

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Only a fool would reject the concept that the God who created the universe out of nothing is not totally sovereign in that universe.

However, does sovereignty have its limitations?

In a kingdom or dictatorship the issue of greatest importance is not how powerful the ruler is, but how he will exercise the power vested in him. The Power, if it is absolute, cannot be limited externally, but it will be limited by the character of the sovereign himself. It will be channeled only in ways that reflect his character. Thus sovereignty, in itself, holds the potential of either great good or vast evil. Essentially a one ruler government (kingdom or dictatorship) is not evil of itself -- that depends on who is reigning. This is made clear when we compare the reign of Anti-Christ on the one hand and Christ on the other. While we, today, abhor a government giving one man absolute and final authority, it is the most efficient form of government and is the form of government earth will enjoy during the Millennium. The extent of the ruler's authority is not the issue, but how that authority is used. Since the authority is invested in one man it can be, and will be, limited by that man's character. Thus God, though He has totally unlimited sovereignty over His universe, is *self*-limited. There are things **God cannot do!**

If authority and power alone were the issue, and knew no limitations, God could lie! But Scripture assures us that He *cannot* lie! (Titus 1:2). Limited? Yes, by His own attributes. Down through the history of the kings of Israel and Judah the same form of government was in force. The kingdom was good or bad, not by changes in the government, or limitations to the sovereignty of the king, but by the character of the man who wielded that kingly power. David used his sovereignty to make Israel a great and blessed nation -- a standard by which all subsequent reigns were measured. Manasseh used the same sovereignty to bring the kingdom to destruction. The issue was how that sovereignty was utilized.

The attributes of God.

Instead of debating the sovereignty of God versus the free will of man we should accept the "self limited sovereignty of God" -- and then believe the Scriptures as to all of His attributes and how the exercise of His sovereignty is shaped by them. No one attribute stands alone. If love were His only attribute He would save all men. If holiness stood alone He would save none of them. But because God is also gracious He saves some men without compromising His holiness and judges some men without violating His love. If God's authority alone were exercised He could have created a host of individuals for the express purpose of sending them to hell. Further, He could demand faith from those incapable of it apart from His decision, with-hold it from most of them, and then blame them for not having it. But God is righteous. Our very concept of righteousness is derived from His word, as He demands righteousness from us. Therefore He must be the perfect pattern for that righteousness. Because He is righteous He is self-limited -- He cannot do, Himself, what His righteousness would soundly condemn in man.

Can man limit God?

Scripture says, "Yes!" See Luke 13:34; 1 Tim. 2:4.

Has God then ceased to be sovereign? No, for the choice made by God to give man true volition, and hold him accountable for how he uses it, was *His sovereign choice*. One wonders why this is not recognized as an outstanding "decree" of God.

Does this concept depict a weak God? On the contrary, it enhances His greatness. A man is not considered a great Chess player just because he wins all his games -- if he makes all the moves on the board, both his and his opponents. Even I could be a great Chess player that way. But if his opponents are not limited to those pre-chosen for their poor ability, and they are fully free to make their own moves (within the rules of the game) -- and he still wins all of the games -- he is a great Chess player. God has set the rules of the game and granted man the responsibility and ability to make his own choices. Yet He always wins the game! (2 Cor. 2:14 - 16). A God who must make all the decisions in order to triumph in the end is "too small a God" to fit the scriptural model.

Who is the initiator of salvation?

Does this mean that man seeks God? No, for salvation was initiated by God as soon as man fell. He sought Adam, Adam did not seek Him. Adam was hiding! The entire Old Testament preparation for the coming of Christ; His birth, death, resurrection and ascension; and the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring writers of Scripture, empowering its teachers and convicting its hearers, is the work of God making man's salvation possible. Man is asked only one thing -- to believe the message. Faith is not a work, it is man's response to God's work. It is put in stark contrast to works (Rom. 4:3 - 5) and was chosen as the only response of man which would not be a work -- *so that salvation might be by grace* (Rom. 4:16).

"Logical conclusions" from Scripture versus Scripture itself.

It is instructive to compare the conclusions of even some of the wisest theologians, drawn by human logic from Scripture, with what Scripture itself specifically says. See some examples of this.

Theological positions
based upon human logic

Specific statements from the Word of God

God loved only the elect.

"For **God** so **loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Christ died only for the elect.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time **Christ died** for the **ungodly**" (Romans 5:6). "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if **one died for all**, then were all dead: And that **he died for all**, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves,

but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying **the Lord that bought them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15). "Who *will* have **all men** to be **saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a **ransom for all**, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:4 - 6). (*The word for "will" has the thought of desire, not that of determined purpose*)

Since the sinner is dead he can and do nothing -- so he must be life, and given life so he can hear. passed from death

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting shall not come into condemnation; but is

unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:24, 25) -- *Not "They that live shall hear"!*

Faith is a work, therefore it must be a gift from God

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). (*Faith is put in **contrast** works*)

God cannot be limited by what man does.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37 -- See also Luke 13:34). "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 78:41).

The Holy Spirit cannot be resisted.

"Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).

William P Heath

Bible Study # 69

<My Documents\Bible Studies\calvin2 > on Microsoft Word.

< bibstudy\calvin2.sam > on AmiPro.

See: Bible Study # 36, a different study on the same topic < C-4 # 3 > on Epson

Bible Study # 58 < bibstudy\calvin1.sam > on AmiPro.
< My Documents\Bible Studies\calvin1 > on Microsoft Word