

# Trusting God in Adversity





# Introduction

Having spent two lectures wrestling with the *Problem of Evil*, we will now turn our attention to the topic of ***Sovereignty and Control***. This is a major issue for anyone who has adopted the values of *Personal Peace and Affluence* – to use the words of Francis Schaeffer. “Personal peace,” he writes, “means just to be left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city – to live one’s life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed....Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity – a life made up of things, things, and more things – a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.” Control is what we use to see to it that our lives move along as we planned.



# Introduction

Many still remember the famous statement made by Jim Elliot, who, along with four other missionaries, was speared to death by the Auca Indians deep in Ecuador's rain forest on a strip of white sand on the Curaray River on January 8, 1956: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

*He gives what he cannot keep.*

*He gains what he cannot lose.*

In sixteen brief words, Jim invites us to examine a major key which will help us understand how to trust God in adversity: *Relinquishment*.

# Introduction

**When we consider the issue of control, we are really talking about rulership, or sovereignty, and the questions it raises:**

1. Am I really the master of my own fate, the captain of my own soul?
2. How much control do I really have over life events?
3. Do I believe in a comprehensively providential God, or am I committed to tychism (chance), fatalism, or determinism?
4. Is God in control of my seemingly contradictory and perplexing circumstances?
5. How does God relate to an adverse turn of events?
6. When bad things happen to me, what should I be thinking?



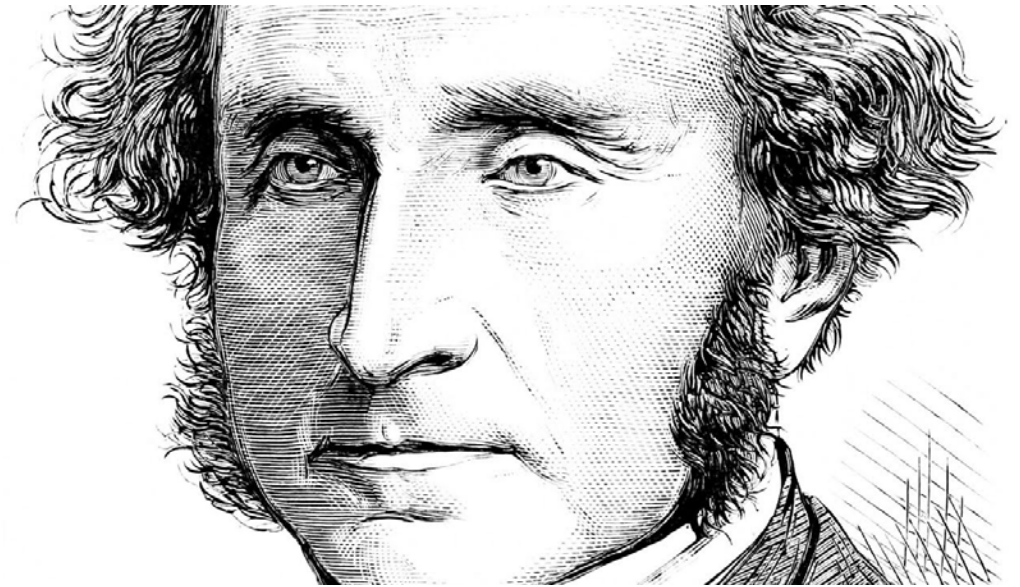
# The Meaning of Sovereignty

- **Sovereign:** *n.*, “one who has supremacy or rank above, or authority over, others; a superior; a ruler, governor, lord, or master (*of* persons, etc.). Frequently applied to the Deity in relation to created things” (OED).
- **Sovereignty:** *n.*, “supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme dominion, authority, or rule” (OED).
- “God’s exercise of power over his creation is also called God’s *sovereignty*. God’s sovereignty is his exercise of rule (as ‘sovereign’ or ‘king’) over his creation” (Wayne Grudem).

# Who Is Sovereign?

“Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.”

- from *On Liberty*



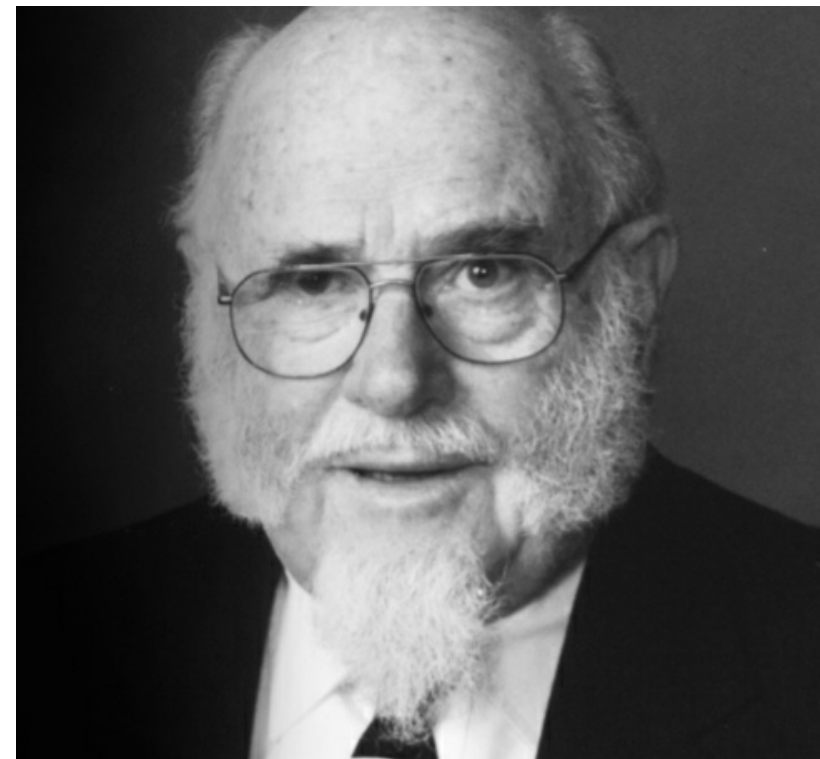
**John Stuart Mill**

1806-1873

English Philosopher (Utilitarianism)

# God's First Self-Disclosure as Almighty

“The strong and foremost deity referred to himself as *‘el-šaddaî* (El Shaddai, Gen. 17:1). The generally accepted connotation of *šaddaî* is that of a combination of the concepts all-powerful and elevated, or exalted and majestic. These concepts – strong, power, foremost, exalted, and majestic – can be expressed in combination by the term ‘sovereign.’”



**Gerhard van Groningen, PhD**

1921-2014

Old Testament Scholar and Professor



# Gerhard van Groningen on *God's Sovereignty*

“Yahweh God repeatedly revealed that **he was and is the sovereign King, the omnipotent Ruler of the entire cosmic kingdom**. All aspects were under his positive rule: the descendants of the patriarchs, his covenant agents, Moses and Aaron, the Egyptian nation, the heart of its ruler, all elements, forces, and laws in nature, and, not least of all, the parasite kingdom of Satan. In this revelation of his kingship, his virtues of omnipotence, wisdom, compassion, righteousness, justice, patience, goodness, mercy, grace, majestic glory, and holiness came to ever clearer expression.”

# Select Old Testament Passages: *El Shaddai*

- “When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘**I am God Almighty**; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1).
- “For the arrows of **the Almighty** are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me” (Job 6:4).
- “God has made my heart faint; **the Almighty** has terrified me; yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face” (Job 23:16).
- “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of **the Almighty**. I will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:1).



# Insights from Stephen Charnock

1. No one can free himself/herself from the power of God's hand.
2. Finite man is unable to measure the incomprehensible omnipotence of God.
3. God is never hindered from doing what He wills.
4. "The power of God is that ability and strength, whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He please; whatsoever His infinite wisdom can direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will can resolve."
5. God's power cannot be checked, restrained, or frustrated.
6. The power of God is the application of His will to effect what it has resolved.

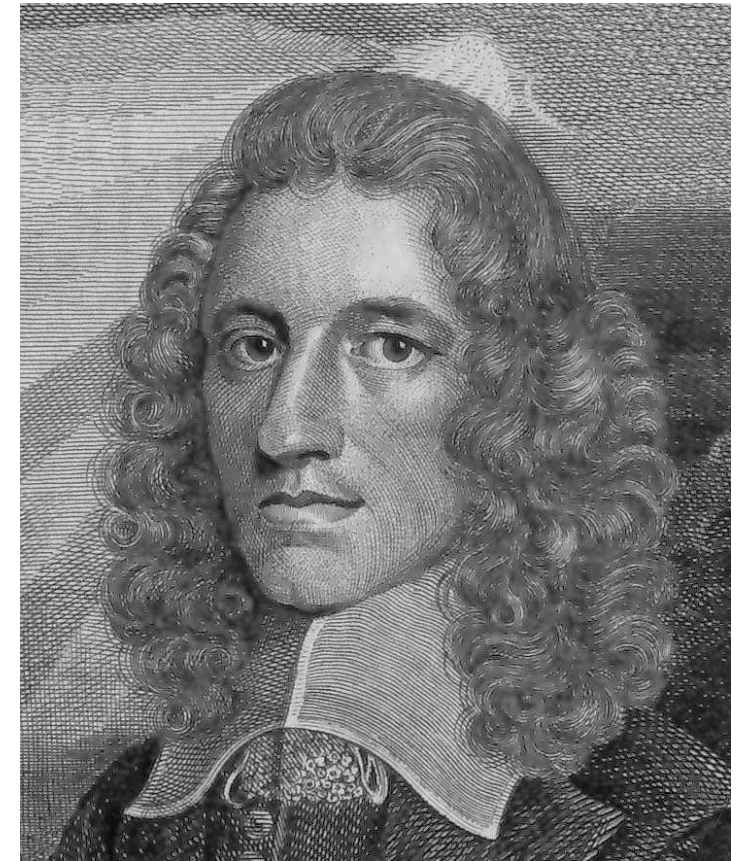


# Insights from Stephen Charnock

7. The power of God is perpetually vigorous, without any interruption. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Is. 40:28).
8. “As Omnipotence is an ocean that cannot be fathomed, so the comforts from it are streams that cannot be exhausted.”
9. “Our evils can never be so great to oppress, as His power is great to delivers us.”

# The Relationship Between Trust & Power

“There can be no trust in God without an eye to His power.”



**Stephen Charnock**

1628-1680

# The Westminster Assembly

## 1643-1649

**Q 12: What are the decrees of God?**

**A:** God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men."



**John Roberts Herbert**

1810-1890

*Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents  
of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, 1847*

Palace of Westminster

# The Decrees of God

- “The decrees of God are the eternal plans of God whereby, before the creation of the world, he determined to bring about everything that happens.”
- These are God’s decisions *before* the world was created.
- God’s providential actions are the outworking of the eternal decrees that He made long ago.
- “The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart though all generations” (Ps. 33:11).



# The Decrees of God

- “The counsel of God is the unity of the thoughts of His heart, i.e., of the ideas, which form the inmost part, the ultimate motives of everything that takes place. The whole history of the world is the uninterrupted carrying out of a divine plan of salvation, the primary object of which is His people, but in and with these are included humanity at large” (Keil and Delitzsch).
- “What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do” (Is. 46:11).
- “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that will prevail” (Prov. 19:21).



# What Is Providence?

“God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”

- Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 5

# What Is Providence?

- **Providence**, *n.*, the foreknowing and protective care of God; divine direction, control, or guidance (OED).
- The word is from the Latin, *pro* + *videre*, which means foresight, foreknowledge, providence.
- The term *providence* is not found in Scripture.
- Providence “has been traditionally used to summarize God’s ongoing relationship with his creation” (Dr. Wayne Grudem).
- The concept is multifaceted.

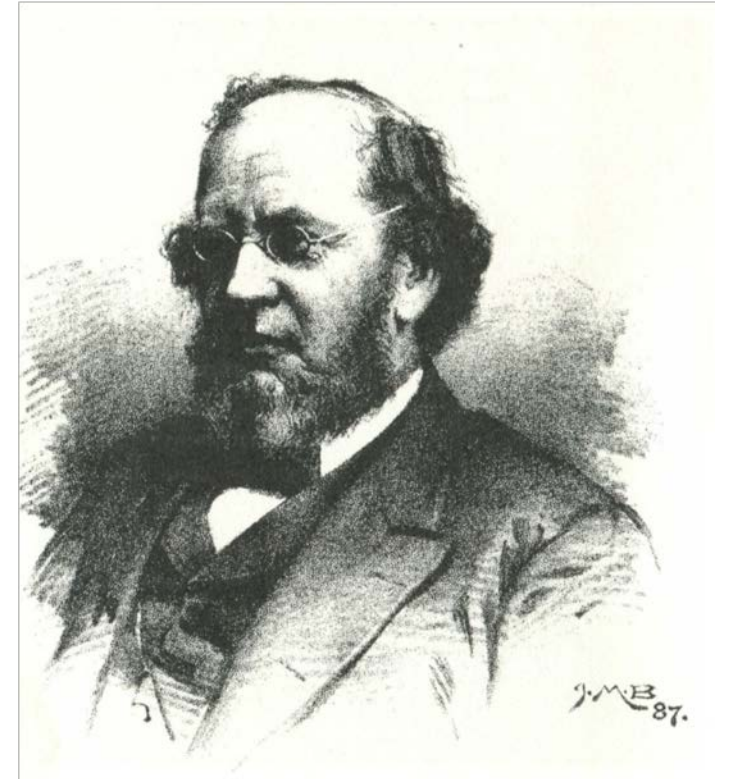


# One Key Idea

- Providence means ***provision***. “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?” (Matt. 6:26).
- Providence means **Fatherly care**. God not only looks ***at*** us, but ***after*** us.

# A.A. Hodge's Commentary

1. God, having created the substances of which all things are composed out of nothing, having endued these substances with their respective properties and powers, and having out of them formed all things organic and inorganic, and endowed them severally with their respective properties and faculties, he continues to sustain them in being and in the possession and exercise of those properties during the entire period of their existence.



**A.A. Hodge**  
1823-1886



# Hodge's Commentary

2. God directs all the actions of his creatures according to their respective properties and relations.
3. God's providential control extends to all his creatures and all their actions of every kind.
4. God's providential control is in all respects the consistent execution of his eternal, immutable, and sovereign purpose.
5. The final end of His providence is the manifestation of his own glory.

# God's Providence: Grudem

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He:

1. Keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them.
2. Cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.
3. Directs them to fulfill His purposes.



**Wayne Grudem**  
1948 –  
Evangelical Theologian

# The Doctrine of Providence

- God is everywhere at work.
- The world is governed by His secret counsels.
- Sometimes God conceals the causes of events.
- There are mysteries which far transcend our understanding.
- We must be humble before God and revere His hidden judgments.
- God keeps all things under His subordination.
- The eternal decrees of God by no means prevent us from proceeding to do His will, to provide for ourselves, and arrange all of our affairs.
- Every person is under His power.
- If the Lord wills it, it must be borne.

# God's Self-Disclosure

“At the end of days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and **he does according to his will** among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Dan. 4:34-35).

# God's Self-Disclosure

“Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the **clouds rise** at the end of the earth, who **makes lightnings for the rain** and **brings forth the wind** from his storehouses” (Ps. 135:6-7).



# God's Self-Disclosure

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since **he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything**. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having **determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place**, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for **‘In him we live and move and have our being’**; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Acts 17:24-28).

# What Is Under God's Providence?

- Inanimate creation (grass, snow, hail, water, lightning, clouds, stars, etc.)
- Animals
- Seemingly random or chance events
- Events fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature
- Nations
- All aspects of our lives (talents, abilities, life-span, success, failure, decisions, etc.)



# Carl F.H. Henry

“The biblical view of providence is dramatically specific; it unqualifiedly affirms particular divine providence, that is, that God works out his purposes not merely in life’s generalities but in the details and minutiae of life as well. The Bible relates to divine providence not only general and universal structures but also personal experiences; nothing falls outside God’s will and concern.”



# Learning To Trust God

**Learning to trust God in adversity, pain, and suffering** is a slow and difficult sanctifying process whereby our minds and hearts are gradually transformed by the truth of Scripture and the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit to see deeply into the heart of the triune God, fully embracing His goodness, mercy, grace, and love, and trusting His promise that everything in our lives is working together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.



# A Prayer of Relinquishment: Richard Foster

“O Lord, how do I let go when I’m so unsure of things? I’m unsure of your will, and I’m unsure of myself....That really isn’t the problem at all, is it? The truth of the matter is I hate the very idea of letting go. I really want to be in control. No, I need to be in control. That’s it, isn’t it? I’m afraid to give up control, afraid of what might happen. Heal my fear, Lord.

How good of you to reveal my blind spots even in the midst of my stumbling attempts to pray. Thank you!

But now what do I do? How do I give up control? Jesus, please, teach me your way of relinquishment. Amen.”