

# Record of Sermons delivered during the month of May 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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*Delivered Sunday 1 May 2016*

*Back to Basics:*  
**God: What Is God Like?**

(from last week)

We looked at what God is Himself. (Refer to catechism #7 – printed on 27<sup>th</sup> March order of Service and WCF 2:1 printed on last week's order of Service)

But it's not enough to say, "Well God is everywhere. God is eternal. God knows all things. God does whatever He wants." We've got another question to ask: "What is God like?" "This everlasting God, what sort of God is He?"

This God who is a Spirit, what is He like? And the Bible tells us!

He is '**Holy**'! We read last month: God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

Now in God's presence are wonderful creatures, who have never sinned, and yet there's more about God, which is so splendid that these very creatures, which have never sinned can't even look on God because He is Holy. The word Holy means to be cut-off. And God is cut-off from all His creatures (in Heaven and on Earth). He's completely different and separate from all His creatures, because He is entirely pure. And yet we can never really understand what that means. We just have to accept what the Scripture says and say, with Moses: (Exodus 15:11)

*<sup>11</sup>Who among the gods  
is like you, Lord?  
Who is like you –  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders?*

And with the prophet Habakkuk (1:13a)

*<sup>13</sup>Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;  
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.*

Isn't that a wonderful truth? Can you imagine what it would be like if God who exists from eternity to eternity, who is in all places at all times, who knows all things and can do whatever He likes ... Wouldn't it be a terrible message we would have to preach, if we had to tell you that God is wicked or tyrannical or selfish! But thank God I don't have to tell you that. He's holy. Everything about Him is pure and right. Which leads us to the next word:

He is '**righteous**'. We read in Psalm 145:17

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and faithful in all he does.*

God can't do anything wrong. He can't think a wrong thought. He can't speak a wrong word. He can't do a wrong act. Absolutely everything that God does is right. And when we read the Bible we breathe a great sigh of relief. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this great, infinite, eternal God did even one thing wrong. But that's a fear we never have to nurse. The Lord is righteous in all His ways. He can never be blamed for anything.

He is '**loving**'. We read over and over again that Christ is Risen. (see banner) This is the ultimate demonstration of God's love. (the banner also shows "God is Love" but in Welsh) By the way our Bible doesn't say love is God. (except when Welsh grammar is involved)

If you don't know God you really don't know what love really is! God then is the model for love. We read in Exodus 34:6.

*<sup>6</sup>And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,*

Joel 2:13 adds to the description, 'possessing great kindness'.

The justice of God and the holiness of God say: the sinner must die. The love of God says: the sinner must be saved. Justice punishes Jesus Christ in my place and love sends Jesus Christ to die in my place. Thus justice and love aren't opposites, because they are both found in God and the whole gospel is summed up. God is love. Why do some stay away from Him? ...

God is '**good**'.

*The Lord is good to all, we read earlier in Psalm 145 (verse 9). Isn't that marvellous. You are good, and what you do is good, David said in Psalm 119:68. [Aside: Note the humanising of the Jewish mantra. "We should, be good and do good"!]*

Many men and women consider God to be their enemy! They would rather have God out of their lives. YET their hearts still beat; their lungs still breathe; their minds still think. He gives them rain and sunshine and fruitful seasons to enjoy and sometimes even gladness of heart. He sends into their world: laughter and joy and love and children. He's actively good to them. The harvest still ripens to them. The bread is still made and they still eat it. But the greatest truth of the goodness of God is that He loves to forgive His enemies and does so when they come asking Him for mercy. The Bible says: Psalm 86:5.

*You, Lord, are forgiving and good,  
abounding in love to all who call to you.*

The last word on this part of the list is '**wise**':

*'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;  
wisdom and power are his.*

Said Daniel 2:20. Look at the intricacy of the Creation. The fine balance. The tiniest creature. The smallest molecule. The atom itself. DNA. It's all the handiwork of God. How wise He is to have created it. Even to the very existence of all knowledge and the very fact that there is such a thing as 'understanding' (his invention) and that He has allowed us to share some of it.

But more than this! How He has planned a way to save rebels and sinners. Ungrateful and spiteful people. He did it all through the blood of a cross. How we must admire the wisdom of God. (Romans 11:33-36)

<sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgements,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!*

<sup>34</sup> *'Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counsellor?'*

<sup>35</sup> *'Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?'*

<sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory for ever! Amen.*

This benediction from the end of Romans chapter 11 sums up God's wisdom and leads us to the last sentence on the sheet.

God is '**incomprehensible**':

As we read the Bible, what the Bible says, is clear enough. One can tell you and you can find out for yourself, what the Bible says. Questions which begin, 'what' we can answer. What is God like? What sort of a God is He? What is He in Himself? Can be answered because God has given the answers.

Questions which begin 'how', none of us can answer. How is it that God can be in all places at all times in the wholeness of His being. We can't answer that. How is it that God can know all things as they really are all the time without learning them. How is it that He can be just and also love, righteous and good? How? ... And we shall start to consider next week: How is it that He can be three and yet one? We can't answer any of these questions, because we are just ordinary creatures (we're created). Our minds are very limited – that's why human centred philosophy can never get the right answers. – In addition we are 'fallen' sinful creatures with darkened minds, poorer than when God first created mankind. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

<sup>8</sup>*'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,'  
declares the Lord.*

<sup>9</sup>*'As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

There are no questions beginning 'how' that we can answer, because we are not God.

All we can do is bow before Him. Acknowledge the mystery and admit that He IS God and we are His creatures.

*For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.  
(Psalm 48:14)*

[1312]

**“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”**

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***Delivered Sunday 8 May 2016***

*Back to Basics:*  
**The Trinity (Part 1)**

Many claim to have been saved. Many say, at a certain point in their lives, that they have become a Christian. But sadly we find that after some time, maybe even a long time, they drift away.

We know from our own observation of the world around us that when buildings are built on poor or no foundation they don't last. Jesus used this to describe the need for good foundations in the life of a real Christian.

This series on the basics of the Christian faith is the necessary foundation.

In previous weeks we have been studying what we know of God:

How the Christian knows, by experience, that God exists;  
What God is like in Himself; and  
What sort of God He is.

Now the greatest mystery of all! And, as we will see, (mainly next week) the most important foundation on which our Christian life (eternal life) is built. The Trinity.

But we must be very careful. Only God understands God. This must be our starting point. Anything we have to say is not because clever men have discovered it. It's not because the 'how' of everything we have to say can be explained. It's because God has spoken! He has revealed Himself and we know these things to be true from His Holy word.

Straight away then:

There is only ONE God. And God is ONE.

A group of Elders were interviewing a small boy, asking him what he knew about the

Scriptures. After a number of questions which he answered they asked, "How many God's are there?"

"Well", said the boy, "There is only one!"

"How do you know that?" an Elder continued.

"Because there is only room for one, It says in Jeremiah 23:24 *'I fill heaven and earth'*.

There is no truth more basic and 'foundational' to the Christian than that!

There is only one true, living God.

Every Jewish child from his very earliest years, learns to repeat Deuteronomy 6:4 *'The Lord our God is one Lord ...'* There IS only one.

They also know Deuteronomy 4:35 *'I am the Lord and beside me is no other'*.

But Deuteronomy 6:4 can also be translated, in English as, *'The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'*

This means that it's not enough to say, 'there is only one God' we also need to say, 'God is ONE'.

God is infinite and eternal and unchangeable. He's all knowing; ever-present; all powerful. But you can't just put all these things together and get God. God isn't like a jigsaw puzzle, made of pieces. You can't take away, for instance, God's Holiness and leave most of God behind. If you were to take away the Holiness of God you would destroy God. Similarly with power. ...

All of God is all of the many attributes without exception.

There is only one God and in all things God is One.

So far so good.

Now to the second point on today's sheet.

What a mystery! There is more than One who is God. Note It didn't say, "There is more than One God!" It says, "That there is more than one who IS God.

Here is a first lesson in Hebrew:

Gen 1:1 In English: *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'*

In Hebrew: *Bereisheet* – In the beginning (easy so far!); *bara* – (he) created (this is the verb in the sentence. It is the singular form of the verb – there is another plural form of this verb which is not used here. We put the 'he' with the verb to show that it is singular. However while we put nouns (or pronouns) in front of verbs in English, In Hebrew the noun comes after the verb and tells us who the 'he' is that 'created'. This is *elohim* which is the masculine and plural form of one of the names for God and literally says 'gods'. There are many (plural) who created but are described as he (singular).

A mystery! And this is only the first verse of God's word!

Immediately in the very first verse we find that although God is singular God is also plural. There is no other book in the world which teaches that.

Still in chapter 1, verse 26. *Then God said, "let us make man in our image according to our likeness ...".* And in the next verse: *So God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* Strange? When God is speaking He uses "us" and "our" but immediately after, this is described as: *He created man in His own image.*

God is shown as plural and singular.

Again in Genesis 3:12 *The Lord God said (singular), behold the man has become like one of us (plural).*

And so on. We recall Isaiah 6:8 *Whom shall I send and who will go for us?*

Our first reading, was Moses and the burning bush.

Moses approaches this unusual occurrence. The Bible says that the 'angel of the Lord' was in the bush. Angel means someone who is sent by God. A sent-person or the sent one. God's sent one was in the bush. But as Moses gets near, the Bible says God spoke to him out of the bush, saying, "Take the sandals off your feet, because the place on which you are standing is Holy ground. I am the God ..." What mystery! There is someone who is sent by God who is then revealed to be God Himself. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The 'angel of the Lord', the sent one, who is generally understood to be the pre-incarnate Christ, is God.

So there is found, in the Old Testament, that there is more than one who is God. But how many? Still in the OT there are early clues:

When the High Priest blesses Israel he uses:

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face to shine upon you;

The Lord be gracious unto you. The Lord 3 times not 2 and not 4!

When Isaiah is in the Temple he hears the cry of the Seraphim. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.

So the Old Testament opens the case that while God is one and also more than one there are hints that God is three. However when we come to the New Testament, what was unclear on the Old – seen dimly we might say – becomes fully clear.

Jesus tells us to pray to God. He says, 'when you pray, pray "Our Father .. "' and throughout the New Testament there is a person called God the Father, but that person is not Jesus, because Jesus tells us to pray to Him. So the Father is God but so is the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider (among many other references) 1 John 5:20 where the subject is Jesus Christ and God's word describes Him as "This is the true God and eternal life".

Yet some may say, "Yes, of course, but when He became man didn't that some how reduce or compromise His Deity, making Him then less than the Father? The New Testament reply: Colossians 2:9. *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in*

*bodily form*. When Paul wrote those words, he understood a particular meaning for the Greek word which is translated 'fullness'. He was brought up in a port and was familiar with nautical word usage. When an empty ship was being filled with its complete crew from Captain to cabin boy, as it were, the word used is this word 'fullness'. A complete crew in every way! This is how Paul talks about the God-head of Jesus Christ. Everything you can say about God; all that it is to be God; all it means to be God: Jesus Christ is!

What about the Holy Spirit. Isn't He lesser than the Father or the Son?

No, no, no.

The notes remind us that the Holy Spirit is also a Divine Person. How could the Apostles (who we remember, wrote the New Testament) have said in Acts 15:28. *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ...*, if the Holy Spirit wasn't a person, merely a force or a wind could they have said this?. He IS a person!

How could we Baptise, as Jesus commands, in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit if the first two were Persons and the third wasn't?

The Holy Spirit IS God, which is why Peter says to Ananias, *'how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied just to human beings but to God.'* (from Acts 5:3-5)

Further Jesus says: (Matthew 12:31) *'And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.'* Continuing proof that the Holy Spirit is God!

So, God is ONE and God is Three:

The Father is God, and He is all of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, is God and He is all of God.

The Holy Spirit is God and He is all of God.

And so there is only one true and living God!

We continue with the notes.

If we are to get our 'foundation' right there are a few more things we MUST accept:

The Father is not the Son. Which is why Jesus tells us to pray to the Father.

The Son is not the Holy Spirit. Which is why Jesus said He would send the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not the Father. Which is why Jesus said that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father.

In John 12:28 the Father says "I"; In John 17:4 Jesus says "I"; and in Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit says "I", but they don't say "We". This is the mystery that is the Trinity. One God, three who are God, but the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. [diagram]

In fact they are distinguished from each other because there are things you can say about the Father you can't say about the Holy Spirit. And there are things about the

Holy Spirit you can't say about the Son.

About the Father you can say: He wasn't begotten and He does not proceed.

Of the Lord Jesus Christ you can say He was begotten. In other words, He could not be what He is without the Father, although He has existed as long as God the Father has. But He does not proceed.

Of the Holy Spirit you can say: He proceeds from the Father and the Son. In other words, He is God at work. He would not be what He is without the Son and the Father.

So you can say certain things about each one that you can't say about the others. They are distinct persons and each one is the whole of God!

The Trinity, the greatest mystery of all. There is no mystery greater than this one.

Yet this is foundational to being a true Christian.

[1909]

**“May this foundation be so for all the saints gathered here today”**

*[next week we will complete the rest of the notes.]*

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***Back to Basics:  
The Trinity (Part 2)***

(Summary of last week)

Consider now a few sentences which are a little more difficult:

There's a quotation from the Westminster Confession of Faith. WCF 2:3 (review it from last week's exposition)

Now consider this sentence: In the relations of the The Three Persons within the God-head, THERE IS PRIORITY, BUT NOT SUPERIORITY. [A phrase suggested by Thomas Watson and Jonathan Edwards.]

In the Bible the Father is First, the Son second and the Holy Spirit third. But they are equal [each being ALL of God!].

Equally God. Equally powerful. Equally Holy. Equally glorious. But in the way that the God-head operates – within the mystery of the God-head, the Father is first, the Son second and the Holy Spirit is third.

There is neither senior nor junior and yet there is order. [For those who like long words: that is the Ontological Trinity! [The [Trinity](#) is the Christian teaching that God consists of three simultaneous, eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons is equal in their attributes and [nature](#) but differ in [how they relate to the world and to each other](#). When we say they are equal in nature and attributes, we are speaking of what is called the Ontological Trinity (ontology--study of being and essence). Each of the three persons in the Godhead are [divine](#)--have equal attributes (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, holiness, etc.). When we speak of how they relate to each other and the world, we are speaking of the Economic Trinity (economic--from the Greek oikonomikos, which means relating to arrangement of activities). To be overly simplistic, we could say that the Ontological Trinity deals with what God is, and the Economic Trinity deals with what God does.]

What God is inside Himself is reflected in the way God works. These relations are reflected in the way God acts:

- **When God makes the world:**

God the Father is the Creator and yet we can say about Jesus, “But without Him was not anything made that was made”. And yet we also know that none of these things came to pass without the Holy Spirit!

God the Father makes the world, **by** God the Son, who does what He does **through** the Holy Spirit.

So it's Father first; Son second, Spirit third, and yet they continue to be equal in power and glory. They are exactly God in exactly the same way. There being no senior nor junior. No superiority nor inferiority. But there is **order**.

- **Now if you're a Christian:**

It's because God the Father gave you to God the Son before the world was made; God the Son died for you 2000 years ago; and the Holy Spirit called you to faith more recently. In this there is perfect harmony. It was the Father's **decree**; the Son's **death** and the Holy Spirit's **calling** which made you a Christian.

And so you may say:

“The Holy Spirit is my Saviour”, because you wouldn't have been saved without Him.

“Jesus is my Saviour”, because you wouldn't have been saved without Him.

“God the Father is my Saviour”, because you wouldn't have been saved without Him.

And over all, you can say of the glorious Trinity:  
GOD IS MY SAVIOUR.

This is the mighty Trinity. We must never try to explain it. How can anything created – perfectly explain their creator? How could any one explain God with a picture? How can any picture or analogy explain the invisible and eternal God. **We should never even try!**

People have always tried, throughout history, and they have always ended up saying more than the Bible says; less than the Bible says or other (something else) from what the Bible says.

So we should never try!

[*homoioúsios* similar; *homoousios* It was by Athanasius and the Nicene Synod that the Son was taken to have **exactly the same nature or essence** with the Father, and at the Nicene Creed the Son was declared to be as immutable as his Father is. Note only an iota different!!!!]

We need to be careful else we fall into error.

Knocking on your door may come the Mormons. They believe that there are many Gods. That it is not true that there is one living and true God.

So people believe in tritheism: That the Father is a God; the Son is a God and the Holy Spirit is a God. All separate Gods!

Some people believe (a version of Monarchianism) that the Father is senior, the Son is Junior and the Holy Spirit is in the lowest rank of all.

Some people (many otherwise very sincere and conscientious persons) believe (or imply by their examples and illustrations) in modalism: That God sometimes shows Himself as the Father and then separately shows Himself as the Son and sometimes He shows Himself as the Holy Spirit. But from the New Testament Reading you can see that this is impossible because there you see the three glorious Persons of the Trinity showing themselves at the same time.

- You have God the Father speaking from heaven at Jesus' baptism;
- You have Jesus being baptised; and
- You have the Holy Spirit coming on Him 'like a dove' all at the same time.

Also, as we have already seen, there are things you can say about the Father, you can't say about the Son. Things that you can say about the Son that you can't say about the Holy Spirit, and things that you can say about the Holy Spirit that you can't say about the Father.

This is our God and all we can do is say that the mystery (as it should) completely baffles us. It is a glorious mystery and we will bow down before God and worship Him.

Finally,

This discussion is not just abstract truth. This is not something just to make our head ache. This is not something to stimulate thought for those who like thinking deep thoughts.

This is something that effects your very life. Jesus said: "This is eternal life". John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

In other words you can't be saved without knowing God. And the only God there is to know is the God who is the Holy Trinity. Nobody is a Christian who doesn't believe in the Trinity. The proof of that is Christian Baptism.

When we are baptised (and every Christian should be) allegiance to God is being confessed. And so we are baptised in the Name (singular) of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. One Name but THREE who are named. Three who are named, each one who is distinct from the other, but only ONE Name. So when you are baptised allegiance is being expressed to a Trinitarian God. Nobody is saved without the doctrine of the Trinity. If you refuse this teaching you are refusing Salvation because there is no other God to save you.

It doesn't mean that you must understand all the intricacies. But it does mean that it is a truth, that is to be believed.

It's a truth to love!

The Father loved me;  
the Son bled and died for me; and  
the Holy spirit lives in my heart and loves me.

It's the truth of love!

The Father sent the Son because He loves sinners (but not their sin);  
The Son – His righteousness has been put to my account, and my sin has been put to His account; and  
The Holy Spirit brought me to **realise all this and gave me faith**, so that I might profit from it all.

The Father is my Heavenly Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ, by my being graciously adopted, is in some ways like my elder brother, and

The Holy Spirit assures me in my heart of hearts, that I belong to God as His adopted child.

It truly is a truth – to love! And we who are Christians we do love it. It's a truth to live by in every sense.

The only God you may come to is this God. Even now, come to the Father through Jesus Christ, which you will be able to do because the Holy Spirit may be touching your heart, making you ashamed of your sin and giving you a desire to know God and to receive from Him everlasting life.

Perhaps we seek to pray to God. Not knowing what to say. God comes to meet with us none the less, because of His patience and kindness. As we pray, we pray to the Father, through what the Son has done, relying on the Holy Spirit to help us with our prayer. Even when we haven't got the words to say. Just groans in our hearts – groans generated by the Holy Spirit within us. These groans are taken by that very Spirit, presented by the Lord Jesus Christ and as a consequence heard and accepted by God the Father.

How wonderful is this process of prayer. In it we see most gloriously the doctrine of the Trinity.

But remember, where did we learn this glorious truth? We learnt it from a book:

- A God given book.
- A Christ centred book.
- A Holy Spirit inspired book.

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :  
World without end. Amen." [Trinitarian doxology used since the Nicene Conference]

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the principal foundation – that solid rock – of everything that we love, believe and experience.

[1562]

**“May this foundation be so for all the saints gathered here today”**

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*Back to Basics:*  
**Sovereignty of God (Part 1)**

(Summary of last week's): There is ONE God who is ONE, but He is 3 distinct Persons. Each being 'ALL of God'.

ALL of God is what God is: Ontological Trinity. Each Person Is the same essence. Thus the 3 Persons have the same Nature BUT differ in how they react to the world and each other: different arrangement of activities – Economic Trinity.

One of these terms describes what God is, then other what God does. In this there is priority (order) but not superiority.

Here is THE question!

Is God in control of everything?

After all we have said about God in the past weeks – how could He not: and still be that God?

Think about your own life:

Sicknesses you've had; people you've met. Even just the things that have happened to you, so far just this weekend.

Is God in control of EVERYTHING?

I also invite you to think about what you know about history and what you now see and hear on TV and read in the paper.

Is God in control of EVERYTHING?

Where should Christians look for answers? To this and all other questions.

The Bible and we will first of all look at 3 texts:

1 Tim 6:15 Paul refers to Jesus Christ appearing on the last day, and goes on to say, *“<sup>15</sup> which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ...”* (NIV)

The NKJV is even stronger where for “the blessed and only ruler” it uses “the blessed and only potentate”.

When we say something is potent we mean that it is powerful. When we say that somebody is a potentate we mean that he is powerful. The verse says that God is the blessed and ONLY potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In fact in God's creation, no earthly king has actual authority. There have been kings, they have lived and died and are no more. There are dictators: they live and die and go. There are people whom may rule over you, Kings or Queens, Prime Ministers, Presidents, but they don't rule over everything about you. Never rule over your thoughts.

The Bible maintains there is but one potentate. There are kings, but He's the King of them. There are lords but He's the Lord of them. In the ultimate there is finally only one who rules in all things and that is God Himself!

Only God truly rules.

The second text is Psalm 103:19

*The Lord has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.*

Could it be more plain than this. His Kingdom rules over all! There is absolutely nothing that God doesn't rule over. If there were one thing, whatever it might be in the universe, which is outside the rule of God, He would not be God of that thing. Yet He is the Creator (thus God) of everything (created out of nothing). There is nothing left out!

So absolutely everything, without exception – atoms; the largest nation; the most momentous events – everything. His Kingdom rules over ALL.

Our third text is Ephesians 1:11 earlier in the chapter, Paul talks about Christ, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him. And continues...

... the purpose of Him who works ALL things according to the counsel of His own will. (NKJV) ALL THINGS!

So in answering our initial question the first statement on the sheet contains: God controls all things everywhere all the time.

And thus our lesson today is: The Sovereignty of God. Whatever you can think of, whatever you may ever hear about, God controls all.

There are then on the sheet eight consequences which follow: if God controls ALL things; if He's the ONLY potentate; if His Kingdom rules over all.

It follows that He controls NATURE.

There are no actual Laws of Nature. Natural Laws of Physics one might say. Some people think that the universe is like a clock. God winds it up and then He walks away and it ticks on, all on its own. It isn't like that at all. If you consider this idea of God's clock to be true to the Bible: there would be no motor, no spring, inside it. God

(as it were) turns the hands himself.

There are no laws of nature. Not one!

Of course God usually acts in the same way (as He moves the hands) all the time. Therefore because He nearly always acts in the same way all the time people can say that when something falls, it falls with the same acceleration. And when light travels it travels at a certain speed. And they think that they are defining Laws. In fact, all they are doing is observing God in action.

Sometimes, of course, God acts differently and everybody says, "Oh, it's a miracle!" It isn't a miracle, it's an extra-ordinary act of God's (normal) Providence. It only means that God is still controlling all, as He always does but this time differently from the more usual. Though they may say the Laws of Nature have been broken. They have not been broken, there weren't any Laws to break! Just God acting differently.

[Please add to your sheet after "It follows that He controls Nature" Ps 147: before 15-18]

We read this. As an illustration of God verses the so called Laws of Nature.

*<sup>15</sup> He sends his command to the earth;  
his word runs swiftly.*

*<sup>16</sup> He spreads the snow like wool*

Now the scientist, who rightly is an observer of God's actions may say, "Snow falls when this or that circumstance occurs" Fine! But it is still, and only, God's word that forms the snow by a direct word (command).

*and scatters the frost like ashes.*

*<sup>17</sup> He hurls down hail like pebbles.*

*Who can withstand his icy blast?*

*<sup>18</sup> He sends his word and melts them;*

*he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.*

There's the frost and there's the hail, (and in other Psalms lightning), there's the ice, the blowing wind and God is commanding it all. All because of His word.

As we recognise God in all of these actions we find Nature is very exciting. Not just a mechanical watch inexorably running, running, running **down**. Mechanical and predictable.

We look out into our world and see that this is God in **action** (not only in creation).

Now as we continue, it further follows that if God controls all things and also Nature, then He controls all creatures.

Here's Jonah. He's running away from God! God sends a great wind. (God controlling Nature) The sailors throw Jonah into the sea, but God has prepared a great fish (God controls creatures).

Later on there is a great heat which the Lord sends and a plant for shade grows because the Lord commands (God controls ...). And now there's a little worm which bites away at the plant that grew in a day and then dies in a night. (God controls His creatures)

Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin and not one of them may fall to the ground without the will of your Father" Even a small bird, if it should fall, it is God who controls even such an event. God controls even this.

Now it follows from our sentences so far that God controls men.

There are some brothers and they are jealous of their younger brother. They put Him into an empty water hole (cistern). He would have died had he stayed there, but they change their mind and sell him into slavery in Egypt. You know the story of Joseph. How he goes to Potiphar's house; ends up in prison; meets Pharaoh's butler and baker; and eventually becomes Pharaoh's 2IC. Second most powerful man in the whole world.

Eventually he's the one who stores up grain for the 7 years of famine and when the famine comes he releases the grain. Who is saved by this food? His own brothers.

After their father has died, the brothers are afraid that Joseph will get revenge. This is what Gen 50:20 says, <sup>20</sup> *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

They were wicked and spiteful. God doesn't do 'wicked' and 'spite'! Yet God is so sovereign and wonderfully King that He is even in perfect control, when wicked men do their worst. And He actually brings to pass all these events to save His own people. Their wickedness in selling Joseph into Egypt was actually the means by which God saved them from certain death themselves.

God controls men. Even wicked men. That's why a Christian when He watches TV or opens a newspaper can't accept it like a non-Christian. It can't be done. You can't do anything like a non-Christian. Since when we see what wicked men are doing in the world, we know, none the less, that God's plan is still coming to pass. Nothing is holding it up, or even delaying it. God is perfectly in control.

If God controls men, of course it follows, that God controls their destiny. The supreme proof that God controls man's destiny is the cross.

What is the worst crime that's even been committed?

What is the most wicked event that has ever happened in the history of the world?

It's that wicked men, took the Son of God who was without sin and without any form of

guilt, treated Him like a common criminal and nailed Him to a cross. Spitting and cursing and jeering! And yet, even that had been planned by God before the foundation of the world. And that's why Peter was able to say, *"and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* having earlier said, *This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge;* ,

What more needs to be said?

God is perfectly in control, even when wicked men are doing their worst.

Well if God controls men He even controls the destiny of each person.

The Bible says: (Rom 9:18) *God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

(We read the more complete account earlier.)

If you're a saved person, it's because God saved you. (As we'll see next week, if you're an unsaved person it's your own fault, but this doesn't change the fact that God hardens you.)

People are entirely in the hands of God. God is Sovereign. God is King.

Now it also follows that He controls Nations.

Assyria comes down from the north of Palestine and takes 10 tribes back to Assyria and nobody knows where they are today.

Babylon then comes over the desert, a little while later, and grabs the two remaining tribes in the south and takes them off into exile in Babylon and it looks like one day soon they'll disappear too! Then a man who never came to really know God, Cyrus, king of Persia having just conquered Babylon, makes a decree: (Ezra 1:1) The Lord told him to send the Jews – anyone who wants to go back to Jerusalem – to go back to their country to rebuild their Temple and Nation. They go back. The Jews remain the Jews, and the Messiah is at last born of the Jews. Jesus Christ our Lord! God's plan is certainly fulfilled.

Assyria has been described as God's rod. He uses Assyria, this great and cruel nation to punish those 10 tribes and then God uses Babylon to purify Judah and then sends Cyrus to send Judah back to Palestine making sure that the ancestors of Jesus Christ lived through the terrible predicament. At last Jesus Christ was able to be born from David's line, just as the Old Testament had said.

What a wonderful truth of the Sovereignty of God.

God is in control of all circumstances.

The Bible takes hold of that immense truth, wraps it up as a great present and gives it to you as a Christian. It's a wonderful truth.

God is in control of everything and therefore the Apostle Paul stands up before the

Christian Church, then as now, and says: (Rom 8:28-30)

*<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

[2061]

**“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”**

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***Delivered Sunday 29 May 2016***

***Back to Basics:  
Sovereignty of God (Part 2 – Man's responsibility)***

(Summary of last week and continue with the eight sentences)

Is there a calamity in a city, says the Bible, and I have not done it?  
Think of that! That's why we had another long OT reading this morning.

Here is an ungodly king and a reasonably godly king. They get together to make war on a nation over there. But the reasonably godly king says that he wants to know what God thinks of it before he decides. All sorts of false prophets come and say, “You'll win”, but along comes the true prophet of God and he says, “You'll die!” to the ungodly king, “and if you don't, it will be because the Lord hasn't spoken by me.”

Well the wicked king goes into battle in disguise. Whereas the reasonable godly king remains dressed as a king. The enemy however has received an instruction to only kill the king of Israel and when they reach the obvious king they recognise that he is not the king of Israel. So they don't kill him.

Is the prophesy going to be fulfilled?

Is God in control of this horrible battle field or isn't he?

There just happens to be over here, in the enemy camp a man who does what many have done in history. He fires an arrow into the air in the general direction of the battle. He hopes it might hit an enemy. Up goes the arrow. Is God in control?

If you're wearing armour (as the disguised king of Israel is) what are the chances that an arrow could pierce your body? Not great. Except that to be able to move, the armour must have joints with overlapping plates. With certain movements small

openings appear briefly here and there.

The arrow hadn't been aimed at anyone in particular. But it hits a particular man, the king of Israel, and in one of those brief openings. Mortally wounding the king. He is taken from the centre of the battle and eventually dies. The prophecy (against all human odds) is true!

The trajectory of the arrow and the random movement of the plates of armour all under the control of God. In God's hands.

Every circumstance is in the hands of God.

God IS in control and as we quoted last week, Paul is confident to exclaim, "We know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

God loves believers. He loves true Christians. He loves people who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He loves them and because He's in control of every detail, he makes every detail work together (in His marvellous divine plan). For your good, if you're one of those who love God and have been called by the Holy Spirit (after hearing the message of the gospel).

Do you really believe that?

When things go wrong and there are tears in your eyes. When that thing has happened to you that you thought only happens to others. Do you believe it all works together for your good?

When your heart is bleeding through disappointment and you don't know how anyone can help you; or advise you; or even understand you. Do you believe that is working together for your good?

Poor non-Christians! Where do they turn.

But Christians can know. Even at the moment when our faith is severely tried to the point when we can't believe, for a while. Even at that moment it IS still true, because God cannot deny Himself. He is faithful, even when we are faithless.

All things work together for good. All of them! This the promise of the Word of God.

Now, the last of the eight sentences from last week:

It follows that He controls even Satan.

What about Satan? Can't he throw a spanner in the works?  
God controls even Satan!

Reading the book of Job we find Satan can't even move, without permission from God.

“Hah! He's only serving you because of what he gets out of you.”

“Alright”, says God, “try him, but you can't have permission to touch his body.” So Job loses his possessions and even his family, but nothing touches his body.

“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away,” says Job, “blessed be the Name of the Lord.”

Behind “secondary causes” – even those done by the Devil – lies the hand of God. The Lord gave and the Lord takes away!

“But,” says the Devil, “Job still says what he does, because of impure motives – self importance.”

“You put him to the test,” says God, “touch his body if you like but you can't take away his life.”

Now Job is ill and covered in sores. Thoroughly miserable.

“Why don't you curse God and die”, says his wife.

“Shall we receive good from the hand of God,” he replies, “and shall we also receive adversity?”

Once again, behind the secondary causes – devil caused sickness and sorrow – he could see the hand of God.

Hudson Taylor, that great missionary to China in the nineteenth Century, believed that the only thing that kept him sane, was that he refused to believe in secondary causes. “No secondary causes”, he said.

You see the devil acts upon a man, but the Devil is controlled, so why even consider the Devil. Look only at the hand that controls him.

Evil is a terrible thing and sickness is an awful thing. So is bereavement and pain and disaster. We can't describe what they do to us. But why fix our attention on these? Look beyond and see the hand which moves the world. This is the only way to know peace! The Sovereignty of God was never expressed to make us proud but to be humble. Not to make us doctrinaire or abstract, but to comfort us. Know that God controls everything.

And now one final question:

The one we must ponder as we think about the great truth of God's absolute Sovereignty.

If God controls everything, why can't I just sit back and leave it all to him? Nothing is my fault, whatever I do!

Again the Bible answers: At the same time as is thunders God's sovereignty. It just as firmly asserts, human responsibility for each person's actions.

Despite the limitations of the human creature's intellect, since the Bible so certainly adheres to these two truths: In God's superior logic THERE IS NO CONFLICT.

There was never a man who preached the Sovereignty of God more than Moses, but in God's Name he stands before the people of Israel and declares, "See this day I have set before you, good and evil; life and death. Therefore chose life." The fact that God is God and so great, does not excuse you for a millionth of a second! You are responsible for the way you live!

"I can't understand that." says somebody. No. We can't understand the ways of God. But we are still bound by them!

Judas: The Old Testament writes about him and says that he will betray the Messiah. And he does. Yet he is not a puppet. Jesus sad, "All these things are happening, just as the Scripture said, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed."

Judas, you're doing exactly what God said you would do! AND... Judas you are responsible for what you did!

When they nailed Jesus to the Cross, they were responsible for what they did. They were guilty! Yet it was the plan of God which was being fulfilled.

If you're unsaved: it's your fault! Not God's

If you wont repent: it's your fault ...

If you won't believe: it's your fault ...

If you neglect the gospel (call), stay as you are, and go to hell: it's your fault ...

The Bible won't let you say, "Ah! It's the sovereignty of God, I'm made that way. I can't do anything about it." It's still your fault. And if you can't understand (as no one can) how God can be Sovereign of all things and yet I can be completely responsible for what I do, don't selectively try to use God's word as an excuse for your lack of repentance. It's your fault. You're responsible and you'll pay the price for it, says the Bible.

God's ways are not our ways. The Bible tells us: His greatness is unsearchable; His thoughts are greater than ours; His ways are higher than our ways. He does what He pleases. He's not answerable to you or to me. "Who are you, man, to reply-est against God."

Above all we must remember God's Sovereignty is not in conflict with human responsibility. This joint truth has two major pathways:

The Sovereignty of God and human responsibility together, guarantee that if you remain in evil, God will punish you. It won't matter if you're cremated or buried, He will resurrect you. Doesn't matter if you run to the East or the West, He will bring you to judgement. It doesn't matter if you die in the sea or on the land, you will come before

His judgement at last. God who can speak whole worlds out of nothing. It's nothing to Him to raise the dead and to bring them to the judgement seat, that they may give account to Him of the way they have lived, thought and spoken. God the great King and Potentate guarantees that every evil word will be remembered; every evil act called to account; every evil thought will be published openly and sinners will pay the price.

It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God in this condition.

And yet the same great Sovereignty to those whom He saves.

How often have you been to a Christian funeral and heard these comforting words from the end of Romans Chapter 8 (verses 31-39):

*<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

And then with that great truth of the Sovereignty of God in His mind, Paul goes on to say,

*<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written:*

*'For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'*

*<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God's Sovereignty guarantees that nothing will separate you from Him. Nothing can come between you and Him. Nothing at all! Because He is over all. Therefore we react to trouble like Job did; or Paul did: (Phil 4:11) *"I've learnt that whatever state I'm in, therewith to be content."*

React to trouble as we are told to in Hebrews 13:5 *"Be content with what you have"*.

There are no mistakes! Nothing has gone wrong with God's plan. It's like one of those beautiful carpets: God looks at the top and all the patterns are in place. We can only look underneath and we see all sorts of tangled threads that don't seem to make any sense at all. But God's plan has been perfectly brought to pass, because He's Sovereign.

What keeps you away from Him? Nothing but your own stubbornness.

Why don't you come to Him? He's given a sovereign invitation:

“Come to me”.

*“<sup>7</sup>Let the wicked forsake their ways  
and the unrighteous their thoughts.*

*Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)*

It's the Sovereign Lord who said that. And also this:  
*the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

*(John 3) <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever  
believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

The Sovereign God caused that to be written! Isn't that wonderful!

Those are promises which are royal, divine, powerful and strong. We can put all our  
weight, our trust, upon them.

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and His greatness is unsearchable.

... everyone who calls on the Name of the LORD will be saved, Joel 2:32

[2212]

**“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”**