

Doctrine of God Part 23...God Is the Lord and Sovereign over All

John Murray on the Sovereignty of God...

"The sovereignty of God I take to be the absolute authority, rule, and government of God in the whole of that reality that exists distinct from Himself in the realms of nature and of grace...

Sovereignty is not mere uniqueness or supremacy or even transcendence in the realm of Deity. It is not as if there were a host of lesser deities over whom God is supreme and therefore demands from us supreme worship and devotion. It is rather that he alone is God. "The Lord he is God; there is none else besides him." "He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. 4:35, 39). "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me" (Deut. 32:39). "Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth" (2 Kings 19:15).

It is significant that it is precisely this line of Old Testament witness that is appealed to by our Lord as the answer to the question, "What commandment is the first of all?" "The first...is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29). And the necessary consequence for us is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30). "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10).

The concept of divine sovereignty presupposes also the fact of *creation*, that is, the origination of all other existence by the fiat of God. The moment we posit the existence of anything independent of God in its derivation of factual being, in that moment we have denied the divine sovereignty. For even should we grant that now or at some point God has assumed or gained absolute control over it, the moment we allow the existence of anything outside of his fiat as its principle or origination and outside of his government as the principle of its continued existence, then we have eviscerated the *absoluteness* of the divine authority and rule...."

R C Sproul on the Sovereignty of God...and "no maverick molecules"

"Now, what are the practical implications of a non-sovereign God? Think of it from the perspective of those of you who are professing Christians.

I like to explain it this way: if there is one molecule in the universe running loose, outside of the control of God's sovereignty, what I like to call "one maverick molecule," then the practical implication for us as Christians is that we have no guarantee whatsoever that any future promise God has made to His people will come to pass.

Remember when you were little kids, and you learned a little rhyme: "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe, the horse was lost; for want of the horse, the rider was lost; for want of the rider, the battle was lost; for want of the battle, the war was lost"? One grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the whole course of western civilization. A tiny little thing like that can change the course of history. A bullet into the head of John Kennedy changed the course of American history.

If we have one maverick molecule running loose out there, we have no assurance whatsoever that this single molecule may not be the grain of sand in the machinery of God's eternal plan. It may be the thing that runs amuck and makes it impossible, ultimately, for Christ to return to this planet. It may be the thing that destroys any hope for the consummation of the kingdom of God, leaving all those promises of God unfulfilled. There are no maverick molecules in a universe where God is sovereign."

The Scriptures teach us not only that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, but also that He is its Sovereign Lord and King. He rules over all creatures, actions, and things—from the greatest to the smallest—by His perfect wisdom, infinite power, and absolute righteousness. He is free to do all things according to His own will and to do them for His own glory and good pleasure. No power in heaven or on earth can annul what He has determined.

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

We must first consider a doctrine that is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of God—His supremacy. The word "supreme" refers to that which is highest in excellence, rank, or authority. The **supremacy of God** refers to His exalted place above all creation.

The truth of God's supremacy has many important implications. With regard to **God's person**, it means that He is infinitely more excellent than any of His creatures and of infinitely greater worth than all of His creation combined. With regard to **God's place**, it means that He is exalted above all creation and has no equals. With regard to **God's purpose**, it means that He is at the very center of all things and that He directs all things toward one great goal—His own glory.

Consider the names or titles ascribed to God in the following Scriptures. Note what they reveal to us about His supremacy and His relationship to His creation, especially to man.

Psalm 97:9 For You are the Lord Most High over all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods.

NOTES: The name, "Lord Most High," is translated from the Hebrew phrase **Yahweh-Elyon**, which communicates the sovereignty, exaltation, and majesty of Yahweh (see also Psalm 7:17 and Psalm 47:2). In the time of the psalmist (as well as today), the nations were inundated with false gods and the worship of idols. The Apostle Paul states that these so-called gods were nothing more than demons and that those who sacrificed to them sacrificed to demons (I Corinthians 10:20; see also Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37). Psalm 97:9 is simply stating that God is exalted and sovereign over all things—including the false idols of men and the powerful demonic influences behind them.

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
"I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite.

NOTES: The phrases, “the high and exalted One” and “whose name is Holy,” both communicate the same truth about God. The word “holy” comes from the Hebrew word **qadosh**, which means, “separated, marked off, placed apart, or withdrawn from common use.” With regard to God, the word has at least two important meanings: (1) God is transcendent above His creation, and (2) He is transcendent above His creation’s corruption.

We will now consider one of the most beautiful declarations of the supremacy of God in the Scriptures...I Chronicles 29:11

¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

Note six attributes and rights that are ascribed to God...

(1) **Greatness.** From the Hebrew word **gedolah**. God’s greatness is an eternal and immutable attribute, not merely a title that He has earned. He always has been and always will be infinitely greater than anything to which He is compared.

(2) **Power.** From the Hebrew word **gevurah**, which also denotes strength and might. In the realm of power, there is no one who can contend with God. **Consider Psalm 2 as well.**

(3) **Glory.** From the Hebrew word **tif’arah**, which also denotes beauty. It is often used to describe the splendor of garments or the magnificence of jewels. The most breathtaking beauty of creation is a dark shadow compared to the One who created all.

(4) **Victory.** From the Hebrew word **netzach**, which can communicate different meanings depending on the context. In one context, it may communicate victory or strength; but in another, it can communicate the idea that something or someone is perpetual or enduring.

(5) **Majesty.** From the Hebrew word *hod*, which may also denote splendor, honor, beauty, or vigor.

(6) **Dominion.** From the Hebrew word *mamlakhah*, which communicates ideas of kingdom, sovereignty, reign, or rule. The pagan king Nebuchadnezzar declared of God, “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 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?’” (Daniel 4:34-35).

NOTES: Why is it right for God to exalt Himself as head over all? The answer is two-fold. First, God is the most worthy Being to take the highest place above His creation. Second, the greatest good God could ever do for us and the greatest kindness He could ever show us would be to exalt Himself as head over all, as He has done.

Psalms 113:4-6 teaches us about God’s absolute supremacy over all creation.

⁴ The Lord is high above all nations;
His glory is above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the Lord our God,
Who is enthroned on high,

⁶ Who humbles Himself to behold
The things that are in heaven and in the earth?

NOTES: In verse 6, we read, “Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?” This is one of the most majestic verses in all of Scripture.

The Titles of God’s Sovereignty

LORD

The English title that is most often employed in the Scriptures to communicate God’s sovereignty is **Lord**. The title describes someone who has supremacy and authority over another. When applied to God, it refers to His absolute sovereignty over all

creation. It is important to recognize that the title “Lord” not only communicates truth about God but also defines man’s relationship to Him. If God is Lord, then man is His subject.

Lord of the Whole Earth (*Psalm 97:5*). The title “Lord” is translated from the Hebrew word **adonai**, which is the plural form of **adon**. The word denotes both lordship and ownership. In the Scriptures, the plural form is always used with reference to God to denote intensity—God is the absolute Lord of all things, without exception.

Lord of Heaven (*Daniel 5:23*). The extension of God’s lordship or sovereignty is not limited to the earth; it extends to the farthest reaches of the universe and encompasses all creation—material and spiritual.

Lord of Heaven and Earth (*Acts 17:24*). The title “Lord” is translated from the Greek word **kúrios**. For the Greeks, the word **kúrios** could refer to a man of high position and power or a supernatural being (*i.e.* a god). The word is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) in place of the Hebrew name **Yahweh** and in the New Testament to communicate the Hebrew idea of God as Lord. It is significant that the word **kúrios** is used without reservation when referencing Jesus.

Lord of lords (*Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; I Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16*). In the above Old Testament texts, the title “Lord” is translated from the Hebrew word **adonai**. Whatever lords there may be in the heavens or on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—God is Lord over all of them!

Lord of kings (*Daniel 2:47*). Whatever kings or lords may exist in any realm of creation, we can be assured that God rules over them with absolute and undaunted authority and power.

KING

Closely related to the title of **Lord** is that of **King**. There is probably no other title in the English language that has as much power to communicate the ideas of sovereignty, power, royalty, nobility, and majesty. In the Scriptures, God is the great King over all creation, who reigns with unsurpassed glory. His throne is in heaven, the earth is His footstool, and His kingdom endures forever.

Note the names attributed to God in the following Old Testament Scriptures...

The Great King over all the Earth (*Psalm 47:2, 7; Malachi 1:14*). He is not **a** great king reigning over **a portion** of the world; rather, He is **the** great King reigning over **all** the earth without restriction of authority or limitation of jurisdiction!

The King of Heaven (*Daniel 4:37*). Even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the extension of God's reign is not limited to the earth but extends to the farthest reaches of the universe and encompasses all creation—material and spiritual.

The Great King above all gods (*Psalm 95:1-3*). This Scripture is not teaching that there is more than one true God. The Apostle Paul states that these so-called gods of the nations were nothing more than demons and that those who sacrificed to them sacrificed to demons (I Corinthians 10:20; see also Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37). This text is simply stating that God reigns over all things—including the false idols of men and the powerful demonic influences behind them.

Consider the names or titles attributed to God in the following New Testament Scriptures...

King of the Nations (*Revelation 15:3-4*). Throughout human history, nations have arisen that have ruled over others with absolute and undisputed sovereignty (Babylon, Rome, etc.). Yet God is the King over all nations, and He rules them with absolute

authority. The prophet Isaiah declared that, in comparison to God, “the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales” (Isaiah 40:15).

The King of kings (I Timothy 6:15-16; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). As Christians, we must give honor to and pray for the kings of this earth and all who are in authority (Romans 13:1; I Timothy 2:1-2). Nevertheless, there is a sense in which this world has only one true King, and to Him must our ultimate allegiance be given. The truth in this text should also lead all human authorities to humble themselves before God and submit to His will.

The King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God (I Timothy 1:17). Here the divine King is described with three adjectives that demonstrate His supremacy or superiority over all other so-called kings. (1) **Eternal** – the word is translated from the Greek phrase **ton aiónon** (“of the ages”). The idea is that God is King of every age. No matter how far back through history we travel or how far forward, we will discover that God is King. (2) **Immortal** – the word is translated from the Greek word **áphthartos**, which also means, “imperishable, incorruptible, and undecaying.” Even the greatest of all earthly kings die and turn to dust. At the moment of death, their rule comes to an end, their bodies decay, and they are weaker than an infant born into poverty. But God is immortal. He will always be the King with whom we must deal. (3) **Invisible** – the word is translated from the Greek word **aóratos**, which denotes that God is spirit and is therefore unhindered by the physical limitations or restraints of even the most powerful rulers.

SOVEREIGN, RULER, AND MASTER

The three divine titles **Sovereign, Ruler, and Master** clearly communicate the absolute authority of God over His creation. The title “Sovereign” comes from the Latin prefix **super**, which means, “over” or “above.” It refers to one who rules over others with authority. The title “Ruler” is derived from the Latin verb **regere**, which means, “to lead straight or guide.” It refers to one who sets the standard and marks out the path with

authority. The title “Master” is derived from the Latin term **magnus**, which means, “great” or “large.” It refers to one who has control or mastery over something, such as a teacher who has mastered a certain area of study, an owner who has control over his property, or a ruler who reigns over his subjects.

The Blessed and only Sovereign (I Timothy 6:15-16). The word “sovereign” comes from the Greek word **dunástes**, which denotes a ruler or potentate. It is from the same primary verb as **dúnamis**, which denotes power or might. It was often used to describe someone who ruled with a delegated authority, but this is not the case with God. He rules by His own right and power. The word “blessed” comes from the Greek word **makários**, which denotes that God exists in perfect and uninterrupted blessedness, joy, and contentment.

The Ruler over the realm of mankind (Daniel 4:17). The word “ruler” comes from the Aramaic word **shallit**, which denotes one having mastery, rule, or dominance. The word “realm” is translated from the Aramaic word **malku**, which denotes a kingdom or realm. God does not just rule over individual persons or kingdoms—His rule extends over the entire realm of humanity collectively, and He is directing everything toward His desired end.

Our only Master and Lord (Jude 4; see also II Timothy 2:21 and II Peter 2:1). The word “master” is translated from the Greek word **despotés**, which denotes ownership and absolute lordship. In its oldest use, the **despotés** was the master of the house, who ruled with absolute authority....God is the rightful Owner and Lord of what He has made. His holiness and righteousness guarantee that He will always use His absolute authority with perfect justice. The term **despotés** is used six times in the New Testament with reference to God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; II Timothy 2:21; II Peter 2:1; Jude 4; and Revelation 6:10). In II Peter 2:1 and Jude 4, the reference is specifically to Jesus Christ.