

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Biblical, Traditional, Congregational

Lord's Day Worship for
October 6, 2024



trinityreformedct.org

"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" – Isaiah 46:9-10

“*” = Please stand if you are able.

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

Call to Worship – Daniel 4:34-35

Leader: But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven

People: And my reason returned to me,

Leader: And I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him

People: Who lives forever;

Leader: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,

People: And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Leader: All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,

People: But He does according to His will in the host of heaven

Leader: And among the inhabitants of earth;

People: And no one can ward off His hand

Leader: Or say to Him,

People: What have You done?

Prayer of Invocation and Confession

Gospel Absolution Text – Romans 8:28-30

***Hymn #38** (red hymnal) – “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

Scripture Reading – Matthew 10:24-31; Ephesians 1:3-14

Ancient Creedal Reading – Nicene Creed (pg#846 in the red hymnal)

Offerings Presented

[Please put your tithe/offering in the plates before or after the service – Thank you!]

[Gifts labeled “Deacon’s Fund go to aid those in need in the congregation.]

***Doxology #731** (red hymnal)

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Sung Psalm #51A** (see insert below) – “God, Be Merciful to Me”

Prayers of the Church & Lord's Prayer (sins)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Reformation Creedal Reading – Savoy Declaration (1658 AD), #3.1

Leader:	<i>God from all eternity, did, by the most wise</i>	Eph 1:11
People:	And holy counsel of His own will,	Rom 11:33
Leader:	<i>Freely, and unchangeably ordain</i>	Heb 6:17
People:	Whatsoever comes to pass:	Rom 9:15,18
Leader:	<i>Yet so, as thereby neither is God</i>	James 1:13,17
People:	The author of sin,	1John 1:5
Leader:	<i>Nor is violence offered</i>	Acts 2:23
People:	To the will of the creatures;	Matt 17:12
Leader:	<i>Nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away,</i>	Acts 4:27-28 John 19:11
People:	But rather established.	Prov 16:33

Ministry of the Word

Prayer of Illumination

***Sermon Text** – Revelation 5:1

***Gloria Patri #735** (red hymnal)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

Sermon – “Causes”

(A Sermon Series on Revelation 4-7)

Ministry of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Invitation & Warning

Prayer

Scripture – Revelation 19:6-10

Partaking of the Bread and then the Cup

Prayer of Thanksgiving

***Hymn #95** (red hymnal) – “Though Troubles Assail Us”

***Benediction** – Numbers 6:24-26

All are welcome for Fellowship & Food downstairs after Worship

Announcements

- TRC is doing our first mass mailing inviting locals to worship. Please pray for this outreach. The church would like to thank Karen Griska for all her labors in helping out with the design.

Upcoming Special Events

- On Saturday, October 12th at noon, there will be an **outdoor pot luck** at Pastor Doug's House. (54 Horseshoe Cir. Barkhamsted, CT 06063). Please bring a lawn chair and a dish if you can. There will be fall games, apple bobbing, etc. Rain Date: October 19th.
- The New England Reformed Fellowship's **Bolton Conference** will be held on Friday, October 25th through Saturday, October 26th at the Pleasant Street Christian Reformed Church in Whitinsville, MA 01588. newenglandreformedfellowship.org/2024-conference
- The **Annual Meeting** will be held after church on November 17th.
- Save the date! The 2nd Annual Calvinist **Christmas Party** will be at the Grange on Friday, Dec 6th.

Regular Weekly Events

<i>Sunday</i>	9:00 – c.10:00 AM	Sunday School Children's curriculum: KVB Publications Women's Study: Study on cults Adult Study: Westminster Larger Catechism
	10:30 – c.11:40 AM c.11:40 AM	Worship (Lord's Supper on the 1 st Sunday of the month) Coffee Hour Fellowship
<i>Tuesday</i>	10:30 AM – Noon	Tuesday Classics Study at Pastor Doug's house Overview of Medieval Theology & reading some Aquinas
Wednesday	6:30 – 8:00 PM	Wednesday Bible Study at Pastor Doug's house Origins of the Bible & a Study of 2Peter & Jude
Friday	6:30 - ??? PM	Young Adult Discussion Group at Pastor Doug's house (1 st & 3 rd Fridays)
Saturday	morning	Prayer Group at the Gabelmann's (Please call Sheryl to confirm if the group is meeting that day, 860-309-7250.)

ONLINE RESOURCES

<i>TRC's Webpage:</i>	TrinityReformedCT.org
<i>TRC's Facebook Page:</i>	facebook.com/people/Trinity-Reformed-Church/61554974150922/
<i>TRC's Youtube Channel:</i>	youtube.com/@TrinityReformedCT
<i>Pastor Doug's</i>	youtube.com/simplyreformed
<i>Youtube Channels:</i>	youtube.com/@PilgrimsOfPlunder

INTERNET PRAYER CHAIN

If you have any prayer requests you would like for, please email them to Donna Ensminger at: trcnwprayer@gmail.com. (If you would like to join the Prayer Chain, also see Donna.)

LEADERSHIP

Elders:	Rev. Douglas Aldrich, pastor	860-379-1147	douglas_aldrich@sbcglobal.net
	Bob Ensminger	860-485-8738	robert.ensminger@arthurgrossell.com
	Rich Gabelmann	860-605-7852	rgabelmann0415@gmail.com
	Rev. Jonathan Haulenbeek	203-709-0784	jhaulenbeek@icloud.com
Deacons:	David Mattson (chair), Carl Bierce, Caleb Goodell, Mason Goodell, Dean Winters		
Sunday School:	Verna Aldrich, Mason Goodell	Music Coordinator:	Cindy Rines
Clerk:	Sheryl Gabelmann	Treasurer:	Cindy Rines

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Worship Starts At: 10:30 AM (9:30 AM in the summer)

Sunday Worship At: Winchester Grange (100 Newfield Rd; Winchester Center, CT 06098)

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 343; Riverton, CT 06065 – *Phone:* (860) 238-7399

Webpage: trinityreformedct.org – *Email:* trinityreformedct@gmail.com

Sermon Notes

Revelation 5:1

“Causes”

A Sermon Series on Revelation 4-7

October 6, 2024

Introduction

- 1) *Question:* Is all that happens in history by God’s plan?
 - a) Most Christians say “yes” because the thought that God is in control is comforting. (And it is!)
 - b) However, when pressed about the details most Christians back down.
 - i) *For example:* Did God ordain the Black Death? The holocaust? The rise of Communism and secularism? The legalizing of abortion? Or put a terrible leader into power?
 - ii) Most Christians will now start shying away from that initial bold declaration that God is sovereign. Especially the more individual and personal it gets.
 - iii) Now the answer because “well God foresaw it and tries to work with it”, or “God allows it”, or even worse, a simple “no” is given.
- 2) Not our Reformed Tradition!
 - a) The thing Reformed theology is famous, or infamous for, is a strong/high view of the sovereignty of God.
 - b) Reformed theology teaches that God, on some level, decrees (i.e. has ordered, wills) everything to happen.
 - c) This is a major theme in the Book of Revelation, written during a time of great persecution of the tiny Christian church by the vastly powerful pagan Roman Empire.
- 3) Yet that tiny persecuted church (and us too!) was given a revelation, that starting in chapter 4, showing at the center of everything is God enthroned. Rev 4:2ff
- 4) In Revelation, chapter 5, a new major revelation is given:
 - a) Revelation 5:1 – *“I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.”*
 - b) In God’s right hand is a scroll (the Greek word here, *biblion*, is also translated as “book”) that is sealed with seven seals. Rev 5:1,7
Rev 6:14
 - c) The imagery of the “right hand” denotes strength & power. Think of a “right hand man” or to sit on the “right side” of a person of power is the privileged position. Rev 1:16-17,20; 2:1; 10:5
Ex 15:6,12; Is 48:13
Ps 18:35; 21:8; 60:5; 98:1
- 5) The scroll represents God’s eternal plan, especially between Christ’s first advent (His incarnation) and His second advent (at the end of this age).
 - a) This is God’s all-comprehensive decree for all of creation throughout history.
 - i) That God is Lord of all of history, as taught throughout the Bible.
 - ii) Isaiah 46:9-10 – *“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’”*

- b) That it is full of writing on both sides implies it is a detailed plan.
 - i) God, on some level, micromanages everything.
 - ii) As the late noted theologian R.C. Sproul wrote, *“If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God’s sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.”*
 - iii) Or, as the Lord Jesus taught, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”* – Matthew 10:29-31

(Note, God’s total sovereignty brings comfort to the faithful!)

- 6) The scroll has seven seals. Ezek 2:9-10; Dan 12:9; Is 29:11
 - a) The breaking of the seals means not only will God’s plan be revealed, but it will also be executed.
 - b) Before we get to what is in this scroll, and how it is unsealed, we should first wrestle with the big question: Is all of history planned out by God? In every detail?
 - i) The quick answer is: “Yes.” As taught in Revelation 5ff.
 - ii) Everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen, has been ordained by God.
 - iii) Questions come up, however, if God is sovereign what about evil and free will?
 - iv) Today, we need to wander off into the deep end of the theological pool and try to think systematically (i.e. putting everything together) about what the Bible teaches about God’s sovereignty and how He decrees/ordains all of history.
 - v) So that we can know God better, help us to understand His word, and find comfort in His power.

Thinking Biblically & Systematic About God’s Sovereignty

- 1) All Christians must believe that God is sovereign and that we are responsible for our actions.
 - a) Gluing those two things together is where there is much debate.
 - b) Our Reformed theology (correctly) errs on the side of focusing on God while not denying we use our wills to choose and are responsible for our actions.
- 2) It is tempting to say *“I believe both, because the Bible teaches both, however, it’s all just a mystery as to how it all fits together so I am not going to worry about it.”*
 - a) Um, okay, if you want to have a childish (I didn’t say “child-like” but “childish”) faith that can only handle milk and not solid food. Heb 5:11-14
1Cor 3:2
 - b) The Bible doesn’t say “its all a mystery, don’t worry about it.”
 - i) There is a lot in Scripture about the sovereignty of God.
 - ii) Go read the Book of Job, or Ephesians 1-2, or Romans 8-9, let alone today’s sermon text about the sealed scroll in Revelation 5ff.
 - c) Granted, you can overdo a systematic theology and try to explain away all mysteries.

[For example, see the great New England Congregational pastor Jonathan Edwards’ (1703-1758) work called The Freedom of the Will.]
 - d) Let’s be blunt, today overdoing theology isn’t a problem in modern Christianity.

- 3) Good systematic theology tries to hear all of what Scripture teaches and put it together.
 - a) It starts with God and works down. Yet because of our fallen nature we tend to start with ourselves and work up.
 - i) As we try to hear all of what God teaches, and put it together, we do not want to go beyond what is written – understanding there is a mystery to God.
 - ii) While never using “mystery” as an excuse for laziness or secret agendas.
 - iii) Remembering Deuteronomy 29:29 – *“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.”*
- 4) Probably the greatest short, but detailed, systematic statement of the biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God is from the Congregational Savoy Declaration of Faith (1658 AD), which is from the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith (1646 AD).
 - a) Especially chapter 3 on “God’s Eternal Decree” and chapter 5 on “Providence”.
 - b) Also see chapter 9 on “Free-Will.”
- 5) Most people, including Reformed Christians, do not know there is much more detail, nuance, and subtlety (in the good sense) in the Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God.
 - a) Its not just “God directly ordains everything and we are robots!”
 - b) The Bible goes deep on this issue, so our theology has to also.

The Sovereignty of God

- 1) Probably the best simple statement describing the sovereignty of God is from chapter 3.1 of the Savoy:

“God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: (Eph 1:11; Rom 11:33; Heb 6:17; Rom 9:15,18) yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, (James 1:13,17; 1John 1:5) nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. (Acts 2:23; Matt 17:12; Acts 4:27-28; John 19:11; Prov 16:33)”

 - a) So, on some level, God ordains everything that “comes to pass.”
 - b) As we are going to read in Revelation 5.
 - c) Again, good theology starts with God and works down.
- 2) We start our thinking with God, enthroned in heaven, like in Revelation, decreeing everything not merely because He foresaw it, but because He, on some level, willed it as part of His perfect plan. (Savoy 3.1)

1Sam 23:11-12
Matt 11:21,23
Acts 15:18
Rom 9:11,13,16,18
- 3) Yet, God is not *“the author of sin”*. – Savoy 3.1b

James 1:13,17; 1John 1:5

 - a) Because *“sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be the author or approver of sin.”* – Savoy 5.4b

Ps 50:21
James 1:13-14,17
1John 2:16
 - b) James 1:17 – *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*
- 4) Nor does God’s sovereign decrees do *“violence”* to *“the will of the creatures.”* (i.e. men, angels, etc.)

Prov 16:33; Matt 17:12
John 19:11; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28

 - a) As we just read in Savoy 3.1.

- b) We do have a will that freely (in the sense of choosing, not in the sense of free from sin) makes choices.
 - c) Savoy 9.1 – “*God has endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.* (Matt 17:12; James 1:14; Deut 30:19)”
 - d) Reformed Christians (Calvinists) believe in free will!
- 5) To put together the total sovereignty of God, and human choice, the Confession states: “*nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*”
- a) What does that mean?!
 - b) Pastor Doug found this confusing for many years, however, when unpacking these theological systematic terms, much biblical clarity followed.
 - c) Especially when looking up the Scripture references, which are mind-blowing.

About First & Secondary Causes

- 1) A **First Cause** is the first, direct and ultimate cause of an action or event. Acts 2:23; Rom 9:15,18; 11:33;
Eph 1:11; Heb 6:17
 - a) God alone is the first cause of all things. He is the source of all being and the ultimate controller and cause of all events.
 - b) God alone decrees all things that come to pass by His perfect unchangeable and infallible will.
- 2) A **Second Cause** is a created thing that God uses to bring about His purposes. Gen 8:22; Ex 21:13; Deut 19:5;
1Kgs 22:28,34, Is 10:6-7; Jer 31:35
- 3) While secondary causes (like humans, natural laws, acts of nature) can be seen to be an immediate cause of something, God is the underlying and ultimate cause of everything.
- 4) Examples from Genesis:
 - a) Example #1 – God created light by speaking it into existence. Gen 1:3ff
 - i) *First Cause*: God speaking.
 - ii) *Secondary Cause*: None.
 - b) Example #2 – God ordained the animals to be named. Gen 2:18-20; Ps 50:10; Heb 4:13
 - i) *First Cause*: God decreed that animals have names.
 - ii) *Secondary Cause*: Adam names all the animals by his free will.
 - God knows what the names will be.
 - Not passively foreseeing it.
 - But decreeing it from the beginning.
 - It is brought about by Adam’s free choice.
 - So it is both that God ordains it and Adam freely chooses.
- 5) God has decided that most of His decrees “fall out” according to the nature of secondary causes.
 - a) God thus governs His creation through patterns & regulations. (secondary causes)
 - b) Not through continuously creating every action & event directly.
(This would make God the only cause. There would be no secondary causes.)

- c) Genesis 8:22 – “*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*”
- d) Question, has God ordained that we have light today in this room because of the light bulbs above us?
- i) All those actions that brought us having light bulbs turned on above us is by God?
 - ii) Yes, He ordained it all, but they “fall out” by secondary causes.
- 6) The Confession describes this in an amazing fashion:
- a) Primary Cause is taught in Savoy 5.1-2a – “*God the great Creator of all things does uphold, (Heb 1:3) direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, (Dan 4:34-35; Ps 135:6; Acts 17:25-26,28) from the greatest even to the least, (Matt 10:29-31) by His most wise and holy providence, (Prov 15:3; Ps 104:24; 145:17) according to His infallible foreknowledge, (Acts 15:18; Ps 94:8-11) and the free and immutable (unchangeable) counsel of His own will, (Eph 1:11) to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy. (Is 63:14; Eph. 3:10; Rom 9:17; Gen 45:7; Ps 145:7) Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; (Acts 2:23)”*
 - i) Most of this is pretty straightforward.
 - ii) Hearing that God is the “first cause” of all things. - b) Secondary Cause is in the next section, 5.2b – “*yet, by the same providence, Gen 8:22
He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes,
either necessarily, Jer 31:35
freely, Ex 21:13; Deut 19:5
or contingently. 1Kgs 22:28,34; Is 10:6-7*
 - i) Unpacking the different aspects of secondary causes (necessary, free & contingent) is very interesting.
 - ii) Especially, the biblical references.
- 7) Some secondary causes are **necessary** (required, indispensable) to have.
- a) *For example:* God has ordained that the sun was necessary for light and that mankind needs sunlight to live.
 - b) The sun is a secondary necessary cause for humans to live.
 - c) Jeremiah 31:35-36 – “*Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the LORD of hosts is His name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.’”*
- 8) Some secondary causes are “**free**”, depending on whether one decides to choose that action, or even if that action works out.
- a) *For example:* In the Old Covenant God ordered the creation of sanctuary cities, where a person who committed accidental homicide could flee to and be safe from revenge of the killed persons’ family. (Remember, a police force is a modern concept.) Ex 21:12-13
Deut 19:5
 - b) God decreed this secondary free cause of how to remedy the problem of manslaughter.
 - i) A man could be saved, or lost, by freely finding a city of refuge.
 - ii) Whether the one who committed manslaughter chooses to flee to a city of refuge, or even makes it to the city, is a free action. (Though God has decreed that outcome too, according to His secret will.)

iii) Ex 21:12-13 – “*He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.*”

- 9) Some secondary causes are “**contingent**”, which seem to us to happen by chance or accidentally.
- a) *For example:* Do you know that in many English Bibles (NASB, ESV, NKJV, etc.) the word “random” is used? In 1Kings 22:34 & 2Chronicles 18:33.
 - b) In these texts King Ahab is killed by a “random” arrow shot confirming Micaiah is a true prophet as per God’s decree. 1Kgs 22:28,34
1Kgs 22:19
 - c) The truth of Micaiah’s prophesy was contingent on Ahab’s death.
 - d) In the mind of God, was it ordained that Ahab die from that particular arrow? Yes!
 - e) But from our perspective it seemed to happen randomly.
 - i) God didn’t strike Ahab down from heaven or command the archer in a dream.
 - ii) Instead, God’s decree/will “fell out” in a seemingly very ordinary way.

Conclusion

- 1) I hope the unpacking of these systematic theological terms hasn’t been too complicated and that it helps you better understanding all of what the Bible teaches about the nature and sovereignty of God.
- 2) Granted there is a mystery to this.
 - a) God’s sovereignty is compatible with our free choices.
 - b) We have a hard time grasping this. However, it is what the Bible teaches.
 - c) Evil things seem to happen randomly from our perspective, yet we know God cannot do evil.
 - i) Therefore, we get to call something evil that is contrary to God’s revealed will as found in Scripture.
 - ii) Yet there is no random evil but everything in history has a purpose, part of God’s plan, though we might see it, or understand it, this side of glory.
 - d) We, however, have a special revelation that shows God is working out is perfect plan! As we will hear in Revelation 5-7.
- 3) As we work through Revelation 5-7, we are going to hear about a lot of troubles in this world, yet it is greatly comforting to know it is all part of God’s plan, as shown by the sealed scroll in Revelation 5:1.
- 4) The supreme example of this is the death of Christ. Is 53:10; Acts 2:23; 4:27
 - a) Which is by far the most evil act in all of history.
 - b) Yet it was ordained by God for His glory and our supreme good.