

The Sovereignty of God 7-16-00 revised for 5-19-02

Does God determine all things? Does He reign supreme over all His creation? Can anything trouble Him, or cause Him to change His plans? These questions deal with the sovereignty of God. Notice that within the word 'sovereignty' is the word 'reign'. Is God on the throne of the universe, reigning over all His creation? As we did with all other attributes, we will look at this attribute of the sovereignty of God in the light of the declaration of Scripture.

First we must understand that the very name LORD, or JHWH, implies sovereignty. In fact, the NIV translates 'LORD' 290 times as 'Sovereign'. Those scholars thought Sovereign with a capital S best fit the translation. So His very name implies He is the Ruler over all.

The Bible teaches monotheism, that there is only one God. Moses declared,

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deut 6:4-5

Because He is Sovereign it is a command. Our belief in only one God is part of our understanding of Sovereignty. If there were more than one God what would we have as a standard? We have seen that right and wrong is based on the very character of God. But if there is more than one god then which one is the right one? If they are different then one is not perfect. How would you know which one? If they are both perfect they are the same. And so round and round we would go with no standard or direction, but the Bible declares He is One. Since He is One, He can command us – His creation – as He wills. He is the Creator, and we are but His creatures. The Potter can do as He wills with His clay. Whatever He does will be holy, just, and righteous. No man can challenge what He does for God is Creator and we are mere creatures.

In the attempt to understand His sovereignty we should review the three 'omni' terms applied to God. 'Omni' means 'all'. These terms separate Him from the rest of His creation. None of His creatures share these 'omni' characteristics. He is omnipotent or all-powerful. He can do whatever He wills, but He only wills to act consistently with His character. If all the angels of heaven and all the sons of men joined together to fight God – He would laugh. (Ps 2:4) It wouldn't disturb Him in the least or shake His sovereignty in the slightest. 2Chron 20 :6 "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." All power is His – He speaks things into existence and they remain existent by His power alone. (Hebrews 1:3)

He is omniscient. That simply means all knowing. God lives in the Eternal present tense. He lives outside time and is the Creator of time. He sees our past, present and future all at once, for He is I AM. He knows every thought of every creature He has made throughout time. There is nothing hidden from Him. Peter realized this after walking with Jesus for 3 years. At his restoration he declared, "Lord, You know all things...". Everything that ever happened or will happen is visible to God in this very instant and always. Psalms 147:5 (NIV)⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

He is omnipresent - He is everywhere present at once and always. He is spirit and is not bound by location. He is transcendent – beyond physical boundaries and yet He is also immanent, always by our side. His omnipresence and His manifest presence are different. He is everywhere and yet He was manifestly present over the mercy seat in the ball of light known as the Shekinah Glory. Hear how God describes it in Isaiah 57:15, “For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Now put these attributes together – all-powerful – all knowing – all present and you have the reasons He alone is sovereign. No man or angel compares with God in these characteristics. He is the only One who could be in charge. He is the only One we’d want in charge. He is the One for Whom all things exist. Ephesians 1:11b tells us, “He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,” And Ro 11:36 declares, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

As the Creator of everything He has all the rights to determine what will be.

Is 46:10 “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.”

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Remember He is nothing like man. In fact, He chides us saying, “...you thought I was altogether like you.” No – He is perfect in all His attributes and acts according to His perfect character. If omnipotence were in the hand of a man, the world would be destroyed in no time at all. If omniscience were in the mind of a man the world would end up his slave. But God is not like a man. He is just and faithful, loving and merciful. He is holy. Those attributes are evident in all that He chooses to do. These attributes of God bring us great comfort, if we are walking in obedience. But they should put the fear of God in us if we are not.

If God were not all knowing He could be surprise attacked. He would learn and change according to what He learned. Then He would not be the same yesterday today and forever. The God you read about in the Bible would not be the same today. If He was not all-powerful there could be rebellion within His creation that could potentially overthrow Him. If He were not omnipresent how could He be omniscient for there would be things going on He was not aware of. This is the mind boggling God we serve. He is unfathomable because we are mere creatures and He is infinitely greater than His creation.

When we consider these qualities of God we get a glimpse of His supremacy and sovereignty. But here we step into the realm of what is entirely impossible for man to conceive. He gives man free will to choose or reject Him and yet what He purposes is all that will stand. Even the rebellion of the wicked will bring Him glory. I can choose to resist the Holy Spirit and God will use it to teach me. When men choose to do evil is God still Sovereign? How could He be otherwise and remain God? Then what is this rebellion going on under His nose, the fallen angels and the unrepentant men and women? Psalms 76:10 (NLT)¹⁰ Human opposition only enhances your glory, for you use it as a sword of judgment.

We see the examples in the Word – Joseph’s brothers sinned against God and out of jealousy sold their brother into slavery – but God is Sovereign and used their rebellious acts as a part of His plan to save the family of Israel. Pharaoh, in Ex 9:16, is told He is in rebellion against God so God can display His glory in just judgement on the nation of Egypt. His hard heart was an instrument that made it possible for the fame of God to spread through the world as people talked about the plagues on the Egyptian gods. And look at Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednigo. The King Nebuchadnezzar wanted everyone to worship his image, and when they would not he had them thrown in a furnace. His demands and actions were pure wickedness, but God delivered them and turned the King’s heart. And if you really want to marvel at the sovereignty of God in the midst of man’s free choice look what happened to Jesus. Pharisees deliver Him up for envy, rulers condemn Him to death unjustly, horribly murdered, and laid in a cold tomb. Through that tragic event, filled with the ruthlessness of man and Satan, God brought about the salvation of mankind. Obviously Satan had no clue as to what was about to happen, or he would never have inspired the murder of Jesus on a cross. What he thought was his ultimate victory over God, was the heel prophesied to crush his own head. What a mighty God we serve!

God is on the throne of heaven even when man rebels – He works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. ⁶ The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. Psalms 135:6 He can command the Red Sea to part that His children can walk through on dry ground. He can have the earth open up and swallow Korah and the other rebels. He can order the Sun to stand still in its place until Joshua’s army obliterates an enemy. He can have a sundial go backward to confirm His promise to a king. He can shut the mouths of hungry lions, and cause fire not to burn, axe heads to float, a dead Almond branch to bud, and food to fall from the sky. He is the Creator of all you see and He can have His creation do as He pleases.

Most amazing of all His actions, He incarnated Himself as a baby in the womb of Mary. As a man He was no more limited than on the throne of heaven. He could say to deformed bodies, “Be whole”. He could say to the sin sick, “You are forgiven”. He could feed thousands from just a picnic basket. He could tell demons to leave and quit harassing individuals. He spoke to the wind and the waves and they were stilled. And when men killed and buried Him, He conquered death. He was no less than Sovereign LORD over all then, as He is both now, and forever! And you better praise Him!

You may have thought your life was a random set of circumstances. Nothing could be further from the truth. The hairs of our heads are numbered. All the days God has ordained for us are written in His book before we were born. He picked our parents, the place of our birth, the place we live, the people we meet, and the fact that you are listening to this message this morning at Wayside Chapel in Sedona, Arizona. It is all in the hands of the Almighty Sovereign LORD of all.

He is Sovereign over all His works. The wonder is that He allows us to rebel if we choose. No other creatures but the fallen angels were given such freedom. I believe He gave us that freedom because He desires our willing love to be expressed to Him as He pours out His goodness on us. You can rebel but why would you want to? We are just

allowing ourselves to be deceived if we take that route. Every good thing comes from the unchanging God. We find our greatest peace and fulfillment when we yield to Him by yielding to the life of His only Son in us.

What peace and joy you should have knowing this Sovereign One is the God that has called you into a relationship with Himself! Nothing can thwart His plans, and nothing is too hard for Him. Whatever happens in the world and nature, or with those who rise against us, He is Sovereign over all. One day every knee will bow to His Sovereignty over all creation, but don't wait till then. Do it now. Bow your knee in worship of His right to rule your life everyday.

There are many that stubbornly refuse to yield to His sovereignty, thinking that they are the lord over their own life. The Scriptures declare that we serve God or Satan. There is no real self as lord. To serve self is to become enslaved by Satan while in our delusion we think we are "free". That slavery ends in death – death of the spirit and the body. You can see it throughout the stories of the Bible: Cain, the world of Noah's day, Pharaoh, the evil kings of Israel, the Pharisees. All of them thought they were free, when in fact they were slaves to destruction. You can see it in the people in our society, driven by greed, addictions, and pride, talking about God but not letting Him be the Lord of their lives. We can see in our own lives in the temptations to do things we know are destructive. When we think it through and see clearly, we realize that the momentary pleasure of sin is not nearly worth the cost it will take from our lives. When the early church said, "Jesus is Lord", they meant He made the decisions in their lives. He called the shots. He was sovereign over all they did. He was sovereign over their lives and over their worship together. His Sovereignty is real freedom, freedom to be who God made us to be.

One last thought for those who do what is only right by choosing to yield to the inevitable sovereignty of God – In Luke 1:31-33 the angel told Mary that her son, Jesus, would reign forever. In 2Timothy 2:12 Paul wrote that if we endure we would also reign with Him. How can that be? Wont we mess it all up? Our Sovereign God is able to make us capable of reigning with Him.

The words of the Psalmist fill my heart when I consider them, "What is man that you are mindful of him...you have placed him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor, you have placed all things under his feet." (Psalm 8). Only the Sovereign God could make us capable. He will finish the work He started by making us able. He reigns! That will never change! What a mighty God we serve! Psalms 47:2 (NIV)² How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!

Is there an area in your life that you have not surrendered to His rule? Are you thinking that somehow this one area that you stay lord of will not have terrible consequences? You know that is not true, if you know Jesus. He will handle it in the way that is best for you. Surrender it to His Sovereignty. Let Him reign in every area of your life. That is real freedom. There you will find real peace. Jesus is Lord. Let Him be your Lord. Find the comfort of knowing the God who is sovereign over all is for you not against you.