

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

GOD IS KING!

- Providence includes the idea of sovereignty but focuses on the design of God's governing of all things...it focuses not on God's sovereignty as powerful but as purposeful
- In providence, God sees to it that things happen in a certain way for a certain purpose
- However, sovereignty does not necessarily contain the idea of purposeful action...it simply focuses on God's right and power to do all that he wills
- To say that God is sovereign is not to say merely that he is stronger than everyone else, although this is true
- Rather, to call him sovereign is to ascribe to him a rule and authority that transcends space and time, leaving nothing outside its scope...he is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth
- As sovereign, he is subject to no one, influenced by no one, and absolutely independent of everyone
- God does whatever he pleases, whenever he pleases, wherever he pleases...no one can thwart him nor can anyone hinder him...He is the supreme King of heaven and earth
- To be sovereign, God is all powerful, all knowing, and absolutely free...therefore, history and the future are in God's control...it is his absolute rule and authority over all things...his will is the cause of world events
- God has total rule...he is a righteous totalitarian ruler...he makes all laws...and functions as a benevolent dictator
- Abraham Kuyper: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"
- Jonathan Edwards: "God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me a great part of his glory. It has often been my delight to approach God, and adore him as a sovereign God."
- Charles Spurgeon: "The sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which the child of God rests his head at night, giving perfect peace."

THE AVERSION TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

- Sadly, the view of God in the eyes of many today is that he is a dethroned deity in which he has seemingly exchanged his throne for a footstool of subordination to the will of his creation
- In the minds of many, God has limited his control and given free reign to people in order to give them unconditional liberty
- In this concept of God, he is only slightly sovereign...presiding over his creation, but not prevailing over it in power or control
- "In the views of many, God is always pacing back and forth in heaven, wringing His hands over unfolding events on earth, rubbing His furrowed brow, and losing sleep over His plans, which are being repeatedly frustrated by men. They see him as continually going into an emergency session with the other members of the Trinity, strategizing His next move, always reacting to the next hand dealt to Him by man, Satan, or circumstances."¹
- Some even believe that God is involved in some cosmic stalemate between himself and Satan in which man has the swing vote

¹ Steven Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, 93.

- This is often expressed in the catchy idiom: “God votes for you; the devil votes against you; and you cast the deciding vote”
- This implies that God and Satan are somehow equals and that man’s will is able to cast the tie-breaking vote for heaven or hell
- “God is too often perceived as a codependent deity who is always rigging solutions to earthly problems, but who, quite frankly, lacks the clout to pull it off. This is the user-friendly god. But is *this* God? Has He really chosen to limit the free reign of His sovereignty? Is He limited by the choices of man? Or is God really the supreme ruler of the universe, exercising total control over all the works of His hand? Rest assured, God is in complete control.”²
- Not only are many indifferent to this attribute of God, many are actually hostile to it
- “On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He will with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.”³
- Many hate the doctrine of God’s sovereignty because they think that it excludes human responsibility
- But divine compatibilism states that when people perform free acts (i.e. not constrained or compelled in their actions), they do that which God wants them to do
- His sovereignty is compatible both with human freedom and responsibility
- Compatibilism reconciles the reality that every event is causally determined, ordained, and/or decreed by God and is also compatible with the free agency of man
- Compatibilism deals with the foundational issue of how man can be held accountable for his actions if his actions were always going to occur and could not have been anything other than that which occurred
- In short, both are true...God sovereignly determines all that occurs AND man is a free, moral agent
- “There is perfect harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Many have most foolishly said that it is quite impossible to show where Divine sovereignty ends and creature responsibility begins: in the sovereign ordination of the Creator. As to His sovereignty, there is not and never will be any ‘end’ to it!”⁴
- “Agents may properly be said to be free so long as their acts are uncoerced. People are free to act within the confines of their nature. Since all men are fallen in Adam, their nature is corrupted by sin, and they are therefore not free to choose righteousness. Nevertheless, they still freely make their moral choices according to their thinking and desires. Those choices arise from a fallen human nature, which is fundamentally opposed to obeying God. So people act freely in their sin and are not coerced by God to act against their nature. God’s decree extends to the uncoerced choices of agents free to act within the bounds of their nature (cf., e.g., Gen. 50:19–20; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28).”⁵
- But the primary reason that fallen man recoils at the sovereignty of God and argues against it is because ultimately he wants to be God himself...he is not content to allow God to be God

² Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, 93.

³ Charles Spurgeon, sermon on Matthew 20:15.

⁴ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*. 34-35.

⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 211.

- “The fallen heart of man says, ‘We will not have an absolutely sovereign God rule over us!’...But God already rules over them! That’s the whole point. God is already sovereign, for His sovereignty is not dependent upon our acquiescence. Acknowledging and submitting to His sovereignty does not make Him sovereign, any more than saving faith “make Jesus Lord.” He already is Lord. An attack on the sovereignty of God is an attack on the sovereign God.”⁶
- Ultimately, then, it is an ethical problem not just a theological one...denying absolute sovereignty is a serious sin, not just a theological error

THE EVIDENCE OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

- God’s sovereignty refers to His right to rule, govern, and preside over all things...it is his supremacy and meticulous control over all that occurs
- One who is sovereign is supreme in rank, power, and authority...and who reigns over all
- He reigns freely over all that he has made...he is unrivaled in majesty, unlimited in power, and unaffected by anything outside himself...he needs nothing and nobody
- He did not create the universe because he needed it...he is totally independent...he does what he does for the simple reason that he chooses to do so
- Every realm of God’s creation is subject to his decrees...every atom obeys his authority...every human is controlled by his desires
- The Scriptures frequently speak of God’s matchless rule

Deuteronomy 4:39 ~ Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.

Job 23:13 ~ But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does.

Psalms 103:19 ~ The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

Psalms 115:3 ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Psalms 135:6 ~ Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

Isaiah 46:10 ~ 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’;

Ephesians 1:11 ~ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- The “counsel” of God refers to the inter-Trinitarian deliberation that preceded the creation of the universe...this is unconditional and not based on outside influences
- The “will” of God refers to his divine decisions and desires, which encompass each aspect of our lives
- The “purpose” of God refers to his divine determination to carry out His righteous will
- God’s act of “predestination” guarantees that his sovereign will is brought about in totality
- The fact that he “works all things” indicates the comprehensiveness of God’s sovereignty

1 Timothy 6:15 ~ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

Revelation 19:16 ~ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

- In particular, the enthronement Psalms resound with the theme that God reigns

⁶ Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 190.

Psalm 47:1-9 ~ O clap your hands, all peoples; Shout to God with the voice of joy. 2 For the LORD Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth. 3 He subdues peoples under us And nations under our feet...5 God has ascended with a shout, The LORD, with the sound of a trumpet. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises; Sing praises to our King, sing praises. 7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. 8 God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne. 9 The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham, For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is highly exalted.

Psalm 93:1-2 ~ The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. 2 Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.

Psalm 96:7-10 ~ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; Bring an offering and come into His courts. 9 Worship the LORD in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity."

Psalm 97:1-2 ~ The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad. 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Psalm 98:7-9 ~ Let the sea roar and all it contains, The world and those who dwell in it. 8 Let the rivers clap their hands, Let the mountains sing together for joy 9 Before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness And the peoples with equity.

Psalm 99:1-5 ~ The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! 2 The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. 3 Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He. 4 The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His footstool; Holy is He.

Psalm 145:13 ~ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

- God is entirely sovereign over all things and his will is supreme
- He doesn't merely do what is right...he is a law unto himself so that whatever he does is right
- We have no right to question how God exercises his will, for that would be to act as a god, but God alone is God...we dare not quibble or argue with God about rights we presume to have
- "Surely we must be out of our minds if we set bounds on God's authority over us in this way, giving more credit to the creature than to the One who created and sustains the heaven and earth by his Word alone?"⁷
- And woe to that person who calls God's sovereignty into question

Psalm 2:2-3 ~ The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"

Proverbs 21:30 ~ There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the LORD.

Isaiah 45:9 ~ "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker— An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands'?"

Jeremiah 50:24 ~ I set a snare for you and you were also caught, O Babylon, While you yourself were not aware; You have been found and also seized Because you have engaged in conflict with the LORD.

Daniel 4:35 ~ All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

Romans 9:20-21 ~ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

- God does not have to answer our questions or defend his decisions...nor does he need our advice

⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, 298.

Isaiah 40:13 ~ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him?

Romans 11:34 ~ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?

THE ARENAS OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Creation

- Everything that exists has God as its source...all things belong to God and exist for His glory
- Sudden creationism is the understanding that God created all that exists directly and instantaneously (*fiat*) out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)
- In an extraordinary display of sheer sovereignty, God simply spoke this universe and all it contains into existence
- Every single dimension of creation is a silent, but clear, testimony to the supreme authority of God
- He chose to create by himself and for himself...he created what he wanted, when he wanted, and as he wanted

Psalm 33:6-9 ~ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. 9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Hebrews 11:3 ~ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

John 1:3 ~ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

Colossians 1:16 ~ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Hebrews 1:2 ~ in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- Not only has God spoken into being everything that exists, he continually sustains and rules over his creation such that plants, creatures, and the forces of nature are under God's complete control
- He has established the physical laws by which he governs the forces of nature...and these laws operate according to his sustaining power
- All types of weather are the result of the controlling, sovereign hand of God
- It's not that he intervenes in his creation on certain occasions, but that he rules over all of nature every day

Job 37:3-13 ~ Under the whole heaven He lets it loose, And His lightning to the ends of the earth. 4 After it, a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice, And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard. 5 God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend. 6 For to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' And to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.' 7 He seals the hand of every man, That all men may know His work. 8 Then the beast goes into its lair And remains in its den. 9 Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. 10 From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen. 11 Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. 12 It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth. 13 Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen."

Matthew 5:45 ~ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 10:29 ~ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

- Jesus' calming the sea (Matt 8:23-27) demonstrates his complete power over nature, day by day, in all places

History and Nations

- Rather than simply creating things and setting them in motion, God orders and directs human affairs
- His sovereignty extends to worldly power structures and earthly rulers...he makes all the decisions of human governments conform to his plan for human history
- He truly is the King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling over all governors, presidents, monarchs, and leaders
- He determines who assumes office, as well as when and where they exercise their rule

Psalms 33:10-11 ~ The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

Psalms 75:6-7 ~ For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert comes exaltation; 7 But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.

Proverbs 21:1 ~ The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Daniel 2:21 ~ It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

Daniel 4:17 ~ This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men."

- "All earthly kings, leaders, and rulers are subject to God's direct intervention and are subordinate to His divine control. Even evil tyrants, self-willed dictators, and corrupt politicians carry out their duties within the inscrutable, sovereign will of God. God is His own purpose. He alone knows his sovereign ways, and He works through leaders – yes, even wicked leaders – to carry out His eternal purposes."⁸
- So sovereign is he that he uses pagan kings and rulers as instruments to accomplish his divine purposes
- Although they operate of their own volition, God actually governs their every decision in order to carry out his purposes on a global scale

Ezra 6:22 ~ And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Ezra 7:27 ~ Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem,

Isaiah 10:5-6 ~ Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, 6 I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets.

Isaiah 44:28-45:1 ~ It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.' " 1 Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

Satan

- Many people believe that God and Satan are two nearly-equal powers fighting it out, with God narrowly gaining the victory
- However, Scripture paints a very different portrait of Satan...he is a created and defeated foe whose outcome has already been decided

⁸ Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, 97-98

- Satan was the highest of all the angels, created with extraordinary gifts and beauty (Ezek 28:11-15), who rebelled against God's authority, wanting to be God himself (Isaiah 14:12-14)
- As a result, he was cast down to earth (Luke 10:18), taking one-third of the angels with him in a cosmic revolt (Rev 12:4)
- As such, he is presently the ruler of this world (John 12:31), the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4), and the whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19)
- But, in his infinite sovereignty and wisdom, God ordained all this to accomplish his purposes
- Satan can and does create havoc...but only to the extent that God allows him (Job 1-2)

1 Samuel 16:14 ~ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

- He was defeated at the cross (Col 2:15) and he awaits his execution at the final judgment (Rev 20:10)
- Until then, God exercises absolute authority over him, using him as a pawn to accomplish his own eternal purposes

Our Lives

- God has sovereignly overseen our physical development...and he has numbered our days

Psalm 139:13-16 ~ For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

- Clearly, God has orchestrated every part of our lives according to his master plan

Salvation

- God's sovereignty extends to his choice of those whom he predestines for salvation
- This election is not his simple foreknowledge of human actions and decisions...rather his choice of his elect was made by Himself and for His glory

John 6:44 ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Ephesians 1:3-5, 11 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- Spurgeon: "I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine."⁹
- Spurgeon: "Whatever may be said about the doctrine of election, it is written in the Word of God as with an iron pen, and there is no getting rid of it. To me, it is one of the sweetest and most blessed truths in the whole of revelation, and those who are afraid of it are so because they do not understand it. If they could but know that the Lord had chosen them, it would make their hearts dance for joy."

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography*, 51

THE APPLICATION OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Comfort

- “There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation – the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands – the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne.”¹⁰

Trust

- God’s sovereignty establishes his power over our circumstances such that we can rest entirely in the One who does all things well
- Our future does not rest in the hands of human beings...nor does it depend upon blind chance
- Rather, God is actively involved in our lives, directing them according to his holy purposes

Salvation

- Salvation is not merely believing in Christ...it is a belief that results in submission to his lordship

Romans 10:9 ~ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

John 20:28 ~ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

- “One cannot truly believe in Christ’s deity without submitting to His total lordship and absolute authority. Not submitting means not believing that He is Lord and God...To deny the absolute sovereignty of God reveals a deficient view of saving faith. It actually leads to atheism, for if god is not totally sovereign, He is not totally God, and a partial God is no god. But the God of the Bible is both Lord and God and the absolute sovereign of all.”¹¹

God-Centeredness

- “The universe is centered around God. It is a theocentric cosmos. Each of us should consciously and morally centered around God as well. God Himself is God-centered. The church needs a theological Copernican revolution. Hundreds of years ago, scientists switched from geocentrism to heliocentrism, and we must change from anthropocentrism to theocentrism...We must center on the glory of Christ, not the felt needs of man. In worship we must engage in God-centered praise, not man-centered entertainment.”¹²

Counseling

- Sadly, much of so called “Christian counseling” has succumbed to the emphasis on self-esteem, self-image, self-confidence
- What is needed in this arena is a return to showing people God’s principles and promises and putting them back into a God-centered relationship

¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon, sermon on Matthew 20:15.

¹¹ Daniel, *History and Theology of Calvinism*, 186.

¹² Ibid.