

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
The Attributes of God
Banska Bystrica, 25th November 2018

<p>ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, ¹⁶ ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται· ᾧ τιμὴ καὶ κράτος αἰώνιον, ἀμήν.</p>	<p>1Tim 6:15-16 [God] ...who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.</p>
<p>Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὤμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ</p>	<p>Heb 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">וַאֲלֹהֵינוּ בְּשָׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר-רָחֵץ עֵפָה</p>	<p>Ps 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.</p>
<p>ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.</p>	<p>Rom 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">מִי לֹא יִרְאֶה מֶלֶךְ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי לֹךְ יִאָחֶזַח כִּי בְּכָל-חַכְמֵי הַגּוֹיִם וּבְכָל-מַלְכוּתֹם מֵאִין כְּמוֹךָ</p>	<p>Jer 10:7 Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.</p>

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. THE WORDS

- Sovereign → Lat. superanum, chief, principal; formed with suffix -anus from Lat. super, above;
- עָלִיּוֹן upper; Most High, (LXX ὑψιστος, *highest, most exalted*)
 - **Gn 14:18** And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High. (וַיִּמְלֹךְ־צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שְׁלָם הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם וַיִּין וְהוּא כֹהֵן לֵאלֹהֵי עֲלִיּוֹן)
- **Ps 97:9** For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. (כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה עֲלִיּוֹן עַל־כָּל־הָאֲרָצִים מְאֹד נְעֻלִיתָ עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים)
- **Ps 82:6** I say, "You are gods (אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם), children of the Most High, all of you; (וּבְנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן כָּלְכֶם)

0.2. THEOLOGY

- [John PIPER *Devotional*] There is one Person whose worth and honor and dignity and preciousness and greatness and beauty and reputation is **more than all other values combined** — ten thousand times more — namely, God himself.
- A “derived” attribute of God?

[HODGE, C. *Systematic Theology*] Sovereignty is not a property of the divine nature, but a prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being. If God be a Spirit, and therefore a person, infinite, eternal, and immutable in his being and perfections, the Creator and Preserver of the universe. He is of right its absolute sovereign. Infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, with the right of possession, which belongs to God in all his creatures, are the immutable foundation of his dominion.

The attribute of God’s Sovereignty is not an eternal attribute. Sovereignty means complete rule or dominion **over others** (some prefer the term “providence” but the point is the same because a distinction has to be drawn between the endless power of God and how He chooses to use that power). For God to be in control over others there has to be others in which to control. He can’t display His power over creatures unless the creatures exist. Therefore, before creation the concept of sovereignty (or providence) was not an attribute that could be used to describe God. An eternal attribute is something God possesses that is not contingent upon something else. (<https://soteriology101.com/2014/11/25/is-sovereignty-an-eternal-attribute-of-god-that-the-non-calvinist-undermines/>)

- [A.W. Tozer *The 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.”
- **Sovereignty is an eternal attribute of God** if we take God’s INFINITY into account. Infinity includes the idea of OVERFLOWING (*Levinas*).¹ God as the One infinite being is NOT CLOSED TOTALITY, that is in need of others to be SUPREME. The idea is impossible to be fully grasped
- Two problems of sovereignty: (1) the presence of evil, (2) the freedom of created beings

0.3. OUR PROBLEMS WITH DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

- **Rebellion**
 - **Is 14:14** I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. (אֶעֱלֶה עַל־בְּמֹתַי עַב אֲדַמָּה לְעִלְיוֹן)
- **Totality**
 - **Daniel 6:7** ...the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.
- **The unexpected acts of God**

[CHAMBERS, O. *The Place of Help*] God wants us to realise His sovereignty. We are apt to tie God up in His own laws and allow Him no free will. We say we know what God will do, and suddenly He upsets

¹ “Le rapport avec l’infini ne peut, certes pas, se dire en termes d’expérience car l’infini déborde la pensée qui le pense. Dans ce débordement, se produit précisément son infinité même...” (*Totalite et L’infini*)

all our calculations by working in unprecedented ways; just when we expected He would do a certain thing, He did the opposite. There are unexpected issues in life; unexpected joys when we looked for sorrow, and sorrow when we expected joy, until we learn to say, all my expectations are from Thee.

- **No sovereignty → lack of stability** (Should God not be sovereign, there would have to be A SUBSTITUTE)

[CHAMBERS, O. *Notes on Isaiah*] To-day we are so emphasising the freedom of the human will that we are forgetting the sovereignty of God, consequently when we come up against the forces at work in the world we are paralysed by fear and get into despair, which we need never have done if we had been built up in faith in God.

- **An overemphasized doctrine?**
 - [COCHRANE *The Existentialists and God*, p. 119] "Because orthodoxy had been dominated by the idea of God's sovereignty conceived as absolute power, knowing and willing, we find here no mention of the love of God, nor of his mercy and grace."

1. THE ESSENCE OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

1.1. THE GREATNESS OF THE POWER OF GOD

- **Heb 6:13** ...since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself
- always transcending *Deus semper major*...

1.2. THE WILL OF GOD

- **Ex 3:14** "I AM WHO I AM." (אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה) And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you (אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם)."
- **Ps 115:3** Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

1.3. THE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF GOD

- **Rom 11:33-36** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen

1.4. THE LOVE OF GOD

- **1John 4:8, 16** God is love.
- **Ps 145:14** The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down (סוּמְדֵי יְהוָה לְכַלְהַנְפִּלִים וְזוֹקְרֵי לְכַלְהַכְפוּפִים)
- **Isa 26:12** O LORD, you will ordain peace for us; you have done for us all our works. (יְהוָה תִּשְׁפַּח שְׁלוֹם לָנוּ כִּי גַם כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיֵנוּ פָעַלְתָּ לָנוּ)
- **Isa 63:9** In all their affliction he was afflicted (בְּכָל־צָרָתָם לֹו צָר), and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

2. THE FORMS OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

2.1. THE DECREES OF GOD

- The Westminster Larger Catechism:
 - Q. 12. What are the decrees of God?
 - A. God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will, whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men.
- **Ps 33:11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever (עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תַּעֲמֹד), the plans of his heart to all generations (מִהַשְּׁבוֹת לְבוֹ לְדָר וְדָר)

2.2. THE LAWS OF GOD

- (1) Physical law and (2) moral law [FINNEY *Systematic Theology*]
 - (1) Physical law is a term that represents the order of sequence, in all the changes that occur under the law of necessity, whether in matter or mind. I mean all changes whether of state or action, that do not consist in the states or actions of free will. Physical law is the law of the material universe.
 - (2) Moral law is a rule of moral action with sanctions. It is that rule to which moral agents ought to conform all their voluntary actions, and is enforced by sanctions equal to the value of the precept. It is the rule for the government of free and intelligent action, as opposed to necessary and unintelligent action.

2.3. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

- **Gn 1:2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם).
- **Job 32:8** But it is the spirit in man (אֲכֵן רוּחַ־הַיָּיָא בְּאָנוּשׁ), the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand (וְנִשְׁמַת שְׂדֵי תְבַיִימָה).

[BRIGGMAN *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*] ...all human beings receive temporal life by the instrumentality and not the presence of the Holy Spirit. ...while the presence of the Spirit is the basis for its activity in believers, Irenaeus highlights the instrumentality of the Spirit in the giving of the power or grace that renders temporal life eternal.

- **1Cor 12:3** ...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit (οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν· Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ)

[BASIL THE GREAT *On the Holy Spirit*] Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to Paradise, our ascension to the Kingdom of heaven, our adoption as God's sons, our freedom to call God our Father, our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ, being called children of light, sharing in eternal glory, and in a word, our inheritance of the fullness of blessing, both in this world and the world to come. Even while we wait for the full enjoyment of the good things in store for us, by the Holy Spirit we are able to rejoice through faith in the promise of the graces to come.

2.4. THE INCARNATION

- identification of God's love with his creation
- **Is 53:4** Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (אָכֵן חָלָנוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמְכַאֲבֵינוּ סְבָלָם)
- **2Cor 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ)

3. OUR RESPONSE TO DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

3.1. WORSHIP

- **Ps 7:17** I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High (אֲזַמְרָה יְהוָה כְּצַדְקוֹ וְאֲזַמְרָה שֵׁם־יְהוָה עֲלֵיוֹן)
- **Ps 9:2** I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. (אֲשֻׁמְחָה וְאֶעֱלֶצָה בְּךָ אֲזַמְרָה שִׁמְךָ עֲלֵיוֹן)

3.2. TRUST

- **Ps 21:7** For the king trusts in the LORD (כִּי־הִמְלִיךְ בַּטֶּחַ בַּיהוָה), and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved (וּבְחֶסֶד עֲלֵיוֹן בְּלִי־מוֹט)
- **Ps 57:2** I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me (לְאֵל גֹּמֵר עָלַי).
- **Ps 91:9** Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place- the Most High, who is my refuge (כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה מְחַסֵּי עֲלֵיוֹן שְׁמִתָּ מְעוֹנֶךָ)

3.3. EMPOWERMENT

- **Gn 14:19** And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth (וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ אֱבְרָם לֵאלֹהֵי עֶלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ)
- **Gn 14:20** ...and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" (וַיְבָרְכֵךָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲשֶׁר־מָנֵן צָרֶיךָ)

4. TO REMEMBER

- The sovereignty of God is related both to his eternal infinity and to the temporal created beings.
- Our response to the attribute of sovereignty must be repentance and worship. God's total and absolute rule gives freedom because it is not limited by finitude.
- Trusting faith is based primarily on the understanding of the immutable sovereignty of God "...who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (**Eph 1:11**).