

Lesson 5

God Is Sovereign

Wednesday night, just before I fell asleep, I asked God to grant me wisdom as to what attribute of Himself He would like me to preach on this week. When I awoke on Thursday morning, the first thought that came into my mind were the words of Revelation 19:6, ***“The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”*** (KJV). God gave me the assurance that I was to preach on His sovereignty and since Wednesday He has flooded my finite mind with high and mighty thoughts of Him.

God has impressed on me again that He is the Supreme Ruler of this universe and is in ultimate control of all that happens in this world.

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.” (1 Chron. 29:11-12)

“O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.” (2 Chron. 20:6)

Beloved, there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God and no God at all. God is either sovereign or He is not God! The average person’s concept of God is nothing but a figment of the human imagination. Man, in his mind, has reduced God to a puppet. He speaks of a God whose designs can be thwarted, whose plan is subject to change according to the whims of man, and whose omnipotent power must be restricted to preserve man’s free will. Reflect on this for a moment, Christian; a God whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, and whose purpose is checkmated, is not God at all. The Bible tells us that God sits in the heavens and laughs at puny man’s attempt to make Him less than God.

“The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.” (Psa. 2:4)

SOVEREIGNTY EXPLAINED

By “sovereign” we mean that God rules over His creation. His sovereignty is a result of His omniscience, omnipotence and freedom. Since God is omniscient (knows all) there can be no

unforeseen events; therefore, there are no accidents in God's plan. Because God is omnipotent (all powerful) He has the power to accomplish all His planned ends. God is the only free being in the universe, and He is free to do whatever He wills anywhere at anytime to carry out His eternal purpose in every detail without interference.

"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." (Psa. 115:3)

By "sovereign" we mean that there is no law of any kind anywhere in the universe that can coerce or force God to do anything which He does not please to do. Nothing can hinder Him, compel Him, or stop Him, for He is God.

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Isa. 46:9-10)

God is a law unto Himself and whatever He does is right, and woe unto the man who dares call God's sovereignty into question.

"Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker . . . Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'" (Isa. 45:9)

SOVEREIGNTY AND SIN

Concerning God and sin, we may make two absolute statements which are, "God is" and "sin is." The real question is, "Does God somehow have control over sin?" The answer is "YES!" God is not the author of sin and it always originates with His creatures; but in His plan He has control over it. God must control sin or sin might somehow defeat God; and if anything could defeat God, then God would not be God.

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." (Prov. 19:21)

Since God somehow has control over sin, we know that one day He will judge it and defeat it.

"The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster." (Prov. 16:4)

Whenever I see or experience the sin of this world, my first reaction is that it seems as though God is not sovereign or He would do something about sin. But then my next reaction is that if God does not somehow have control over sin then life is not worth living and suicide seems the best way out. My God has the power to control, judge and defeat sin because He is sovereign.

SOVEREIGNTY AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE WORLD

We look at this world with its wars, suffering and human misery and we tend to become awed, frightened and discouraged by it all. We can see that the history of the world is one nation conquering another and much of that problem is due to inflexible, independent, selfish governments who want wealth and power. Is God on the throne in world affairs? Is He sovereign over world governments? He most certainly is and the Bible tells us this clearly.

The Apostle Paul wrote the Roman Christians to be in submission to the Roman government for this government was ordained by God.

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” (Rom. 13:1)

At this point in history, the Roman government was dictatorial and tyrannical. God in His sovereignty permitted the Roman government to exist to further His own ends. When we look on our modern world, do we believe that God has control over Iraq, China, Korea and Cuba? You can rest assured that God is using all governments of this world to bring about His desired end – the second advent of Jesus Christ.

God has final control over all governments and world leaders.

“He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them . . .” (Dan. 2:21)

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.” (Prov. 21:1)

Evil leaders can do no more in this world than that which God permits. What a comfort it is to know that presidents, dictators, kings and emperors are less than ants before a sovereign God.

Christ Himself declared that the final power in world affairs is not human government, but Almighty God.

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” (John 19:10-11)

Therefore, we can conclude from the Bible that it is not elections or revolutions that ultimately put governments in power but, rather, it is God, and it is all permitted by God in His plan to bring the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

SOVEREIGNTY AND SALVATION

God is sovereign in salvation. For many Christians it comes as quite a surprise to learn that behind their acts of faith in Christ was the sovereign will and choice of God,

“Yet to all who received him (Christ), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12-13)

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth . . .” (James 1:18)

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last . . .” (John 15:16)

At first, men fight hard against the sovereignty of God in salvation for it seems unfair by human standards; but upon deeper meditation it becomes the bedrock doctrine of one’s whole life. When rightly understood, God’s sovereignty in salvation is the most comforting truth in the Bible.

God’s sovereign choice in salvation preserves true Theism and supernaturalism in salvation, and it becomes a great comfort to know that we were not saved by chance, but according to God’s own purpose.

“Who (God) has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace . . .” (2 Tim. 1:9)

To contemplate that God chose us, sinful critters, indeed, out of the mass of sinful humanity, when He could have damned us for all eternity, should humble us in the dust. The question is not, “Why does God choose some and pass by others?”, but “Why does God choose anyone?” for all men deserve nothing from God. When you begin to ask yourself the question, “Why should I be saved when others, apparently more deserving than I, are not saved? Why me, Lord? Why me?” then you are beginning to enter into God’s sovereign purposes in salvation.

*Why was I made to hear His voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?
Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste
And perished in our sin.*

There are ever so many humanists who want to make man rather than God the focal point of salvation. One humanist, William Ernest Henley, said in the poem *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." There are many Christian humanists in the evangelical church in our day who strive to preserve man's free will and exclude the biblical teachings on God's sovereignty in salvation. So many times I have heard preachers and evangelists say, "God is a perfect gentleman; He will not overrule your will; He leaves the choice of salvation completely up to you; God has done all he can to save you, and now His hands are tied; you must do the rest by believing." I ask you, "Where in this kind of preaching is supernaturalism?" Why pray for the salvation of the lost if God cannot overrule the human will, for God's hands would be tied by a mere creature? What place is given to the Holy Spirit's convicting, drawing and regenerating works? God deliver us from ever saying that God cannot or will not override a man's will in salvation! The Bible tells us that God so works on the will of a person that He makes that person willing to believe.

There comes to my mind the story of a man who was giving a testimony at a meeting, and he told how God had sought him and finally found him. When he sat down, the leader of the meeting said, "Now, brother, you have told us about God's part in the way you became a Christian, but you never mentioned anything about your part, for I had to seek, and I had to pray, and I had to do all these other things, and you have not mentioned anything about them." And the other man quickly rose to his feet and said, "Yes, you are right. I didn't mention anything about my part. Well, my part, Sir, was running away from God for thirty years, and His part was running after me until He found me, broke me and gave me the grace to trust the Savior."

The major problem created by the doctrine of divine sovereignty has to do with the will of man. Since God is sovereign, how is it possible for man to exercise free choice? If man does not exercise choice, how is it possible for God to hold him responsible for his conduct? The answer to these problems is not easy and Christian men have disagreed over it throughout the history of the Church. There are four basic approaches to this problem, but only one, in my opinion, is biblical.

One possible view is to deny the sovereignty of God and exalt the free will of man. In so doing, God is robbed of His sovereignty and God is no God at all.

Another view exalts God's sovereignty but denies man's human responsibility. This results in fatalism, which is the view that all things are determined by God and man is a robot.

A third viewpoint is a mediating position between the two extremes of sovereignty and free will. This group claims that they can reconcile and harmonize these two truths. They

believe that God is so sovereign that He limited His own sovereignty in the area of free will so as to allow men to make free choices. In His absolute freedom, God has willed to give men limited freedom. This view is often illustrated by an ocean liner that is leaving from New York to arrive in Liverpool, England. The destination of the ship has been determined. On the ocean liner are people and they are free to move about on the ship as they will with no activities planned for them by decree. But all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward to a predetermined goal.

On the surface, this third view seems to solve many problems, but upon further examination it is proved to be more philosophical than biblical. This view denies the plain teaching of the Bible that God is sovereign in all things. Furthermore, a God who limits His sovereignty is really not sovereign in all things. He would be in semi-control, but things within the realm of free choice would be by chance and accident. A limited sovereignty is not sovereignty at all. Using the illustration of the ocean liner, would God be sovereign if a person slipped on the ship and broke his neck? Those who believe in limited sovereignty would have to place this under the area of chance. Furthermore, this view does not take into consideration the total depravity of all men, for sin has affected their wills so that they are not free to make free choices. This is true because they are slaves to their own nature.

The fourth viewpoint, and what I consider to be the right position, is that the Bible accepts both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility as true. They are two equal truths taught side by side and are irreconcilable to the human mind. This is an antinomy, a mystery and a paradox. God has an elect people that will be saved, and any one who believes in Christ will be saved.

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.” (2 Thess. 2:13)

God does not save men apart from the human will but through the human will. Men must believe in Christ or they will never be saved; but if they believe, it is God who enabled them to do it.

Why did God choose Christians to salvation? Not because of any good in us, for we are all sinners. Not because of any foreseen faith in us, for there is no good thing in us. He did it according to the good pleasure of His own will, and we should be forever grateful.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” (Eph. 1:2-4 KJV)

SOVEREIGNTY AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

An understanding of the sovereignty of God in our daily Christian lives is essential to a normal and healthy Christian experience.

“. . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Phil. 2:12-13)

The Christian can work out his salvation because God is working in him. God has even planned the good works the Christian will do.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph. 2:10)

The Christian, by faith and obedience, must walk in these good works already prepared.

It is vital to grasp the sovereignty of God in our prayer lives to make sure we are praying according to God’s will and then we shall get answers to prayer.

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” (1 John 5:14)

The Christian should feel free to ask for anything from God and, if it is not God’s will, the answer will come back “no.” The believer in fellowship with his God begins to think God’s thoughts and he will begin to pray according to God’s will. God will lay things on his heart to pray for, so the Christian will have the privilege of seeing God work through his prayers.

A belief in the sovereignty of God is to have a conscious awareness that in our lives God must providentially guide and do His will.

“Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15)

A deep assurance of the sovereignty of God is such a comfort when trials and testing and crises come into our lives. In all circumstances, we can thank God, for He is sovereign over circumstances.

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thess. 5:18)

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "I wonder if I am numbered among the elect of God?" It is good to ask yourself that question, but you will never know the answer to it until you trust Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

God saves, but faith is the means whereby you appropriate God's salvation. Without faith in Christ you cannot be saved. The Bible says, "***Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.***" (Acts 16:31)