controls all things.
- i. **One author writes-** “Simply put, providence encompasses every aspect of the created order. From beginning to end, from heaven to earth, from animate to inanimate, from individuals to nations, from hours to ages, from weeds to wheat, from birth to death, from catastrophe to calm—everything is within the loving presence and involvement of the heavenly father.” (Elwell, Providence, EDT)
- i. If God controls anything, he must control everything.
 - i. Supposed to meet with a recruiter for a job interview... did not write it down. That could have changed the course of my life...
 - ii. The smallest decisions or actions change the course of world history. All history is held together by the thread of billions of tiny decisions and details.

- iii. How different would world history be if Hitler would have pursued his childhood passion of art instead of world conquest?
- iv. What if Mao contracted an incurable and deadly disease when he was 3 years old? The lives of 60 million would have been spared. But that was not God's plan...
- j. *You may be thinking- "If God controls all things, that raises some questions..." This brings us to our next point.*
- k. *So far, we have*
 - i. *Defined providence*
 - ii. *Demonstrated providence*
 - iii. *We will now...*

3. Defend providence

- a. This view, known as meticulous providence raises two primary questions...
- b. First question- If God controls all things, isn't God the author of evil? No!**
 - i. Let me make a few brief statements and then illustrate them from scripture.
 - ii. The Bible clearly teaches that God controls all things.
 - 1. Eph. 1:11
 - iii. The Bible clearly teaches that evil is the result of sin.
 - 1. In other words, there is evil in this world because people break God's laws.
 - 2. When the first humans broke God's laws all of creation was cursed, bringing about moral evil and natural evil.
 - iv. The Bible clearly teaches that God never does evil and can never be blamed for evil.
 - 1. Evil is always blamed on sinners.
 - 2. Sinners are always responsible for their sinful actions, not God.
 - v. The Bible clearly teaches that God uses secondary causes to accomplish his purposes.
 - 1. This means that His control of good and evil is asymmetrical.
 - a. God directly controls good
 - b. God indirectly controls evil, yet he still controls it.

2. More on this in a moment...
- vi. The Bible clearly teaches that God uses evil to accomplish His purposes.
 1. **Romans 8:28 (ESV) — 28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
 - vii. Let me illustrate these statements with scripture.
 1. Act 2:22-23 ESV "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- (23) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
 - a. God had a definite plan to have Jesus delivered up to lawless men in order to be killed. Who will get blamed on the Day of Judgment?
 2. Act 4:27-28 ESV (Peter talking to God) for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, (28) to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.
 - a. God raised up people to do whatever God had predestined to be done which was the murder of his son.
 - b. Who gets blamed for evil?
 - c. Who is in control?
 3. We see the exact same principals illustrated in Story of Joseph from Gen 45:4-5 and Gen. 50:19-20. God used the evil and jealous desires of Joseph's brothers to save Israel.
 - viii. **Dr. Grudem-** "...In all these passages it is very clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as *directly doing anything evil* but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures. Moreover, *Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure in evil* and Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do." (Grudem, 322)
 - ix. At this point, we must confess that our human brains can't comprehend how it is that God controls all things and yet he is not the author of evil.

1. But shouldn't we expect mystery in theology?
2. We have a pet lizard... he spends all day in his cage staring off into space. Imagine trying to explain the theory of general relativity, super string theory, or the innerworkings of my MacBook pro to my son's pet lizard.

c. *Question one- If God controls all things, isn't God the author of evil? No!*

d. Question two- If God controls all things, do we have free will?

i. That depends on how you define free will?

1. We have free will in the sense that we all act according to our strongest desires or inclinations.
 - a. Side note- Theologians call this the freedom of inclination and it is the opposite view of libertarian free will or power of contrary choice.
2. Furthermore, we have free will in the sense that we all make real choices that have real consequences.
 - a. We are not robots.
 - b. Plus, we will all be held accountable for our choices.
3. YET, God still controls every detail of our lives.
 - a. What did you have for breakfast this morning? You freely choose to have a Lucky Charms, but that choice was determined before the foundation of the world.
4. There is great mystery here...
 - a. God's sovereign control of all things is somehow compatible with our real choices.
 - b. Exactly how this works is not explained to us in scripture.
 - c. If we deny God's control of all things, we step outside of the bounds of scripture
 - d. Yet, if we deny that humans make real and willing choices we step outside of the bounds of scripture.
 - e. We must submit ourselves to scripture and embrace mystery, while finding great comfort in God's tremendous power!!!

5. This all seems so esoteric.... How is it going to help me this week?

ii. Transition- we have

1. *Defined providence*
2. *Demonstrated providence*
3. *Defended providence*

4. Apply providence-

a. Providence is one of the most practical doctrines in all of scripture. How???

b. Providence will help us survive trials

i. Currently we are all in a trial.

1. Unemployment
2. Uncertainty
3. Health concerns...
4. Financial concerns...

ii. We experience other trials

1. Miscarriages
2. Difficult children
3. Aging parents
4. Trials at work
5. Trials in your relationships
6. Health trials
7. Financial trials

iii. How does providence help us survive trials? The doctrine of providence reminds us that God is in control of the details of our lives...

1. He has a plan
2. He is working his plan
3. Because he is in control, He will work all things for the good of his children.

4. How can we be sure that God will work evil for good? The cross... God took the greatest act of evil and turned it into the greatest act of good!!!

iv. Providence will help us survive trials...

c. Providence will help us stop worrying

- i. What do you worry about?
 - 1. Your health
 - 2. Getting married
 - 3. Finishing school
 - 4. Pleasing your parents
 - 5. Finding a job
 - 6. Keeping your job.
 - 7. Getting back to work?
 - 8. Having enough money to stay in school, pay rent, and eat.
 - 9. Pleasing your boss?
- ii. If we truly believe that God is good and in control of our future, and God is good, we of all people should be the least worried.
- iii. When we worry, we are saying something about the God we worship.
 - 1. We are either saying he is not in control or he is not good. Both of these misconceptions must be repented of.
- iv. *Providence will help us survive trials*
- v. *Providence will help us stop worrying*

d. Providence will help us stop complaining

- i. Complaining seems like a little sin.
- ii. We complain about
 - 1. Not being able to see our friends.
 - 2. Our governor...
 - 3. Not being able to go to our favorite restaurants.
 - 4. Having to home school our kids.
 - 5. Having to work from home.
 - 6. Etc...
- iii. If God is in control and working all things for our good, we should never ever complain about anything. Ever!
- iv. *One of my professors used to say, "A Complaining Calvinist is an oxymoron."*
- v. Similar to worry, our complaining also says something about the God we worship.
 - 1. We are saying that he is not good in what he has dealt us.
 - 2. Or we are saying that he is not in control of our lives.
 - 3. Again, both notions must be repented of.

5. I have-

- a. *Defined providence*
- b. *Proved providence*
- c. *Questioned providence*
- d. *Applied providence*

6. *Conclusion*

- a. The famous hymn writer William Cowper (cooper) lived in the 18th century. He suffered from severe manic depression. It got so bad that he ended up inside an insane asylum. Eventually he was released, but he spent the rest of his life battling depression. It got so bad that he tried to kill himself several times. Not only did he suffer from severe depression, he also suffered from a broken heart. He was never able to marry the women he loved.
- b. William Cowper's suffering brought him in close contact with the doctrine of providence. One of his best loved hymns is a beautiful treatment of providence. Let me read you a few verses in closing.
 - i. *God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm.*
 - ii. *Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head.*
 - iii. *Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*
 - iv. *His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flow'r.*
- c. William Cowper persevered by clinging to the doctrine of providence. You can too!!!
- d. Lets pray...