

The Sovereignty of God

In the eyes of many, to be a “Calvinist” is somewhat synonymous with holding to what is commonly known as “the five points of Calvinism,” which is simply a logical and orderly understanding of the doctrine of salvation as presented in the Bible. However, before even believing what the Bible says about the triune God’s utter sovereignty in the redemption of His elect, we must believe what the Bible clearly teaches about triune God’s utter sovereignty over everything.

And so, before we spend the next few months exploring these “5 points,” it may be helpful first to see that this 5-petaled soteriological tulip is founded on, and flows out of, the singular stem of God’s absolute sovereignty of and over all things.¹

The Bible clearly and unashamedly declares and exults in God’s rule of, and right over, all things: creation, history, and salvation. There is nothing outside the scope of God’s magnificent sovereign rule and reign.

This is because, by His very nature, Yahweh, the triune and only true God, *is* King:

- Psa. 93:1 (cf. 96:10; 97:1; 99:1) – “YHWH is King.”²

And so, before focusing solely on God’s kingly might and right over the salvation of His elect, we would do well to remember that this is but *one* piece of the pie, *one* expression of His kingly prerogative as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Perhaps one of the best texts we can anchor ourselves to is Daniel 4:34-37:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and

¹ This answers Michael Horton’s question, “If Calvinism can be reduced to “five points,” why not just one?” See his *For Calvinism* (Zondervan, Kindle Edition), location 289.

² YHWH is fronted for emphasis. The perfect form of the verb stresses that YHWH has been, is, and will forever continue to *be* King. Many translations have, “The LORD reigns.” This is an adequate translation. However, *that* He is King assumes this, and hence is a preferable translation.

honored Him who lives forever, for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are right and His ways are just; and those who walk in pride He is able to humble.

This accords with Paul's own teaching about God's sovereignty, not only in the salvation of His people, but in *every* detail and decision throughout time and history:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth,³ does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place (Acts 17:24-26).

In fact, as Jesus teaches, even the most seemingly insignificant things are governed by God's sovereign providence and power:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father (Matt. 10:29).

³ The Greek literally reads, "He Himself of heaven and earth existing [as] Lord." The verb (ὁπάρχω), a present participle, emphasizes that existentially, the God who made the world and everything in it is in His very essence "Lord" (*kurios*). His creating all things is but one expression of His sovereign Lordship over all things. Paul then says that His sovereign providence over all and sustaining of all is another expression of that same Lordship (v.25-26). Finally, as we see later in verse, His right to judge all is yet another expression of this (v.31).

Even the results of every roll of dice in a game of chance are determined by God (cf. Proverbs 16:33).⁴

And so, in light of the teachings of Holy Scripture, we might, with Arthur Pink, happily define God's sovereignty as:

The supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood 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 none 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 purpose, or resist His will (Psalm 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is "the governor among the nations" (Psa. 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 King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.⁵

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, and infinite. When we say that God is sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that His right is the right of the potter over the clay, i.e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, that God is a law unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any. Sovereignty characterizes the whole being of God.⁶

⁴ Cf. Horton, Michael. Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples (p. 113). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Pink, Arthur W. The Sovereignty of God. Chapel Library. Kindle Edition, location 237-243.

⁶ Ibid., location 263 (emphasis mine).

And so, God, as omnipotent King, exercises His right and might to carry out His eternal wise plan into time, sovereignly orchestrating and inscrutably bringing to pass His perfect will.

No portion of Scripture so clearly captures this as Ephesians 1. Though the immediately context specifically refers to God's large-scale inclusion of the Gentiles into His "household" in the new covenant, Paul sets even their sovereignly-decreed and predestinated salvation – as was that of His elect Jews – in the context of the Triune's eternal counsel and rule over history, including the Messiah's irruption into time and space to accomplish this:

And this is the plan: at the right time, He [i.e. God the Father] will bring everything (τὰ πάντα) together under the authority of Christ, in whom we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works **all**⁷ things (τὰ πάντα) according to the counsel of His will" (1:10-11, emphasis mine).

Simply put, the triune Yahweh is either the sovereign and eternal Lord *of* all, or He is Lord *not at all*.

Many – Christians included – have no problem with God having the sovereign right to predetermine *how* they were born (i.e. race, sex, parentage, giftings, etc.), *where* they were born, or *when* they were born.

What such people do not realize is that, when they question His freedom and right to predetermine one's *second* birth, they undermine – perhaps even inadvertently and unintentionally – His character and ultimately challenge not only His sovereignty, but also His wisdom and goodness.

⁷ In the Greek, "all things" (τὰ πάντα) is fronted for emphasis. The present participle "who works" (τοῦ...ἐνεργοῦντος) carries a titular force, that is, this is something that the Father *is*, and not merely something that He *does*.

However, when we – with a simple faith in what is clearly revealed about God in the Scriptures – bow our knees before this all-wise and all-loving and all-good and all-powerful King, we will not only submit to His rule, but glory in it and rest on it:

- “Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases” (Psalm 115:3).
 - When we survey the immediate context, we see that this confession is not being forced out of the psalmist, but are the overflow of His exulting in the God who has worked all things for his salvation.
 - Because Yahweh is indomitably sovereign, His people have a solid basis and foundation for entrusting their past, present, and future on Him (vv.9-11).
 - ⇒ This accords with God’s purpose and will to work all things for the praise of His glory (115:1; cf. Ephesians 1:11-14).

And so, when we remember that the root and stem of this indescribably beautiful flower – the TULIP – is God’s unwavering and unswerving sovereignty over all things, we will better appreciate and love the plant – and ultimately its Creator and Sustainer – even more.

*For **from** Him and **through** Him and **to** Him are all things (τὰ πάντα). To Him⁸ be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:36)*

⁸ “To Him” (αὐτῷ) is fronted for emphasis, as is the omission of any verb. The definite article (“the glory”) is tragically not translated by the NET, NLT, KJV and NKJV.