

# GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

## STUDY TWO

### A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

*Romans 11:33–36*

*God's sovereignty is something that holds you close, gives you rest and peace, and takes away your worries. You don't lie awake at night restless and turning and struggling and twisting over the details of life that you can't put together. He's putting life together, and your need is to fit into what He is doing and how He is putting it together.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**F you listen carefully, you can hear a siren calling in the distance. Her alluring enticements tickle the ear, impelling many men and women to set sail toward her island of temptation every day. Her subtle promise seems harmless. But it's a false promise, for her island is surrounded by impassable rocks hidden beneath the water's surface, making her reward unobtainable.

The siren's name? *Control*.

Imagine earning this prize of *total* control. Control over your finances. Control to make others see things from your perspective. Control to dictate the future. Control to erase those dark memories.

As enticing as these thoughts may seem, the reality is that having total control is nothing more than an illusion. No human being *ever* has had *total* control over anything. That's because God is in control. That's because God is *sovereign*. Yet many still resolve to chase the siren's call and run farther from the truth.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will focus on a truth you dare not dismiss: the ever-important reality of God's sovereignty. This truth always sings louder and more beautifully than the tempting call to take total control.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

### A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to take a voyage through the waters of God's Word today, offer this prayer to Him to help you navigate your study:

*Heavenly Father, I thank You that You are in control and that I am not. I ask that, through my study of Your Word today, You would show me how trusting in Your sovereign plan is always better than grasping for control. I pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.*



#### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Often, the apostle Paul would divide his letters into two parts. The first part would concentrate on theology. In other words, he would start by focusing on *orthodoxy*—right belief. Then, he would use that theology as the foundation for practical commands or *orthopraxy*—right living.

Paul's letter to the Romans follows this same outline: chapters 1–11 discuss right belief, and chapters 12–16 look to right living. In the theological part of the letter, Paul emphasizes God's work of salvation through Christ—taking desperately sinful people and declaring them righteous by faith so that they might live new, Spirit-empowered lives for God's glory.

Romans 11:33–36 acts as a conclusion of this masterful theological treatise. These verses form a *doxology*—words of glory—praising God for the sovereign outworking of His good plan.



#### Observation: A Doxology of Praise

Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method follows four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.<sup>1</sup> When reading the Bible, it may feel tempting to jump straight to application, but without good observations, our applications won't have roots in biblical truth. Read [Romans 11:33–36](#), and focus only on what the passage says.

According to [Romans 11:33](#), what three “deep” qualities does God possess?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



**A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss**

*Romans 11:33–36*

According to *Romans 11:33*, what kind of language does Paul use to describe human attempts to understand how God works?

In *11:34–35*, Paul asks three rhetorical questions—a literary tool he uses to make his main point clearer. In your own words, summarize the three questions Paul asks.

In *11:36*, Paul uses three prepositional phrases to describe the relationship between God and all things. List these three prepositional phrases below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

*Romans 11:33–36*

According to the concluding sentence of this song of praise, what is the only appropriate response to these truths about God?

What a beautiful hymn of praise to God! It may not be apparent, but this song by Paul is filled with theological significance. It contains timeless truths that have guided followers of Jesus Christ through the ages.



### Interpretation: God's Sovereignty

Romans 11:33–36 is a doxology about God's sovereignty. According to *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, sovereignty is "a term by which is expressed the supreme rulership of God. This is held to be not an attribute of God but a prerogative based on the perfections of divine being."<sup>2</sup>

In what ways does Paul reveal God's sovereignty through this passage?

*Sovereignty means our all-wise, all-knowing God reigns over us in realms beyond our comprehension to bring about His plans that are beyond our ability to start, to alter, to hinder, to fully understand, or to stop. Let me amplify that. God's plan includes all gains and losses, adversity, tragedy, and calamity as well as prosperity, blessings, and joy.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

*Romans 11:33–36*

As you likely noticed, Paul didn't state his answers to his three questions in *Romans 11:34–35*. And that's the point! Authors don't provide answers to rhetorical questions because the answer is so obvious it doesn't need stating. But it helps us in our Bible study to provide clear answers in our own minds. So what is the unstated answer to each of these questions?

Paul didn't formulate these questions by his own wit or wisdom. Rather, the first two come from *Isaiah 40:13* and the third from *Job 41:11*—one of the earliest books of Scripture. The truth of God's supreme sovereignty is not a new one. It has stood as the central pillar of His character and plan from the very beginning, and it will guide human history until Jesus returns in the end.

A wooden translation of the Greek of Romans 11:36 reads, "From Him and through Him and for Him are all things." What did Paul mean by this? Reading this verse in a *few different Bible translations* can help you see how the translators interpreted these prepositions.

Before discussing what it looks like to live in the light of God's sovereignty today, let's look back through the telescope of time to see an example of one individual whom God confronted with His sovereignty in a powerful, life-changing way.



## A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

*Romans 11:33–36*



### Correlation: Nebuchadnezzar's Past Experience of God's Sovereignty

Nebuchadnezzar reigned as king of Babylon—one of the most formidable and wicked empires the world had ever seen. This powerful king often had bizarre and vivid dreams, which none of his most trusted magicians, counselors, or government officials could interpret . . . well, except for a Jewish exile named Daniel.

One night, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a great tree whose branches touched the sky. Its lush leaves and abundant fruit gave many animals a home. Suddenly, an angel appeared and commanded the king to chop down the tree, scatter the fruit, and disperse the animals.

*Daniel 4:24–27* records Daniel's interpretation of this strange dream. According to Daniel, what did the following images represent?

**Tree:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Animal:** \_\_\_\_\_

What warning did Daniel offer to Nebuchadnezzar in *4:27*?

According to *4:28–33*, did Nebuchadnezzar heed or disregard Daniel's warning? What happened as a result of his choice?



## **A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss**

*Romans 11:33–36*

In *Daniel 4:34–37*, Nebuchadnezzar shared his personal reflections on these events. How did his perspective change? What did he learn about God's sovereignty?

*There's a difference in learning and acknowledging. When you acknowledge something, you accept it. In fact, you embrace it. Turn to the God of heaven. Learn from this warning. You have an opportunity to acknowledge that it is God who is sovereign, not you.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### **Application: Our Present Experience of God's Sovereignty**

Amid personal reflection on his own life, Pastor Chuck reveals four ways embracing the sovereignty of God has changed him:

1. *The sovereignty of God has relieved me from anxiety and worry.*
2. *The sovereignty of God has released me from explaining why.*
3. *The sovereignty of God has restrained me from arrogance.*
4. *The sovereignty of God has reminded me that He's always in charge.*

Which of these four statements most closely resonates with your circumstances today? How can embracing God's sovereignty free you from the burdens of your current struggles?



### A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

*Romans 11:33–36*

*As much as when life is filled with delight and pleasure—which we don't deserve—His inscrutable sovereignty has dominion over all hardships, heartaches, helplessness, broken dreams, disappointments, disabilities, and lingering painful difficulties.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Are you struggling to give up control to God today? Is there something you're grasping hold of with all your strength? What would it look like for you to set free this thing, person, desire, or feeling and trust that what God has given you through His Son is better? Write your reflections below.

God is in control. We are not. Don't miss it! If we sinful humans had complete control, the consequences would be unimaginably disastrous. Thankfully, our sovereign God is good and wise and not a petty tyrant. We may not understand His plan, but we can trust that everything is working out just as He intends—for our good!



### A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study today, reread *Romans 11:33–36* aloud to God. Remember, Paul wrote these words as a doxology of praise. Use these words to guide you in prayer and thanking God for both His sovereignty and His goodness.

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1214.



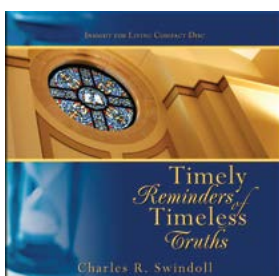


### A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

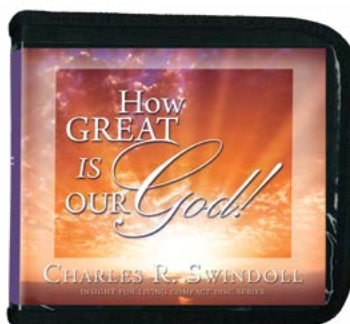
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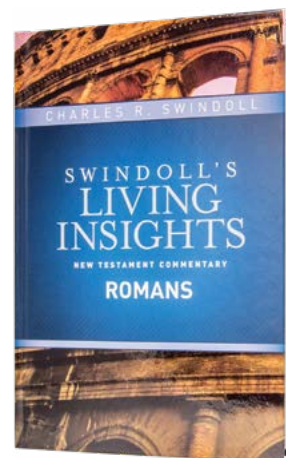
#### Tools for Digging Deeper



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Timeless Truths**  
by Charles R. Swindoll  
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