

CHAPTER XXI

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6). "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3).

We have been writing without conscious fear or favor of men. We endeavor to write each chapter as if the Lord were present personally, looking over our shoulders and passing judgment upon what He sees. We believe the honest reader will agree that what we have been, and are writing is honoring to God our Creator and Lawgiver. We are trying to magnify Him in the eyes of the reader and show what a great God we have to fear and love and worship and serve.

The writer is an old-fashioned Baptist without any frills or modern notions. He has lived in spirit with, and has learned much from such men as Paul, Augustine, Bunyan, Gill, Fuller, Carey, Judson, Spurgeon, Graves, Jeter, Boyce, Strong, Carroll, and Mullins. He is in fellowship with those who wrote our various Confessions of Faith, such as the London, the Philadelphia, and New Hampshire.

We began our Christian career, as most men do, in Arminian togs, but with an inward experience that made us susceptible to Calvinistic teachings. It should be well known that there are two and only two schemes or systems of divine grace, unalterably opposed to each other, and mutually exclusive. The two systems represent the only two possible positions or views on the subject of grace. Whether or not one is willing to wear either name, does not alter the fact that he is either Calvinistic or Arminian in his views. Calvinism stands for the truth that salvation is of the Lord; Arminianism makes salvation the result of human merit, The one system postulates irresistible grace; the other postulates inherent human goodness.

A good way to locate or label oneself is to turn to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, where the two systems are fairly set forth. Here are the five points of Calvinism: unconditional election or predestination, limited atonement or particular redemption, total depravity necessitating prevenient grace, effectual calling or irresistible grace, and preservation or perseverance of the saints. And the writer does not hesitate to subscribe to all five points. Nor does holding the five points cause him to deny human responsibility or to be lax in missionary endeavor.

If we may judge by Confessions of Faith or public utterances of their leaders, the champions of Arminianism are the Catholics, the Methodists, the disciples of Mr. Campbell, the Free Will Baptists, and many other smaller groups. Judging by the same standards, the champions of

Calvinism are the Missionary Baptists, the Anti-Mission Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and a few smaller bodies. It is doubtless true that many preachers in the Calvinistic bodies have departed from their historic faith, and no longer teach what they took an oath to teach. In many cases it is a Calvinistic creed and an Arminian clergy.

Sovereignty of God a Big Doctrine

Sometime ago we read where somebody called for "big doctrines." Well, the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty is a big doctrine. It is almost too big for us to attempt to define. But the two texts (as do many others) at the head of this chapter declare and affirm it. Mr. Spurgeon delighted to proclaim this big doctrine, and he could do it about as well as anybody we know. The reader will do well to read and ponder the following paragraph from the pen of this prince among preachers:

"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 afflictions, that Sovereignty over rules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. 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 God. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense alms and bestow blessings. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. 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 gnash their teeth, and when 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 the throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne we love to preach. It is the God upon the throne Whom we trust."

Oh for a Spurgeon today to reach the masses with this God honoring and man humbling truth! God is nothing more than a big man with a lot of people, and with many He is not even a very big man. Of old God complained to an apostate Israel, "*These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes*" (Ps. 50:21). This is the trouble today: people's conception of God is too human. And we believe this accounts for much of the alarming irreverence in the average congregation. "*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves*

thereof arise, thou stillest them" (Ps. 89:7-9).

The Meaning of Sovereignty

The Sovereignty of God may be defined as the exercise of His supremacy. God is the one supreme and independent Being. He is the only one in all the universe who has the right and the power to do absolutely as He pleases. He sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be. He is the only one who has the right to act for His own glory. The sovereignty of God means that He does as He pleases, always as He pleases, and only as He pleases. God is in control of all things and people, and is directing all things after His own will and to the praise of His own glory. He even makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and the wrath of man that does not praise Him, He does not allow. *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain "* (Ps. 76:10).

There is no alternative between an absolute sovereign God and no God at all. A man once wrote that he believed God was a sovereign, but not an absolute sovereign. A woman once talked of two supreme beings. But we believe in a sovereign God whose will is not subject to veto by His creatures. In his poem, "There Always Will Be God," Albert Leonard Murray describes Him as a Sovereign:

"They cannot shell His temple,
 Nor dynamite His throne;
 They cannot bomb His city,
 Nor rob Him of His own.
 "They cannot take Him captive,
 Nor strike Him deaf and blind,
 Nor starve Him to surrender,
 Nor make Him change His mind.
 "They cannot cause Him panic,
 Nor cut off His supplies;
 They cannot take His kingdom,
 Nor hurt Him with their lies.
 "Though all the world be shattered,
 His truth remains the same,
 His righteous laws still potent,
 And 'Father' still His name.
 "Though we face war and struggle

And feel their goad and rod,
 We know above confusion
 There always will be God."

Sovereignty in Creation

God acted as a Sovereign in His work of creation. He did not create from necessity, but from His own imperial pleasure. And in creating, He was free to create whatever He pleased. He did not create for the sake of creatures, for creatures in view must exist for their Creator, and not the Creator for the creature. "*The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil*" (Prov. 16:4). "*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*" (Rom. 11:36). "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*" (Rev. 4:11).

Sovereignty in Administration

God is the Sovereign Ruler in His universe. He is in control of all things and of all men, of demons and the Devil. He rules everywhere as seemeth good to Himself. He seeks counsel from none. He controls and directs in the realm of nature. The Scriptures rarely ever use the expression "it rains"; they speak of God sending rain. "*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matt. 5:45); "*Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*" (Acts 14:17); "*When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder*" (Job 28:26).

The Bible does not ascribe the recurring seasons to the laws of nature; it says that God changeth the times and the seasons: "*And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding*" (Dan. 2:21). Job did not talk about his disease as the cause of death, but looked up to God and said, "*For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living*" (Job 30:23). In the face of the many foes, who sought his life, David cried to God and said, "*My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me*" (Ps. 31:15).

And there have been demonstrations of God's control over, and direction of, irrational creatures. He locked the jaws of the lions so that Daniel was not hurt. "*My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found*

in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Dan. 6:22). He directed the cock to crow just when He said it would. "Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew" (John 18:27). He caused the cows, contrary to natural instinct, to leave their calves and make a "beeline" for the borders of Israel with the ark of God. "And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place. And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land. Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed? Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us. And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh" (1 Sam. 6:1-12).

God also controls men, all men, whether good or bad, individually or collectively. He exerts upon the wicked a restraining power. He does not allow them to do all their nature would lead them to do. God said to Abimelech, "*And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her" (Gen. 20:6). How often it is said that God will not infringe upon man's free will. But if*

God had not controlled the will of Abimelech, that heathen king would have harmed Sarah. Yes, even *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"* (Prov. 21:1). God was controlling and directing the will of Cyrus, king of Persia, when he ordered the building of the temple at Jerusalem: *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."* (Ezra 1:1,2). God was controlling and directing Titus and his army in the destruction of Jerusalem; yea, they are called "His armies": *"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city"* (Matt. 22:1-7).

Sovereignty in Salvation

By this we mean that God was under no obligation to save His rebellious creatures. His purpose to save was entirely free to the praise of His grace. He could send every sinner to hell and remain absolutely just. Salvation cannot be of grace and of debt too. *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt"* (Rom. 4:4). Sovereignty in salvation also means that God saves whom He pleases. *"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"* (Rom. 9:18). *"As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him"* (John 17:2).

"Tis not that I did choose Thee
 For Lord, that could not be;
 This heart would still refuse Thee,
 But Thou hast chosen me.
 "T'was sovereign mercy called me,
 And taught my opening mind;

The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind."

Sovereignty in Physical Healing

We believe most heartily and sincerely in Divine healing, but we have neither patience nor respect for men who pose as Divine healers. All healing is Divine, whether with or without the use of medicine. God's usual method is to bless the means that are used, but sometimes He heals without medicine. Moreover, He heals some and keeps others on the sick bed, or brings them to death. *"For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living"* (Job 30:23). *"And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee"* (Exo. 15:26). He is sovereign both as to whom and how He heals.

In the days of public miracles, Paul had the gift of healing, but he could not always exercise that gift. *"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them"* (Acts 19:11,12), we read of special miracles God wrought by the hands of Paul, but *"Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick"* (II Tim. 4:20). Isaiah prescribed a fig poultice for Hezekiah's boil and God blessed it to his cure. *"For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover"* (Isa. 38:21). Paul prescribed a little wine for Timothy's poor stomach. *"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities"* (I Tim. 5:23).

God heals whom and when and how He pleases. Let the sick saint pray, "Lord, if Thou wilt thou canst heal me." *"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"* (James 5:14,15). *It may be His will for you to be sick for your good and for His glory. It may be His will for the thorn in the flesh to remain to the praise of the sufficiency of grace. The very order and safety of creation itself rests upon the sovereignty of God. If God is not in control, working all things after the counsel of His own will, then an absolute blackout is ahead for all of us!*