

GOD!
Message 13
Scripture:
Song: Abide with Me

INTRO: We will be considering the 10th and last attribute of God under the heading of impersonal attributes. It is certainly not the last of the impersonal attributes, but we will have covered the major ones. We looked at these 10 in this order: First His self existence. He is Jehovah, the One who needs nothing or no one to continue to exist.

Now, let me add a little note that subject this morning that I later wished I would have covered on this topic. Turn with me to Exodus 4:10 (read). Now I want you to notice something in this verse. If you will notice, the name 'lord' occurs once all in capitals and once with only the first letter capitalized. I told you some time ago that when the Jews come to this name 'Jehovah' they do not pronounce it but read 'Adoniah' instead. Now when God is called 'Adoniah' in the OT it is translated 'Lord' with only the first letter capitalized as we usually do with names. The name 'Jehovah' occurs 5521 times in the Hebrew OT. Of those 5521 occurrences it is translated by the KJV translators LORD, all in capitals 5517 times. Only four times is it translated 'Jehovah'. So, like the Hebrew reader, when we come to the word 'Jehovah' we read it as 'LORD'. The capitals remind us that it is actually the word Jehovah.

The second attribute we covered was that God is a spiritual being. Then we considered that He is invisible. Then, He is the living God in contrast to all other gods. He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Then He is unchangeable. We call this immutable. He is also infinite. There are no measurements that confine Him. We can measure the known universe, even if it is in light years. But you cannot measure God. You cannot measure His knowledge, ask Job. But last, this morning, we want to look at a most controversial attribute, the sovereignty of God!

So, let us now consider the sovereignty of God.

10. Sovereign

Our subject, then, is the sovereignty of God. But before we proceed we must explain just what we

mean by sovereignty. By the way, the word 'sovereign' does not occur in the Bible, but certainly the concept of sovereignty does. The Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary says of the word sovereign: 1. One in whom the supreme power of a state or nation is vested; monarchy; ruler. 2. An individual, governing body, etc... having supreme authority.

In our day of democracy we do not know much about sovereignty. Our prime minister is certainly not a sovereign. The president of the United States of America is certainly not a sovereign. These men have to bring a lot of people on board before they have any authority at all. Our own prime minister is trying to throw out the gun laws the former government set in progress. He appealed to hunters to help him do it just a week or two ago. He asked the hunters to bring pressure to bear on the opposition to help him get rid of this costly, useless program. He is not sovereign if he needs the help of hunters to achieve his goals.

So we do not know much about sovereignty. Sovereignty is when supreme authority is in the hands of one person. Now the Bible never uses the word sovereign but it is not a thought foreign to it. We want to look at two areas of the sovereignty of God: God's sovereignty as related to governments and God's sovereignty as related to individual people.

a. Over the world

It should come as no surprise that God is sovereign in the world. From creation life progressed and mankind expanded and governments came into being. First it was family rule and from there it progressed onward. If you have an interest in God's work in governments you could ask our sound people for the series "God and Government."

But about 600 years before Christ, a man by name of Nebuchadnezzar became the first world ruler. And like most potentates, he was a very

proud man. And God gave him a dream about a huge statue which had a head of gold, the chest and arms were of silver and the stomach and thighs were of bronze and the legs were of iron, and its feet of iron mixed with clay.

Here God revealed all the governments from Nebuchadnezzar to Christ who would be the head of the fifth world empire, the millennial reign of Christ. Christ is the stone that smites this image on the feet and destroys the whole thing. We are at present in the feet mixed with iron and clay, and there is your perfect picture of democracy, a strong form of government with tremendous weakness in it.

Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. Dictatorship, is the highest form of government. Nebuchadnezzar was what we would call a 'sovereign'. This is by far the best form of government as the gold clearly indicates, the only problem is to find a man who can fill the shoes of such a position. Pride usually destroys them, and so it was with Nebuchadnezzar.

Well, time went on and years later, Nebuchadnezzar made a huge image all of gold (Daniel 3:1-7). You will remember how Daniel's three Hebrew friends refused to worship this image and they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Well you remember the story. These godly men would not burn and so Nebuchadnezzar exalted them with governmental positions (3:26-30).

More time went by and Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. It was about a tree that grew up to heaven and the whole earth was nourished and protected by this tree. Then a watcher from heaven came down and gave orders to have the tree cut down. But the stump was left in the ground, and the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar. And the stump pictured Nebuchadnezzar cut down, but not pulled out of the ground (Daniel 4:13-16).

Now look at the fulfillment of this (Daniel 4:28-33). Nebuchadnezzar was to learn a lesson, one that we want to learn this morning. Let us learn it from Nebuchadnezzar himself (read 4:34-37). What do we learn here? God is sovereign in the kingdoms of men! Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." God is sovereign in the world.

Now let me point out something to you about the word 'sovereign' that should be of great help. It would keep most people from going off the track on this subject like Calvinism has done. Here is the definition I read earlier. A sovereign is: 1. One in whom the supreme power of a state or nation is vested; monarchy; ruler. 2. An individual, governing body, etc... having supreme authority.

Now what you need to note most carefully is that it has to do with 'power' or 'authority'. Power and authority are two different things. A red traffic light has the authority to stop you, but it has absolutely no power to enforce it! A police man may have the authority to handcuff someone but they may not have the power to do it. On the other hand, you may have the strength to overpower a policeman, but you do not have the authority. If you do that, the long arm of the law will call enough power together and they will exercise their authority.

A sovereign has both power and authority. BUT, and here is an important point, having power and authority does not mean a sovereign controls everything every one does! Fidel Castro's brother is now in charge in Cuba. He is sovereign! But because he is in charge, that does not mean he controls everything everybody does. He may control far more than we think he should, but he does not control what everybody does all the time. That is not part of sovereignty! That is not even part of a dictatorship, no matter how bad it is.

Sovereignty does not mean the sovereign controls everything everybody does. Sovereignty means that when he sets certain things as the rule, and that is disobeyed, he has the authority to do as he wishes with that person.

God is sovereign in the kingdoms of men. So does that mean He controls every government exactly the way He wants? Of course not! Neither Harper or Obama would be in power then because both men fail miserably in some areas, and, may I say, Obama more so than Harper. God gives them a certain amount of freedom, even though He is fully sovereign over them. He can put them down in one second, if He wishes. He has both the power and the authority to do so. He is sovereign over them, but He does not dictate everything they do!

b. Over the individual

Now let us take this subject of God's sovereignty and set it over against man's individual free will. Here, of course, we enter the great Calvinistic and Arminian debate. The question is this: Does man have a free will? And if man has a free will, how is God then sovereign? Well, there is only one passage to go to, because no matter where else you go, you will end up here again and again and that is Romans 9. You see, the great contention in God's sovereignty is with regard to man's free will.

Now Romans 9 was read for us earlier but let me point out to you the problem passages especially in verses 9-24. But before we consider that, let me first point out to you the purpose of Romans 9-11. This letter is an extended Tract on the Gospel. And Paul has shown how the Gentiles are justified by grace through faith. Then in 9-11, he slips in a section that is different from his usual epistles. He usually has a doctrinal section and then a section on duties, but here he slips in a dispensational section (9-11) to

show what has happened to the Jews and to remind the Gentiles that God is not finished with the Jews. The overriding theme of this book is faith and Paul will show that Israel was cut off because of unbelief and that they will be brought in again some day by faith, and that the Gentiles are saved by faith.

So let us read 9:1-5. Here Paul unburdens himself about his own people the Jews. He would be willing to go to hell himself, if the Jews would repent. All the blessings belong to the Jews but they are set aside and Paul is deeply grieved.

Now let us read 6-14. Now here we run right into the free will of man and the sovereignty of God. We read here that before the children were born, God chose one to one purpose and the other to another, and neither had any say in the matter. And why was that? So that the purpose of God might stand according to His choice, not man's, or so it seems at least. And we are going to respond as verse 14 says, "Is there unrighteousness with God?"

Well, consider Paul's argument for a moment. First in verses 6-9. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. And God said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." In other words, not in Ishmael. Why? Just because God said so? Or is there a reason? Well there is a reason, look at it in verse 8 (read). Why did God choose Isaac and not Ishmael? Because Ishmael was by the flesh, and Isaac was the son by faith. God would never set the flesh over faith! Faith is His principle of selection.

Then Rebekah was to bear twins and God said, "The elder shall serve the younger!" Why? "Because Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated!" Now, you say, "That is terrible." These guys had no choice in the matter. God just chose one and rejected the other! Is there unrighteousness with God? How could God do something like this and man has no choice in the matter? Is there unrighteousness with

God? Now notice Paul says at the close of verse 14, "Certainly not!"

Now Paul will prove that there is not unrighteousness with God because verse 15 begins with the word, "for". He will prove himself. So we read verse 15 (read). God will be gracious to whom He will be gracious and He will have compassion on whomever He chooses to have compassion! I ask you, "Does God have the right to do that?" He most certainly does! Now I ask you, to whom is God gracious and to whom does God desire to show compassion? Well, I will show you because God has revealed that principle all over Scripture. Listen to Exodus 20:4-6, the second commandment. God says this, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

To whom does God show mercy? To those who love Him and keep His commandments. You can see why God chose Isaac, and why he hated Esau! Esau was a wicked man. Isaac, like all of us had his problems but he learned to be a prince with God, a man of faith.

That godly young woman, Mary, who became the mother of Jesus was saturated with the Scriptures. Her mouth reveals a godliness few young women of her age arrive at. Turn with me to Luke 1:46-50 (read). On whom is God pleased to place His mercy? On those who fear Him! You will find this principle all over the Bible. God is pleased with those who love Him, trust Him, and obey Him! God resists the proud. He hates the wicked. He is angry with them all day long! Does He have the right to do this? Of course. So Mary, right in the very next

verse says, "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

Now notice Romans 9:16 (read). So then, 'it' that is mercy and compassion are not of him who wills or runs, but of God who shows mercy. You see, God's mercy and compassion can never be achieved by works, working and willing or running. It is ever only by faith. And when faith is expressed, God shows mercy! That is His way. It always has been His way. There is no other way!

Now let us read 17-24. God says He raised up Pharaoh that He might show His power in him. Now let me tell you what Pharaoh was. He was a very ungodly, very proud, very haughty man who hated God and godliness so much that he could not hear God even when God spoke through ten plagues! Each plague was against one of Pharaoh's gods, but would he bend his proud neck! No!

Now look at verse 18 (read). On whom does God will to have mercy? On those who love Him and fear Him and trust Him and obey Him! Whom does He then will to harden? Those who turn from God's efforts to humble them! God gave Pharaoh opportunity after opportunity to humble himself, and he remained stuck in his arrogant pride, and thus he was hardened by the very thing that should have softened him.

You see, those on whom the rays of God's sun shine are either softened or hardened, not because of who God is but because of who they are. The same sun that melts the snow hardens the clay. Hardened people get harder, humble people get softer. Well the passage goes on to show that God has the right to make vessels to dishonor out of those who are of a hard substance and he has the right to make vessels of honor out of those who respond to Him in faith. Do not call God bad because He hardened some. If they had repented He would have made something beautiful out of them!

Now I want you to notice verses 25-26, a quote from Hosea (read). Now we are talking about the Gentiles becoming the people of God. Here is a prophecy that God will make something beautiful out of those horrible heathen, among whom we find ourselves. And I ask you, how does God do that? And the answer is they have to come by grace through faith. That always has been God's principle of selection whether in Jacob and Esau or the Jews or the Gentiles.

Then in 27-29 we have a quote from Isaiah (read). What is the point of this quote? God still had a remnant among the Jews! Well, Paul told us so in 9:1-4 for he too is an Israelite. And why did God reject the rest of the Jews? Did He simply make an arbitrary decision about that? Look at 11:19-20. God's principle has always been by grace through faith. The Jews rejected that and all those who reject that principle are rejected by God.

Now let us summarize this whole subject in 9:30-33. You see, it is not of him that wills nor of him that runs. The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness attained to it. Why? They received it by faith! The Jews who ran and pursued righteousness did not achieve it. Why? Because they did not do so by faith.

Now I ask you, do you see God's sovereignty in this chapter as regards the lives of individuals? Of course! He is the One who decided on what basis certain people would be received and others rejected. He has full power and authority to condemn to eternal hell anyone who rejects His principle of selection.

I ask you, do you see man's free will in this passage? Did Pharaoh have a free will? Yes, and a ton of pride too! Could Pharaoh have humbled himself? Can you? Pharaoh had more opportunity to humble himself than many people might ever get. He had no excuse. He will have to admit before God Almighty some day that he was too proud. He will have to say, "It was ALL my fault! I was too proud!"

What does it mean that God is sovereign? Well, first let me tell you what it does not mean. It does not mean that God has planned everything you are going to do and you have no choice in the matter. That is the last thing it could mean! It does mean that God has given us a free choice to choose to live as we wish, but God has full power and authority to deal with me exactly as His justice sees fit. He has the right to remove me at absolutely any moment He so desires. He has full authority to bless me when I follow Him in faith and He has full authority to condemn me to hell any moment He desires when I turn my back on Him.

Now let me tell you the Calvinist's fear. You see, the Calvinist believes that from before creation God already chose by an arbitrary will all those who will go to hell and all those who will be saved. Furthermore he adamantly insists that God's choice of an individual has nothing to do with the choices that individual would make. And the Calvinist fears that if man truly has a free will, he may ultimately thwart the plans of God. And I think the trouble with the Calvinist is that His God is not omniscient!

I want to tell you with the fullest conviction I can muster, you have a free will and you better exercise it by trusting in Christ by faith or you will spend eternity with Pharaoh!

And for those who trust God by faith, they confess their sins and receive forgiveness by faith, and Christ becomes their Lord and Master by faith and they live by faith and by faith they will go to heaven! And I want to show you something most wonderful. Turn with me to Matthew 8 (read 5-12). Why will Gentiles sit down with these great Jews in the kingdom of God? Because they have trusted Christ by faith, God's unchanging principle of selection or election if you like!

CONCL: So we conclude on God's sovereignty. What is it? Is it God's control over everything so that everything you think and do has been pre-planned and you are predestined to heaven or to hell? Of course not. That is the farthest thing from what it means. Let me give you the definition once more: 1. One in whom the supreme power of a state or nation is vested; monarchy; ruler. 2. An individual, governing body, etc... having supreme authority. A person who is sovereign is one in whom both power and authority reside, not full control of everything everyone does. Queen Elizabeth is the so called Sovereign of England. She does not know what most people are doing, never mind controlling them. But she is vested with power and authority to make decisions to govern the country.

God is sovereign over the world but He does not control every thought and every action of every person. Of course not! He has not predestined some to hell and some to heaven so they can't help what they are doing because they have been predestined. But I can assure you at the end of life, we will all be judged for how we chose to think and act in this life. He is sovereign. That is His right and He has the power to carry out that judgment! That is what it means to be sovereign.

And let me tell you this about God Almighty, in His sovereignty: If we become proud, He will resist us! He will not listen to us. He will also some day deal with us and measure to us the judgment we have coming. But if we humble ourselves, God Almighty will open to us and pour out of His blessings upon us and He will see to it that we sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom! The choice is always ours!