

# God's SOVEREIGNTY

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD MAY BE DEFINED AS THE EXERCISE of His supremacy—see preceding chapter. Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: “My counsel shall stand, and *I will do* all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10); “He doeth according to *His* will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand” (Dan 4:35). Divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things “after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11).

Rightly did the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon say in his sermon on Matthew 20:15—

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne.

On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth.

And we proclaim an *enthroned* God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as *He* thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). Yes, dear reader, such is the imperial Potentate revealed in Holy Writ. Unrivalled in majesty, unlimited in power, unaffected by anything outside Himself. But we are living in a day when even the most “orthodox” seem afraid to admit the proper Godhood of God. They say that to press the sovereignty of God excludes human responsibility; whereas human responsibility is based upon Divine sovereignty, and is the product of it.

“But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever *He* hath pleased” (Psa 115:3). He *sovereignly* chose to place each of His creatures on that particular footing which seemed good in His sight. He created angels: some He placed on a conditional footing, others He gave an immutable standing before Him (I Tim 5:21), making Christ their head (Col 2:10). Let it not be overlooked that the angels which sinned (II Peter 2:4), were as much His creatures as the angels that sinned not. Yet God foresaw they *would* fall, nevertheless He placed them on a mutable, creature, conditional footing, and suffered them to fall, though He was not the Author of their sin.

So too, God *sovereignly* placed Adam in the garden of Eden upon a *conditional* footing. Had He so pleased, He could have placed him upon an unconditional footing. He could have placed him on a footing as firm as that occupied by the unfallen angels. He could have placed him upon a footing as sure and as immutable as that which His saints have in Christ. But, instead, He chose to set him in Eden on the basis of creature responsibility, so that he stood or fell according as he measured up or failed to measure up to his responsibility—obedience to his Maker. Adam stood accountable to God by the law which his Creator had given him. Here was responsibility, unimpaired responsibility, tested out under the most favorable conditions.

Now God did not place Adam upon a footing of conditional, creature responsibility, because it was right He *should* so place him. No, it was right because God did it. God did not even give creatures being because it was right for Him to do so, i. e., because He was under any obligations *to* create; but it was right because He did so. God is sovereign. His will is supreme. So far from God being under any law of “right,” He is a law unto Himself, so that whatsoever *He* does *is* right. And woe be to the rebel that calls His sovereignty into question: “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, What makest Thou?” (Isa 45:9).

Again; the Lord God *sovereignly* placed Israel upon a *conditional* footing. The 19th, and 20th and 24th chapters of Exodus afford a clear and full proof of this. They were placed under a covenant of works. God gave to them certain laws, and made national blessing for them depend upon their observance of His statutes. But Israel was stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart. They rebelled against Jehovah, forsook His law, turned unto false gods, and apostatized. In consequence, Divine judgment fell upon them, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies, dispersed abroad throughout the earth, and remain under the heavy frown of God's displeasure to this day.

It was God in the exercise of His high sovereignty that placed Satan and his angels, Adam, and Israel in their respective *responsible* positions. But so far from His sovereignty taking away responsibility from the creature, it was by the exercise thereof that He placed them on this conditional footing, under such responsibilities as He thought proper; by virtue of which sovereignty, He is seen to be God over all. Thus, there is perfect harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Many have most foolishly said that it is quite impossible to show where Divine sovereignty ends and creature accountability begins. *Here* is where creature responsibility begins: in the sovereign ordination of the Creator. As to His sovereignty, there is not and never will be any “end” to it!

Let us give further proofs that the responsibility of the creature *is* based upon God's sovereignty. How many things are recorded in Scripture which were right because God *commanded* them, and which would *not* have been right had He not so commanded! What right had Adam to “eat” of the trees of the Garden? The permission of his Maker (Gen 2:16), without which he would have been a thief! What right had Israel to “borrow” of the Egyptians' jewels and raiment (Exo 12:35)? None, unless Jehovah had authorized it (Exo 3:22). What right had Israel to slay so many lambs for sacrifice? None, except that God commanded it. What right had Israel to kill off all the Canaanites? None, save as Jehovah had bidden them. What right has the husband to require submission from his wife? None, unless God had appointed it. And so we might go on. Human responsibility *is based upon* Divine sovereignty.

One more example of the exercise of God's absolute sovereignty. God placed His elect upon a *different* footing from Adam or Israel. He placed His elect upon an *un* conditional footing. In the Everlasting Covenant Jesus Christ was appointed their Head, took their responsibilities upon Himself, and wrought out a righteousness for them which is perfect, indefeasible, and eternal. Christ was placed upon a conditional footing, for He was “made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,” only with this infinite difference; the others failed; He did not and could not. And *who* placed Christ upon that conditional footing? The Triune God. It was sovereign will that appointed Him, sovereign love that sent Him, sovereign authority that assigned Him His work.

Certain conditions were set before the Mediator. He was to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh; He was to magnify the law and make it honourable; He was to bear all the sins of all God's people in His own body on the tree; He was to make full atonement for them; He was to endure the outpoured wrath of God; He was to die and be buried. On the fulfillment of those conditions, He was promised a reward: Isaiah 53:10-12. He was to be the Firstborn among many brethren; He was to have a people who should share His glory. Blessed be His name for ever, He fulfilled those conditions, and because He did so, the Father stands pledged, on solemn oath, to preserve through time and bless throughout eternity every one of those for whom His incarnate Son mediated. Because He took their place, they now share His. His righteousness is theirs, His standing before God is theirs, His life is theirs. There is not a single condition for them to meet, not a single responsibility for them to discharge in order to attain their eternal bliss. “By one offering He *hath perfected* for ever them that are sanctified [set apart]” (Heb 10:14).

Here then is the sovereignty of God openly displayed before all, displayed in the *different* ways in which He has dealt with His creatures. Part of the angels, Adam, and Israel, were placed upon a conditional footing, continuance in blessing being made dependent upon *their* obedience and fidelity to God. But in sharp contrast from them, the “little flock” (Luke 12:32), have been given an unconditional, an immutable standing in God's covenant, God's counsels, God's Son; their blessing being made dependent upon what *Christ* did for them. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His” (II Tim 2:19). The foundation on which God's elect stand is a perfect one: nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it (Eccl 3:14). Here, then, is the highest and grandest display of the absolute sovereignty of God. Verily, He *has* “mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Rom 9:18).