

Trusting God: God's Control of Nature

Most of us appreciate nature, but we also recognize the potential for destruction within nature. When nature is stable and predictable, we enjoy what nature provides. But occasionally, we see terrifying danger in nature. It might be a tornado, a flood, a famine, a hurricane, or an earthquake. These natural phenomena can do tremendous damage and cause death and suffering for thousands of people. Every day around the world, many people die because of natural disasters.

People today often say that the only thing controlling nature is the laws of nature. We know the mechanics of earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, and famines. We know why these things happen; those who study climate and weather understand the science behind such things. Many would say that these things happen naturally, by chance, without reference to God.

Those who say such things don't know or don't care what the Bible says about God's control of nature. As Christians, we must affirm that God is in control of nature; God has power over all natural events.

God's control of nature is comforting when we enjoy the benefits of nature. We thank God for how nature provides food, clothing, and shelter for us. When it rains when we need it, when the crops are healthy, and when the weather is pleasant, then it's easy to be thankful for the natural world. But what about when natural disasters cause death and destruction? Then we start wondering why God allows nature to do such harm. If God is good and powerful, why doesn't he control nature so that it is not so harmful? These are profound questions.

This is the sixth message in our Summer Sermon Series on trusting God. Today we'll consider God's control over nature. Even when nature is violent and dangerous, we trust that God has a good purpose in his control of nature.

I. God controls nature.

A. Atheists commonly claim that ancient people did not understand nature and thus invented various gods to explain natural events. Lightning was the gods' arrows; thunder was god's voice; the planets and stars moved because the gods moved them around. Whatever could not be explained by human reason would be explained by the action of the gods.

B. But now, in modern times, humans have come to understand nature. We no longer need the idea of a god to explain natural events. We have science now; we no longer need God. We don't believe that storms or earthquakes are produced by gods. We can explain natural phenomena without recourse to god. Things happen through natural law, not because a god causes things to happen.

C. Christians don't have to choose between natural law and God. We recognize that nature operates according to natural law, but we also affirm that God is in control of nature and of natural law.

God is the creator; he is the God of nature. He established the natural laws by which nature operates. He can manipulate these laws. He can violate these laws if he so chooses. He is not restricted by nature or by natural laws. God can do whatever he wants within nature. God is super-natural and transcendent—he's above, beyond, and over nature.

D. In fact, the more we study nature, the more reasonable it is to believe in God.

1. Just a century or so ago, scientists did not realize the complexity within nature as we know it now.

2. We didn't know how human life is possible only because nature is delicately balanced in such a way that life is possible.

3. Scientist today recognize that natural laws are finely tuned in order to create and sustain life on earth. If these laws were slightly different, life would be impossible on earth.

Examples of this fine tuning in nature:¹

1. strong and weak nuclear force constants

2. gravitational force constant

3. electromagnetic force constant

4. ratio of electromagnetic force to gravitational force

¹ From Rich Deem, "Evidence for the Fine Tuning of the Universe."

5. ratio of electron to proton mass
6. ratio of number of protons to number of electrons

That's a list of seven examples of fine tuning. I'm told that there are about 30 such examples that we know of in nature. If these forces or constants were even slightly different, life could not exist in the universe.

For many people, this fact provides good evidence that someone has set up the laws of nature in just the right way to provide for life. Someone has been fine tuning the "dials." The fine tuning of nature is a very strong argument and good proof for the existence of God.

E.g., Anthony Flew rejected atheism because intelligent design is evident all around us.

Trans: Let's consider several specific things in nature that God controls.

II. God controls the weather.

Job 37:6 For He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth'; Likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain ...

Job 37:10–13 By the breath of God ice is given, And the broad waters are frozen. ¹¹ Also with moisture He saturates the thick clouds; He scatters His bright clouds. ¹² And they swirl about, being turned by His guidance, That they may do whatever He commands them On the face of the whole earth. ¹³ He causes it to come, Whether for correction, Or for His land, Or for mercy.

Amos 4:7 I also withheld rain from you, I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. ...

Jeremiah 10:13 ... He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures.

Psalm 147:8 Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepares rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains.

Psalm 147:16–18 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; ¹⁷ He casts out His hail like morsels; Who can stand before His cold? ¹⁸ He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow.

- A. Note that these passages refer to all kinds of weather—both good and bad, both beneficial and disastrous. Because God is sovereign over weather, all of it happens according to God's will.

- B. God shows his grace and kindness through the weather. Both saint and sinner enjoy the benefits of rain and sunshine. Good weather is an aspect of God's common grace.

Ps 104:10-14 He sends the springs into the valleys, They flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; ... He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, ...

Matt 5:45 ... He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

- C. On the other hand, sometimes God uses weather as a means of judgment.

Amos 4:7-9 "I also withheld rain from you, I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, And where it did not rain the part withered... I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, Your vineyards, Your fig trees, And your olive trees, The locust devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the LORD.

God used nature to judge disobedient people. God's intent was that these natural disasters would cause the people to repent and turn from their sin.

- D. We should be thankful that usually the weather is tolerable and sometimes even pleasant. Only rarely is the weather really dangerous or deadly. And God has given us the capacity to deal with the weather.
- E. We can pray about the weather. We believe God can change the weather.
- F. I suppose it's human nature to talk about the weather. We typically complain about it when we don't like it. But if God is in control of the weather, if God could change it, then we get what God gives us. We should not complain about the weather. We should see God's sovereign hand in whatever happens in the weather. When we complain about the weather, we are complaining about the providence of God.

Trans: God controls the weather. He sends the rain or the sunshine. At times, he allows natural weather disasters for his own purposes.

- III. God controls natural disasters.

Isaiah 45:7 *I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.* ’

Joel 1:4 *That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.*

Joel 2:25 *And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army **which I sent among you.***

- A. In the old days, and still sometimes today, people refer to natural disasters as “acts of God.” There used to be a general understanding that the only one controlling these massive acts of nature was God. When such things happened, people attributed them to God.
- B. We naturally wonder why God allows such things or even causes such disasters to happen, especially when thousands of people die. As we’ve said before, God has his reasons for governing the world the way he does.
- C. We hear about natural disasters quite frequently. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, floods, and famines are all fairly common. Some kind of natural disaster is happening somewhere on earth almost all the time. E.g., fires in the west, tornados, hurricanes.
- D. When these natural disasters strike, we should remember a few things:
 - 1. We live in a fallen world that is under the curse of sin. Natural disasters are evidence of the curse. The world is often a dangerous place. Natural disasters are part of our broken world.
 - 2. But we should also see that God brings about judgment and chastisement through natural disasters.

E.g., the list of curses at the end of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 28:38–40 *You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant vineyards and tend them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil; for your olives shall drop off.*

E.g., Joel’s description of the locust invasion.

Joel 2:12–13 *“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.*

The natural disaster of the locust invasion was a judgment sent by God; it should have caused the people to repent. God used the locust to chastise the people. Natural disasters could be God’s hand of judgment against a sinful and rebellious people.

Some people claim that more natural disasters are happening now than were happening previously. I don’t know if that’s true, but if God wanted to judge us, natural disasters are one way of doing it.

However, we should be careful about assigning blame for natural disasters. We don’t know God’s purposes in these events, and we should not speculate about it. These things often happen to both the wicked and the righteous.

- E. We should also realize that atheists have no reason to complain about the suffering brought about by natural disasters.
1. One of the common complaints that atheists make is that so many people suffer and die because of natural disasters. They say that, if God existed, he would prevent such things. But these disasters happen, so God must not exist.
 2. But on the atheistic worldview, why is it a problem if thousands of people die through natural disasters? After all, they believe that we are all just a bunch of molecules in motion, just a random collection of star dust. Evolution is based on death; the weak or unlucky die, only the fittest survive.
 3. So they have no right to complain about natural disasters—they are just random events happening in nature. How can a naturalist complain about nature? These events are arbitrary and meaningless on their view. These disasters happen because of the impersonal laws of nature. They claim that there is no meaning or purpose behind it; it’s all just random chance or it’s predetermined by natural laws.

4. Christians believe in God and that he is in control of nature. So we believe that natural disasters are not mere random events. God has a purpose in everything he allows to happen.

Trans.: We may not understand why God allows natural disasters, but we affirm that God is in control of them.

IV. God controls physical afflictions and death.

Exodus 4:11 *So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?"*

Job 14:5 *Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;*

- A. Part of the curse of sin is the fact that people suffer from physical afflictions. This is part of the natural, broken, fallen world.
 1. Some people are born with physical problems or birth defects. Something goes wrong in natural processes that leads to defects and diseases.
 2. Some people have accidents or experience trauma that leaves them handicapped.
 3. Some people experience afflictions through the process of aging. The older you get, the more infirm you get (usually).
 4. Whatever the circumstances, most people will suffer with physical afflictions at various points throughout their lives. If you live long enough, you will probably suffer afflictions as you get older.
- B. We affirm that God is in control of our health or lack of it. God claims credit for making people with the conditions they have. In the Exodus passage, he claims responsibility for making people deaf, mute, or blind. So these conditions are not merely luck or fate; they are not merely the outcome of natural laws. The natural cause might be a problem in your DNA, but the ultimate cause is God.
- C. We should be careful about assigning blame for the physical afflictions people endure. We should not assume we know why people suffer.

John 9:1–3 *Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*

Part of the reason for the man’s blindness was “that the works of God should be made revealed in him.” Jesus was planning to heal the man, and this would result in glory for God. The man’s blindness was part of God’s plan for him.

If this is true for blindness, it would also be true for any other physical affliction that we might suffer. These things don’t happen to us randomly; they are within God’s sovereign will for us.

The question as to why God allows them to some and not to others is a profound mystery. All we can say is that God has his reasons. We find some of these reasons in the Bible.

- God’s grace and justice may be displayed through suffering (Rom 5:20-21; 9:17)
- God uses disasters to judge wickedness (Matt 13:35; John 5:14).
- Disasters may shock unbelievers into repentance (Joel 2:12-13; Zech 13:7-9; Luke 13:1-5).
- God uses suffering as a means of chastening His people (Heb 12)
- Those who have suffered are able to comfort others who suffer (2 Cor 1:4).

Ultimately, we don’t know why disasters happen or why God allows so many natural disasters in the world. But we believe that God has a morally sufficient reason for the suffering that he allows.

- D. Disasters sometimes lead to death. God knows and has planned the day of our death.
1. The Bible affirms that all our days are numbered. We’ll live precisely as long as God has planned for us to live.
 2. Hopefully, we’ll have a long, happy, full, productive life and, when we come to the end of our lives, we die painlessly and quickly.
 3. Sadly, many people suffer greatly in the process of death.

When such things happen, we are sad and dismayed, and we naturally wonder why God would allow such a thing to happen. Even in the midst of tragic death, we believe that God has a plan; God is working out his plan in both life and death.

Trans: God calls on us to trust him within our physical afflictions. We trust that God has a purpose in it all. What we experience is not mere random circumstances. God is in control, and we must have faith to believe that he is working all things for his glory and for our good.

V. God controls pregnancy and birth.

- A. We know that many couples would like to have children but are unable to do so because of various issues. This is a very frustrating experience for those who have had difficulty in this area.
- B. The Bible affirms that the ability to have children is within the providence of God.
 - 1. Gen 16:2—Sarah said, “the Lord kept me from having children.”
 - 2. Gen 29:31—the Lord had opened Leah’s womb
 - 3. 1 Sam 1:5—the lord had closed Hannah’s womb
 - 4. Judg 13:3— *And the Angel of the LORD appeared to [Samson’s mother] and said to her, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.*
 - 5. Luke 1:13—Elizabeth would bear a son in her old age.
- C. God is actively involved in the whole pregnancy and birth process. According to Ps 139, God “knits” us together in our mother’s womb.
- D. We can ask the same questions about why God would allow pain and disappointment when it comes to the ability to have children.

Why does God not allow some people to bear children? Why does it seem like the worst people are able to have lots of children while the good people can’t have them? Why does God allow a child born with a physical defect or disability?
- E. We simply do not know or understand the providence of God in these areas. It’s hidden to us; it’s a mystery. We have to leave it with God and trust that he knows best.

VI. Practical principles in light of God’s sovereign control of nature

- A. We ought to appreciate and strive to understand the natural world. We should try to conserve nature and not destroy it. We should be good stewards over the natural world. God created nature for our good, but we should not abuse the natural world through careless pollution and mindless exploitation. We should manage the earth's resources carefully and wisely. We should not ruin the beauty of nature.
- B. We must avoid assuming that natural disasters are *always* God's hand of judgment against a sinful people. Maybe it is, but we would not know that with any level of certainty. When a disaster happens, we should not conclude that those who suffered because of it were worse sinners than others.

There are plenty of examples of good, godly Christians suffering from natural disasters. E.g., Andy Hudson in Janesville lost part of their house in a tornado. Both sinners and saints suffer from natural disasters.

- C. We should be careful about trying to control nature in ways that contradict biblical principles. Through science and technology, we now have the ability to control nature in various ways. Some of these abilities are good and beneficial, but others are fraught with moral and ethical problems.

E.g., IVF, surrogacy, end-of-life procedures—when to pull the plug; lab-grown meat; computerizing humans—“neuralink”—interfacing a computer with the human brain; genetic engineering/manipulation; cloning. The attempt to control nature could lead to disaster. As Christians, we must be sensitive to the laws of nature and be very careful about trying to manipulate it or control it.

Most natural events are outside of our control. We certainly cannot control the weather or natural disasters. We are in many ways vulnerable to the acts of nature.

We must believe that God is good, that he's powerful, and that he loves us. We must accept what God gives us through nature with thanksgiving and praise. When things are going well, that's easy. But when natural disasters strike, it's very difficult. The whole book of Job speaks to this very issue.

We must pray about all these things and trust that God will do what is good and right for us. God acts ultimately for his own glory, but also for our good. It may be hard to see how afflictions and disasters can be for our good, but we trust that God has a morally sufficient purpose for all he does or allows.

It's easy to *say* that we would trust God when a child is born with a defect or a loved one suffers with a disease. We *say* that we would continue to serve God even if a tornado destroyed all we own. It's an entirely different thing to actually trust God as those things are happening. But that's what we must strive to do. We must seek to respond to the natural difficulties of this world with the words of Habakkuk:

Hab 3:17-18 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

