

God is sovereign and works all things according to his own righteous will, for his own glory (Romans 11:33–36). From all eternity God decreed everything that would ever happen in time (Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11b; Romans 11:33–34; Revelation 15:3–4); he did this in perfect wisdom and holiness (Revelation 15:3–4). Furthermore, God sustains and governs all his creatures by his supremely wise and holy providence. In so doing he fulfils the purpose for which they were created, in order that his own attributes and glory may be praised (Psalm 104; Matthew 10:29–32; Acts 17:25–28; Psalm 145:7; Isaiah 63:14; Romans 9:17; Ephesians 3:10).

(Sola 5 Confession 1.3)

Greg Boyd, a prominent proponent of “open theism,” his book *God of the Possible*, tells the story of a young woman named Suzanne. One Sunday, Suzanne approached him, very angry at God. After he had worked through some of her raging words, she told him her story.

Suzanne had been raised in a wonderful Christian home in which she had developed missionary zeal for Taiwan. She knew that her future husband must have similar passion. In college, she met a man who shared her vision for Taiwan. For three-and-a-half years, they dated, worshipped together, and prepared themselves for the mission field. When he proposed, she did not immediately accept. Instead, they prayed and fasted to seek God’s will. They sought counsel from parents, pastors, and friends.

After they married, they went to missionary school to start preparing for the field. Two years into training, Suzanne discovered that her husband was involved in an adulterous affair. He repented, but several months later returned to the affair. The cycle of repentance and sin continued for the next three years, during which time her husband lost his Christian conviction and his zeal for Taiwan. He grew angrier and became verbally and eventually physically abusive, at one point fracturing her cheekbone in a fit of rage. He filed for divorce and moved in with his lover. Two weeks later, Suzanne discovered she was pregnant.

The relationship had seriously damaged Suzanne’s faith. She could not understand how a sovereign God could allow all of this to unfold, particularly after deliberate prayer and fasting and after the confirmation he had given through her parents, pastor, and friends that the marriage was God’s will. She felt that the ordeal had taught her nothing and left her bitter. Boyd then describes his counsel to her:

I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel (1 Sam. 15: 11, 35; see also Gen. 6: 5–6). Not that it was a bad decision—at the time, her ex-husband was a good man with a godly character. The prospects that he and Suzanne would have a happy marriage and fruitful ministry were, at the time, very good. Indeed, I strongly suspect that he had influenced Suzanne and her ex-husband toward this college with their marriage in mind. Because her ex-husband was a free agent, however, even the best decisions can have sad results. Over time, and through a series of choices, Suzanne’s ex-husband had opened himself up to the enemy’s influence and became involved in an immoral relationship. Initially, all was not lost, and God and others tried to restore him, but he chose to resist the prompting of the Spirit, and consequently his heart grew darker. Suzanne’s ex-husband had become a very different person from the man God had confirmed to Suzanne to be a good candidate for marriage. This, I assured Suzanne, grieved God’s heart at least as deeply as it grieved hers.

Our confession tells us that **God is sovereign and works all things according to his own righteous will, for his own glory**, that **from all eternity God decreed everything that would ever happen in time**, and that **he did this in perfect wisdom and holiness**. Evaluate Boyd’s counsel in light of the affirmations in the confession. How would you counsel Suzanne? _____

What does it mean that God is **sovereign**? How far does sovereignty extend? _____

When things happen that we don't understand, we sometimes find refuge in Scriptures like Deuteronomy 29:29 and Isaiah 55:8–9. These Scriptures assure us that we don't always have to understand what God is doing to affirm that what he is doing is consistent with his **perfect wisdom and holiness**. Does God's sovereignty mean that what he does is arbitrary? If we are not to question his secret motives, do we assume that he has no reason behind what he is doing? _____

If God hates sin and takes no delight in the suffering of his people, how can we affirm that the “bad things” that happen to “good people” are consistent with his **holiness**? _____

What does it mean that God **sustains and governs all his creatures by his supremely wise and holy providence**? If God **governs all his creatures**, what responsibility should be assigned to God for the entrance of sin into the world? What about things like natural disasters, which cause such great harm in our world? _____

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Why?

Nothing frustrates God's decree. _____

Nothing escapes God's decree. _____

Nothing conditions God's decree. _____

Does the Bible draw a distinction between what God decrees and what God permits? Explain. _____

If we affirm that God governs all his creatures **by his supremely wise ... providence**, what do we think when God's way of doing things seem contrary to our own wisdom? _____

What is **the purpose for which** all things **were created**? _____

Does it seem arrogant that God would desire **that his own attributes and glory may be praised**? Why, or why not? _____