

## Doctrine of God Part 24...the Implications of God's Sovereignty

### A W Pink on the Sovereignty of God...

"The sovereignty of God! What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the Godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that no one can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purposes, or resist His will (Ps. 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Ps. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the Kings of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible."

When the sovereignty or lordship of God is correctly understood, it moves all men to humble themselves before Him and to acknowledge that He alone is worthy of creation's reverence, obedience, worship, adoration, and praise.

### REVERENCE AND OBEDIENCE

Man's first response to the sovereignty of God should be reverence and obedience. To revere God is to acknowledge His highest place before us as Lord and regard Him with the utmost respect and awe. Such an attitude of reverence will always result in obedience. Sovereignty implies a relationship of one exercising authority over another.

If we truly acknowledge God's sovereignty, then we will place ourselves before Him in reverent submission to His will.

Note what the following Scriptures teach us about the great and sincere reverence that is due God as the Lord and only Sovereign of creation.

*Psalm 47:2...<sup>2</sup> For the Lord Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth.*

**NOTES:** In this text, three titles are given to God: Lord, Most High, and great King. Any one of these by itself should be enough to fill us with the deepest reverence. How much more when all three are used together? The word "feared" in this context denotes fear, awe, and great reverence.

*Jeremiah 10:6-7 <sup>6</sup> There is none like You, O Lord; You are great, and great is Your name in might.<sup>7</sup> Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Your due! For among all the wise men of the nations And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You.*

**NOTES:** The call to give God the fear that is due Him is placed among three great motivations—the greatness of His might (v.6), the greatness of His sovereignty (v.7), and the greatness of His wisdom (v.7). No one is like Him; therefore, He is to be feared above all else. The question, "Who would not fear You...?" is clearly rhetorical. In light of who God is, the only logical response is to give Him the reverence that is due Him.

*Daniel 6:25-27...*

*<sup>25</sup> Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! <sup>26</sup> I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel;*

*For He is the living God and enduring forever,  
And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed,  
And His dominion will be forever.*

*<sup>27</sup> "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders  
In heaven and on earth,  
Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."*

**NOTES:** Darius was the pagan king of the Medo-Persian Empire. However, through God's deliverance of the prophet Daniel, he came to recognize that the God of Israel was the one true God. He was so impressed by God's deliverance of Daniel from the lions' den that he wrote out an official edict to all the subjects of his vast empire, demanding that all show reverence to the God of Daniel. According to his edict, men are to fear Daniel's God because: (1) He is the living God, in contrast to the lifeless idols of stone that were typically worshiped by those outside of Israel; (2) His sovereign rule is forever; and (3) He delivers, rescues, and performs signs and wonders, in contrast to the false gods of the nations, who did neither good nor bad.

Obedience must follow all true reverence. Consider what the following Scriptures teach us about the obedience that is due God as the Lord and only Sovereign of creation.

*Psalm 66:7...<sup>7</sup> He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; Let not the rebellious exalt themselves.*

*Deuteronomy 27:10...<sup>10</sup> You shall therefore obey the Lord your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."*

**NOTES:** In Hebrew, the phrase, "obey the Lord," is literally, "hear the voice of the Lord." The word "hear" denotes more than simply hearing; it also includes listening to or obeying what one has heard

**NOTES:** Peter and the other apostles had been commanded by the Jewish Council to no longer teach the people in Christ's name. Their response was that they must obey God. Believers are to give honor to earthly authorities and to obey their commands whenever possible (Romans 13:1-7). However, when the commands of men contradict those of God, the believer must submit to God.

*James 1:22...<sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

**NOTES:** The word “delude” means, “to reckon wrongly, to miscalculate, to reason falsely, or to delude.”

In Scripture and in our own day, we see the danger of confessing God to be Lord while living in a manner that contradicts our confession.

Malachi 1:6...<sup>6</sup> “‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’<sup>7</sup> You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.

*Luke 6:46...<sup>46</sup> “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*

*Matthew 7:21...<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*

**NOTES:** This does not mean that salvation is by works. The truth communicated is that those who have believed unto salvation will obey the Father’s will. Faith will not result in a perfect life on this earth, but it will result in a life that is being changed by the power of God. In other words, faith will result in works; works are therefore the proof of faith (James 2:14-26).

## **WORSHIP, ADORATION, AND PRAISE**

If men think it proper to give homage and honor to the kings and rulers of the earth, whose lives are mortal and whose kingdoms are frail and temporary, how much more should mankind honor the eternal King, whose kingdom endures forever! Although there are many kings and lords, God alone bears the title of **King of kings and Lord of lords**. He alone is supreme over all creation, ruling with absolute and unhindered sovereignty. He reduces rulers to nothing and makes void the decisions of the most powerful among angels and men. There is no wisdom, no understanding, and no counsel against Him. He does all things according to the counsel of His own perfect

will, and no creature in heaven or on earth can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" He should therefore be the focus of all worship, adoration, and praise.

In Psalm 99:1-5 is found one of the most majestic declarations in the Old Testament about the worship that is due God as Lord and King.

*The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble;  
He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!*

<sup>2</sup>*The Lord is great in Zion,  
And He is exalted above all the peoples.  
<sup>3</sup>Let them praise Your great and awesome name;  
Holy is He.*

<sup>4</sup>*The strength of the King loves justice;  
You have established equity;  
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.*

<sup>5</sup>*Exalt the Lord our God  
And worship at His footstool;  
Holy is He.*

**He Reigns** (v.1). He is the great King over all the earth (Psalm 47:2, 7; Malachi 1:14), the King of heaven (Daniel 4:37), the great King above all gods (Psalm 95:1-3), and the King of kings (I Timothy 6:15-16; Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

**He is enthroned above the cherubim** (v.1). We know very little about these angelic creatures. It is possible that, like the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2-3), they are among the greatest of all created beings. Yet God is enthroned above them as their Creator, Sustainer, and Lord.

**He is great** (v.2). The word is a relative term. Some men may consider themselves great in comparison to others, but God is infinitely greater than all of creation combined.

**He is exalted above all the peoples** (v.2). To give us a perspective of how exalted the Lord truly is, the prophet Isaiah tells us that the earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1).

**His name is great and awesome** (v.3). God is not to be feared because of some inconsistency in His nature or unrighteousness in His work, but because of His greatness and holiness.

**He is holy** (v.3). The Hebrew word means, “separated, marked off, placed apart, or withdrawn from common use.” God is transcendent above His creation, and He is transcendent above His creation’s corruption.

**NOTES:** God’s reign is marked by His strength, His love for justice, and His equity and righteousness in judgment. This should instill in believers the greatest confidence and security, and it should lead the rebellious to repent of their ways and seek reconciliation with God. Consider Psalm 99:1-5 and how men are to respond to what God has revealed about Himself and His sovereign rule over His creation.

a. *Verse 1...let the peoples tremble;*

*Our trembling ought to be a response of wonder at His infinite greatness and majesty!*

b. *Verse 3...let them praise Your great and awesome name*

**NOTES:** The word “praise” literally means, “to throw or cast.” Figuratively, it means to confess or praise. In one sense, praise is simply confessing as true what God has revealed to us about Himself.

c. *Verse 5...worship at His footstool;*

## **Implications of God’s Sovereignty...God’s Providence**

### **R C Sproul on God’s Providence**

We do well to consider the most important practical application of the doctrine. Knowing about the Lord’s eternal decree, His use of means, the way in which secondary causes operate, and so on is vital. But we do not seek this knowledge so that we can win theological and philosophical debates or impress others with our understanding. Instead, we study the sovereign providence of God for the sake of His glory, but also

for the comfort and security it brings us. All sound theology is practical, but fewer doctrines are more practical than knowing our good Creator actively governs all things to bring about His perfect plan.

God's perfect plan involves the revelation of His glory by doing good to and for His children (2 Chron. 7:1–3). And when we understand the sovereign providence of the Lord, we will be confident that God really is working good for us and can accomplish the good He seeks for us. Many Christians know today's passage by heart. They quote Romans 8:28 when they themselves are enduring great difficulties, and they remind other suffering believers of its truth. It is a great and precious promise indeed. However, only those who affirm the Reformation doctrine that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass and governs everything that happens—large and small, good and evil—have a consistent reason to believe Paul's words and derive comfort from them.

Just think about it. If God is not actively guiding everything that happens, how can we be confident that He will accomplish the good He intends for us? Perhaps something that He is not governing will go so far afield that He will be unable to bring good out of the worst situations. Some might answer that God can bring about good because He looks into the future, knows how people will respond to certain circumstances, and so tailors what He does to that. But if that is so, how can we really give the Lord the credit for working for good? If His decree does not establish the actions of His creatures, then logically, He cannot get the praise for working things to a good end. He just gets lucky, as it were, that things turn out for our good. Everything just happens to fall into place; He did not and could not ensure that it would.

There is no greater comfort than to know that God will successfully work out all things for our ultimate good. And the only way we can know that is to believe that He ordains and governs whatsoever comes to pass.

John Calvin writes, "Ignorance of providence is the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it the highest happiness" (Institutes 1.17.11). We have nothing to fear if God ordains and governs whatsoever comes to pass. Our ultimate good will be achieved, and we can trust that even the worst this world has to offer will finally be used to glorify the Lord and benefit us

### **Kevin DeYoung on God's Providence**

When Calvin and other early Reformed thinkers exulted in God's design and decrees, they typically did so with a different word besides "sovereignty." They much preferred to talk about *providence*. Obviously, the two are related. There is nothing wrong about celebrating divine sovereignty, so long as we understand that God's inscrutable power

is not exercised on a whim, but always as an expression of love for his people. His sovereignty is pro-us, which is why the Reformers talked about providence more than raw sovereignty.

Typically, the doctrine of providence has been placed alongside the doctrine of creation, the former being an extension of the same power and purpose we see in the latter. Calvin's most "extreme" statements about divine sovereignty are stated in his chapters on the doctrine of providence (*Institutes*, Book 1, Chapters 16-18). Calvin thrilled in divine providence, not because it was some cold esoteric principle, let alone an example of God's cruel caprice, but because it reminded Calvin that in all of life's surprises and suffering that God has a "special care toward us." Because God is powerful and because he is for us as his children, we can be grateful when things go well, patient when things go poorly, and enjoy "an incredible freedom from worry about the future."

The Heidelberg Catechism picks up this same language in Lord's Day 10 when it explains what we understand by the providence of God and how this knowledge helps us: "We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither ore nor be moved." Likewise, the Belgic Confession teaches that this doctrine of providence "gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only be the arrangement of our heavenly Father" (Article 13).

We love to sing and savor the sovereignty of God. And rightly so. But let us always remember—and make explicit before our children and our churches—that this "big" God is our God. More than that, through Christ, he is our heavenly Father. And by the firm and gentle hand of providence, our Father works all things no only for his glory, but also for our good.

### **How do I meditate on God's providence?**

John Flavel's recommendations:

- a). Work hard at remembering and exploring the providence of God toward you. (Extensively and intensively trace God's blessings and ways thru your life. Note answered prayer. Give thanks)
- b). Trace the connection between the providences of God in your life and the promises of God in his Word.



c). Look beyond the events and circumstances of providence to God as author and provider. (Think of God's attributes and his work in your life, both in good and difficult times)

d). Respond to each providence in an appropriate way. Be thankful in good providences and look to the Lord for comfort and joy even in difficult providences.

Flavel~ "Consider all your losses are but as the loss of a farthing to a prince."

### **How do we handle difficult providences?**

a). Learn how to resist discouragement by trusting God is working in his timing toward greater blessing.

b). Learn not to assume that we fully understand God's ways and purposes, but meditate on his goodness in the past and promises for the future. Trying to solve mysteries too great for us will only breed suspicion toward God.

William Cowper~

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

<http://bakersfieldchurch.blogspot.com/2013/07/what-are-some-implications-of-gods-all.html>

## **Conclusion...**

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God reveals the glory, power, and dominion of God, and ought to cause all of His creatures to bow to Him in humble adoration and to walk before Him in complete submission. R. J. Rushdoony beautifully states the practical implication of God's sovereignty:

What does it mean then to believe in sovereignty, government, and providence as a Christian? It means that my life and being are under the sovereignty and government of the all-wise and most holy Trinity, whose ordering, preserving, and government of all things is for His own purpose and glory, and my only joy and purpose is to acknowledge that sovereign, governing providence, and to rest in its sufficiency. It means that, in every area of life, I must acknowledge and establish rule, law, and authority only in terms of his law word and in faithfulness to His Kingship. This means that, in every area of life and thought, I must assert the crown rights of Christ the King and bring all things into captivity to Him.

<https://chalcedon.edu/>