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**I believe ...**

## **IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

- < Adult Covenant Instruction
- < Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church
- < 12 April 2009, Pastor Paul Goh

### References:

Saved by Grace, Ronald Cammenga & Ronald Hanko

Various articles in the internet

### Introduction

- A. The Scope of this classes
  - 1. During the months of April to June this year, I plan to cover certain important aspects of the Reformed Faith
  - 2. In total, there will be six lessons and I plan to cover the following topics:
    - a) The Sovereignty of God,
    - b) The truth of the particular atonement of Christ
    - c) The Catholicity of the Church
    - d) Reformed Worship
    - e) Amillennialism
- B. Concerning the truth of the Sovereignty of God
  - 1. This is one truth that distinguishes what is known as the Reformed Faith, or Calvinism
    - a) Believe this truth, and you will grasp and embrace this truth
    - b) Reject the sovereignty of God, and you will have immense difficulties in embracing the Reformed Faith
  - 2. This is the central truth proclaimed by Calvinism
    - a) The Calvinism that is faithful to its heritage is the absolute sovereignty of God
    - b) John Calvin saw the essential place that the confession of the sovereignty of God has in relation to the whole body of biblical truth, "Unless we fully believe this (i.e., God's sovereignty) the very beginning of our faith is periled, by which we profess to believe in God Almighty" (*Calvin's Calvinism*, "The Eternal predestination of God," p. 43).

### I. The Doctrine

- A. Definition
  - 1) "God's sovereignty is His absolute authority and rule over all things. To say that God is sovereign is to say that God is God, and that because He is God He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases. That God is sovereign means that He is the Lord, the Ruler, the Master, the King. The one who confesses the sovereignty of God confesses that God is Almighty, Omnipotent, the One Who exercises all power in heaven and on earth. To confess the sovereignty of God is to confess that nothing is outside of God's control, but that all things take place according to His will and appointment" (Saved by Grace, 3)
  - 2) "God's sovereignty means He does what He wants to do, when He wants to do it and without having to give an explanation for why He did it" by Roger Ellsworth
  - 3) "The spider building its web in the corner and Napoleon marching his army across Europe are both under God's control" by Jerry Bridges
  - 4) "In my classes in the seminary, I raise questions like, "Is God in control of every single molecule in the universe?" When I raise that question, I say, "The answer to that question will not determine whether you are a Christian or a Moslem, a Calvinist or an Arminian,

but it will determine whether you are a theist or an atheist." Sometimes the students can't see the connection. And I say to them, "Don't you realize that if there is one molecule in this universe running around loose outside the scope or the sphere of God's divine control and authority and power, then that single maverick molecule may be the grain of sand that changes the entire course of human history, that blocks God from keeping the promises he has made to his people?" It may be that one maverick molecule that will prevent Christ from the consummation of his kingdom. For if there is one maverick molecule, it would mean that God is not sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then God is not God. If there is any element of the universe that is outside of his authority, then he no longer is God over all. In other words, sovereignty belongs to deity. Sovereignty is a natural attribute of the Creator. God owns what he makes, and he rules what he owns" by R.C. Sproul

## B. Explanation

- 1) Two fundamental truths stand at the basis of God's sovereignty
  - a) The Oneness of God
    - 1) God is God alone
    - 2) There is no other god than the Lord God
  - b) He is Creator
    - 1) God has made everything that exists
    - 2) By His almighty power, He brought everything into existence in the beginning, "... call(ing) those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).
- 2) God's sovereignty is an absolute sovereignty
  - a) That God's sovereignty is over everything and everyone and this means that nothing is excluded from God's sovereignty control
    - 1) God rules in the realm of the natural, exercising his power over non-living and brute creation.
    - 2) God also rules over men, angels, time and history, the world and the church
    - 3) His rule extends to all circumstances, including those that we would regard it as bad, including sickness, famine, disasters (earthquake, tornadoes, cyclones, floods, hurricanes)
    - 4) And this includes over sin, sinners, the devil and demons of hell. They do nothing apart from His sovereign will
  - b) Scriptural proofs
    - 1) Job 42.2
      - a) Job acknowledges that God can do everything
      - b) The implication is that no one can withhold or prevent from being realised any thought in the mind of God
    - 2) Psa. 115.3
      - a) God's sovereignty is affirmed with the statement that God is in the heavens
      - b) This affirmation is strengthened with he adds, "he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased"
      - c) What God pleases, that is, what he will, he does
    - 3) Isa. 14.24, 27
      - a) What God thinks comes to pass; what his purpose stands
      - b) Nothing can contradict God's sovereignty
      - c) No one can contradict it, no one shall turn it back

## II. Various Aspects of Sovereignty

### A. God's Counsel shall stand and nothing shall change it

- 1) Isa 46.10
  - a) He has declared the end from the beginning
  - b) He did not wait for the end to come and then declare (which anyone can do), so God must be absolutely certain that this is going to happen or things not yet done

- 2) Isa 43.13
  - a) Before there was day or time, I am he. "I am" is God's name of Jehovah (Ex. 3.14), or Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am"
  - b) So, none can deliver out of my hands
  - c) I work and no one can turn it back
- 3) Isa. 55.10
  - a) God will accomplish his word
  - b) and will not return empty
- 4) Psa. 33.11
  - a) God's counsel is the thoughts of God's hearts from generation to generation
  - b) An His counsel shall stand and will not be frustrated
- 5) Psa. 135.6-10
  - a) God does his pleasure in heaven, earth and seas and all deep places
  - b) Namely
    - 1) The vapour to rise, lightnings for rain, wind
    - 2) Smiting of the firstborn of Egypt
    - 3) Sending of the 10 plagues
    - 4) Smiting of great nations and kings
- 6) Prov 19.21
- 7) Heb 6.17
- B. God's sovereignty over man and over affairs of men's lives
  - 1) Prov 16.9, 16.33, 21.1
  - 2) Jer 10.23
- C. God is also sovereign over evil
  - 1) Isa. 45.7
    - a) God creates darkness and evil
      - 1) Darkness refers to adversities of every kind
      - 2) Evil refers not to the evil of sin, evil of punishment and not the evil of guilt
    - b) I the Lord creates all these things
  - 2) Amos 3.6 - Evil is ordained by the Lord
- D. The sovereignty of God in salvation
  - 1) "God's sovereignty in salvation means that God saves whom He wills to save and there is no power able to frustrate the sovereign power of God at work in the saving of the sinner. Not the natural obstinacy of the sinner himself, not the power of the devil, formidable though it is, not the opposition of the wicked world, intense though it may be, are able to stand in the way of the sovereignty of God. Not only can none of those frustrate the sovereign power of God in salvation, but under the sovereignty of God they actually serve the ultimate salvation of God's people"
  - 2) The teaching
    - a) Because God is God, He possesses the right to predestinate; thus, he chooses some to election unto eternal life and some to reprobation unto eternal condemnation
    - b) And there is no one that can protest his choosing because He is God and men are his creatures and He is the potter and we are only clay
    - c) And so He saves whom he will and has mercy whom he wills (Rom. 9.18)
    - d) "To say otherwise is to deny sovereignty. If there is anything beyond the pale of God's sovereignty, He is not truly sovereign. God's sovereignty in salvation means that He saves whom He will, and those whom He saves owe nothing at all to themselves. They are saved because God graciously chose them in eternity and regenerated and called them in history. They cannot even take credit for their faith because it is the gift that He Himself sovereignly bestows"
  - 3) Mat. 11.25, 26
    - a) God's sovereignty extends even to those whom the Lord will open their hearts

- b) He hid God's truth to the wise and prudent and he opens it to the babes (c.f. II Cor. 2.14-16)
- 4) Acts 16.14
  - a) The first thing in the salvation of Lydia is God's work
  - b) God opened her heart
  - c) And then, she worshipped the Lord and attended to the apostle's preaching

E. Teaching from the Reformed Creeds

- 1) Belgic Confession, article XIII Divine Providence, I believe that the same good God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that *He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment*; nevertheless, God neither is the Author of nor can be charged with the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then when devils and wicked men act unjustly ...
- 2) Canons of Dordt
  - a) I. 7, Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the *sovereign good pleasure of His own will*, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation ...
  - b) I. 11, And as God Himself is most wise, unchangeable, omniscient, and *omnipotent*, so the election made by Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast away, nor their number diminished.
  - c) I. 15, What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His *sovereign*, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but, permitting them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the Author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous Judge and Avenger thereof.
  - d) II. 8, For this was the *sovereign* counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them, free from every spot and blemish, to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.
- 3) Westminster Confession of Faith
  - a) II.2, II. God hath all life,[25] glory,[26] goodness,[27] blessedness,[28] in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made,[29] nor deriving any glory from them,[30] but only

manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things;[31] and hath most *sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth.*[32] ...

- b) V.1, God the great Creator of all things *doth uphold*,[1] *direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things*,[2] from the greatest even to the least,[3] by his most wise and holy providence,[4] according to his infallible foreknowledge,[5] and the free and immutable counsel of his own will,[6] to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.[7]
- c) V.4, IV. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men;[14] and that not by a bare permission,[15] but such as hath joined with it a most wise and *powerful bounding*,[16] and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends;[17] yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.[18]

### III. Objections

A. If God is sovereign, He is the author of sin.

1) Our answer to the objection

- a) Is that God is sovereign, sovereign even over sin and evil, but sovereign over sin and evil in such a way that He is not the author of nor can be charged with the sins that wicked men commit (Ezek. 18:25-30; Acts 2:23, 24; Rom. 9:10-18).
- b) Man is responsible for the sins he commit for he sins willingly, desires to sin, delights in sin and actively commits sin
- c) God's purpose with sin is a good purpose. His purpose is His own glory through the demonstration of the glorious perfections of His Being.
  - 1) His purpose is the demonstration of His power that is able to make even sin and the sinner subservient to His will.
  - 2) His purpose is the demonstration of His righteousness which demands and accomplishes satisfaction for sin.
  - 3) His purpose is the demonstration of His free grace that saves not good people but unworthy sinners in the cross of Christ.
  - 4) God's purpose in decreeing sin is the revelation of His Son Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin.

B. If God is sovereign, man is not responsible for his sin.

- 1) The apostle Paul deals with this objection to divine sovereignty in Romans 9. In verse 19 the objection is brought: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he (God) yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" What is Paul's answer to this objection? Does he concede the objection? Not at all. Listen: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (v. 20).
- 2) God is sovereign, sovereign even over sin and the sinner. But God is sovereign over sin and the sinner in such a way that the sinner himself always remains responsible before God for his sin. Yes, the Son of Man goes to the cross as it was determined by God: "But woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed" ([Luke 22:22](#)). To be sure, Christ is delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, but it is also true that "wicked hands" are responsible for His being crucified and slain ([Acts 2:23](#)).
- 3) Nor is this ever a real problem for the sinner. In our everyday life we experience no tension between God's sovereignty and our own responsibility. Although we believe that all things are under the sovereign control of God, we know that when we do wrong, we are responsible for the wrong we have done. We feel the guilt and must also face the

consequences. In a way that surpasses our ability to comprehend it, God is absolutely sovereign and man is responsible for his sin.

IV. Our Attitudes to Sovereignty

- A. One of Godly Fear
  
- B. One of Implicit Obedience
  
- C. One of Entire Submission to God
- D. One of Deep Thankfulness and Joy
  
- E. One of Adoring Worship

V. The Value of this doctrine

- A. It deepens our veneration of the divine character
  
- B. It magnifies his grace
  
- C. It is the solid foundation of all true religion
  
- D. It repudiates the heresy of salvation by works
  
- E. It is deeply humbling to the creature
  
- F. It affords a sense of absolute security
  
- G. It supplies comfort in sorrow
  
- H. It begets a spirit of sweet submission
  
- I. It evokes a song of praise