

Our Sovereign God

Selected Scriptures

Dr. Steve Hereford

This message was Preached on 7/12/06 at Changed By Grace Community Church, 49 N. Bowlan Street, Jacksonville, FL.

© 2006 Steven R. Hereford. All Rights Reserved.



Pastor Steve is the featured speaker on "Changed By Grace" and the author of the How to Study the Bible Workbook and Grace Moments, a daily devotional blog from Changed By Grace. Steve is a graduate of North Florida Theological Seminary (A.Min), Jacksonville Baptist Theological Seminary (Th.B., Th.M), and Logos Graduate School (D.Min) and is the founding Pastor-Teacher of Changed By Grace Community Church in Jacksonville, FL where he serves with his wife, Theresa, and three kids: Jeremy, Naomi, and Karrah. Sermons by Pastor

Steve may be heard on sermonaudio.com, oneplace.com and locally on WAYR AM 550 Sunday's at 8:30 PM.

Tonight we have the wonderful privilege of looking once again at the doctrine of God. In our last study we considered *the goodness of our God*. Tonight we're looking at the sovereignty of God.

When you hear that phrase "the sovereignty of God," for some, they are sweet words falling on a submissive heart but for others they weigh heavy like rocks.

Jonathan Edwards in his sermon entitled *God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men* says, "Let us therefore, labor to submit to the sovereignty of God. God insists, that His sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter, a matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about His sovereignty, it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should submit to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and harden whom He will (Rom.9:18).

There are many subjects that brings debate among God's people, this is one of them. My goal tonight is to help you understand that the God of the Bible is sovereign and as such we *must* and *will* submit to Him. Either now by bowing the knee at salvation or in an eternal hell where there will be no escape from His divine purposes. Philippians 2:10 says "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NASB).

I want to begin tonight with a simple question, "What do we mean by the word 'sovereign?'" The 1828 Edition of Webster's Dictionary defines sovereign as "Supreme in power; possessing supreme dominion; as a sovereign ruler of the universe. Supreme; superior to all others; chief. God is the sovereign good of all who love and obey him. Supremely efficacious; superior to all others; predominant; effectual; as a sovereign remedy." You won't find this kind of definition in the dictionaries today. If you go to dictionary.com, you won't read any definitions referencing the word "sovereignty" with God. What you read is something like this: "One that exercises supreme, permanent authority, especially in a nation or other governmental unit, as: 1) A king, queen, or other noble person who serves as chief of state; a ruler or monarch. 2) A national governing council or committee." Sovereignty, as The 1828 Edition of Webster's Dictionary states is "Supreme in power; possessing supreme dominion; as a sovereign ruler of the universe." A.W. Pink elaborates on the understanding of "supreme" when he says that sovereignty is the "exercise of [God's] supremacy...Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him" (Gleanings in the Godhead, 31). This truth is illustrated throughout the Bible. One place that we see it is in His name El Elyon which means "God Most High." This Hebrew word occurs 31 times in the Old Testament and it speaks of God's supremacy; God's sovereignty. Psalm 47:2 says, "For the LORD Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth" (NASB). Psalm 97:9 says, "For You are the LORD Most High over all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods" (NASBU). 2 Sam.22:14 says, "The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice" (NASBU). In Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar explains a second dream he had and the interpretation that Daniel gives to him. In this dream, the sovereignty of God is declared with the name El Elyon.

Scripture is full of evidence that God acts according to His pleasure. Job said to the Lord, "I know that

You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (NASB). The psalmist said in Ps.115:3 that “our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.” In Ps.135:5-6 he says, “For I know that the Lord is great, And our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.” God said in Isaiah 46:10, “My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (NASB). “Divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11)” (Pink).

Charles Spurgeon said, “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 their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation-the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands-the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. 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 the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. 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 then gnash their teeth. And 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 His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.”

So as we look at the sovereignty of our God we need to understand it as “His absolute right to do all things according to his own good pleasure” (Easton's Bible dictionary). When we talk about God being sovereign over all things, the Scripture specifically tells us what is meant by “all things” so as to take away any doubt. Let’s take notice of a couple of them tonight. First we see that *God is sovereign over life*.

I. God is Sovereign Over Life

A. He Creates Physical Life

1. According to Genesis 1:11-12, on the third day of creation, after God created the heavens and the earth, He created the plants and vegetation (Gen. 1:11-12)

Here we have the first existence of “life.” It is only after the fall in Genesis 3 that “death,” disease, and destruction appears.

2. On the fifth day Genesis 1:21 says that God created the “great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind.”

Now we see the creation of all the creatures that live in the waters and those that fly.

3. On the sixth day Genesis 1:25 says that God created “the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind.”

Now we have the creation of all the land animals.

4. Also on day six, God created “man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them” (v.27).
 - a) Genesis 2:7 says that “The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (NASB).
 - b) Genesis 2:18 says “the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’”
 - c) Verse 21-22 says, “ And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”

5. We know from our study of Psalm 139 that God creates life in the womb (it is not something that happens by chance)

Verses 13-15 says, “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.”

- a) In Genesis 29:31 says, “When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.”
- b) In Genesis 30:1-2 it says, “Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" 2 And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"
- c) Verse 22 says that after Leah bore Dinah that “God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.”
- d) In 1 Sam.1:5 we’re told that “the LORD had closed her [Hannah’s] womb.”
- e) But in verse 19 it says that “Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, ‘Because I have asked for him from the LORD.’”

God creates physical life as seen in the creation of the plants and animals, the first man and woman, and the creation of children in the womb.

Notice also that:

B. He Creates Spiritual Life

1. He also did that by His choice (God chooses whom He will save)

- a) Romans 9:15 (quote from Ex.33:19) says, “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’”
- b) Peter begins his first epistle by stating that they are the “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet.1:2).
- c) Just as God told Israel that He chose them because He loved them He also says this to His bride, the church
 - (1) Deut.7:6-8, “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

- (2) Eph.1:4-6 says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.
- d) John 6:37 says, “All that the Father *gives* Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”
- e) John 6:39 says, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has *given* Me I should *lose* nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”
- f) In Jesus’ High-Priestly prayer in John 17, He says in verse 12, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. *Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition*, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Judas was “lost” because the Father did not give Him to the Son. Therefore Jesus did not keep Him.

- g) John 10:26-30 says, ““But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.””

John Piper says, “Election...is unconditional in that there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no condition he can meet before God chooses to save him from his deadness. We are not saying that final salvation is unconditional. It is not. We must meet the condition of faith in Christ in order to inherit eternal life. But faith is not a condition for election. Just the reverse. Election is a condition for faith. It is because God chose us before the foundation of the world that he purchases our redemption at the cross and quickens us with irresistible grace and brings us to faith” (Sermon Manuscript - “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” desiringgod.org).

John MacArthur adds, “We are redeemed not because of anything good in us, but because God chose us for salvation. He chose certain individuals and passed over others, and He made that choice in eternity past, before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4). Moreover, He chose without regard to anything He foresaw in the elect; simply ‘according to the good pleasure of His will [and] to the praise of the glory of His grace’ (vv.4-6, KJV)” (The Love of God, 12).

2. He did that before the foundation of the world

- a) If you look again at Eph.1:4, it says that “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

- b) When speaking about those who will worship the beast in Revelation 17:8, it says it will be those “whose names are *not* written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.”

Notice what it says, “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

II. God is Sovereign Over Death

A. He Creates Physical Death

1. In the Garden of Eden, God told man in Genesis 2:16-17, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (NASB).

This is the first mention of death in the Bible.

People ask today, “Why is there death, disease, and destruction?” The answer is found in this verse and in Genesis 3.

2. In Genesis 5 we see the reality of death when we read the genealogies. All of them conclude with the same theme “and he died.”
 - a) Gen.5:5 says, “So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died” (NASB).
 - b) Gen.5:8 says, “So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died” (NASB).
 - c) Gen.5:11 says, “ So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died” (NASB).
 - d) Gen.5:14 says, “So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died” (NASB).
 - e) Gen.5:17 says, “So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died” (NASB).
 - f) Gen.5:20 says, “ So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died” (NASB).
 - g) Gen.5:27 says, “So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died” (NASB).

- h) Gen.5:31 says, “So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died” (NASB).

3. Because God is sovereign, He creates life and death

- a) 1 Sam.2:6 says, “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up” (NASB).
- b) Deut.32:39 says, “See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”
- c) After David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheeba and having her husband killed, Nathan the prophet appears to him with a word from the LORD.

2 Sam.12:7-15 says, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! 9 Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. 10 Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' " 13 So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." 15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.”

Verse 18 says, “Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died.”

- d) Since our lives are like a “vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away,” we ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall *live* and do this or that” (Jas.4:14-15).
- e) In Genesis 6 after the “Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, ‘I will *destroy* man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them’” (vv.5-7).

In Genesis 7:21-23 says, “And all flesh *died* that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. 22 All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, *died*. 23 So He *destroyed* all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained *alive*.”

4. Life is mentioned some 959 times in the Bible (“live” - 272; “life” - 495; “born” - 144, “birth” - 48), while death is mentioned some 1080 times (“death” - 395; “die” - 290; “death” - 395).

As we read of these occurrences, the Bible makes it very clear that it is God who gives life and God who causes death. Life and death are in the power of His hands.

- a) Deut.32:39 says, “It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal.”
- b) Romans 9:20-23 says, “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

B. He Creates Spiritual Death

1. After God placed man in the Garden and commanded him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He said if He did eat he would die (Gen.2:16-17)
2. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command, they immediately died *spiritually* and later *physically*
3. Both spiritual and physical death are a result of sin
 - a) Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

This verse encompasses both spiritual and physical death.

- b) Rom.5:18 says, “Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation.”
- c) In the terms of Ephesians 2:1 they are “dead in trespasses and sins.”

4. Spiritual death results in condemnation in hell

a) This is called “the second death”

Everyone will die the first death unless the rapture occurs first then believers will be taken up to be with Christ but the second death is for those who reject Christ.

- (1) Rev.2:11 warns, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the *second death*.”
- (2) Rev.20:6 says, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the *second death* has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”
- (3) Rev.20:14 says after the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers “then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the *second death*.”
- (4) The final warning of Revelation is found in 21:7-8, which says, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the *second death*.”
- (5) The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 illustrates the second death

b) This is also what is meant by the term “condemnation”

- (1) John 3:18 says, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
- (2) As that verse and Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

CONCLUSION

Charles Hodge said, “From these and similar passages of Scriptures it is plain, (1.) That the sovereignty of God is universal. It extends over all his creatures from the highest to the lowest. (2.) That it is absolute. There is no limit to be placed to his authority. He doeth his pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. (3.) It is immutable. It can neither be ignored nor rejected. It binds all creatures, as inexorably as physical laws bind the material universe” (Systematic Theology).

I would like to close with a quote from Charles Spurgeon on the practicality of the sovereignty of God.

He says, ""World events are not tangled, confused, or perplexing to God...Jehovah's power is apparent, from the least to the greatest, for God is in all and rules all. He guides the grain of dust in the March wind and the planets in their immeasurable pathways. He steers each drop of spray beaten back from the face of the rock. He leads the north star God is the dictator of destinies. He appoints both the ideas and the end. He is the King of kings ruling rulers and guiding counselors. He is the same in the crash of battle or in the hush of peace. He is the same in famine or in the joy of an abundant harvest. He is Lord. He does according to His will, not only in heaven but among the inhabitants of this lower world. The storm may rage, but all is well, for our Captain is the governor of storms. He who trod the waves of the Galilean lake is at the helm, and at His command winds and waves are quiet (Mt 14:27). Courage, dear friend. The Lord, the ever-merciful, has appointed every moment of sorrow and every pang of suffering. If He ordains the number ten, it can never rise to eleven, nor should you desire that it shrink to nine. The Lord's time is best. The span of your life is measured to a hair's width. Restless soul, God ordains all, so let the Lord have His way."

I want to invite you to let Him have his way in your life tonight. Our pastors are coming to the front right now to answer any questions you may have about the gospel and the salvation God gives. If you would like to talk with any one of them, they will be here for you after we pray. Let's pray.