

Saved By Grace III -

The Eternality of God and Objections to His Exhaustive Sovereignty

Introduction – “*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;*” (Deut 33:27). “*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen*” (1 Tim 1:17).

God is eternal, which is not simply to say that He is old. When we attempt to understand who God is, we must see that He is unchanging in all His attributes. Keep this in mind as we consider many objections to the doctrine of the exhaustive sovereignty and providence of God.

Review – The scriptures teach us that God knows all His works from eternity (Acts 15:18), that He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11), and that He does whatever He pleases (Ps 115:3). His sovereign will has decreed everything that happens, and His will is never thwarted, not by wicked men or angels, not by ‘chance’, and not in the most trivial activities and decisions of men. With that understanding, we then considered ‘what has God decreed?’. The scriptures also teach that the overall plan of God is Christ’s efficacious work of redemption and dominion of the world through the salvation of the world and the rule of Christ over all nations mediated through His victorious church.

“Yeah, But What About...” - The scripture appears so plain on the point of God’s exhaustive sovereignty and decrees, how can there be any debate? And yet, there are numerous Bible passages that at first glance appear to contradict these doctrines. How are we to handle them?

God Needs Information? (Gen 18:20-21) – Is God really coming down not knowing all the facts? That is like asking if God couldn’t find Adam (Gen 3:8-11). But these are not requests for new information. God is drawing near *as Judge*. These appearances of God are in a judicial context; evidence is being brought forth. He already knows everything (Job 34:21, Prov 5:21, Psalm 139:2-4). Therefore, it is as Judge and Tester that He renders a verdict (i.e. Gen 22:12, Deut 13:3). He is not experimenting like a behavioral scientist.

God Searches? (Psalm 139:23) – Yes, but not because He doesn’t already know the psalmist’s heart. Notice what is already asserted about God’s knowledge in this Psalm (v1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 16). Verse 23 is a figure of speech in a humble prayer to be led by God in all ways.

God Forgets? (Gen 8:1, Ex 6:5) – God is not slapping His head and saying ‘*oops, I almost forgot – the covenant!*’. The scriptures are again declaring judicially that God kept His promises, remembering His covenant. When God forgets, it is a phrase testifying to His covenantal curse (Jer 23:39) or His delay of covenantal promise (Psalm 9:18).

God Changes His Mind? (Gen 6:6, 1 Sam 15:35, Jonah 4:2) – These passages speak of God regretting what He had done. Understanding these passages in light of all of scripture, we can see that God’s hatred of sin, or love of mercy, is being brought to the foreground in the passages. God’s course of action, including the changes in how He would act towards a people, was all in His preordained plan.

God Changes His Mood? (Exod 32:9-11) - If there is no variation in turning with God (James 1:17), then we know that God was not literally wavering over whether to keep His covenant with Abraham (Deut 4:31). God’s thoughts and affections are beyond our understanding, and so we are given a partial understanding by describing those thoughts in human terms we can understand. You probably have heard of *anthropomorphism* (human body parts ascribed to God). Descriptions of God’s emotions, as in Exodus 32, are called *anthropopathism* (human passions ascribed to God).

Applications – They are broad and deep. They will require of us time to think and meditate. But if we discipline ourselves, they will satisfy us in immeasurable ways.

An Eternal God and Fat Worship – With regard to God’s attributes, a faithful study of His Word leaves us overwhelmed in worship (Rom 11:33-36). With regard to God’s covenantal love towards His church, we are left incapable of measuring its fullness (Eph 3:14-21).

An Eternal God and Fair Warnings – We must submit to God’s Word even in studying God (Deut 29:29). There are things that we cannot fully comprehend and attempting to do so will lead us into false doctrines. We must remember He is our eternal Father, and we are little children with little minds.

An Eternal God and Inexpressible Joy – The predestination of all things does not leave us unemotional about our own salvation or God’s plan of redemption (1 Pet 1:8-9) nor does it leave God without strong affections towards us (Zeph 3:17).

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