

## **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY**

**NOTE:** Romans 16:25 Paul explains we were established according to my gospel. Again in Romans 2:16 – in the day when **God** will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ - according to my gospel. Romans 3:9 For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written (v. 10) “There is none righteous, no, not **one**.” **But now** (Romans 3:21) **the righteousness of God** apart from the law is **revealed**. . . even the (v. 22) righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ – to all and on all . . . For there is no difference . . . For if when (Romans 5:10) we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. – That is from what we are – sinners by birth not what we have done.

Now we come to a mystery – the preaching of Jesus **according** to the mystery kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25). About the same time another mystery – Romans 11:25 – For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion – that blindness in part has happened to Israel **until** the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Acts 15:14, 18 – Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. Known to God (v. 18) from eternity are all His works. Romans 9:1 through chapters 10 and 11 Paul explains how Israel is set aside in blindness as a mystery in order that the mystery kept secret since the world began by the preaching of Jesus Christ in Romans 16:25 could come in. (Chapter 12 follows chapter 8)

Read verses Acts 2:23, Acts 4:28 and all of chapter 9.

## **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DEFINED**

“Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as Head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11).

The Sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth which brought comfort to many hearts, and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas! that it should be so. Alas! That the doctrine which is the key to history, the interpreter of Providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology, should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.

The sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God *is* God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His

will (Ps. 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is “The Governor among the nations” (Ps. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the “Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe, which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the Potter over the clay, i.e., that He may mould that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a law unto Himself*, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.

Sovereignty characterizes the whole Being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes. *He is sovereign in the exercise of His power*. His power is exercised *as He wills, when He wills, where He wills*. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season that power appears to be dormant, and then it is put forth in irresistible might. Pharaoh dared to hinder Israel from going forth to worship Jehovah in the wilderness—what happened? God exercised His power, His people were delivered and their cruel task-masters slain. But a little later, the Amalekites dared to attack these same Israelites in the wilderness, and what happened? Did God put forth His power on this occasion and display His hand as He did at the Red Sea? Were these enemies of His people promptly overthrown and destroyed? No, on the contrary, the Lord swore that He would “have war with Amalek *from generation to generation*” (Ex. 17:16). Again, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, God’s power was signally displayed. The city of Jericho barred their progress—what happened? Israel did not draw a bow nor strike a blow: the Lord stretched forth His hand and the walls fell down flat. But the miracle was never repeated! *No other city fell after this manner*. Every other city had to be captured by the sword!

Many other instances might be adduced illustrating the sovereign exercise of God’s power. Take one other example. God put forth His power and David was delivered from Goliath, the giant; the mouths of the lions were closed and Daniel escaped unhurt; the three Hebrew children were cast into the burning fiery furnace and came forth unharmed and unscorched. *But God’s power did not always interpose for the deliverance of His people*, for we read: “*And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented*” (Heb. 11:36, 37). But why? Why were not these men of faith delivered like the others? Or, why were not the others suffered to be killed like these? Why should God’s power interpose and rescue some and not the others? Why allow Stephen to be stoned to death, and then deliver Peter from prison?

God is sovereign in the *delegation of His power to others*. Why did God endow Metheselah with a vitality which enabled him to outlive all his contemporaries? Why did God impart to Samson a physical strength which no other human has ever possessed? Again; it is written, “But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that *giveth thee power to get wealth*” (Deut. 8:18), but God does not bestow this power on all alike. Why not? Why has He given such power to men like Morgan, Carnegie, Rockefeller? The answer to all of these questions, is, Because God is Sovereign, and being Sovereign He does as He pleases.

*God is sovereign in the exercise of His mercy.* Necessarily so, for mercy is directed by the *will* of Him that showeth mercy. Mercy is not a *right* to which man is entitled. Mercy is that adorable attribute of God by which He pities and relieves the wretched. But under the righteous government of God no one is wretched who does not *deserve* to be so. The objects of mercy, then, are those who are miserable, and all misery is the result of *sin*, hence the miserable are deserving of punishment not mercy. To speak of *deserving mercy* is a contradiction of terms.

God bestows His mercies on whom He pleases and withholds them as seemeth good unto Himself. A remarkable illustration of this fact is seen in the manner that God responded to the prayers of two men offered under very similar circumstances. Sentence of death was passed upon Moses for one act of disobedience, and he besought the Lord for a reprieve. But was his desire gratified? No; he told Israel, “The Lord is wroth with me for your sakes, *and would not hear me*: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee” (Deut. 3:26). Now mark the second case:--“In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, *I have heard thy prayer*, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (2 Kings 20:1-6). Both of these men had the sentence of death in themselves, and both prayed earnestly unto the Lord for a reprieve: the one wrote: “The Lord would not hear me,” and died; but to the other it was said, “I have heard thy prayer”, and his life was spared. What an illustration and exemplification of the truth expressed in Rom. 9:15!—“For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy *on whom I will have mercy*, and I will have compassion *on whom I will have compassion*.”

The sovereign exercise of God’s mercy—pity shown to the wretched—was displayed when Jehovah became flesh and tabernacled among men. Take one illustration. During one of the Feasts of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He came to the Pool of Bethesda, where lay “*a great multitude* of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.” Among this “great multitude” there was “a certain man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.” What happened? “When Jesus saw *him* lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto *him*, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked” (John 5:3-9). Why was this one man singled out from all the others? We are not told that he cried “Lord, have mercy *on me*.” There is not a word in the narrative which intimates that this man possessed any qualifications which entitled him to receive special favor. Here then was a case of the sovereign exercise of Divine mercy, for it was just as easy for Christ to heal the whole of that “great multitude” as this one “certain man.” But He did not. He put forth His power and relieved the wretchedness of this one particular sufferer, and for some reason known only to Himself, He declined to

do the same for the others. Again, we say, what an illustration and exemplification of Rom. 9:15!—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

#### 1. GOD GOVERNS INANIMATE MATTER.

That God governs inanimate matter, that inanimate matter performs His bidding and fulfils His decrees, is clearly shown on the very frontispiece of Divine revelation. God said, Let there be light, and we read, "*There was light.*" God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear," and "*it was so.*" And again, "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: *and it was so.*" As the Psalmist declares, "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast."

What is stated in Genesis one is afterwards illustrated all through the Bible. After the creation of Adam, sixteen centuries went by before ever a shower of rain fell upon the earth, for before Noah "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2:6). But, when the iniquities of the antediluvians had come to the full, then God said, "And, behold, *I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth*, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die;" and in fulfillment of this we read, "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights" (Gen. 6:17 and 7:11, 12).

Witness God's absolute (and *sovereign*) control of inanimate matter in connection with the plagues upon Egypt. At His bidding the light was turned into darkness and rivers into blood; hail fell, and death came down upon the godless land of the Nile, until even its haughty monarch was compelled to cry out for deliverance. Note particularly how the inspired record here emphasizes God's absolute control over the elements—"And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: *and the Lord sent* thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; *and the Lord* rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. *Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.*" (Ex. 9:23-26). The same distinction was observed unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: *but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings*" (Ex. 10:21-23).

The above examples are by no means *isolated* cases. At God's decree fire and brimstone descended from heaven and the cities of the Plain were destroyed, and a fertile valley was converted into a loathsome sea of death. At His bidding the waters of the Red Sea parted asunder so that the Israelites passed over dry shod, and at His word they rolled back again and destroyed the Egyptians who were pursuing them. A word from Him, and the earth opened her mouth and Korah and his rebellious company were swallowed

up. The furnace of Nebuchadnezzar was heated seven times beyond its normal temperature, and into it three of God's children were cast, but the fire did not so much as scorch their clothes, though it slew the men who cast them into it.

What a demonstration of the Creator's governmental control over the elements was furnished when He became flesh and tabernacled among men! Behold Him asleep in the boat. A storm arises. The winds roar and the waves are lashed into fury. The disciples who are with Him, fearful lest their little craft should founder, awake their Master, saying, "Carest Thou not that we perish?" And then we read, "And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. *And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm*" (Mark 4:39). Mark again, the sea, at the will of its Creator, bore Him up upon its waves. At a word from Him the fig-tree withered; at His touch disease fled instantly.

What a declaration is this—"He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth: His word runneth very swiftly. *He giveth* snow like wool: *He scattereth* the hoar frost like ashes. *He casteth forth* His ice like morsels: who can stand before *His cold!* *He sendeth* out His word, and melteth them: *He causeth His wind to blow*, and the waters flow" (Ps. 147:15-18). The mutations of the elements are beneath God's sovereign control. It is *God* who withholds the rain, and it is *God* who gives the rain when He wills, where He will, as He wills, and on whom He wills.