

King's Online Bible School
Doctrine 101: Learning about God

God is Omnipotent (adapted from Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrines*)

Definition: God's omnipotence means that God is able to do all His holy will. Derived from two Latin words, it literally means "all powerful" (*omni* - "all" + *potens* - "powerful").

1. The fundamental reality: God is absolutely powerful and can do anything.

The Bible frequently points to the fact that God's power is infinite.

Genesis 18:14. When Sarah hears the Lord say that she will have a son and laughs incredulously, the Lord says to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear, when I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

The heavens are Yours. The earth also is Yours;
The world and all it contains, You have founded them.
The north and the south, You have created them;
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name.
You have a strong arm;
Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted (Ps 89:11-13).

"To whom then will you liken Me
That I should be equal?" says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high
And see Who has created these stars,
The One Who leads forth their hosts by number,
He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power
Not one is missing (Isa 40:25-26).

Jeremiah 32:17. "Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You."

Matthew 19:26. When Jesus' disciples realize that no man will manage to arrive at the heart attitude that is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus answers, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

"Now to Him Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21).

2. The balance: there are some things God cannot do.

Omnipotence is understood in terms of God's ability to do "all His holy will." What is outside His holy will He will never do. God's omnipotence works within the framework of His character.

a. God can only do what His character permits.

God cannot do absolutely everything, because not everything is consistent with His character. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2); He cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13); and He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). His use of infinite power is qualified by His other attributes.

b. God's power operates in the context of His will.

God cannot do what He does not will to do because He is One and He cannot contradict Himself. So when we talk about God's omnipotence we are not claiming that because of His infinite power He therefore can do everything. We understand that in the exercise of that measureless, unlimited power, He will always be found more than sufficient to do whatever He wills to do.

God's sovereign will is realized in His omnipotence. It is infinite in itself and it is unlimited in His power to perform it. Because He is infinite and absolute in all His attributes and because every created thing is finite, nothing can thwart His purposes. God is not hindered by anything outside of Himself; no person or force or circumstance can dictate to God what He should do. There are no external restraints. He has the ability to do whatever He pleases and chooses, even in every creature's and every person's life.

Our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases (Ps 115:3).

The king's heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord;
He turns it wherever He wishes (Prov 21:1).

In one of the most remarkable developments in human history, King Nebuchadnezzar failed to humble himself, even though he was warned what would happen if he did not. He spent seven years like one of the cattle, grazing on grass in the fields. Then he raised his eyes toward heaven, and his reason returned to him, and he "blessed the Most High, and praised and honored Him Who lives forever." Here are some of the king's words:

All the inhabitants of the world are counted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And the inhabitants of the earth;
And no one can strike against His hand (Dan 4:34-35).

3. God's omnipotence operates within the boundaries of God's will.

We determine and "will" in different ways and at different levels: sometimes we will to do things eagerly, sometimes reluctantly; sometimes secretly, sometimes more publically. We need to see that God's will also operates in different ways.

a. God's revealed will

There are many things that God has made clear to us because it is His will that by these words and acts we should come to know Him, worship Him, trust Him and obey Him.

There are many things, however, that God has kept secret. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Law" (Deut 29:29).

b. God's secret will

As we saw in the first lesson in this course, God is unknowable. Among the things we are not able to discover is His secret will. This includes details about the future and mysteries of why people suffer. We will not find out any of God's secret purposes until it is His will for us to know.

The Bible is clear that His secret will includes the decrees and purposes by which God governs the universe and determines everything that will happen. We may not understand it, but nonetheless, God's will is the ultimate reason for everything that happens.

Paul shows how important realities remained hidden in God until Jesus' finished work made it possible for these mysteries to be revealed.

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him (Jesus) with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him (Jesus) also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose Who works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:9-11).

Paul's words show how God is working out His will in the universe and in our lives at the present time.

c. God's operative will

God is always working out His purposes. Some of those purposes He has already revealed. But there are also purposes He is working out that remain a secret. We see Him doing things, but we do not understand why.

God reveals more about why He has done some things in Paul's words in Romans 11. His dealings with the Jews and the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles was all according to His great merciful plan.

For just as you (Gentiles) once were disobedient to God but now have been shown mercy because of their (the Jews') disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all (Rom 11:30-32).

Paul takes this opportunity to exclaim the wonder of God's ways, His wisdom, and His will:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord,
Or who became His counselor? (Rom 11:33-34)

As Paul begins to quote from Isaiah 40:13 the words of Isaiah lead immediately on to an exclamation about God's operative will.

Or who has first given to Him
That it might be paid back to Him again?

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.
Amen (Rom 11:35-36).

d. God's will in the deeds and lives of men

Even events caused by evil men serve to further God's purpose. Every man will always bear responsibility for each thing he does, but God is able to take men's evil intentions and deeds and make them work to the advantage and purposes of His will. The ultimate example, of course, is Jesus' crucifixion. Powerful men were involved in sentencing and executing Him.

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, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur (Acts 4:27-28).

This was the news Peter proclaimed about Jesus to the multitudes on the day of Pentecost:

This Man, Who was delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power (Acts 2:23-24).

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba it obviously was not the will of God. The first child Bathsheba bore to him died and David's house was devastated by intrigue and violence. But in the secret plans and purposes of God, He would use this marriage toward the day he would prepare a body for His Son, because it is through David and Bathsheba's son Solomon that the royal lineage was extended, and it is that lineage of which Jesus was born.

The fact that God in His secret will and sovereign grace uses man's evil to accomplish His good does not mean that God is responsible for evil. The evildoers are responsible, but God can use evil for His good purposes. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20).

This has always been the way God has been at work. Joseph understood this. When his brothers feared that he might seek revenge after their father died, he said, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:20).

The Bible makes it clear that God does not take any pleasure in our suffering, but even our suffering may be part of the perfect will of God. "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing right . . ." (1 Pet 3:17). When our conformity to God's will results in our suffering, we can know that it is the best situation for us.

e. God's will in God's ways

There are many things that we do not understand about God. Even some of the things He has revealed are difficult for us to hold together in our thinking in their proper balance. This is because God's heart is so deep and profound.

His revealed will is that all should come to Him. Jesus invited everyone: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). At the same time, His ways include the fact that some have the gospel hidden from them. So only a few sentences earlier we hear Jesus pray, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes" (Matt 11:25-26).

What is no secret is that God resists the proud and gives grace to the lowly. His desire is that men should need Him because they all do. His invitation is that men should become lowly before Him, because the proud will not come. We know what He did to help Nebuchadnezzar bow before Him and acknowledge Him. When God resists the proud, it does not mean that He has rejected them. He is powerful in His pursuit of human hearts.

God's omnipotence is seen in the fact that nothing, not even our disobedience to God's revealed will, can thwart Him in His plans to fulfill His secret will. We can trust God to oversee our future plans in confidence that nothing can prevent Him from fulfilling His purposes for us (Ps 139:15-17).