

The Attributes of God
Sovereign
Psalm 115:1-3

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

During the course of my life I've encountered things, small and large, that have caused me to wonder if God can be trusted. What good is does it do to "believe" in God or say we believe in God if we don't trust him?

Eugene Peterson (who passed a way a few weeks ago)– A Long walk in the Same Direction
The Bible isn't interested in whether we believe in God or not. It assumes that everyone more or less does. What it is interested in is the response we have to him: Will we let God be as he is, majestic and holy, vast and wondrous, or will we always be trying to whittle him down to the size of our small minds, insist on confining him within the boundaries we are comfortable with, refuse to think of him other than in images that are convenient to our lifestyle?

One of those areas where we try to whittle him down to size is the area of Control. We ask ourselves, "Is He really in control?" At times we don't see how he could be. We are sure he's not handling things the way we know he should. We actually think that we could do a better job. Let's find some common ground this morning...

No One in this room is qualified to be God.

WARNING: Things may get pretty heavy this morning, and all your questions won't be answered by a 35 minute sermon. This topic could be a series in itself.

I came to faith at age 18 in 1974, and I began to read theology and delve into issues of God, salvation, man, God's control/sovereignty, Free will, etc.

You can find much agreement on some of those issues and you can find much disagreement on some of those issues.

In 1979 an album came out by B.J. Thomas – He was known for "Raindrops keep falling on my head" – Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid movie

There was a simple song on that album that brought a deep sense of stability and peace to my soul when difficulties came. HE'S GOT IT ALL IN CONTROL

Lyrics- Archie Paul Jordan, sung by B.J. Thomas
He's got it all in control He's got it all in control
He's put that reassurance Way down in my soul; He's got it all in control

**He holds the stars in the sky, He holds the land back from the sea
If He can do all of that, Surely he can take care Of you and me**
He's got it all in control; God's got it all in control
He's put that reassurance Way down in my soul; He's got it all in control

Those verses and that simple song still bring me comfort 39 years later because I've got more of life behind me that bears witness to their truth.

HE'S GOT IT ALL IN CONTROL – in our lives, in our nation, in this world – God is in control , even when we can't figure out or understand what God is doing.

Back on week 1 of this series I raised the question...
Why STUDY THEOLOGY?? **Why study the nature and character of God?**
Some of you may still be asking that question

And I gave this answer...

Just listen to Joni Erickson Tada as she shares of her journey following a diving accident at age 17. It left her a quadriplegic.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reflections-on-50th-anniversary-of-my-diving-accident/>

Throughout my 20s, I became immersed in Bible study with these same friends—mostly character studies about God, especially his sovereignty. When it came to my accident, I had to know whether the buck stopped with him, and if it did, why didn't he prevent my accident?

Read the headlines today and we see that there is no lack of questions about who's in charge or if anyone is – wildfires, mass shootings, wars around the world, persecution of believers, Ebola outbreaks in the Congo, etc.

If God is in control, then does the buck stop with Him? Is He to blame for the mess in the world? If He's not in control, then what? If not Him, then who? Where do we turn?

I'm fairly certain that I can say that more than any other attribute of God, this one – Sovereignty- has been a SOURCE OF GREAT COMFORT AND GREAT CONCERN.

**One thing that we must keep in mind is that our conclusions must be drawn from scripture, not from our own emotions or a sense of some sort of human reasoning. We must submit ourselves to the texts of the Word of God, even if they rub us the wrong way.

Eph 1:3-11 deals with God's saving grace, adoption, predestination, redemption and forgiveness through Christ. v. 9ff

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who WORKS ALL THINGS after the counsel of His will,

Psalm 115:3;

- 1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory
Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.
- 2 Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?"
- 3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

135:6

- 5 For I know that the LORD is great And that our Lord is above all gods.
- 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

God "works all things after the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). This "all things" includes
the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29),
the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33),
the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11),
the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1),
the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11),
the sickness of children (2 Samuel 12:15),
the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7),
the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19),
the completion of travel plans (James 4:15),
the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7),
the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25),
the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29),
the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13),

the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3),
the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6),
and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28).

From the smallest thing to the greatest thing, good and evil, happy and sad, pagan and Christian, pain and pleasure - God governs them all for his wise and just and good purposes (Isaiah 46:10). The Bible does not run from the sovereign control of God over the affairs of men and nations.

Let's not miss the point, the Bible speaks most clearly to this in the most painful situations. Amos asks, in time of disaster, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?" (Amos 3:6).

After losing all ten of his children in the collapse of his son's house, Job says, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). After being covered with boils he says, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10).

And the author of the book agrees with Job when he says that Job's brothers and sisters "consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him" (Job 42:11). ... Job himself concludes in prayer: "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

1 Tim 6

. 13I charge you in the presence of God, ... 14that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ... **who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen**

“sovereign” = from greek word dunamai = dynamite

Those references give the scriptural foundation for the term “sovereignty of God”. As we’ve seen so far in the series, God is Self-existent, ALL Powerful, Omnipresent, and Omniscient. The Bible thus informs our thinking to see that God is indeed Sovereign.

In our Christian tradition there is a summary statement on God’s sovereignty that is associated with Presbyterians, but it is not unique to us.

WCF chapt 3 (1646)

I. God from all eternity did by the most and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

1. God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; ... London Baptist Confession of 1689
https://www.proginosko.com/docs/wcf_lbcf.html

There is a lot at stake with the issue of Sovereignty. The issue goes beyond our view of God, or an understanding of an attribute of God.

This is not an attribute that distinguishes one denomination from another, one church tradition from another. In the words of R.C. Sproul – a highly respected PCA pastor, scholar, theologian, professor

“This is One of the attributes that distinguishes the theist from the atheist.”

Opening of chap 3 is not unique to Reformed tradition or to Christians. It does not distinguish us from pious Jews or Muslims; but rather the distinction comes between theists and atheists.

WHY???

If anything happens outside the foreordination of God, it is happening outside the sovereignty of God. If God isn't sovereign, then he isn't God. For God to be God, he must be in control. This is not human reasoning, it is the testimony of scripture – God rules from Heaven over the universe.

TOZER Knowledge of the HOLY

God's sovereignty is the attribute by which He rules His entire creation, and to be sovereign God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free.

The reasons are these: Were there even one datum of knowledge, however small, un-known to God, His rule would break down at that point. To be Lord over all the creation, He must possess all knowledge. And were God lacking one infinitesimal modicum of power, that lack would end His reign and undo His kingdom; that one stray atom of power would belong to someone else and God would be a limited ruler and hence not sovereign.

Sovereignty is a “perk” of being God.

WCF 3 after the semi-colon we read... **yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.**

What we have here is a theology that is Not rigid determinism, but a sovereign God over free creatures. Unpacking all of that is beyond the scope of this sermon but suffice it to say that God is not the author of sin. He does not sin, nor does He tempt anyone to sin. **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. James 1:13**

Implications of a NON-sovereign God:

If there is one loose molecule outside the control of God, then there is no guarantee that any future promise of God will come to pass. That rogue molecule could gum up the works of God's agenda for the universe.

FOR WANT OF A NAIL... (an old proverb)

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.

For want of a shoe the horse was lost.

For want of a horse the rider was lost.

For want of a rider the message was lost.

For want of a message the battle was lost.

For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

This “proverb” has different variations reminding us that seemingly unimportant acts or omissions can have grave and unforeseen consequences.

If God is NOT sovereign, then How can He guarantee anything He has promised?

How can He guarantee Rom 8:28 – “all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose”

If God is NOT sovereign, then He has NO PURPOSE that is sure and certain. He's just spinning plates.

Is that the God of the universe who spoke and the universe came into being? Job 38

Is that the God who is described in scripture?

One ministry blog raised this objection, *If everything was "sovereignly" controlled by God, then there would be no need to pray, no need to give financial offerings, no need to even live right – because whatever happened would be what God wanted regardless. In fact, if God sovereignly controls everything, then there is no need to evangelize.*

Bless his heart. I think he has a skewed view of what the sovereignty of God means.

My response is this...

If God is NOT sovereign, then why pray? Why pray to a God who is incapable or limited?

Theoretical theism without a sovereign God is practical atheism. – R.C. Sproul
We can say we believe in God, but if we don't see Him and relate to Him as the one who is in control, then we are functional atheists.

EXAMPLE: functional atheism can infect us in the everyday things of life.

Tuesday 11/13 – notice of recall / repair needed for our smaller back up fridge (needed for big family times).

Wed 11am I call to get repair set up for Nov 21 (day before Thanksgiving). ALL IS GOOD!

Wed 4pm I get a call from repair folks that they could come Friday 16th, even better. BUT they don't have the part, but it was ordered by the "recall hotline" folks. This is a multi-layer process Haier sets it up, passed on to GE, passed on to Repair service. Their calendars aren't synched, so I'm left with "When the part arrives call me back and THEN WE'LL SET THE DATE". BUMMER.

My mind is racing and agitated to figure out how I CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN, then it hits me, "God is sovereign; He's got it all in control."

That didn't make the part magically appear, but it changed my attitude. God's call and agenda on my life is to conform me to the image of Christ, not get my refrigerator part here by a certain date. Knowing that He is in control won't necessarily change the circumstance, but it can give peace of heart and mind in the midst of the situation.

That's a small example, but I've seen God use a similar reminder to my heart during far more serious circumstances as well.

But the most significant example of this is the sovereignty of God in and over the death of His Son.

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

25 who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,

'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE,

AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND,

AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER

AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

If the sovereignty of God extends over the death of Christ, then we can trust that it extends over our lives as well, and He will keep His promises.

He holds the stars in the sky, He holds the land back from the sea
If He can do all of that, Surely he can take care Of you and me

He's got it all in control; God's got it all in control
He's put that reassurance Way down in my soul; He's got it all in control

