

# The Sovereignty of God

by Ronald Hanko

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*The sovereignty of God is the central truth of the Reformed faith, affirming that God is absolutely authoritative and in control of all things.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 50:20, Job 42:2, Psalm 115:3, Proverbs 16:9, Isaiah 14:24, Matthew 11:25, Luke 22:22, Romans 9:18, Ephesians 1:11, Philippians 1:6

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Reformed Theology"

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## Description

Ronald Hanko preaches about the central truth of the Reformed faith, which is the sovereignty of God, emphasizing that predestination is not the central truth but rather a part of the doctrine. The absolute sovereignty of God is the core of Calvinism, faithful to its heritage, as seen in the confession of God's sovereignty by believers. The knowledge of God is highlighted as man's highest calling and greatest good, with salvation itself consisting of knowing God. The sermon delves into God's sovereignty over all things, including creation, men, salvation, and even the adversities of life, refuting objections and denials of God's sovereignty in various aspects of life.

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## Transcript

One truth distinguishes what is known as the Reformed faith, or Calvinism. That truth is the sovereignty of God.

Many people suppose that the heart of Calvinism is its teaching of predestination. When they hear of Calvinism or that someone is a Calvinist, they immediately think of election and reprobation.

Now certainly, it is true that the doctrine of predestination has an important place in the teaching of Calvinism, as it did in the teaching of John Calvin himself. Nevertheless, predestination is not the central truth of the Reformed faith. The heart of Calvinism is not the doctrine of predestination, or, for that matter, any one of the other Five Points of Calvinism. The central truth proclaimed by Calvinism, Calvinism that is faithful to its heritage, is the absolute sovereignty of God. 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).

The distinguishing feature of the Reformed faith is unquestionably its conception of God. What we believe about God matters most. Everything else that we believe stands connected to and is affected by what we

believe about God. The most important question that any man faces is the question "Who is God?" It is true, as Calvin writes in the opening paragraph of his Institutes, that all "... true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (I, 1, 1).<sup>1</sup> But as he goes on to say, "... it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself" (I, 1, 2).<sup>2</sup> Not only is the knowledge of God of great importance, it is also the chief end of man. The opening question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." But man cannot glorify God or enjoy Him, if man does not know God. Man's chief end and calling, therefore, is to know God.

Not only is the knowledge of God man's highest calling, it is also his greatest good. Jesus teaches that in John 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Salvation itself consists in knowing God. Those who have eternal life possess a right and saving knowledge of God.

The God Whom we must know is a sovereign God. Knowledge of God begins with the affirmation of faith that God is and that God is sovereign. Since God is, He is sovereign. If He is God, He must also be a sovereign God. If God is not sovereign, the inescapable implication is that He is not God.

This is the great issue that divides true religion and false religion! This is the great issue that separates the true church of Jesus Christ in the world from the false and apostate church! This is the issue that distinguishes faith from unbelief: the sovereignty of God!

The confession of God's sovereignty is gladly made by every believer. It is the teaching about God set forth in the infallible Scriptures, the source of our knowledge about God. And this is the truth confessed about God by Reformed Christians.

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#### A. The Doctrine

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.

Two fundamental truths stand at the basis of God's sovereignty. The first of these truths is the oneness of God. God is God alone; and there is no other god than the Lord God. Obviously, two cannot be almighty. Two cannot be omnipotent. Two cannot be sovereign. God is sovereign because He and only He is God.

In the second place, the sovereignty of God rests on the truth that He is the Creator. God has made everything that exists. 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). The entire universe owes its existence to God. By virtue of the fact that He is the Creator, God is sovereign over all things.

Parents have the right to rule over their children. God gives them that right because they are their children. They have conceived them; they have brought them forth; they have given them their life and existence. If

this is true of earthly parents in relationship to their children, how much more is this not true of God in relationship to the universe!

God's sovereignty is an absolute sovereignty. By this we mean that God's sovereignty is over everything and everyone - nothing is excluded from God's sovereign control. God rules in the realm of the natural, exercising His power over inanimate creatures as well as the brute creation. God rules over men and angels, time and history, the world and the church. God's rule extends not only to those circumstances we regard as good, but also to the bad: sickness, famine, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Beyond this, God is sovereign even over sin and sinners, the devil and the demons of hell. They do nothing apart from His sovereign will.

Not only is God absolutely sovereign in the realm of the natural, but He is sovereign also in salvation. 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.

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## B. Scripture Passages

### 1. God's sovereignty affirmed.

a. Job 42:2. I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Job acknowledges that God can do everything, in other words, that God is sovereign. He goes on to state the implications of this, namely, that no one can "withhold" or prevent from being realized any thought in the mind of God. What God wills and plans He is able always to bring to pass.

b. Psalm 115:3. But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

God's sovereignty is affirmed here by the statement of the psalmist that God is "in the heavens." He is not an earthly creature, finite and limited. This affirmation is strengthened when he adds, "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." What God pleases, that is, what He wills, He does. With us men it is different. It is very well possible that we will something but are unable to bring it to pass. We deal with this frustration daily. I want to go somewhere, but if my car is broken down, I am prevented from carrying out what I will. What God wills, He is able to accomplish. Nothing is able to frustrate His will because He is sovereign.

c. Isaiah 14:24, 27. The Lord of heaven hath sworn, saying, surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

What God thinks comes to pass; what He purposes stands. Nothing is able to contravene God's sovereignty. When Isaiah asks, "Who shall disannul it?" the obvious answer is "No one!" And when he asks, "Who shall turn it back?" the implied answer again is "No one!"

d. Isaiah 49:9, 10. Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

God's counsel stands, that is, comes to pass just as He has willed it. God does all His good pleasure, everything He pleases. This happens because "... there is none else, ... there is none like me...."

e. Daniel 4:34, 35. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

In His sovereignty God does as He wills in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Heaven and earth - all things - are included in His sovereign control. What makes this such a striking confession of the sovereignty of God is that it is a confession made by an unbelieving man - King Nebuchadnezzar. Even such a wicked man is forced, not only to see, but also to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar had experienced that sovereignty of God in his own life. In His sovereignty God had taken Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom away from him and humbled that proud king as a beast of the field. Nebuchadnezzar had gloried in his own power and fancied himself the master of his own destiny: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30) He had denied and defied God's sovereignty. And God had demonstrated His sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar, demonstrated it to him in a way that he would not soon forget, as He often does to those who deny His sovereign prerogatives.

f. Ephesians 1:11. In whom we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

This text is speaking about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As the Son of God, He works all things according to His will.

g. I Timothy 6:15. Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is exalted over the rulers of this world. And if God rules over the rulers of this world, the highest earthly dignitaries, He rules over everything in this world.

h. Revelation 11:16, 17. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

In this passage God's sovereignty is taught in two ways. First, He is called "Lord God Almighty." That God is Lord and that He is Almighty indicates His sovereignty. Secondly, it is said about Him that He has taken to himself "great power and hast reigned." That God takes to Himself "great" power, the greatest power, and that He reigns, reigns alone, and reigns notwithstanding the defiance of His enemies means that He is sovereign.

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## 2. God's sovereignty over the brute creation.

### a. Genesis 1, 2, the creation account.

The fact of God's creation of the heavens and the earth demonstrates His sovereignty over the creation. When God said, "Let there be light," there was light. When God said, "Let there be a firmament," the firmament appeared. When God called forth the animals they did not begin a long evolutionary development of several million years, but they came forth into existence. And so it was with every creature God made.

b. Miracles like the Flood ( Gen. 7), the ten plagues sent by God on Egypt (Ex. 8-12), Israel's crossing of the Red Sea ( Ex. 14), the sending of the manna ( Ex. 16), the standing still of the sun ( Josh. 10), and other similar miracles all point to God's sovereignty over the creation and every creature in the creation. This is why it is necessary for the church today to defend the miracles that are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. To deny the miracles is not only to deny the infallibility of the Bible but it is also to deny the sovereignty of God. Because the Christian believes the sovereignty of God, he has no difficulty accepting the miracles taught in the Bible. Because he believes the sovereignty of God, the Christian looks forward eagerly to the miracles prophesied in the Bible: the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of our dead bodies, and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell.

c. Psalm 103:19. The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Since God's throne (the symbol of power) is in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all, the entire creation is subject to His sovereign control.

d. Psalm 135:6, 7. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh the lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures.

God's sovereignty, according to this passage, extends to heaven, the earth, the seas, and all deep places. Dew, lightning, rain, and the wind are under the controlling hand of God. "It" does not rain; God causes it to rain. "It" does not blow; God sends the wind. That it rains, where it rains, how much it rains - all are determined by God.

e. Matthew 10:29, 30. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

The sovereign rule of God extends to the (what we would call) insignificant sparrows, and even (who would think of it!) the hairs of our heads. If sparrows and hair are under the sovereignty of God, it is safe to conclude that everything is under His sovereign rule.

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## 3. God's sovereignty over men and the affairs of men's lives.

### a. Proverbs 16:9. A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.

Man may set goals and make plans, but God "directeth" the course of man's life. What a man does, where he goes, what he accomplishes, are determined by a sovereign God.

b. Proverbs 16:33. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.

In Bible times issues were often decided or people chosen by means of the casting of lots. For example, when the children of Israel came into the land of Canaan, each tribe received its specific portion of the land of Canaan by the casting of lots: "Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers shall they inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few" (Num. 26:55, 56). The outcome of the casting of lots might appear to be random, purely arbitrary. Solomon says in Proverbs 16:33 that that is not the case. The "disposing," that is, the result of the casting of lots, is under the control of God. Clearly, God rules over men and the activity of men.

c. Proverbs 21:1. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Not just the king's actions, but the very heart of the king is in the hand of God. The heart in the Scriptures is the center and seat of man's entire life. If God controls the king's heart, He controls the king. And if God controls the king, the greatest of men, He controls all those who are under the king. In other words, all men, high and low, great and small, mighty and insignificant, are subject to the sovereign will of an Almighty God.

d. Jeremiah 10:23. O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

Man, Jeremiah says, does not direct the course of his own footsteps. His way in life is not "in himself." He walks, he lives an active life in the world, but ultimately it is God who directs the course of man's life.

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#### 4. God's sovereignty in salvation.

a. Matthew 11:25, 26. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

By these words Jesus teaches clearly the sovereignty of God in salvation. God hides the things of the kingdom of heaven from certain men, with the result that they are not saved. God reveals the things of the kingdom to other men, with the result that they are saved. Both the hiding and the revealing take place according to the sovereign will of God: "... for so it seemed good in thy sight."

b. Acts 16:14. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Lydia was saved. Although she was saved by means of the preaching of the apostle Paul, it was not Paul who saved her. Although Lydia believed Paul's preaching, Lydia did not save herself by the power of her own free will. Lydia's salvation was due to this, that the Lord opened her heart, as He does the heart of every sinner who is saved.

c. Romans 9:18. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

The apostle Paul teaches here that God shows mercy to those men and women to whom He wills to show mercy. Since God's mercy is the cause of our salvation, we may understand Paul to be teaching here that God saves whom He wills to save. Not only that, but those who are not saved, are not saved because God hardens them in their sin and unbelief: "... and whom he will he hardeneth."

God's sovereignty in salvation is also clearly taught in a multitude of Scripture passages that speak of God efficaciously saving sinners. God does not just try to save sinners, all the while depending on their willingness to be saved. He does not attempt to save them but stand helplessly when they do not cooperate with Him by using their free will to be saved. He does not do His best to save sinners, always facing the real possibility that His best is not good enough and that the sinner may effectively resist His efforts to save him. No, God saves sinners, sovereignly, efficaciously, irresistibly. This is always how the Scriptures describe salvation.

d. Matthew 1:21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

e. I Corinthians 1:21. For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

f. Ephesians 2:4, 5. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

g. II Timothy 1:9. Who saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

h. II Timothy 1:12. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

That which Paul has committed to God is his soul's salvation. He is confident that God is able to keep that which he has committed to Him. What explains the confidence of Paul? How can he be sure that he will be kept in salvation notwithstanding the devil, the wicked world, and his own sinful flesh? He can have that confidence only because of his belief in God's sovereignty. Because God sovereignly brought him to salvation, he can be sure that God will also sovereignly preserve him in salvation.

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## 5. God's sovereignty over the evils and adversities of earthly life.

There is a popular misconception today that only that which is good comes from the hand of God and is under the control of God. The bad things, the trouble, and earthly distresses, it is supposed, are the work of the devil. Health and prosperity come from God, while the sudden death of a young mother or the disaster caused by an earthquake are from the devil. The Bible teaches quite differently.

a. Genesis 50:20. But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Great calamity had befallen Joseph. He had been thrown into a pit, sold as a slave to Egypt, separated from family and friends, and even in Egypt imprisoned for a time. In his afflictions, Joseph never lost sight

of the truth of the sovereignty of God. God, he says, was the One Who brought all those calamities to pass. And God did it for good. Not only did Joseph confess God's sovereignty, but it is plain that he enjoyed the comfort of the sovereignty of God.

b. Job 1:21. And Job said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Job 2:10. But he (Job) said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Job spoke these words at a time in his life when he was enduring extreme suffering. He had lost all his earthly possessions, his cattle, his servants, and even his ten children. Satan and Job's enemies had been the instruments to bring this suffering into his life. But Job understood the truth of the sovereignty of God. Behind Satan and the wicked Sabeans and Chaldeans, Job saw the mighty hand of God. He does not say: "The Lord gave, and the devil and my enemies have now taken it all away." Oh no! "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Not only had Job received good at the hand of God (riches, cattle, servants, and children), but he had also received evil (the loss of all these things) from the hand of God.

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#### 6. God's sovereignty over sin and the sinner.

a. Genesis 45:7, 8. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Not only was it great suffering for Joseph that he was sold as a slave into Egypt, but his being sold was due to the sinfulness of his brothers. Yet, Joseph was able to see the sovereignty of God ruling even over the sinful deed of his brothers. Very really it was the brothers who had sent Joseph down into Egypt. But Joseph, because he understood the truth of God's sovereignty, teaches that it was God Who had sent him down to Egypt.

b. II Samuel 16:10. And the king (David) said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him (Shimei) curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

At the time David spoke these words, he was fleeing from his own son Absalom who had usurped the throne. Added to his suffering of having to flee for his life from his own son, he was also made to suffer the reproach and blasphemy of wicked Shimei. Two of David's faithful captains, the brothers Joab and Abishai, wanted to kill Shimei for his wicked reproach of David. But David forbade them because "... the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." Behind the sinful deed of Shimei, David saw the sovereign hand of God. David was content that the sovereign God would avenge the sin of Shimei in His own time and in His own way.

c. Isaiah 45:7. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.

In this passage the Lord Himself is speaking. He affirms His sovereignty over evil: "I ... create evil." If the Lord creates evil, certainly He is sovereign over the evil.



d. Amos 3:6. Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?

As certainly as the blowing of the warning trumpet made the inhabitants of a city afraid of the attack of the enemy; so certainly when there is evil in a city, that evil is brought by the Lord. The Lord appoints the evil, brings the evil, and controls the evil.

e. Luke 22:22. And truly the Son of Man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed.

Acts 2:23. Him (Christ) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

Both of these texts teach the sovereignty of God over the very worst sin ever committed - the crucifying of Jesus Christ. Wicked men crucified Him and were to blame, to be sure, for their sinful deed. But even Christ's crucifixion took place according to the sovereign appointment and under the almighty control of God. If God was sovereign over the worst sin, certainly He is sovereign over all sin.

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### C. Objections

Historically especially two objections have been lodged against the Reformed teaching of the sovereignty of God. It has been charged that to teach God's sovereignty is to make God the author of sin. And it has been charged that to teach God's sovereignty is to deny man's responsibility.

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1. If God is sovereign, He is the author of sin. This is the contention of the enemies of the Reformed faith. The argument is that if God has willed and by His almighty power brings about the evil, God is to blame for the evil in the world. Since God is perfect, completely without any sin, He cannot be sovereign.

There are some who have attempted to reconcile this seeming contradiction by teaching that God in His sovereignty only permits sin. Although He actively wills the good, He only passively allows the evil to take place. This is an unsatisfactory explanation. For one thing it does not resolve the problem. If I permit someone to be run over by a truck, when I could have warned that person or prevented him from being run over, I am as responsible for his injury as if I had deliberately run over him myself. The point is that if God permits sin, when He could prevent it, the same charge can be brought that God is responsible for sin.

But besides not solving the difficulty, to speak of God only permitting sin and evil does not do justice to the teaching of the Scriptures with regard to the sovereignty of God. God did not simply permit the devil to afflict Job, but, says Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." God did not simply permit the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but Christ's crucifixion took place according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

Our answer to the objection 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). Although God is sovereign over sin, the sinner sins willingly, desires to sin, delights in sin, and actively commits the sin. He is not compelled against his will to

sin. He is not forced to sin although he does not want to sin. God effects the evil in such a way that Satan and wicked men willingly perform it. As James says in James 1:13, 14, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

That God is not to be charged with being the author of sin is further evident from His purpose in decreeing sin. In distinction from Satan and wicked men, 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. His purpose is the demonstration of His power that is able to make even sin and the sinner subservient to His will. His purpose is the demonstration of His righteousness which demands and accomplishes satisfaction for sin. His purpose is the demonstration of His free grace that saves not good people but unworthy sinners in the cross of Christ. God's purpose in decreeing sin is the revelation of His Son Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin.

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

This is the second objection that is often made against the teaching of the sovereignty of God. The argument is that if God sovereignly wills and brings about sin and evil, man cannot be held accountable for the evil that he does. After all, since God sovereignly willed that he sin, what else could he do but sin?

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).

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).

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.

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## D. Denials of God's Sovereignty

The denial of the truth of the sovereignty of God takes many forms. There are theological denials and more practical denials.

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## 1. Communist totalitarianism.

According to Communist theory, the state and the idea of the state is sovereign. The state owns everything. The state controls every area of life. The interests of the state are the only interests that are of any importance. This is a fundamental attack on the sovereignty of God. It is giving to the state those things that belong only to God. Given this teaching of Communism, it is not surprising that the Communist states have shown themselves hostile to Christianity. Communism is, in fact, inherently anti-God and anti-Christian.

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## 2. Evolutionism.

The teaching of evolution is that the world came into existence by mere chance. The continued existence of the world is due to the outworking of fixed natural laws and blind fate. Evolution is a fundamental denial of the sovereignty of God. It denies His sovereign power in creating the heavens and earth. It also denies the sovereignty of God in the upholding of the universe and the directing of the course of the world's history. There can be no compromise between the Reformed faith and evolution. The god of evolution, if there is one, is not the sovereign God of the Bible. Those who today are attempting to compromise these two are guilty of attacking the very heart of the Reformed faith - the sovereignty of God. If concessions are made to the theory of evolution, the truth of God's sovereignty is bartered away for a mess of humanistic pottage.

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## 3. Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, the free offer of the gospel, and free will.

All of these false teachings, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, have in common that they deny the sovereignty of God, particularly His sovereignty in the salvation of lost sinners. According to all these views, although God sincerely desires the salvation of all men, He is unable actually to accomplish the salvation of anyone. Although God wants to save a man, that man is in himself powerful enough to resist God's saving grace and frustrate God's intention to save him. Even after God has begun to save a man, regenerated him, given him His Holy Spirit and the gift of faith, it is possible for the man to fall away from grace and salvation, a falling away which God is unable to prevent. This is a blatant denial of God's sovereignty in salvation. It is no surprise that where these untruths have been accepted, there the teaching of the absolute sovereignty of God is no longer heard.

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## 4. Deism.

This teaching, more philosophy than religion, arose about the time of the American Revolution, especially in France. It taught that God exists and that He created the world but that He has at present no relation to the world. In other words, it denied that God is everywhere present in the creation and that He is the God of providence, upholding and ruling all things in creation by His almighty power. Over against the truth of God's sovereignty, then, it taught that though God may be sovereign, His sovereignty has no significance in time and history and for man's life, but that all things develop according to natural laws, and that it is up to man to determine his own destiny.

This denial of God's sovereignty needs to be mentioned because it was the "religion" of the men who were the leaders of the American Revolution and who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison. So it is that the American Constitution and other documents connected with the history of the United States of America are founded on deist principles rather than on the biblical teaching of God's sovereignty.

This is clear especially from the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

So also it is this view that lies at the basis of the proud statement with which the Preamble to the American Constitution begins: "We the people...."

Apart from the fact that it simply is neither true nor biblical that all men are created equal and have certain unalienable rights (Deut. 7:6; Dan. 2:21; Luke 1:52; I Cor. 1:26), it is a blatant denial of God's sovereignty to teach that government derives its power from the consent of the governed and not from God (cf. Rom. 13:1-7), and, as the Declaration goes on to say, that "it is the right of the people to alter and abolish it (government), and to institute new government" as they see fit (paragraph 13).

The idea, then, that is so common today, that the American Constitution and Declaration are "Christian" documents is utterly false, and the simple fact that God is mentioned in them should not mislead us.

Along these same lines, we must condemn every form of rebellion and resistance against God-instituted government as a denial of the sovereign power and right of God as outlined in the first part of Romans 13.

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## 5. Feminism.

The "heresy" of feminism which has swept through both human society and the church is also a denial of God's sovereignty, for it denies not just the headship of the man over the woman, but the headship of God, which is reflected in the man's headship over the woman, and which is the foundation for his headship. Nor is it surprising that this feminism has gained such a hold in the church, when the church for the most part no longer believes in the sovereignty of God.

That feminism is a denial of God's headship and thus also of His sovereignty is clear from those passages which show that the woman in submitting to the headship of the man submits also to God in Christ (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22, 24; Col. 3:18).

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## 6. Our practice.

We are also, from a practical point of view, tempted to deny the sovereignty of God. It is one thing to confess this truth intellectually and abstractly. It is quite another thing to acknowledge this truth when the sovereignty of God touches our own lives personally. It is one thing to confess that God sovereignly rules over all things so that nothing takes place by chance but according to His appointment. It is another thing

to confess God's sovereignty when our crops have been devastated, our home destroyed, or we have lost our job. It is one thing to confess that the evils of this life are included in the sovereignty of God. It is another thing to confess the sovereignty of God at the graveside of a loved one. It is one thing to confess the sovereignty of God in salvation. It is quite another thing to confess the sovereignty of God when we see His sovereignty in salvation being worked out in our own congregation, our own families, and even among our own children.

It takes the grace of God to confess and to submit to the sovereignty of God. It takes grace to confess that all things, and our own lives too, are under His control and subject to His will. It takes grace to confess, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Apart from sovereign grace, no man will ever confess the sovereignty of God. That a man does confess the sovereignty of God is itself due to God's sovereignty.

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## E. Practical Importance

The practical importance of the truth of the sovereignty of God cannot be over-emphasized.

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### 1. God's sovereignty and worship.

Belief in God's sovereignty underlies the true worship of God. In the very first commandment of God's law we are confronted with the truth of God's sovereignty. Since God is God and God alone, He ought to be worshipped by us. Since God alone is sovereign, He alone ought to be worshipped. And if our worship is to be proper worship, worship that exalts His greatness and acknowledges our unworthiness and inability, it must be worship at the heart of which is the confession of the sovereignty of God.

And God's sovereignty not only demands that He be worshipped, but determines as well the way in which we are to worship Him. If God is sovereign, He must not and cannot be represented by dumb images that cannot think, speak, or perform one action. If God is sovereign, the almighty "I AM THAT I AM," our worship of Him must be reverent. The lack of reverence in so much of what passes for worship today is symptomatic of the loss in the churches of the doctrine of God's sovereignty.

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### 2. God's sovereignty and the glory of God.

Certainly the importance of the truth of God's sovereignty is that it glorifies God. If the almighty power of God stands behind all that takes place in the world and is the cause of salvation besides, God is to be glorified. None of the glory belongs to man, or to any other creature. Glory to God alone! This is man's great calling. Why has he been put on this earth? Why has God saved him? Why has God given him all that he has? So that he will glorify God. And He deserves that glory because He is sovereign.

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### 3. God's sovereignty and history.

An understanding of the truth of God's sovereignty is important for a proper view of history and so is of great importance for Christian education. History is only properly understood and properly taught when history is viewed as the outworking of the sovereign counsel of God. God is in control and God is executing His will. God sets up kings and casts kings down from their thrones. God brings nations to power and causes their overthrow. God raised up Pharaoh, used him for His own purpose, and when He was finished, drowned him in the Red Sea. Similarly God brought Hitler to power, was sovereign over the blood-shed and devastation he perpetrated, and in the end, after Hitler had served God's purpose, brought his Third Reich to ruin. In the truest sense of the word, history is His story.

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#### 5. God's sovereignty and assurance.

The truth of God's sovereignty is the foundation of the comfort of the people of God. Only if we know that God is in control, our God, the God who is our Father for Jesus' sake, can we have the assurance that all is well. If there is some other power in this world besides the almighty power of our God, some power over which God does not have control, we must be fearful and afraid. But there is no such other power. God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign, sovereign even over sin and evil, the devil and wicked men. That gives us the assurance that "all things work together for (our) good" (Rom. 8:28). Then we may be "persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39).

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#### 5. God's sovereignty and our preservation.

Belief in the sovereignty of God is necessary for the assurance of the Christian's preservation in salvation and for the assurance of the final salvation of the church as a whole. If God is not sovereign, we must always be in doubt concerning our personal salvation, as well as the salvation of the entire church. In fact, if God is not sovereign, the salvation of even one child of God is impossible. Only the sovereign power of God is able to defend the Christian from the power of the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh. Because God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign, the church's salvation is secure. The sovereignty of God gives the believer the assurance that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

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#### F. Relation to the Five Points

The relation between the truth of God's sovereignty and the Five Points of Calvinism is twofold. On the one hand, the basis for the Five Points is the sovereignty of God. On the other hand, the Five Points serve to illustrate clearly the truth that God is a sovereign God. To confess the Five Points of Calvinism is to confess the sovereignty of God. There can be no belief in the Five Points apart from a strong belief in the sovereignty of God.

This can be easily seen. Because man is totally depraved, only the sovereign power of God can save him. Because God is sovereign, He chooses to save whom He wills to save, and there are no conditions or works men fulfill in order to earn their own salvation. Because God is sovereign, the atonement

(redemption) accomplished by the death of Christ was effectual, actually saving those whom it was intended to save. Because God is sovereign, His gracious operations in the salvation of men are irresistible. Because God is sovereign, the saints personally and the church as a whole will be preserved and as a result of that preservation will persevere to the end.

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