

THE FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

- A.** For some this will be the most important study we have had.
1. It will be a breakthrough for some; old hat (perhaps) to others.
 2. It may for others be a very hard pill to swallow; indeed, you may not swallow it at all.
- B.** Sovereignty of God (def.): God's right and power to do whatever he pleases with everyone at any time. Psalm 115:3.
1. In medieval time they spoke of the 'divine right of kings'.
 - a. This meant that the king could do anything, including breaking the rules that would apply to anyone else. King Henry VIII, for example.
 - b. This 'right' however is not biblical and was eventually discredited, although the idea that those born to 'privilege' are a law to themselves sadly exists with some.
 2. In recent years 'human rights' has been an issue of considerable discussion.
 - a. This issue extends to international politics; diplomats used to appeal to 'human rights' as a reasonable point of view when dealing with the Soviets, or dictators.
 - b. This also has extended to individuals at the level of racial tension, poverty, housing, education, health, etc..
 3. Parallel with human rights has been 'animal rights'.
 - a. This extends from the protection of whales and such to birds and dogs.
 - b. Those defending these rights are often highly motivated and also sometimes hostile to the rights of the unborn.
 4. What is almost totally neglected today: God's rights.
 - a. God has a right to be God.
 - b. The question is whether we will 'let God be God'.
- C.** Why is this study important?
1. It lets us view theology from God's perspective.
 - a. There are two basic ways of 'doing theology':

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- (1) From man's point of view - the usual approach nowadays.
 - (2) From God's point of view - the biblical approach.
- b. The Bible is God's 'in house' publication.
 - (1) Not only is it his word but also it is expressed in a God-centred context.
 - (2) It therefore calls for theology from God's point of view.
2. Most theology today is not theology but anthropology (the study of man); the sovereignty of God is the purest theology.
 - a. The word theology came from two words:
 - (1) *theos*, God.
 - (2) *logos*, word.
 - b. Thus to do pure theology is truly to handle God's own word.
 - (1) This means a divine perspective. Not man's perspective.
 - (2) The glimpse of the sovereignty of God gives us a taste of *theology* in its purest form.
3. Today's generation has lost real respect for God.
 - a. There is no real fear of God in the land, or among God's people.
 - b. The irony is: the more theology is presented from man's perspective the less people fear God and the less they care about him.
 - c. A robust view of the sovereignty of God, which puts him back on the throne, will be what brings people to their senses. Illustration: Jonathan Edwards' 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'.
 - d. This is the 'me generation', the 'what's in it for me?' era, when the 'health and wealth', or prosperity gospel, has great appeal.
 - e. The biblical teaching of the sovereignty of God will help correct this perspective.
4. This subject enables us to get better acquainted with the God of the Bible.
 - a. The God of the Bible is the only true God.
 - b. The shortest route to the glory of God is via the sovereignty of God. Ex. 33:18-19.

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I GOD'S RIGHT

- A.** Two meanings are implied in God's right to do whatever he pleases.
- 1.** First, his privilege, or prerogative.
 - a.** Aristocracy are said to be 'born to privilege'.
 - (1)** Whether these are just rights to them is another matter.
 - (2)** Indeed, so much seems to be unfair and quite wrong.
 - b.** But God was not 'born'; he always was, is and shall ever be.
 - (1)** What are the privileges, then, of being God?
 - (2)** Does he have a 'right' to do this or that because he is God?
 - 2.** Secondly, his rightness - indeed, righteousness - in what he does.
 - a.** God makes the rules; what he does is right.
 - (1)** But does this mean he can break the rules - break his own rules?
 - (2)** Does he teach us one thing but live another way himself? No.
 - b.** Within the right or privilege that is God's are also his unchanging characteristics, among them being:
 - (1)** He is holy.
 - (2)** He cannot lie.
- B.** However, although God doesn't break the rules, neither does he have to explain himself along the way.
- 1.** Why? Because God is God.
 - a.** He is answerable to no-one. Heb. 6:13.
 - b.** He is at peace with himself. Psalm 16:11.
 - c.** He is perfectly free. Isa. 57:15. (The greatest freedom is having nothing to prove.)
 - 2.** Having to explain ourselves all the time, or prove something, is a sign of insecurity.
 - a.** God is secure within himself.
 - b.** This security is mirrored in the person of Jesus. E.g.:

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(1) To the chief priests. Matt. 21:27.

(2) To Herod. Luke 23:9.

II GOD'S POWER

A. When the phrase `sovereignty of God' emerges it is difficult to know which, if either, has priority: God's will or his power.

1. Probably, his will.

a. Ephesians 1:11: `In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.'

(1) This is a declaration of God's sovereignty if there ever was one.

(2) What surfaces at once: God's will.

b. Psalm 115:3: `Our God is in heaven; he does whatsoever pleases him.'

(1) This too arises out of the assumption that whatever God does is okay.

(2) Thus the idea of his will, or prerogative, is what we think of most.

2. But behind the assumption that God can exercise any right which he is pleased to do lies the equal assumption that he *can* do anything; that is, he has the power to do what he chooses to do.

a. Some who sit on a throne may exercise their will.

b. But do they have the power to pull it off?

(1) It is said of the Queen: She does not rule; she reigns.

(2) But God not only reigns but rules; he controls and carries out what he pleases to do.

B. The word `power' basically has two meanings: force and authority.

1. Indeed two Greek words are often translated `power' into English.

a. *dunamis* - `power', from which we get the word `dynamite'. It refers to force or energy. It is used in Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.

b. *exousia* - `authority' which means `having the right, or privilege'. It is used in Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; John 17:2.

2. The sovereignty of God encompasses both words.

a. God has the power to do anything because he can make it happen!

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(1) He has power over creation. Psalm 19:1-6.

(2) He has power over nature. Psalm 75:6-7.

(3) He has power over Satan. Job 1.

b. And yet equally God alone has the right, or privilege, to do these things.

(1) He controls our destinies. Rom. 9:18.

(2) It is by his mercy that we are not consumed. Lam. 3:22.

3. In a word: God can do anything and whatever he does is right.

III GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY WITH REGARD TO CREATION

A. The realm of nature.

1. God made the heavens and the earth according to his own will. Gen. 1.

2. He thus gave shape, substance, space and time to all that is. Acts 17:24-28.

a. All that is was not always there; matter is not eternal. Heb. 11:3.

b. What is there was put there by God. Col. 1:15ff.

(1) The earth's surface - land and sea.

(2) The earth's inhabitants - plants, animals, human beings.

B. The nations.

1. Language. Genesis 11.

a. God is the architect of difference of language.

b. God equally has the power to bestow the gift of language, or its interpretation. I Cor. 12:10.

2. Peoples. Genesis 11.

a. God made nations, determining their origins and destinies.

b. God thus has power to topple a nation and to put the leader he chooses there. Psalm 75.

c. God will one day judge the nations. Matt. 25:31ff.

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C. Common grace.

1. Common grace (def.): God's goodness to all men.
 - a. Calvin: 'Special grace within nature'.
 - b. It does not refer to conversion, regeneration or sanctification but to one's natural abilities.
 - (1) Gifts, talents, intelligence.
 - (2) Your job, your income.
2. The existence of law is by common grace. Rom. 13:1-5.
 - a. Where would we be without the fear of punishment?
 - b. God graciously establishes governments for our sakes - which may have no connection whatever with the church.
3. The weather. Matt. 5:45.
 - a. God controls nature from rain to earthquakes.
 - b. Why he allows things that are not good in our eyes belongs to the mystery of his sovereignty. Psalm 115:3.

D. Our individual creation and existence.

1. God chose to give each of us birth. James 1:17.
 - a. None of us is an 'accident'.
 - b. You may say 'My parents didn't want me'. I answer: God did.
2. From this we rightly conclude:
 - a. God chose our parents. Psalm 139:16.
 - b. God therefore chose the time and place of our birth!

IV GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY WITH REGARD TO REDEMPTION (SALVATION)

- A.** The words redemption and salvation may, generally speaking, be used interchangeably.
 1. Redemption means God 'bought us back' by the blood of his Son. I Pet. 1:18-19.
 2. Salvation means God spared us of wrath to come by the blood of his Son. Rom. 5:9.

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- B.** God chose to save us before the Fall and yet in the light of the Fall.
1. The Fall (man's sin in the Garden of Eden; Genesis 3) did not take God by surprise.
 - a. Christ is the lamb chosen before the creation of the world. I Pet. 1:20.
 - b. God therefore did not panic when Adam and Eve sinned but began the process of redemption in the Garden of Eden itself. Gen. 3:21.
 2. God chose to have a people.
 - a. This choice was made before the world began. Eph. 1:4.
 - b. The people God chose were given to the Son. John 6:37.
 - c. Those people are predestined to be saved. Rom. 8:30.
 - d. The choice was not based upon their works. II Tim. 1:9.
 - e. Those God chose believe in time. Acts. 13:48.
 3. If you ask why did God choose some but not all, the nearest you come to an answer is in the words of Jesus: 'Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.' Matt. 11:26.
 - a. Some things remain a mystery, like an earthquake.
 - b. Adopt Abraham's answer: 'Will not the judge of all the earth do right?' Gen. 18:25.

V GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY WITH REGARD TO HIS VARIOUS DEALINGS WITH US

- A.** The explanation for our status, calling, profile or position lies solely and wholly within the mystery of God's sovereignty.
1. Some can say with David: 'The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.' Psalm 16:6.
 - a. David was highly favoured, like Mary. Luke 1:28.
 - (1) David was a man after God's own heart. I Sam. 13:14.
 - (2) David was Israel's greatest king!
 - b. Perhaps with many of you; you humbly and gratefully acknowledge: 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me'. Psalm 13:6.
 - (1) It may be God's goodness not only at the level of saving mercy but also at the level of common grace.
 - (2) It may be God's role for you in his kingdom.

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- (3)** It could be how he has spared you of hurt - or embarrassment. Psalm 103:10.
- 2.** Some are more like Mephibosheth. II Sam. 9.
- a.** Mephibosheth was crippled.
- (1)** Some are lame from birth, or have some handicap from birth.
- (2)** Others develop a problem - either through an illness or through an accident.
- b.** Some Christians seem destined to continual suffering.
- (1)** A friend said to me: 'I have never known much suffering at all.'
- (2)** Others can hardly recall when there were not problems - emotional, physical or social.
- c.** Why? It lies within the mystery of God's sovereignty - and certainly for his glory. John 11:4.
- B.** The explanation of God's strategy for his kingdom lies within the sphere of God's sovereignty.
- 1.** Our calling, or anointing. I Cor. 12.
- a.** Some have greater gifts.
- b.** Some are the eye, or head; others the intestines! I Cor. 12:12ff.
- 2.** Our faithfulness and hard work vis-a-vis those who are equally rewarded without any effort! Matt. 20:1-16.
- a.** Some work for years to get to where others are in a day.
- b.** God may pass over the gifted person at the last minute.
- C.** The explanation for God's chastening. Heb. 12:5-11.
- 1.** God may chasten (discipline) one for a sin or fault which another gets away with!
- a.** He may wait for years to 'discover' one's errors. Lam. 4:22.
- b.** Others are dealt with immediately. Jonah 1.
- 2.** God may use chastening, or suffering, to refine a person's character.
- a.** Another may get this refinement solely via a sudden filling of the Spirit.

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b. Either belongs to God's secret will. John 21:21-22.

D. The explanation for success.

1. God uses Billy Graham, to the dismay of many hyper-Calvinists.

2. God may withhold success, or vindication, from those who may seem so worthy.

a. Some get a promotion; others do not.

b. Some get married; others do not.

IV ALL THE ABOVE WITH REGARD TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD MAY BE ASCRIBED EQUALLY TO JESUS CHRIST

A. A separate study on the sovereignty of Christ would be in order.

B. And yet all that pertains to the will and power of God the Father can be ascribed to the Son.

1. At the level of creation. Heb. 1:1-2.

2. At the level of redemption. John 5:21.

3. At the level of individual dealings. John 21:21.

CONCLUSION

A. Remember Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

B. Can you affirm the above as Jesus did in Matt. 11:26?